

TURKEY'S POTENTIAL ADDED VALUE TO THE EU: RESOLUTION OF REGIONAL CONFLICTS

The supporters of the EU membership of Turkey argue that this state can help the Union become a global player, among other reasons thanks to its capacity as “facilitator” in the resolution of regional conflicts, especially in the Middle East and South Caucasus. This article is a critical analysis of this argument. The author agrees that Turkey after the accession would help the EU in conflict resolution, however only to a certain extent. Turkey would have to counteract long and short term domestic and regional problems as well as the EU’s weaknesses as an international actor.

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The European Union aspires to be a global player in the international arena. However, the current affairs show clearly that the effectiveness of its external actions, including those in the Union's neighborhood, leave a lot to be desired. Supporters of further EU enlargement argue that one of the possible solutions to this problem is the admission of new member states that are able to strengthen the international role of the EU and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Turkey is often mentioned in this context. A number of analysts and scholars point out the capacity of this state to play a crucial role in the resolution of regional conflicts and disputes, especially in two neighborhood regions of the EU, i.e. the Middle East and South Caucasus.¹ Turkey can play the role of a "facilitator" or even a "mediator" among the feuding parties. This is possible thanks to good relations with those in conflict as well as the soft power approach adopted with the changing Turkish foreign policy, particularly after 2002.

This article is a critical "SWOT-analysis" of this thesis, pointing out the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats lying behind this argument. The author argues that Turkey after accession would be able to contribute to the strengthening of the role of the EU in conflict resolution in its neighborhood only to a limited extent, because of its own weaknesses and the way the Union acts in foreign policy. This does not mean that the thesis is ungrounded and the aim of the article is not to convince readers that Turkey should not be admitted to the EU.

EU's Role in Conflict Resolution in its Neighborhood

The European Security Strategy (ESS), adopted in December 2003, considered regional conflicts as key security threats. Keeping in mind that the strategic goal of the Common Foreign and Security Policy is the establishment of a security zone around Europe, it is not surprising that the Council of the European Union stated in the Strategy: "we should now take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus."² It is in the Union's interest to

¹ See Sedat Laçiner, Mehmet Özcan, İhsan Bal, *European Union with Turkey: The Possible Impact of Turkey's Membership on the European Union* (Ankara: ISRO, 2005), pp. 15-86; Özlem Terzi, "Evolving European Security Capabilities and EU-Turkish Relations", *Perceptions. Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 9, No.1 (March-May 2004), pp. 99-118; Thanos Dokos, "Turkey and European Security", in Constantine Avranitopoulos (ed.), *Turkey's Accession to the European Union. An Unusual Candidacy* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2009), pp. 75-85.

²"A Secure Europe in a Better World – European Security Strategy", *Council of European Union*, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p. 8, www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf

bring stability and security to this region. The EU is interested in the peaceful settlement of the unresolved “(un-)frozen” regional conflicts in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh.³

The same is valid for the Middle East. The European Security Strategy underlined that the “resolution of the Arab/Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe. Without this, there will be little chance of dealing with other problems in the Middle East.”⁴ The EU, firstly, wants to contribute to a two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secondly, it supports comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors. Thirdly, it attempts to create the determinants conducive to peace in the region.⁵

The EU has so far taken actions to contribute to the resolution of conflicts in the South Caucasus and the Middle East. When it comes to the former, it appointed Heikki Talvitie as the Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus in 2003 (Peter Semneby holds this office since 2006). His tasks were, among others, to prevent conflicts and to assist in their resolution (in the new EUSR mandate from February 2006: to contribute to the settlement of conflicts and facilitate the implementation in accordance with the UN and the OSCE). For the conflict settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh the EUSR works closely with the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. The instruments and mechanism of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), introduced for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2004, strengthened the political involvement of the EU in the South Caucasus. One of the priorities of the Action Plans (2006), is the contribution to a peaceful solution of conflicts.⁶ However, there are some deficits concerning the political initiatives of the EU in the South Caucasus. Member states are reluctant to be directly involved in the negotiations for settlement of the (un-)frozen conflicts. The EU is only able to support UN- and OSCE-led negotiations by providing funds for confidence building or for reconstruction assistance. It has provided six million euros of humanitarian aid for people affected by the 2008 conflict in Georgia, where it sent the civilian monitoring mission on 1 October 2008 (whose mandate was extended in July 2009).⁷

³ Dov Lynch, “Why Georgia matters”, *Chaillot Paper*, EUISS, No. 86 (February 2006), pp. 66-8, www.iss-eu.org/chaillot/chai86.pdf

⁴ “A Secure Europe in a Better World” (2003), p. 8.

