

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

In Turkey there is currently a lack of trust and an increasing feeling of ambiguity and insecurity about the future of Turkey-EU relations. However, this article argues, EU-full membership should be the main axis of Turkish foreign policy. With Turkey-EU relations as the main axis, Turkey can play the roles expected of it most realistically and successfully – such as offering an alternative to the clash of civilization thesis. And most importantly the EU anchor will enable Turkey to consolidate its democracy and democratize its modernity, which, in fact, constitute a determining benchmark to make proactive foreign policy sustainable.

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In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in Turkey and its modern history – a history that has demonstrated that a secular, democratic, constitutional democracy is possible in a social setting where the population is predominantly Muslim. This interest has occurred in the context of what has come to be known as “the post-9/11 world”, in which the rapid spread of inhuman and deadly terrorist attacks throughout the world and their link to Islam have become a central concern of international relations. Since 11 September 2001, world affairs have been framed increasingly by a “clash of civilizations” discourse. The codification of Islam as the negation of secular modernity and liberal democracy is fundamental to this discourse and has led to the suggestion that success in the ongoing global fight against terrorism depends to a large extent on the possibility of articulating Islam with modernity and democracy. In political and academic discourse, this suggestion has been formulated in a variety of forms, ranging from the idea of “exporting democracy through war and occupation, leading to necessary regime change in failed states” to calls for “global democratic governance” capable of establishing an effective foundation for the coexistence of different cultures and civilizations in a manner that involves tolerance, respect, and responsibility as the guiding principles of social interactions in international, regional, and intra-national relations.

In the post-9/11 world, Turkey and its historical experience of modernity has constituted a significant case for the possibility of the coexistence of Islam and democracy. As a social formation with a large Muslim population, Turkey has succeeded in establishing itself as a modern nation with a strong secular state structure, transforming its political system into a multi-party parliamentary democracy and creating a free-market economy. Moreover, as a social formation located at the intersection of the East and the West, Turkey's identity has always been marked by its will to “reach the contemporary level of civilization,” understood as Westernization and Europeanization. In other words, even though Islam has remained a significant symbolic reference in the formation of cultural identity in Turkey, its modern history has been characterized by Westernization as a site of secular modernity, economic progress, and democracy. Moreover, despite the existence of a number of regime breakdowns and democratic-deficit problems in its multi-party system, Turkey has nevertheless persisted in its commitment to parliamentary democracy and its norms. It is this commitment that accounts for the ability of political Islam not only to find a place for itself in the multi-party parliamentary democracy of Turkey, but also to enlarge that place so as to become the governing party of a strongly secular state, as in the case of the recent majority government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Of course, the Turkish experience of modernity and democracy has not been without serious problems and recursive political, economic, and cultural crises.

In fact, the history of modern Turkey can be described as one of "success and failure" – successful in establishing the necessary institutional structures of modernity, such as nation-state, modern positive law, parliamentary democracy, market economy, and citizenship, but at the same time a failure in making modernity multicultural, consolidating democracy, creating a stable and sustainable economy, and enshrining rights and freedoms in the exercise of citizenship. Yet, it is precisely because of its constant and persistent commitment to secular modernity and democracy, as well as to Westernization and Europeanization that Turkey has become one of the crucial actors in the post-9/11 world.

The deepening of Turkey-European Union (EU) relations, which have taken the form of full accession negotiations since 3 October 2005, cannot be explained without taking into account the increasing importance of Turkey in today's highly insecure world. Similarly, Turkey's ability to experience the coexistence of Islam with modernity and democracy in a generally peaceful manner has also been central to Turkish-American relations in recent years. The recent visit of the new American president Barack Obama to Turkey, which was the first visit of the new president to a national country outside North America, and in which he offered Turkey a model of "enhanced partnership" in dealing with the high security risk areas of the globalizing world, was also an indicator of the increasing global attraction to Turkey. Moreover, this recent interest in Turkey, especially in terms of the possibility of Turkey's full accession to the EU can also be observed in most Islamic countries.

Identity-Based Perception of Turkey in the Globalizing World

In mapping world politics in the post-September 11 world, one observes the increasing presence and role of Turkey in the following areas:

- The Occupation of Iraq and the Kurdish Question in relation to Northern Iraq
- The Iran Problem and the Future of the Middle East region
- The Russia Question and the Future of Eurasia
- The Crisis of Multiculturalism and the Question of Islam in Europe
- The Clash of Civilizations in Global Politics
- The Global Democratic Governance and the Question of Europe as a Global Actor
- Mediterranean Politics and Identity
- Global Political Economy
- Global Energy Politics
- Membership in the Security Council of the United Nations

A quick glance at the growing study and debate in global academic and public discourse about Turkey and its increasing role in the above-listed areas reveals that Turkey is perceived as an important, even pivotal, actor in international relations, regionally and globally. In these discourses, a number of identity-based perceptions have been used to characterize this role:

