

## **Turkish Foreign Policy after the End of Cold War: From Securitising to Desecuritising Actor**

**Paula Sandrin**

PhD Candidate

University of Westminster

### **Abstract**

This paper argues that Turkish foreign policy conducted in the 2000s represents a significant transformation in comparison with the previous phase of activism seen in Turkish foreign policy during the 1990s. The novelty element is a stronger emphasis on good neighbourly relations and on the use of soft power, thus moving Turkey on the direction of a more “benign regional power” (Onis 2008). This distinct era in the conduction of external relations can be explained by the decrease of the role of the military in foreign-policy making, the prospect of membership of the European Union and the new vision put forward by the AKP (Justice and Development Party).

In order to make these inter-related arguments, this paper will first explain the foreign policy developed by Turkey in 1990s, with emphasis given to the use of confrontational tools. It will also explain that Turkey adopted such a security-centered foreign policy because the role of the military in foreign policy making in that decade became more pronounced, and the military’s particular understanding of national security seemed to be under increased threat with the end of bipolarity. This paper will then assess changes in foreign policy in this decade, establishing as reasons for the adoption of a more benign form of external relations the prospect of EU membership and the coming to power of the AKP. Finally, this paper will provide two examples of issues which have been handled differently in the 2000s in comparison with the previous decade: the Cyprus issue and Turkey’s relations with Israel and Palestine.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, to talk about changes and transformation in Turkish foreign policy have become common place<sup>1</sup>. Since the end of Cold war, many books and articles have been published claiming that Turkey’s external relations have undergone a profound change<sup>2</sup>. Most commentators when analysing Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s perceived

---

<sup>1</sup> Meliha Altunisik, 28 November 2008, lecture at LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies Conference “State, Society and Democracy in Turkey in the Era of Globalisation since 1980”.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Makovsky and Sayari (2000) claimed that Turkey became much more *assertive*, establishing the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone, developing ties with the Turkic states and Israel, participating in the 1991 war against Iraq and in peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, sending troops to fight the PKK in Northern Iraq, and threatening a war with Syria. Rubin (2001), when referring to the 1990s, talks about a *post-Ataturk era*, since Turkey became much more *active*, citing the same examples: the involvement in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans, the role it played in the 1991 Gulf war. In his view, the basic principle of limiting international entanglements did not suffice in the 1990s, and Turkey “historically almost a pacifist country, sent troops to Northern Iraq to fight separatist Kurds and threatened all-out war with Syria” (p. 3). During that decade, Turkey was more willing to take risks and to project its influence. Kut (2001) also argued that Turkish foreign policy became more *active* in the 1990s, not because there was a change in principles, but because there was a change in Turkey’s neighbourhood, so Turkey had to respond to them. Altunisik (2008) also thinks that this trend of transformation had already begun with the end of Cold war, not only under AKP. As markers of change she cites a stronger *activism* and *assertiveness*: in the use or threat to use military force (against the PKK in Northern Iraq, threats against Syria and Greece in the 1990s, contribution of peacekeeping missions on Bosnia, Kosovo and Somalia) and in the pursuit of political and economic relations with regions it did not have relations before.

a significant qualitative transformation in comparison with the foreign policy conducted during the Cold War, which is often described as passive and reactive. An assertive and multi-directional foreign policy was developed, and Turkey became much more active in its neighbourhood, establishing ties with the Caucasus and the Turkic Republics, participating in peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, promoting economic relations with Black Sea countries, increasing economic and political ties with the Middle East.

However, a darker side of this activism in foreign policy was observed in the 1990s, when Ankara's ready resort to the threat or the use of military force was particularly visible. Regular military incursions in Northern Iraq to crush PKK forces, threats against Syria, with troops amassed at the border in 1998, hard rhetoric during the Russian S-300 missiles crisis planned to be deployed in Cyprus in the same year are a few examples (Park 2005). In 1995, the Turkish Parliament announced that if Greece expanded its territorial waters from six to twelve miles, Turkey would go to war and war almost happened over islets in the Aegean Sea. In 1996, a former Turkish diplomat, Sukru Elekdag, published an article arguing that Turkey should be ready to fight two and a half wars (against Greece, Syria and the PKK) (Kirisci 2006). This primacy of security and the use of confrontational tools to solve foreign disputes seemed to have contributed to Turkey's image as a "post-Cold War warrior" (Kirisci 2006), a "coercive regional power" (Onis 2003) or a "regional bully" which insists on "one-dimensionality when it comes to means" (Desai 2005) during that decade.

