

TURKEY AND THE EU: BRINGING TOGETHER A REGIONAL POWER AND A GLOBAL ACTOR

This article focuses on the parallel evolution of the foreign policies of Turkey and the European Union. It assesses to what extent it is possible to make compatible Turkey's role as a regional power with EU's plans of becoming a global and united international actor. The concept of 'Europeanising Turkey's Foreign Policy' appears as an interesting option and the article attempts to apply it to the policies towards the Balkans, Russia, Central Asia and the Middle East. Hence, several ideas are proposed in order to increase the compatibilities between both foreign policies and obtaining mutual benefits.

Eduard Soler i Lecha*

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- Eduard Soler i Lecha is a Research Fellow at the Institut Universitari d'Estudis Europeus, Spain

Both the foreign policies of Turkey and the European Union (EU) have evolved drastically since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the bipolar system. On the one hand, the EU has affirmed its will of becoming an international actor with a single voice and, on the other, Turkey has strengthened its efforts to begin the negotiations for its accession to the EU at the same time that it has affirmed its pivotal role in its neighbouring areas, mainly the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. This article will try to assess to what extent both strategies are compatible. In other words, is Turkey's will of being recognized as a regional power a handicap or an asset in its attempt to persuade its European partners of the advantages of bringing Turkey into the EU club? Some may think that if the EU wants to become a real power it cannot accept new powers in its very heart. On the contrary, others may argue that a new regional power, like Turkey, can multiply the resources and the expertise of the whole Union. This is a heat issue especially because this debate is not only applicable to the Turkey's case but to the whole enlargement process. As Karen Smith (2003) suggests there exists a debate on whether the enlargement will benefit EU's Foreign Policy because in spite of expanding EU's network of relations it could also harm the capacity to formulate and implement common foreign policies.

The EU's Foreign Policy: Towards Being a Global Actor

Several objections have been made to the idea of a European Union Foreign Policy. The EU has been accused, both by internal and external actors, of lacking political and military power and having a low profile external action with no visible and effective head. The debate was particularly heated after the September 11th attacks and the Laeken Declaration is a good example of this concern when it asks: 'What is Europe's role in this changed world? Does Europe not, now that it is finally unified, have a leading role to play in a new world order, that of a power able both to play a stabilising role worldwide and to point the way ahead for many countries and peoples?'¹. Thus, the declaration questioned how the coherence of European foreign policy could be enhanced and asked the Convention for the Future of Europe to deal specifically with this issue. After months of intensive work, the Convention prepared a draft Treaty establishing a constitution for Europe. In this draft, external action occupies a major place; the Convention proposes the creation of a foreign minister and specifies which principles should guide this renewed foreign policy (Everts & Keohane, 2003)².

Simultaneously, Javier Solana, Secretary General/ High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), also presented a document to the Thessalonica European Council in June 2003 setting up a new security strategy for the EU³. Solana's document insisted, for example, on one of the more fashionable concepts of the EU debate: the neighbourhood policy. The EU is currently trying to consolidate its leadership in its near abroad. It attempts to establish a more integrated area between the EU and a ring of 'friendly countries' from Russia to Morocco with which it may share

¹ *The Future of the European Union, Laeken Declaration*. 15/12/2001.

² See also Hill, Christopher (2003) 'A Foreign Minister without Foreign Ministry - or with too many?' in CFSP Forum 1. Available from FORNET web page: www.fornet.info. FORNET is a framework of research and teaching on European Foreign Policy.

³ *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, presented at the Thessalonica European Council, 20/06/2003.

everything but institutions⁴. Turkey, as well as Romania, Bulgaria and the Balkans, are not included in this circle because they are supposed to become members of the EU in the future. Solana proposed developing strategic partnerships with regional powers such as India or China as well. This strategy emerged, however, at the same time that the war in Iraq intensified the debate in Europe regarding the transatlantic link, provoking a significant division among the EU member states which has not been resolved yet.

Turkey: A Regional Power

As far as Turkey is concerned, its foreign policy has also undergone a significant evolution in the last few years. Its bid for EU membership has been consolidated as the main goal of Turkey's foreign policy, far more important than other priorities such as its policy towards the Turkic Republics or the Muslim world. Moreover, as Ziya Önis (2003) sustains, it is striking that it is the AKP, much more than any other political party of the previous era, who demonstrates a high degree of commitment to the goal of full EU membership. This is quite significant since the *Refah* and *Fazilet* parties maintained a different stance towards this issue.