- (a) As a modern nation-state formation with democratic governance and a secular constitutional structure, Turkey is a model country for the possibility of stability and peace in Iraq in particular, and in the Middle East and the Islamic world in general. In fact, with its more than a century long legacy of modernizing reform and constitutional democracy experience, Turkey is the most successful example in the world today of a secular democracy within a Muslim society;
- (b) Turkey's modern history constitutes both an "alternative to the clash of civilizations thesis" (as in the case of the Inter-Civilization Dialogue Project, led by the United Nations, Spain, and Turkey) and a significant historical experience from which the Islamic world, and in particular countries such as Malaysia, Morocco, Indonesia, can learn in their attempts to democratize. Particularly instructive may be the AKP and its ability to establish an electoral victory through its claim to be a "conservative-democratic center right party”;
- (c) With its ability to sustain, and even deepen, its secular democracy in a peaceful manner, along with its "dual identity as both a Middle Eastern and European country," Turkey's recent governance by the AKP has made Turkey a pivotal state/regional power in the process of fighting against global terrorism without making Islam the focal point of opposition;
- (d) In the deepening of Turkey-EU relations and the beginning of full accession negotiations, the following perception has been gaining strength, especially among economic and foreign policy actors: Turkey is a unique case in the process of European integration with the ability to help Europe become a multicultural and cosmopolitan model for a deep regional integration. In other words, Turkey can contribute to the EU becoming a space for the creation of a post-territorial community on the basis of post-national and democratic citizenship, and also a global actor with the capacity to contribute to the emergence of democratic global governance. The possibility of Europe to gain these qualities depends to some extent on its decision about Turkey's accession in the European Union as a full member;

- (e) With its dynamic economy, recursive growth rates, and young population, Turkey has become one of the important, but not pivotal (such as India, Brazil), emergent markets economies of today's economic globalization. Moreover, although Turkey does not produce oil or natural gas, it has recently begun to act as an energy hub for the transmission of natural gas between the Middle East, the post-Soviet republics and Europe.

Foreign Policy Options of Turkey

All of these identity-based perceptions of Turkey have to do with both global dynamics and the domestic transformations that Turkey has been undergoing. Foreign policy in this context has become an extremely important dimension. As a response to the global attraction to Turkey, as well as to the multi-dimensional identity-based perceptions of Turkey, Turkish Foreign Policy has become proactive and multi-dimensional, employing a soft-power and diplomatic influence-based discourse and practice. As Turkish Foreign Policy has become more pro-active, constructive, multi-dimensional, and more-soft power-based, the question of whether or not there is a need to have a "main axis" on which that proactive state behavior would gain realism, effectiveness and efficiency has also become crucial. Four options are worth examining here: (a) proactive foreign policy with Turkey-EU relations as its main axis (integration); (b) proactive foreign policy with Turkey-U.S. relations with its main axis (security); (c) proactive foreign policy with Turkey-Eurasia relations as its main axis (autonomy and security); and (d) proactive foreign policy without a main axis (autonomy and pragmatism).¹ These options have been put forward, voiced and defended by a number of actors having different visions of Turkey and Turkish foreign policy. I suggest in this context that to be realistic and effective, Turkish Foreign Policy should put into practice Turkey-EU relations as the main axis. Compared with the other options, Turkey-EU relations are economically, politically, historically, culturally and geographically-constructed relations of deep integration with a system-transforming capacity in the areas of democracy, identity, security and economy. Today, despite problems

¹ These options have been put forward in Turkish academic and public discourse and debate on the question of what should be the main axis, or the main foundation of Turkish foreign policy in its proactive, constructive and multi-dimensional operation in the post-Cold War era in general, and in the post-september 11 world in particular. I have also extrapolated these positions in my research on *Turkey in a Globalizing World*. For a detailed account of these positions, see M. Abramowitz (ed.) *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy*, A Century Foundation Book, Washington, 2000, L.G. Martin and D. Keridis (eds.), *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, F.S. Larrabee and I.O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, G.E. Fuller and I.O. Lesser, *Turkey's New Geopolitics*, Westview, Boulder, 1993, and E.F. Keyman and Z. Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, Bilgi University Publications, Istanbul, 2007.

such as lack of trust and the increasing feeling of ambiguity and insecurity about the future in these relations, the EU-full-membership anchor should still be taken into account by the Turkish state and the AKP government as the main axis of viable Turkish foreign policy. With Turkey-EU relations as the main axis, Turkey can perform its identity-based perceptions more successfully; put into practice a more realistic pro-activism; and more importantly, consolidate its democracy and democratize its modernity, which, in fact, constitute a determining benchmark to make proactive foreign policy sustainable.