This paper agrees with the analyses that Turkish foreign policy became more active and multi-directional with the end of Cold War. Nonetheless, this paper argues that there is an element of novelty in the foreign policy conducted in the 2000s, especially in comparison with the previous phase of activism in Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s, namely the stronger emphasis on good neighbourly relations and on the use of soft power. Turkey would be moving on the direction of a more "benign regional power" (Onis 2008). This distinct era in the conduction of external relations can be explained by the decrease of the role of the military in foreign-policy making, the prospect of membership of the European Union and the new vision put forward by the AKP.

In order to make these inter-related arguments, this paper will first explain the foreign policy developed by Turkey in 1990s, with emphasis given to the use of confrontational tools. It will also explain that Turkey adopted such a security-centered foreign policy because the role of the military in foreign policy making in that decade became more pronounced, and the military's particular understanding of national security seemed to be under increased threat with the end of bipolarity. The military, as will be argued, has a tendency to frame issues as "existential threats" due to its particular interpretation of historical events. Consequently, the military and other security actors in Turkey would propagate the view that the country is surrounded by unfriendly countries, that "Turks have no friends but Turks", and therefore the military has to remain strong. This paper will then assess changes in foreign policy in this decade, establishing as reasons for the adoption of a more benign form of external relations the prospect of EU membership and the coming to power of the AKP. Finally, this paper will provide two examples of issues which have been handled differently in the 2000s in comparison with the previous decade: the Cyprus issue and Turkey's relations with Israel and Palestine.

## **The 1990s**

This paper argues that Turkey's increased reliance on the use of confrontational tools during the 1990s happened because the role of the military - with its particular understanding of national security - increased in foreign policy making, which was manifested mainly in its actions in the National Security Council (NSC). Moreover, the military's security concerns seem to have been aggravated with the end of Cold war, which led to the prominence of security considerations among the military elite in Turkey.

The NSC gained constitutional status in 1961 as an advisory body to serve as a platform for the military to voice its opinion on national security matters (Aydin and Acikmese 2007). However, the 1982 constitution, drafted under military rule, enlarged its authority and the NSC became a powerful institution led by the military, whose recommendations should be adopted. The meeting of the NSC originates the National Security Policy Document, commonly referred to as the "Red Book", which establishes the threats to national security, the priorities and the policy guidelines. In 1992 the document was updated to include Kurdish separatism as the major security threat and in 1997 to include radical Islam. No civilian government should pursue a policy that contradicted this document (Ozcan 2001). The members comprised, on the military side, the Commanders of the Army, Navy, Air force, Gendarmerie and the Chief of General Staff. On the civilian side, the members were the President, the Prime Minister, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Interior. Although apparently there was a balance and a 5:5 ratio between civilian and military members, the military was stronger because it was more unified than its civilian counterpart, and the fact that the Minister of Defence was virtually nominated by the military. In addition, the Secretariat and the Chief of General staff were responsible for the setting of the agenda.

The military's security concerns seem to have been aggravated with the end of Cold war. The traditional security discourse of the military, according to Bilgin (2005) has three main components: a fear of abandonment, a fear of loss of territory and geographical determinism. All these seemed to have been aggravated with a rise in PKK attacks, the rise to power of the Islamic REFAH Party, the very end of bipolarity which heightened the fear Turkey would lose its strategic importance to the Western community – the fact the NATO was reviewing its mission and that the EU was enlarging without Turkey did not help – and growing instability in the neighbourhood. According to the Chief of General Staff, in 1993, "the army, in the face of recent international developments, has to assume duties that are far more important than it used to carry out" (Ozcan 2001, p. 24). The fact that the civilian government was weak and fragmented during the 1990s, with a series of weak coalition governments, frequent change of Foreign Ministers – there were nine different ministers between July 1994 and June 1997 – also helped make the military more assertive (Robins 2003).

With the end of Cold war and the perceived loss of Turkey's strategic importance to the West, the fear of abandonment seemed to have been aggravated exactly at a time when the instability and threats in the neighbourhood were growing (Kirisici 2006). Turkey's relatively comfortable position during the Cold War, as a strong member of the Western alliance, was being challenged. Debates about the future of NATO with the Soviet threat gone were a very strong source of worry. For Turkey, NATO membership symbolised membership to the West and it is therefore no surprise that Turkey was one of the most vocal countries on the importance of the continuity of NATO's existence. President Demirel even argued that "We will continue to be a strong a reliable member of NATO, which undoubtedly is the most successful alliance that humankind ever witnessed" (quoted

on Robins 2003, p. 20). An additional source of concern was EU's enlargements absorbing Eastern European countries, which until recently were members of a rival organisation which Turkey helped keep at bay. Turkey, which signed the Ankara agreement in 1963, liberalised its economy in the 1980s and applied for full membership in 1987, was being by-passed by former enemies.