⁵ Muriel Asseburg, “European Conflict Management in the Middle East. Towards a More Effective Approach”, *Carnegie Paper*, No: 14 (February 2009), p.1.

⁶ See “EU/Georgia Action Plan”, *European Commission*, External Relations, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/georgia_enp_ap_final_en.pdf.

⁷ Data: “EUMM Georgia”, Council of the European Union, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=1512&lang=en>

A similar problem exists in the EU's involvement in the resolution of regional conflicts in the Middle East. The EU here was "initially reluctant to become actively involved in direct political negotiations between the parties to the Middle East conflict and in hard security issues, leaving the field of conflict management and conflict resolution largely to the United States."⁸ The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership served only as a forum for regional dialogue where the parties to a conflict could meet and talk. This framework as well as the ENP and later the Union for the Mediterranean did not provide any effective instruments to manage and resolve conflict. The EU started to actively support the Middle East peace process after the 1991 Madrid conference, but this support was more of an economic rather than a political nature. The Union's activities focused on regional initiatives (e.g. Regional Economic Development Working Group) and confidence building between civil societies as well as on help for Palestinians to build up their own government institutions and to improve their living conditions.

This reluctant approach has changed in recent years. The EU and its member states are more active in conflict management in the region. The Union sent missions to the Palestinian territories – the EU Border Assistance Mission on the Gaza–Egypt border (EU BAM Rafah) and the EU police mission for the Palestinian territories (EUPOL COPPS). The European involvement in the security sector in Lebanon and Palestinian territories as well as participation in UNIFIL in Lebanon were also noticeable. However, these efforts have largely been crisis driven and reactive rather than strategic and comprehensive. The EU has also engaged in attempts to resolve conflict, as part of the Middle East Quartet. The Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process (Marc Otte) has an important role to play here. However, the U.S. still plays the decisive role in conflict resolution in the Middle East while the EU is reluctant to be more engaged due to difficulties in defining and defending common interests.

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⁸ Asseburg (2009), p.1.

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Turkey's Role in the Resolution of Conflicts – Theory and Practice

It is only possible for the EU to pursue its political interests in the South Caucasus and the Middle East, if it solves its internal problems. The condition is the enhancement of its political role in these regions which would give the EU the opportunity to strengthen the CFSP. The EU should act as “honest broker” – a neutral actor and “facilitator” for a dialogue between the conflicting sides as well for opening up the conflicting regions to Europe.¹⁰ As far as the Middle East is concerned, the EU should move from conflict management to conflict resolution, e.g. “much stronger external mediation and chaperonage of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as well as supporting power sharing between Palestinian factions.”¹¹ There is a need for more effective cooperation with the U.S. and among the EU member states.

This is more likely to be achieved with Turkey as EU member. Both Turkey and the EU have similar interests as far as the resolution of regional conflicts in these regions is concerned, i.e. containment and management of instability.¹² They can together “enjoy an exceptional repertoire of soft power.”¹³ Of course Turkey will be a different country when it finally joins the Union. However, it seems that some trends concerning at least Turkish foreign policy are irreversible, although Turkey would have to adapt to the new circumstances connected with EU membership and the CFSP.

Turkish foreign policy has changed since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power in 2002. It began to be shaped above all by the “strategic

⁹ Ibid., p. 2-3.

¹⁰ Lynch (2006), pp. 72-80.

¹¹ Muriel Asseburg, Christian Jouvét, “The EU and Conflict in the Middle East”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Washington DC, 26 November 2008, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=1212>

¹² Dokos (2009), pp. 78-9.

¹³ Hakan Altınay, “Turkey’s Soft Power: An Unpolished Gem or an Elusive Mirage?”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (April-June 2008), p. 61.

depth doctrine” (stratejik derinlik) formulated by Ahmet Davutoğlu, adviser to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and, since May 2009, Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁴ The essence of the doctrine is using Turkey’s historically rooted geo-strategic importance to conduct a multi-pronged foreign policy. This means that the Turkish state should not concentrate on one region or country and depend on it, but give equal weight to all important regions and conduct an independent foreign policy. The rediscovery of Turkey’s historical and geographical identity –and a balanced approach to all major regional and global actors that this entails– makes it possible, according to Davutoğlu, for the Turkish state to conduct an active policy in the near and more remote vicinity.¹⁵