Moreover, as Ian Lesser has correctly pointed out recently, Turkey should focus more and more on “priority setting” rather than multi-dimensional “engagement”, in order to make its proactive and constructive foreign policy realistic and effective. Lesser argues that:

“The entente with Greece, openings with Syria and even with Iran, the prospect of a real opening with Armenia. These are meaningful things but these are all things in Turkey’s neighborhood. If you look at the scope of Turkey’s foreign policy activism in recent years, it does sometimes seem as if Turkey is trying to do all things at once and be all things to all people. Under certain conditions, that could be a perfectly valid approach. When I look ahead, I see the climate for Turkey becoming more difficult and less encouraging to that kind of strategy. Turkey has had the luxury of not having to choose, for example, between Eurasia and the West, between the Muslim world and Europe, etc. In coming years, *Turkish foreign policy will be more about priorities and less about general activism.*”² (The emphasis is mine)

I agree with Lesser. In fact, Turkey should focus on its priorities, not only to make its proactive foreign policy realistic and effective, but also, and more importantly, to maintain its role in global politics as an important actor and pivotal state. As globalization produces multi-polar rather than uni-polar world politics, as conflict in this world becomes conflict among great powers with global security risk areas being geographically situated around Turkey -in the cases of the “Afghanistan question”, the “Iraq question”, the “Russia question” and the “Iran problem”- I would suggest that Turkey in its foreign policy should place emphasis on “prioritization” over “general activism”. In a time when these changes are occurring, Turkey has become a member of the Security Council in the United Nations. The success of Turkey in its new role depends on how it will react to conflict and change. Whether Turkey shapes its proactive foreign policy by

² Ian Lesser, “Turkey to face tough foreign policy choices”, *Today’s Zaman*, 18 September 2008, pp.1-6.

giving primacy to priority or not will determine the degree of its effectiveness and transformative power. It is in this context that it becomes important and useful for Turkish foreign policy to have an “effective anchor” or to establish a “main axis” in its multi-dimensional operation.

As I have argued, rather than Turkey-U.S. relations, Turkey-Eurasia relations, or Turkey as acting an independent state without priority and anchor, Turkey-EU relations should constitute the main anchor or axis of Turkish foreign policy, despite the existing problems and ambiguities in Turkey’s Europeanization process. Contrary to the three options, Turkey-EU relations are deeply integrated relations, constructed historically and institutionally, and generating economic, political and identity-based system-transforming impact both in Turkey and Europe.³ The need to emphasize on priority over general activism also requires in Turkish foreign policy an effective EU anchor, which is compatible with and useful for Turkey’s regional power and pivotal state role in the post-September 11 world in particular, and in the globalizing world in general.

I would conclude by suggesting that a viable Turkish foreign policy requires (a) a proactive, constructive and multi-dimensional state behavior; (b) taking the concept of soft power seriously; (c) having the EU anchor as the main axis of foreign policy; and (d) coming to terms with the fact that it is not only geopolitics, but also, and more importantly, an articulation of modernity and democracy that sustains and deepens the global interest in, and global attraction to, Turkey. Furthermore, a Turkey that successfully links its proactive foreign policy with democratic reform, sustainable economic development and the norm of living together with differences domestically, can demand from the EU a date for full membership (for which the time frame between 2017-2020 is objective and realistic).⁴ In fact, against the claims that Turkey can only be a privileged partner of the EU, it is primarily Turkey’s will and effort to link its proactive foreign policy with its consolidated democracy, which can revitalize Turkey-EU relations in a way that will also enable Turkey to start the talk about the needed and expected entry date into the European community.

In our globalizing world, the role and identity of Turkey as a pivotal state and regional power, and as a democratic society, with an alternative modernity that has achieved the co-existence of Islam and modernity/democracy/free market norms, can benefit immensely from full accession to the EU. We should not for-

³ For a detailed analysis of these system-transforming impacts, see F.Baban and E.F. Keyman, “Turkey and Postnational Europe”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2008.

⁴ E. Fuat Keyman, “Türkiye-AB ilişkilerini Yeniden-Canlandırmak” (Revitalizing Turkey-EU Relations), *Kriter*, 2009.

get that it is also equally true that Turkey's full accession will make a significant contribution to Europe as a global actor and a democratic community with a dynamic economy. And, this reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between Turkey and the EU is indeed what our globalizing world needs to cope effectively with its security risk areas. To make Turkey's proactive and constructive foreign policy more sustainable and more realistic, the revitalization of Turkey-EU relations should constitute a basic foreign policy behavior in the agenda of our new Foreign Affairs Minister Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu. Rather than conflicting with Davutoğlu's visionary approach to what Turkish foreign policy should involve and how it should act in our globalizing world, such revitalization, I believe, will in fact contribute and enhance its "strategic depth."