The developments happening on the borders of Turkey (the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the break-up and wars in former Yugoslavia, the Gulf war) seemed to confirm the idea of geographical determinism i.e., the Turkey's geographical position determines its foreign and security policies. The argument put forward is that because Turkey is faced by threats like no other European country, the military must remain involved in foreign-policy making, and geographical features will be determinants of the policies adopted. This geographical determinism, or this securitisation of geography (Aydin 2003), in Bilgin (2005)'s view, glosses over the essential political character of conceptualising security and takes the "political" out of geopolitics.

The struggle with the PKK awakened the fear of loss of territory, and the historical legacy of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, and the particular interpretation given to that event, continued to influence the military's view of the world. The Treaty of Sevres (1920), which was never implemented, made Turkey suspicious of even its friends and allies and its ties with the West are perceived and distorted through the prism of the "Sevres Syndrome" (Drorian 2005). The idea that Europe wants to carve out Turkish territory is felt until today, and, according to Philip Robins (2003), "Turkey smells conspiracy whenever Europeans insist on conditionality" (p. 103). Treaty of Sevres is frequently invoked when the Turkish state perceives so-called foreign plots to dismember its territory and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, by among other reasons, the foreign powers exploration of minorities to weaken the empire, contributed to perception that domestic threats are an extension of external ones, which is clearly visible in the Kurdish case. During the 1990s, as mentioned before, Greece and Syria support for the PKK culminated in the idea that Turkey should be ready to fight two and a half wars (Drorian 2005). Turkish security establishment thought that these countries support for the PKK was aimed at weakening and dividing Turkey from within. The security elites defined social conflicts as manifestations of external threats, which justified military responses to these situations.

In short, the definition of the referent object to be secure (the territorial integrity and the secular and homogenous features of the nation), the linking of domestic and foreign threats to this object, the particular interpretation of traumatic events, especially the Treaty of Sevres and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, all contributed to the prominence of security considerations among the military elite in Turkey. With the end of Cold War, Turkey's fear of abandonment and loss of territory grew even stronger, along with the role of the military in foreign policy making. The security argument was used to justify a broad range of measures in the domestic sphere, from press censorship in the Southeast to the closure of political parties and the role of military in politics (Robins 2003). Externally, the centrality of security in Turkey, still understood in hard military matters, also had implications for the conduction of foreign policy. The continued fear of loss of territory and encirclement heightened the feeling of insecurity and justified the maintenance of a large army through conscription and a considerable slice of the national budget (Drorian 2005). Moreover, Turkey should be ready to employ force to defend its national security, since the projection of military force, or the threat to use this force

outside Turkish borders were deemed an essential part of Turkey's security strategy (Oguzlu 2002).

It was a misfortune for Turkey that all this was happening when Europe seemed to have embraced a completely different security strategy and culture, one which does not entail the use of force among its member states and prefer the use of civilian means in dealing with security issues. A desecutitisation of its security strategy seemed to be observed in Europe, with the search for solutions through negotiation and consensus building. Moreover, the object of security apparently had changed as well: it was no longer the state, but the individuals and societies inside the states, to be protected against non-military threats, such as environmental damages, economic mismanagement, organised crime, terrorism and illegal trafficking of drugs and humans (Oguzlu and Kibaroglu 2008). Turkey, insisting on a narrow Cold War definition of the primary referent of security, and still considering confrontational tools to protect it, seemed a "normative anachronism".

To summarize the argument so far, the foreign policy conducted in the 1990s was clearly confrontational and security-centered and this can be attributed to the primacy of the military in foreign Policy making, and the fact that the military has a particular security understanding of foreign affairs. The object to be secured continued to be the territorial integrity and the homogenous and secular features of the nation-state, to be defended with the threat or the use of military force against internal and external threats. Following Buzan et al (1998) it is possible to argue that Turkey was securitising its foreign relations during the 1990s, having issues (such as Syria support for the PKK) framed by the securitising actor with "social capital" (the military via the NSC) as an existential threat to a particular referent object (the territorial integrity of the country), and in order to counter this threat, a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means was invoked by the securitising actor and it was accepted by the audience. In fact, according to Kirisci (2006) a survey conducted in 2001 revealed that two thirds of Turks agreed with the military interpretation of foreign affairs and believed that "Turks have no friends but Turks".