Kemal Kirişçi, making use of the grid concept drawn up by Ziya Öniş, writes about present Turkey as “benign regional power”. This means that this state: 1) conducts a proactive foreign policy; 2) develops a network of economic and political ties with neighboring regions – stressing diplomatic and peaceful means (soft power approach); 3) strives for the stabilization of neighboring regions and aspires to be a model of economic and political system; 4) has a balanced approach to both sides of a regional conflict and participates in mitigation of this conflict; 5) is ready to seek compromise solutions.¹⁶

The practice of the AKP proves that Turkey has become more of a security producer and provider than a security consumer, also when it comes to the resolution of the conflicts in the South Caucasus and the Middle East. Due to Turkey’s recently upgraded relations with almost all countries in its neighborhood (with the exception of Armenia), it has actively joined the process of resolving conflicts in the Middle East and the South Caucasus, striving to attain the goal of Davutoğlu’s doctrine, i.e. stability in Turkey’s immediate vicinity.

Turkey, under the first AKP government (2002-7) was active in the initiatives aimed at the resolution of the (un-)frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus. As a member of the Minsk Group, Turkey was involved in OSCE initiatives for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moreover, Turkey initiated a trilateral process of dialogue among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan – the first meeting was held in Reykjavik in May 2002,

¹⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2009).

¹⁵ Alexander Murinson, “The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (November 2006), pp. 951-3.

¹⁶ Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times”, *Chaillot Paper*, EUISS, No. 92 (September 2006), pp. 11-52, www.iss-eu.org.

followed by many other such meetings, one of the last taking place in New York in September 2008. Other actions Turkey took that aimed at the promotion of confidence-building undertakings and cooperation among the states of the region were the active support for the participation of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the concept of the Stabilization Pact for the South Caucasus, presented by Turkey in 2000, but leading nowhere.¹⁷

After 2007 Turkey became even more active in its role as intermediary in the South Caucasus. This can be clearly seen through the prism of the Russian-Georgian conflict. Turkish representatives engaged in shuttle diplomacy, traveling to Russia and Georgia and hosting Russian and Georgian diplomats in Ankara. The most important initiative was the renewed proposal of a Caucasian Pact. The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, a forum for cooperation in trade, energy and security, was to be established in order to prevent the emergence of more conflicts in the region. In principle, discussions involve Russia and Georgia, as well as Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹⁸

The first AKP government actively joined the process of resolving conflicts in the Middle East, striving to attain the goal of Davutoğlu's doctrine on sustaining stability in Turkey's immediate vicinity. Using its geopolitical situation, Turkey tried to play the role of a country facilitating the reaching of an understanding between parties with which it had good relations. This was the case for Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein. In January 2003, Turkey organized a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the region in Istanbul, so that they would call on the Iraqi authorities to cooperate with the Western inspectors investigating the weapons of mass destruction. Also following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the Turkish government tried to defuse tensions between Iraq's Sunnis and Shiites and its representatives went on diplomatic missions to countries neighboring Iraq.¹⁹

Turkey also tried to play the role of an intermediary or facilitator in connection with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli-Syrian disputes which remain unresolved since 1967, the Lebanese problem and the Iranian nuclear program. An

¹⁷ Andrzej Ananicz, "Miedzynarodowa rola Turcji" (International Role of Turkey), *Sprawy Miedzynarodowe*, No. 2 (April-June 2006), p. 19.

¹⁸ Adam Szymanski, "Turcja wobec konfliktu rosyjsko-gruzynskiego" (Turkey Towards the Russian-Georgian Conflict), *Biuletyn PISM*, No. 40 (3 September 2008), www.pism.pl.

active involvement in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was observed, for example, in 2006. Davutoğlu, in his capacity as the Presidential advisor, traveled to Damascus in response to the abduction of an Israeli soldier. The same year also saw the unfortunate invitation of Hamas' leader Khalid Mish'al to Ankara.²⁰ After 2002, the AKP government attempted to mediate between Israel and Syria on several occasions. For example, in January 2004, Israel contacted Bashar el-Assad thanks to the mediation of Prime Minister Erdoğan. Following his conversation with the Syrian president, the AKP conveyed information about the Syrian desire to revive peace talks with the Israeli ambassador in Ankara, Pinhas Avivi. In 2006, Prime Minister Erdoğan took steps to get a cease-fire and put an end to the conflict in Lebanon, and held repeated telephone conversations with George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Kofi Annan, Lebanese, Syrian and Iranian leaders as well as EU politicians. Turkey sent a thousand soldiers to Lebanon as part of a UN mission, underscoring its multi-faceted activeness in resolving Middle Eastern problems.²¹ President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan also played an important role as mediators between Iran and Western countries by trying to have Iranian politicians adopt a more moderate attitude with regard to the other side's proposals and by clarifying the Western point of view.