The war in Iraq has, however, reconducted part of the Turkish foreign interests towards the Middle East and analysts like Philip Robins (2003a) think that this situation began to stir the Sèvres syndrome or, in other words, that the great powers attempted to reshape the Middle East to Turkey's great disadvantage. The Turkish attitude in the previous phase of the Iraqi crisis undermined the strategic partnership with Washington. Nevertheless, as Nathalie Tocci (2003) affirms, a positive signal was sent to Western European countries, especially to those that have been sceptical regarding Turkey's EU membership and were opposed to the war in Iraq, the same countries that some weeks before threatened to dampen Turkey's EU aspirations⁵.

It may be argued that it is neither the Turkish engagement in the Iraq war, nor its policy towards the Turkic Republics of Central Asia, that concerns EU officials the most about Turkey's foreign policy. The unresolved conflict of Cyprus and its consequences for Greek-Turkish relations may represent an insurmountable handicap for Turkey's aspiration to reach a date for the beginning of negotiations with the EU. This issue has been the object of noteworthy articles and research and this is why this article will try to focus, from now on, on another aspect somewhat related to this one: Turkey's will to enhance its position as a regional power and its compatibility with the EU's aim of becoming a strong and united global actor.

In fact, whether Turkey is really a regional power and if it effectively acts as such is quite a controversial issue. Sule Kut (2001), for example, said that the concept of regional power has been often mentioned in evaluating contemporary Turkish foreign policy. It was often synonymously used with terms such as regional state and sometimes hegemonic power. William Hale (2000) affirmed, however, that a notable feature of Turkish foreign policy up to the end of the Cold War was that Turkey seldom, if ever, sought to exploit its status as a middle power to act as a mediator in regional or global

⁴ See European Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: proposed new framework for relations with the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbours*, COM(2003) 104 final, 11 March 2003.

⁵ For example, the Belgian Foreign Minister, Louis Michel, stated that 'very strong pressure must be put on Turkey to let it know that taking such action [sending troops] will be a determining factor in refusing its entry to Europe'. This and other similar statements were compiled by *Euractiv*, 25/03/2003.

disputes. Robins (2003b) has even qualified Turkey as a '*status quo* actor' and sustains that, in spite of some analysts' predictions, Turkey has not been more interventionist after the collapse of the former Soviet Union.

Making Turkey Indispensable for the EU or Europeanising Turkish Foreign Policy?

Turkey's role in the international system and particularly in its near abroad is a matter that has been often presented as an added value by some Turkish politicians when negotiating with the EU. Mesut Yilmaz, for example, speaking as a member of the European Convention, affirmed that 'as a country that is preparing itself for full membership, we believe that our assets will contribute to the projection of the EU as a global actor in all its dimensions'⁶. Some years before, Ismail Cem assessing the conclusions of the Helsinki European Council of 1999, stated that 'rather than confining itself to a limited geography as a small, ethnically-defined club of rich countries, the European Union has taken a bold step by accepting Turkey as a candidate for accession'. The former Turkish Foreign Minister believed that the EU's change of attitude was due in part to a change of rhetoric by Turkish authorities, which did not think in terms of 'what we'll get from the EU' but in terms of 'what we are going to provide the EU' (Cem, 2001).

However, this type of contribution is not equally valued by all European leaders and, for example, Jean Luc Dehaene – former Belgian Prime Minister and Vice-President of the European Convention – has affirmed several times that a country that thinks of itself as a power is difficult to integrate in the EU⁷. He referred to Russia but it was an argument that could easily be applied to the Turkish case. Others, like the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, are worried that the EU could expand its borders towards unstable areas such as the Caucasus, Iraq or Iran and that it would open the door for membership to other Muslim countries, therefore denaturalizing the European essence.

Nevertheless, Turkey is, incontestably, a strong military power with the second biggest army in NATO to which it has been loyal and from whom the alliance benefits given its crucial geopolitical position. It has, as well, a dynamic entrepreneurial milieu and, despite the past crises, it could experience a tremendous economic development. All these are assets that can increase Turkey's attractiveness as an EU candidate. However, as Hüseyin Bağcı and Saban Kardas (2003) highlighted, the more Turkey focuses on its indispensability, the less it is willing to undertake the necessary transformations in its journey towards EU membership. This is why this article suggests that it should reevaluate its foreign policy in order to Europeanise it. But, what does 'Europeanisation' mean?