### **The 2000s**

The decision of the European Union to accept Turkey as a candidate country at the Helsinki Summit held in December 1999 represented a fundamental turning point for Turkey (Onis 2003). After the European Commission published the Accession Partnership document in March 2000, Turkey prepared the National Program, containing the reforms the country were to implement in order to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. A series of reforms packages were passed in the parliament, including the lift of the ban to broadcast and teach in Kurdish, the increase in the number of civilians in the NSC, and the end of the death penalty. Onis (2003) points out that these bold reforms were ironically engineered by a weak coalition government composed of the Democratic Left Party (DSP) led by Bulent Ecevit, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), led by the ultra-nationalist Devlet Bahçeli and the Motherland Party (ANAP), led by Mesut Yılmaz. It was the ANAP who pushed stronger for EU membership and associated reforms.

Mesut Yılmaz, in fact, was central to the debate on the need to reformulate Turkish traditional security culture. In a speech at the Congress of the Motherland Party in August 2001, he claimed that Turkey's integration into the EU was delayed by "national security syndrome" and claimed that Turkey's conceptualisation of national security was too broad. The Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen Association (TUSIAD) issued a press release praising Yılmaz' move (Bilgin 2005). General (Ret.) Ergüvenç, in 1999, argued that

national security in the twenty-first century should be defined by sustaining freedom and development in a ruthless competitive environment, through education, research and investment in infra-structure, and less expenditure on the military. He also argued that Turkey should not solve its internal and external conflicts through military force. Ambassador (Ret.) İlder Türkmen, in 2001, pointed out to the need to have a critical look at Turkey's strategic culture; "although there exists many conflicts and instability in the region surrounding Turkey, not all of these constitute a direct threat to Turkey's security" (quoted on Bilgin 2005, p. 201). New actors (including the business elites and civil society organisations), who benefited from the process of economic liberalisation from the 1980s onwards, became increasingly more vocal and began to question the established approaches to issues (Bilgin 2005).

Apart from the emergence of new actors advocating new attitudes in foreign policy, one of the most important factors for explaining the transformation in Turkish foreign policy is the very prospect of EU membership. Aydın and Acikmese (2007) argue that the EU is able to influence Turkish foreign policy via three different methods. First, Turkey is expected to adopt the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) *acquis*, including joint actions, declarations, and common positions. Second, Turkey is expected to promote domestic changes in order to meet the political criteria established by the EU, and these changes will have an impact on foreign-policy conduction. Third, the EU insists on the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes. As part of the changes in civil-military relations for the sake of meeting the EU's political criteria, a reform package passed in 2003 increased the number of civilian members of the National Security Council, as mentioned before, and rendered its recommendations to the government less binding (Heper 2005). In addition, a civilian was appointed as the Secretary-General of the Council. The influence of the military, the main actor responsible for the militarised foreign policy and *realpolitik* security culture, was thus curbed with EU-related reforms.

The improvement of relations with Greece are sometimes explained as a result of the personal preferences of İsmail Cem and George Papandreou, the respective foreign ministers of Turkey and Greece in 1999 and of the "earthquake diplomacy" carried out in the same year. Aydın and Acikmese (2007), however, argue that the most important factor in the rapprochement was the Europeanisation of Turkish foreign policy towards Greece as part of the prospect of EU membership, with the need to resolve border disputes under the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes. In spite of the fact the disputes remain unsolved, such as the extension of territorial waters and the exploration of the continental shelf, relations between the two countries have improved dramatically, with more official visits, increased volume of trade and tourism and the reduction of military exercises. Onis and Yilmaz (2008) develop a similar argument, claiming that the EU had a significant impact in the changing of the policies of both Turkey and Greece from a hard-line nationalistic stance towards an approach based on negotiation and compromise, and thus facilitated the rapprochement. Greece, from a negative veto power, began to support a process of dialogue with Turkey and Turkey's EU membership. As for Turkey, the recognition of the need to solve the Cyprus dispute along the lines of the Annan Plan, as will be discussed below, represented a shift from previous hard-liners approaches.

Apart from the process of membership of the EU, one can argue the foreign policy formulated by the AKP also contributed to the decrease in the use of confrontational tools and in the number of issues being framed as existential threats. Murison (2006) argues that the foreign policy developed by the AKP is different from the traditional Turkish foreign

policy and that Turgut Ozal (Prime Minister from 1983 to 1989 and President until his death in 1993), who embraced the philosophy of neo-Ottomanism, laid the foundations of this new foreign policy vision. The doctrine of “Strategic Depth”, formulated by Ahmet Davutoglu, the chief foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdogan, and now Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a book published in 2000, would be animating the new Turkish foreign policy.