After the 2007 elections the Turkish government continued this Middle East policy with increased vigor. Until the end of 2008, its role as an intermediary in Middle Eastern conflicts was an even more visible one, as it wanted to be an important player in the region. It continued to be active in mitigation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. President Mahmud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert traveled to Turkey on 12-13 November 2007, just prior to the summit in Annapolis (27 November 2007), which Turkey also participated. For the first time ever, they were invited together to the presidential palace by the Turkish head of state. They took part in the Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation, during which they signed a declaration where they expressed their support for the actions of Turkish private enterprises on the territory of the Palestinian Autonomy and the new Tarkumia industrial zone in the West Bank. They also both gave a speech during one of the sessions of the Turkish parliament. At the beginning of July 2008, the EU commissioner for trade, Peter Mandelson, offered Turkey the

¹⁹ "Turkey Goes Ahead With Non-stop Diplomacy in Mideast", *Turkish Daily News*, 7 December 2006, www.turkish-dailynews.com.tr.

²⁰ Murinson (2006), pp. 958-959; Graham E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic. Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (Washington: USIP Press, 2008), p. 75.

²¹ F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey's New Middle East Activism", in Frances G. Burwell, *The Evolution of U.S.-Turkish Relations in a Transatlantic Context. Colloquium Report* (Carlisle: SSI, March 2008), pp. 75-83.

role of a mediator between Israel and the Palestinian Autonomy for the purpose of normalizing their trade relations.²²

Turkey continued to play a very important role as an intermediary in Israeli-Syrian talks, especially from May 2008 until the end of 2008. In this context, Turkey was a silent mediator engaged in shuttle diplomacy. Turkish envoys traveled back and forth during successive talks taking place in Turkey with representatives of Syria and Israel in order to convey the position of the other side. This activity as an intermediary was interrupted by the conflict in the Gaza Strip at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, although Turkey took some steps at the time in order to help bring the conflict to an end (proposals concerning a ceasefire). Turkey's sharpened position with regard to Israel on account of the latter's actions in Gaza put into question Turkey's continued role as an intermediary in conflicts involving Israel. The position of the Turkish Prime Minister at the beginning of 2009 was most likely driven by electoral considerations (local elections took place on 29 March 2009) and was mitigated by President Gül and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nonetheless, for a time certain elements of traditional Turkish foreign policy come to the fore, above all opting for one of the parties to the conflict, also in the internal Palestinian one, acting emotionally with disinclination to compromise. In fact, this trend in Turkey's approach to Israel can be observed in other incidents, such as the canceling of the Israeli participation in the military exercise held in Turkey and the Turkish film on public television presenting Israeli soldiers as cruel murderers.²³

Turkey has contributed to resolution processes of certain disputes in the Middle East in recent years. In November 2007 it organized in Istanbul a second conference between Iraq's neighbors – following the one in Sharm el-Sheikh. In the spring of 2008 Prime Minister Erdoğan became involved in the resolution of the problem of the Lebanese presidential elections. Moreover, in summer 2009 Turkey tried to ease erupted tension between Iraq and Syria over insurgency bombings in Iraq. In addition, it cannot be ruled out that Turkey will take up new mediation efforts aimed at resolving the problem of the Iranian nuclear program, even though Iran does not look at such a possibility with much enthusiasm.

²² Selin M. Bölme, "From Ankara to Annapolis: Turkey and the Middle East Peace Process", *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 5 (December 2007), pp. 4-7.

²³ Bülent Aras, "Turkey between Syria and Israel. Turkey's Rising Soft Power", *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 15 (May 2008), pp. 4-5; Semih İdiz, "Dış politikamızı altüst eden sözler", *Milliyet*, 19 January 2009; Barçin Yınanç, "Turkey cannot act as mediator until it mends fences with Israel", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 30 July 2009.

Constraints

In the case of accession, Turkey would strengthen the EU's external relations and its role in conflict resolution only to a limited degree. Constraints lie in resources and interests. Though some of the constraints may not exist by the time Turkey becomes a member, some can be expected to still exist. They are a result of structural variables that are continuous, fairly static and not related to current events in the international arena.