Political science analysts and specialists on European integration have used the term 'Europeanisation' to explain how the national policies need to adapt to EU constraints but also how they can profit from new opportunities brought by to being a full member of the EU; this concept can also be applied to the foreign policy analysis⁸. Thought of in

⁶ Intervention by Mesut Yilmaz at the plenary session of the European Convention held on March 21st 2002.

⁷ Conference of Jean-Luc Dehaene, February 5th, 2002, Barcelona (Universitat de Barcelona).

⁸ Despite being quite a new conceptualisation when applied to Foreign Policy there are several case studies which analyse how the Spanish, the Greek, the Irish or the British foreign policies have been 'europeanised'. See Vaquer i Fanés (2001)

terms of adaptation, Europeanisation means, however, assuming that the priorities, the policies and the instruments are previously fixed. It means that there is a sort of hierarchy between the most and the less veteran EU member states, at least in an early phase. This is even more evident when talking about candidates and a good example is the critical words of Jacques Chirac directed at some EU candidate countries which allied themselves unconditionally with the US position vis-à-vis Iraq and against the opinion of the Franco-German axis which is thought of as the core of the EU.

Thus, a feasible Europeanisation of Turkish policy would imply assessing if any aspect of Turkey's foreign policy clearly contradicts the EU's positions; it means analysing which aspects of the EU's and current Turkish foreign policy are more compatible. It also means thinking about how the EU could benefit from Turkey's expertise without changing the guidelines of its foreign policy. On this point, we will go over some areas like the Balkans, the former Soviet republics and the Middle East and the Mediterranean hoping this may provide elements for a further debate.

Turkey and the EU in the Balkans

It has been said that the wars in former Yugoslavia struck hard at the European conscience. The EU proved to be unable to react to a drama happening in its very own backyard and the US had to intervene, both in Bosnia and in Kosovo. Since then, however, the EU has decided to have a more coherent and strong policy towards the Balkans, both promising them the possibility of becoming members of the EU and developing missions like the one carried out in Macedonia. It should be remembered, however, that the activation of the EU military functions came after reaching an agreement with Turkey in December 2002 on the use of the NATO's planning assets.

In fact, Turkey has also had, since the end of the Cold War, an active involvement in the Balkans. It has a worth-mentioning expertise in the region and has participated in multiple regional initiatives. Both Turkey and the EU consider the Balkans a priority area and their objectives are quite close. Hence, this could be a suitable field for Turkey to carry out a progressive Europeanisation of its foreign policy, working together with the EU's officials and creating for itself an image of being a power multiplier for EU's foreign policy.

Turkey and the EU in the Former USSR

As far as the former Soviet republics are concerned, we should differentiate between the Central Asia or the Caucasus and the Slavic area, that is: Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The EU has a clear policy towards the latter; the aforementioned neighbourhood policy is the most evident example. Turkish-Russian relations have also been a crucial aspect of Turkish foreign policy, going from rivalry to strategic partnership and Ankara has also given a notable boost to its relations with Ukraine. In 2002 a Turkish general, Tuncer Kilinc, opened a bitter debate when he affirmed that 'the EU will never accept Turkey, thus Turkey needs new allies, and it would be useful if Turkey engaged in a search that would include Russia and Iran'. Putting the situation in these forms does not correspond at all with an Europeanisation philosophy. Turkey's relationship with Russia should not be perceived as a substitute for its relations or its membership to the EU; on the contrary, it should try to integrate its relationship with

Moscow to the neighbourhood policy, something that the other EU candidates like Poland, which have even deeper links with the Russian Federation, are already doing.

The situation regarding the Turkic Republics is quite different. In this case, neither the EU nor its member states have an articulated policy towards this area, which in spite of its geostrategic importance, remains a minor priority in the framework of European foreign policy. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, for Turkey this is one of the most important aspects of foreign policy and in this framework, Turkey has tried to promote a sort of 'Turkish model' in this area, to the satisfaction of its Western allies (Bal, 2000). Turkey's Central Asia policy is not just a matter of strategic interest but of cultural and historical links as well. To some extent, it could be compared to the relationship between Spain and Latin America. Since Spain's entry into the EEC in 1986, Spanish diplomats have often tried to forge an image of being Latin America's advocates in the EU. They they have tried in other words to gradually draw the EU's attention to a region that was not in its plans until the late eighties⁹. This could be Turkey's future strategy. Ankara cannot impose its own agenda on the EU's foreign policy, at least not at the beginning, but it can try to create an image of Turkey as the key to Central Asia, which would be an unquestionable asset for the whole EU. The Caucasus is, however, a more complex issue; in that case the interests of a main power like the Russian Federation, the conflict in Chechnya, the political situation in Georgia or the rivalry between Armenia and Azerbaijan make it a problematic frontier and a high-risk zone not far from the EU. However, projects like the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline are important for the EU's energetic supplies and will make Turkey's role even more vital in the future.