In Murison (2006)’s view, Ozal had already promoted a paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy, from Kemalism to neo-Ottomanism, by restructuring the economy and promoting an activist foreign policy. According to Murison (2006), prior to Ozal, Turkey’s external relations were guided by the maxim “Peace at Home, Peace abroad”, therefore it embraced isolationism and rejected pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism. It is an exaggeration to say that Turkey wanted to remain isolated, as it did until the end of World War II, since Turkey wanted to join the Western alliance and did so by joining NATO, the Council of Europe, by signing the Ankara agreement with Europe and finally by applying for EU membership. However, Turkey did avoid entanglements in the neighbourhood, which seems fairly obvious when the neighbours were considered unfriendly and capable of posing a threat to Turkey.

Ozal, since 1991, provided political stature to neo-Ottomanism, a term coined by the columnist Cengiz Candar, advocating an active and diversified foreign policy based on Ottoman heritage. Turkey had the potential to be a leader in the Muslim and Turkic world. In many ways, the Motherland Party of Ozal was the ideological precursor of the AKP, since both are nationalist, conservative and pro-free market. Davutoglu’s concept of “Strategic Depth”, which guides AKP’s foreign policy, can be traced back to Ozal’s neo-Ottomanism. This concept is predicated on historical and geographical depth. Turkey, because of the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, has geographical depth, which in turn puts the country at the center of many areas of influence. Therefore, Turkey should engage with all the regions in its neighborhood. In the “Strategic Depth” book published in 2000, Davutoglu criticises Kemalist foreign policy for not taking advantage of Turkey’s historical and geographic depth and now time has come for Turkey to develop a genuine multi-directional foreign policy using its strategic advantages. Turkey should no longer be a frontier country, as it was during the Cold war, or a bridge between civilisations, as it was perceived in the 1990s. Now Turkey should be a central country providing security and stability in its areas of influence, where it has historical responsibilities, namely the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Gulf and the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas (Davutoglu 2008). Furthermore, he advocated the development of a balanced approach towards global and regional powers, including the EU and the US. All this actions should transform Turkey in a global power.

As previously mentioned, the adoption of a diversified foreign policy was already visible in the 1990s. However, there is a fundamental change. Of the principles of the new vision in Turkish foreign policy spelled out by Davutoglu, the most distinct is the “zero-problem policy towards the neighbours”. The AKP promotes a drastic change in the narrative of Turkey’s foreign relations. Instead of a borderline paranoid assessment that Turkey is encircled by unfriendly countries all involved in “playing games over Turkey”, Davutoglu establishes “areas of influence” in which Turkey should increase its role as a facilitator, promoting diplomatic relations and setting channels for political dialogue. Turkey is no longer the “victim” of its neighbours or its neighbours “victims” of Turkey’s aggression in self-defence. Now Turkey should be a benign leader in its bordering regions,

prioritising dialogue as a means of solving crisis. Kirisci (2006) adds that the fact that the AKP is a political party with an Islamist legacy contributes to Turkey's leverage in the Muslim Middle East.

This paper will now turn to two issues which are perceived to have been handled differently in the 2000s in comparison with the previous decade, and will try to access which were the motivators of change.

### Cyprus

One of the issues which had been successfully securitised throughout the years was the Cyprus case and therefore it is one of the areas in which the different stance supported by the AKP was more visible. Cyprus, in the traditional security discourse, is represented as vital to Turkey's national security due to its proximity to the Anatolian heartland and therefore as a potential source of a fatal threat to the Turkish state. The idea is that Cyprus could be used as a "springboard for the conquest of Anatolia from the South" (Kaliber 2005, p. 325) if an unfriendly power, namely Greece, is dominant in the island. Throughout the 1990s, this discourse of encirclement by the state elites did not change: "Cyprus continued to be imagined as the cornerstone of Greece's policy of enveloping Turkey with a strategic belt of hostile states" (Kaliber 2005, p. 326). This fear of encirclement was aggravated by the military cooperation agreement between the Greek-Cypriots and Armenia. In January 2003, the Chief of General staff argued that an acceptance of the Annan Plan would mean the complete entrapment of Turkey in Anatolia (Kaliber 2005). The Cyprus issue remained confined to "experts", and the policy of security towards the island was to be based on technical know-how, not "daily political haggling", effectively closing the possibility of a political discussion. Therefore, the Cyprus issue was a matter "above politics", successfully securitised and insulated from the public domain.