The Turkish potential in the analyzed area is limited first by the problem of insufficient political and economic resources in comparison with other international actors in the South Caucasus and the Middle East. When it comes to South Caucasus, it is Russia that plays a decisive role. Turkey's resources are limited and not comparable with those of the Russian Federation. The best example is the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs –primarily Russia (but also France and U.S.)– are the main mediators between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Turkey as an EU member would still contribute to the Union's policy towards South Caucasian disputes, combining its resources with those belonging to other EU members. However, its individual contribution would be rather auxiliary. A case in point is the proposed Caucasus Stability Platform, which is a good idea, but can be developed only into an early-stage tool that can serve as a dialogue platform as well as a confidence-building mechanism.

The Russian Federation is now Turkey's primary trade partner and its main gas supplier. As a result, Turkey does not want to take initiatives that directly counter Russian interests in the region. This has translated into a cautious and reactive approach to the resolution of the (un)frozen conflicts. This would not change after Turkish accession, especially because the "Russian factor" also weakens the proactive approach in the region of some EU members that have close economic relations with Russia (e.g. France or Germany).²⁴

In the Middle East, from the outside of the region the US plays the most decisive role, and from the region, Egypt is in the forefront. Although Turkey took some steps at the time of the Gaza operation at the turn of 2008 and 2009 to help bring the conflict to an end, it was rather Egypt that played a crucial role in negotiat-

²⁴Adam Szymanski, "South Caucasus – the Case for Joint Commitment of Turkey and the EU", *PISM Strategic File*, No. 8 (June 2009), http://www.pism.pl/zalaczniki/Strategic_File_8.pdf

ing the proposals concerning a ceasefire. Turkey cannot substitute Egypt both because of not sharing a border with Gaza, but also due to the “natural historical leadership role” of Egypt in the Arab world. In summer 2009 Turkey asked Egypt to be more active in mediation between conflicted Palestinian fractions, recognizing its limited resources. Turkey admitted that Egypt can be a mediator and Turkey a “facilitator”.²⁵ Moreover, Iran also aspires to play a mediating role in the region as it was in the case of the Syrian-Iraqi dispute.

According to Hakkı Uygur, a SETA fellow, in case of Iranian nuclear program “the rationale behind Turkey’s diplomatic initiatives is to motivate Iran to follow a responsible line in the nuclear issue and to adopt a non-confrontational policy line with the international community.”²⁶ A similar capability concerns the Palestinian issue. Turkey can only tell Hamas to disarm, become more moderate and start negotiations with Israel. However, in both cases it has no tools that can convince the mentioned conflicting parties to change their position. The EU members are divided on many Middle Eastern issues and only few of them have more historical or strategic experience with the conflicts as for example with the Palestinian question (where France and United Kingdom could cooperate with Turkey).²⁷ Although Turkey’s position after the accession would be strengthened by those of the EU, it is not certain that the EU would supplement the Turkish shortcomings completely.

The problem of division between EU members concerns the South Caucasus as well. There are countries that are clear supporters of the EU engagement in this region, i.e. Germany, Sweden and Finland as well as Poland and the Baltic states. On the other hand France or Great Britain are reluctant to support the strengthening of the EU’s role in this region, having relatively little interest in the South Caucasus and recognizing the Russian position there.

The other constraint on Turkish contribution to the strengthening of the role of the EU in resolution of conflicts in its neighborhood is the problem of its impartiality and reliability. Because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as the historical dispute on the Armenian massacres and territorial disagreements, official diplomatic ties have not been established between Turkey and Armenia. It is

²⁵ Yusuf Kanlı, “The Mediator”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 21 January 2009; “Turkey requests Hamas-Fatah mediation role from Egypt”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 30 July 2009, www.hurriyetdailynews.com

²⁶ Hakkı Uygur, “Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions and Turkey”, *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 7 (February 2008), p. 6.