Turkey and the EU in the Middle East and the Mediterranean

Last but not least, there is the Middle East and the whole Mediterranean region. Both have been important features in the EU foreign policy even if the EU has proved to be a secondary political actor in the Middle East Peace Process, assuming the US leadership in this area. Nevertheless, the Mediterranean region is, unquestionably, one of the main priority issues for the EU and for some of its member states, mainly France and Spain. The development of the Euromediterranean Partnership and a future Free Trade Area between the EU and twelve Mediterranean countries will represent a significant step towards a more integrated Euromediterranean area.

Turkey has been and still is a key actor in the Middle East. It shares strategic borders and controls, for example, the water sources of the Tigris and the Euphrates. It has normalised its relations with its traditional Syrian foe without breaking its particular partnership with Israel, reinforced after the November 2003 terrorist attacks.

Simultaneously, the Turkish policy towards the Middle East and, in a wider sense, towards the Muslim world seems to have experienced a sort of 'Europeanisation process'. Apart from the fact of being an active member of the Euromediterranean Partnership, there are two rather recent examples that show this dynamic. The first was Turkey's leading role in the organisation of an EU-OIC summit in Istanbul on February 2002. The other was the Greek-Turkish initiative of sending a joint peace mission to Palestine which was able to meet with Yasser Arafat, Ariel Sharon and Shimon Peres in

⁹ For the Spanish case see Esther Barbé (2001) analysis on how Spain has become a significant CFSP actor, adapting its own foreign policy.

a very tense moment for the conflict in the Middle East. The EU institutions were aware of this initiative and congratulated both states, often perceived as rivals, for sending such a peace message. Hence, both cases illustrate a sort of 'Europeanised strategy' towards the Middle East and the Muslim world. This is quite important because it could reinforce one argument that is often repeated when defending Turkey's accession to the EU is that it may initiate a new era in the perception of Europe in the Muslim world and would contribute to refute Samuel Huntington's thesis of a forthcoming clash between the Muslim world and the West¹⁰. During 2003 another issue in the Middle East emerged with force: the war and the post-war in Iraq. Within the EU there was and still is a clear division among member states regarding the management of this crisis. The opposition to US unilateralism was a 'Franco-German position regarding the conflict' rather than an EU position regarding Iraq'. Hence, speculating on a hypothetical 'Europeanisation of Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq' would be quite a fanciful exercise. Anyway, Turkey's position supporting the US policy without sending troops appears to be the most intelligent stand in order not to upset the Franco-German block, nor the Atlantist wing of the EU.

Making Turkey's International Stature Compatible with EU Membership

Anyway, as said by William Hale and Gamze Avci (2001), it is hard to see how a 'Central Asia' or 'Islamic' option could emerge as effective alternatives to continuing alignment with the European Union or how any government could put them into effect at acceptable cost. Developing links with Central Asia should be regarded as supplementary to its links with the West rather than an alternative. It is only by following this strategy that Turkey and the EU can both profit from several complementarities as far as foreign policy is concerned. Turkey does not necessarily need to renounce its legitimate will of being recognised as a regional actor having strategic relationships with its neighbours; these links can even appear fruitful for the EU as a whole in the future. However, its foreign policy may undergo an Europeanisation process both in its priorities and in its instruments. Turkey's relations with the Balkans, Central Asia, Russia and the Middle East may need to acquire a more Europeanist nuance. This article sheds some light upon the way to follow: participating in the neighbourhood policy, being a more active member of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, concerting its Middle Eastern policy with the EU, being involved in the EU missions in the Balkans or offering to the EU a sort of Turkish expertise in Central Asia. On the contrary, an independent policy towards Russia, an extremely deep involvement in the Caucasus or intervening alone in Iraq are issues that could toughen some EU members' position vis-à-vis Turkish full membership. Nevertheless, this 'Europeanisation process' will not be easy because of the persistence of a classic nationalist vision of foreign policy in Turkey, even at the level of the public opinion. For instance, the last Eurobarometer showed that Turks were the most reticent to joint decision-making in foreign policy among the public opinions of candidate countries¹¹.

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¹⁰ See Huntington, Samuel P. (1996) *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹¹ See *Eurobarometer 2003.3, public opinion in the candidate countries*, p.16.

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