The AKP discourse towards Cyprus avoided the securitisation of the issue, configuring a shift from a hard-line security stance. For the first time, the government recognised the need for a solution to the Cyprus dispute, at odds with the traditional view of "no solution is the solution" and thus supported the Annan Plan and encouraged the Turkish Cypriots to endorse the referendum held in April 2004 (which they did. However, the Greek-Cypriot side voted against reunification along the lines of the plan). This shift could be attributed to political opportunism on the part of the AKP, since the resolution of the Cyprus issue was an important condition to the opening of membership talks with the EU. In any case, it is significant that the opening of EU talks was considered more important than the continuation of the traditional policy towards Cyprus. The AKP promoted a complete change of approach to the matter, which was a fly in the face of the military, much of the Foreign Affairs and the presidency (Robins 2007). Government leaders began to replace terms such as "them", "the others" and the "enemy" with "Greek-Cypriots", "partners" and expressing preference for a "win-win" approach to the conflict (Kirisci 2006). Civil society groups and the media also helped the establishment of a new stance on Cyprus. The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and the TUSIAD's reports and position documents favouring the look for a solution to the issue were of great importance. In the end, the government succeeded in winning over the military over to their side on the Cyprus issue. The discourse of the Turkish military regarding the Annan Plan softened after 2004 and the NSC issued a statement in January of that year in support of the UN-backed plan for the political solution on the island (Kaliber



2005). Therefore, even the military-security elites did not block the path of a solution along the lines of the Annan Plan (Onis and Yilmaz 2008).

However, with the 75 percent “no” vote in the South of the island, no solution was reached. In December 2006, the EU blocked eight out of the 35 chapters of the negotiation because Turkey refused to extend the Customs Union to the Greek Cypriots and to open its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot ships and planes, at least until the EU ends its trade embargo on the North. Therefore, the AKP wasted significant political capital by providing a stronger push to the solution of the Cyprus issue, which in the end did not pay off.

### Israel-Palestine Conflict

After the AKP came to power, Turkey became more sympathetic to the situation of Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank, and Erdogan’s outbursts against Israel became well-known. In 2004, the Prime Minister called Israel a “terrorist state” after military operations in Gaza (Murison 2006) and this year he walked out of a debate with Shimon Peres at Davos, again protesting against Israeli military offensive in Gaza. After the election of Hamas in January 2006, Turkey invited the representative of Hamas in Damascus with the declared intent of mediating between Hamas and Israel. Turkey justified the invitation on the grounds that it was urging Hamas to renounce violence and to fulfill its responsibilities by trying to steer the Palestinians towards peace. However, this was considered a faux pas, since it was unsolicited and provided Hamas with some degree of legitimacy (Murison 2006).

During the 1990s, Turkey seemed to be moving closer to Israel, signing several agreements, on free trade, tourism and a military cooperation agreement in 1996. Inbar (2001) argues that the reason behind this strategic alliance was common strategic concerns, namely, territorial disputes with Syria (the Hatay province in the case of Turkey and the Golan Heights in the case of Israel) and Syria’s support for the PKK and Hezbollah and Hamas. Moreover, Turkey’s trust in the protection of NATO against threats from the Middle East decreased after the end of Cold War; therefore it turned to Israel to ensure its protection. Turkey’s deepened ties with Israel can also be explained by the growing sense of beleaguerment of the Turkish military in the face of domestic challenges (the rise of Political Islam in the form of the REFAH Party and Kurdish separatism) aggravated by the already mentioned external challenges of NATO reviewing its mission and successive EU enlargements without the inclusion of Turkey. In face of all these perceived “threats”, Turkey turned to Israel to confirm its Western orientation (Yavuz 1997).

At a first glance, therefore, it seems that the AKP’s stance towards Israel represents a major shift. However, a more detailed analysis will prove that this is not the case. Turkey’s sympathy towards the Palestinians were already growing since the 2000 Intifada, and at that stage Turkish politicians began to respond by toning down support for Israel and being more vocal in the support for Palestinians (Robins 2007). Even Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said in April 2002 that Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians. In fact, since the mid-1960s, Turkey seems to have been more tilted towards the Palestinians. Turkey did not allow its bases to be used by the US to send aid to Israel in the wars of 1967 and 1973, but it allowed the Soviet Union to use its air space to send aid to Egypt and Syria in 1973. Moreover, no Turkish minister visited Israel from 1965 until 1992 (Inbar 2001). Turkey allowed the opening of a PLO office in Ankara in the 1970s and in 1977 the Likud Party who took power in Israel downgraded diplomatic relations with

Turkey for its support for the PLO and after the 1980 military coup, Turkey did the same (Kirisçi 2000).