²⁷ Bülent Aras, “Turkey and the Palestinian Question”, *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 27 (January 2009), p. 10.

then very difficult for Turkey to take effective initiatives aimed at the resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The role of a “facilitator” in any dispute requires impartiality, with which Turkey has difficulties, supporting Azerbaijan. Recent events have created the opportunity to change the situation: apart from the unofficial talks in Switzerland, it was primarily the visit of President Gül to Yerevan to watch the football match that constituted an important step towards normalization. The process resulted in two protocols on the establishment and development of Turkish-Armenian relations signed by the Foreign Ministers in Zürich on 10 October 2009. This step has improved the Turkish image as an impartial mediator in the region, but there will only be a real breakthrough when the protocols come into force, which looks unlikely in the near future. Therefore, a doubt still remains if Turkey can be impartial in regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Nevertheless, the Turkish government tries to play a role here. It has raised the stake of the conflict resolution for most of the parties involved, linking the border opening with Armenia to progress on the Karabakh issue.²⁸

According to the Turkish analyst and scholar Selin M. Bölme, “Turkey should develop relations with all actors in the region in order to become a reliable partner and mediator in the region.”²⁹ This was the case before the Gaza operation. However, after its end relations between Turkey and Israel have worsened, which will have a negative impact on the participation of the Turkish state in the resolution of Middle East conflicts. Lack of trust, which is crucial to play the role of a “facilitator”, starts to characterize these ties. On the one hand, Israel did not inform Turkey about its Gaza operation. On the other hand, Turkey’s announcement about its readiness to again mediate between Israel and Syria, without an improvement of Turkish-Israeli relations, could create the impression that it wants to play an active international role without caring about the relations with Israel. Turkey wants to come back to Israeli-Syrian talks, but Prime Minister Erdoğan, who stormed out on a conference panel in Davos following a sharp exchange of views with Israel’s president Shimon Peres, is not treated as a trustful mediator any more by his Israeli counterpart.³⁰ The lack of trust is still noticeable also in contacts with Arab countries and Iran, although their perception of Turkey has changed for better in recent years.³¹ The suspicion of impartiality of Turkey is all the more strengthened due to the fact that Turkey supports every step of the Palestinian side. This concerns also Turkish society. Already in 2003,

²⁸ Tomasz Sikorski, Adam Szymanski, “Porozumienie armensko-tureckie o normalizacji stosunków” (Armenian-Turkish Agreement about the Normalization of Relations), *Biuletyn PISM*, No. 57 (15 October 2009), www.pism.pl

²⁹ Bölme (2007), p. 7.

66 percent of Turks supported the Palestinian's struggle. This pro-Palestinian (and anti-Israeli) attitude is now even more conspicuous.³²

This may change after ten to 15 years, but the sense of trust is very difficult to restore in the short- or even medium term. The first step for Turkey to restore trust would be to stop acting on impulse and in an emotional way. However, this is difficult to achieve for the Turkish politicians who, apart from their convictions, must take into consideration the mood of the society and forget about the language of diplomacy if they want to sustain their support. The best example is the attitude towards Israel and Prime Minister Erdoğan's emotional speeches. Moreover, the Turkish government is often put under pressure by the main opposition parties that protest against a "soft" approach of Turkey to regional disputes, interpreting it as a concession harming the national interests. This is the case with the Turkish-Armenian talks.

One can argue that Turkish foreign policy is an extension of the domestic political situation. Meliha Altunışık underlines that "Turkey's soft power is dependent on its ability to solve its own problems."³³ When the state must fight with the internal economic or political crises, as it was in 2007 during another stage of confrontation between (to put it simply) the secular establishment and the religious-conservative circles connected with the governing party, it cannot concentrate on the role of a "facilitator" or mediator in the neighborhood's disputes and be perceived as such by the conflict parties. In the next years to come such a crisis cannot be avoided, because it concerns the structural problems of the country – among others the model of state and society. These will not be solved by an adoption of *acquis communautaire*.

To sum up, the capabilities of Turkey in the South Caucasus and the Middle East are limited because of its long and short term domestic and regional problems, which weaken the Turkish assets mentioned above. The fact that there are better positioned countries in these regions, prevents Turkey from playing a leading role. Moreover, the Turkish government wants to have good relations with most of these countries. The limitations also include: absence of normal relations

³⁰ Meliha Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April-June 2008), p. 53; Sami Kohen, "Arabulucu olmak bu kez daha zor", *Milliyet*, 24 July 2009.

³¹ Dietrich Jung, "Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (March 2005), s. 1-17.

³² Data: Aras (2009), p. 7.

³³ Altunışık (2008), p. 53.

with Armenia and weakening ties with Israel. These factors prevent Turkey from playing the role of a real “facilitator” in the resolution of regional conflicts. What is more, a lack of internal political stability also limits Turkish ambitions. Turkey as an EU member, wishing to help the EU in the resolution of regional conflicts, would have to counteract these problems. This, compounded with the Union’s own weaknesses as an international actor, offer reason to be skeptical about the prospects of Turkey vastly increasing the EU’s influence in its neighboring regions.