Even the signature of the military cooperation agreement with Israel seems to have been thought carefully by Turkish authorities in order not to hurt Palestinians and the Arab world sensitivities. Taspınar (2005) argues that the fact the PLO and Israel had reached an agreement on the Peace Process (the Oslo accords) facilitated the Turkish move, since the Turkish military would be sheltered from domestic and Arab criticism. The logic behind it was that if the Arabs were signing Peace Treaties with Israel, Turkey could also upgrade the relationship.

Finally, even though the AKP uses a hard rhetoric against Israel, the military and intelligence cooperation agreement has continued (Robins 2007). Furthermore, Erdogan has expressed his wish to participate in the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict several times. In 2005 he visited Israel with a delegation of businessmen and delivered this message to Ariel Sharon and in 2007 Mahmoud Abbas and Shimon Peres met in Ankara (Robins 2007). Therefore, the erratic behaviour the AKP seems to adopt towards Israel is not so worrisome. In fact, as Philip Robins (2007) put it “Turkey needs a voice like that of post-Islamists, issuing sharp criticisms of the conduct of Israel, if the Kemalist security state is to continue to cooperate with it” (p. 300).

## **Conclusion**

The current Turkish foreign policy represents a major departure from previous foreign policy orientation, mainly in regards to the previous tendency to securitise foreign relations. When the issues of concern were securitised (i.e. when they were framed as existential threats) the tendency to use hard power increased, since securitisation legitimises a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means, such as the threat or the use of force (Oguzlu 2007). The use of confrontational tools, which was particularly visible in the 1990s, due the important role the military enjoyed in foreign policy making, has become less frequent in the 2000s.

It was argued in the paper that the real paradigm shift observed in current Turkish foreign policy does not relate to a more diversified or multi-directional foreign relations; this trend was already visible in the previous decade with the end of bipolarity. The real novelty is the improvement of relations with neighbouring countries, the decrease in the use of confrontational tools, the adoption of a win-win approach and an emphasis on dialogue and negotiation as means to solve disputes. The AKP foreign policy does not show signs of paranoia and does not seem to be influenced at all by the Sevres Syndrome (Guida 2008). This distinct assessment of the world led opposition parties (the CHP and MHP) to accuse the AKP of conducting a submissive foreign policy with the help of foreign support to plot the destruction of the established order in the country and to submit and kneel to those who attempt to carry out the Sevres plans (Guida 2008), which reveals that the Sevres Complex is far from eradicated.

The AKP is not the only one who should be credited for this positive development. The influence of the EU, with its reforms programme, which helped curb the power of the military, and insists on the peaceful settlement of disputes, was also important. Furthermore, it seems that the security establishment itself did not oppose these conciliatory moves, apart from some opposition parties claiming that this new foreign policy was submissive as just mentioned. Relations with Syria were already improving

before the AKP came to power, improvement of relations with Iran did not cause major tension, and even on hyper sensitive issues, such as the Cyprus case, the military in the end did not oppose the solution promoted by the AKP.

In short, the new foreign policy vision put forward by the AKP is indeed new, but was facilitated the prospect of EU membership and the convergence of the military's view on many external issues. In any case, the foreign policy adopted in the 2000s must be seen as positive. Instead of seeing the regions around it as a source of risks, Turkey began to see them as areas where it could play a proactive role in the maintenance of peace and stability. This in turn contributes to the improvement of Turkey's credibility in the eyes of both the West and the other regions surrounding it.

## References:

Alpay, Sahin (2008) "Beginning of the end for AKP power? *Today's Zaman*. 17 November 2008. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/yazarDetay.do?haberno=158919>

Altunisik, Meliha. "State, Society and Democracy in Turkey in the Era of Globalisation since 1980". 28 November 2008, lecture at LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies Conference.

Aras, Bulent (2003). "Turkey's relations with Iran in the post-Cold War era". In: Ismael, Tareq Y. and Aydin, Mustafa (eds.). *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a Changing Role in World Politics*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Aydin, Mustafa (2003). "Securitisation of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey". *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 3 (2).

Aydin, Mustafa and Acikmese, Sinem A. (2007). "Europeanisation through EU conditionality: understanding the new era in Turkish foreign policy". In: *Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 9 (3).

Bilgin, Pinar (2005). 'Turkey's Changing Security Discourses: The Challenge of Globalisation' *European Journal of Political Research* 44 (1).

Buzan, Barry, Waever, Ole et al (1998). *Security: A New Framework For Analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Davutoglu, Ahmet (2008). "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007". In *Insight Turkey* 10 (01)

Desai, Seiju (2005). "Turkey and the European Union: a Security Perspective: Risk or Opportunity?". *Defense Studies* 5 (3).

Drorian, Sevgi (2005). "Turkey: security, state and society in troubled times". In *European Security* 14 (2).

Ergil, Dogu (2008). "Fatal Contradictions". *Today's Zaman*, 12 November 2008. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/yazarDetay.do?haberno=158442>

Guida, Michelangelo (2008). "The Sevres Syndrome and the 'Komplo' Theories in the Islamists and Secular Press". In *Turkish Studies* 9 (1).

Heper, Metin (2005). "The Justice and Development Party Government and the Military in Turkey". In *Turkish Studies* 6 (2).

Inbar, Efarin (2001). "The Strategic Glue in the Israeli-Turkish Alignment". In Rubin, Barry and Kirisci, Kemal (2001) (eds.). *Turkey in World Politics – an Emerging Multiregional Power*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Kart, Emine (2008). "Overcoming 'prisoner's dilemma with US, Iraq and eradicating PKK's hopes". *Today's Zaman*, 08 February 2009. <http://www.sundayszaman.com/sunday/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=166332>

Kaliber, A. (2005). "Securing the ground through securitised 'foreign' policy: the Cyprus case". In: *Security Dialogue* 36 (3).

Kirisci, Kemal (2000). "Turkey and the Muslim Middle East". In Makovsky, Alan and Sayari, Sabri (eds.). *Turkey's New World – Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Kirisci, Kemal (2006). "Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times". Institute for Security Studies, *Chaillot Paper* 92, September 2006.

Kut, Sule (2001). "The Contours of Turkish Foreign Policy in the 1990s". Rubin, Barry and Kirisci, Kemal (eds.). *Turkey in World Politics – an Emerging Multiregional Power*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Logan, David (2009). "Turkey and its Middle Eastern Neighbours: Threat or Opportunity for the European Union?". In: *Asian Affairs* 40 (1).

Makovsky, Alan and Sayari, Sabri (2000) (eds.). *Turkey's New World – Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Murison, Alexander (2006). "The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy". In: *Middle Easter Studies* 42 (6).

Oguzlu, T.H. (2002). "Turkey and the European Union – The Security Dimension". In *Contemporary Security Policy* 23 (3).

- Oguzlu, T.H. (2007). "Soft power in Turkish foreign policy". In: *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61 (1).
- Oguzlu, T.H. (2008). "Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives". In *Insight Turkey* 10 (3).
- Oguzlu, T.H. and Kibaroglu (2008). 'Incompatibilities in Turkish and European Security Cultures Diminish Turkey's Prospects for EU membership'. In *Middle Eastern Studies* 44 (6).
- Onis, Ziya (2003). "Domestic politics, International Norms and Challenges to the State: Turkey-EU Relations in the post-Helsinki Era". In *Turkish Studies* 4 (1).
- Onis, Ziya (2008). "Europeanization or Euro-Asianism? New Wave of Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy". Lecture at LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies Conference "State, Society and Democracy in Turkey in the Era of Globalisation since 1980", 28 November 2008.
- Onis, Ziya and Yilmaz, Suhanaz (2008). "Greek-Turkish Rapprochement: Rhetoric or Reality". In: *Political Science Quarterly* 123 (1).
- Ozcan, Gencer (2001). "The Military and the Making of Foreign Policy in Turkey". In Rubin, Barry and Kirisci, Kemal (eds.). *Turkey in World Politics – an Emerging Multiregional Power*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Ozcan, Mesut (2008). *Harmonizing Foreign Policy. Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Park, William H. (2005). "The Security Dimension of Turkey-EU Relations". In Lake, Michael (ed.). *The EU and Turkey – a glittering prize or a millstone*. London: The Federal Trust.
- Polat, Rabia Karakaya (2008). "The AKP and the Kurdish Issue: What went Wrong?" In *SETA Policy Brief* May 2008, n. 14.
- Robins, Philip (2003). *Suits and Uniforms – Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold war*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Robins, Philip (2007). "Turkish Foreign Policy since 2002: between a 'post-Islamist; government and a Kemalist state'. In: *International Affairs* 83 (1).
- Rubin, Barry (2001). "Turkey: a Transformed International Role". In Rubin, Barry and Kirisci, Kemal (eds.). *Turkey in World Politics – an Emerging Multiregional Power*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Taspinar, Omer (2005). *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey – Kemalist identity in Transition*. New York: Routledge.

Yavuz, M. Hakan (1997). "Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate". In: *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27 (1).