



Turkish Foreign Policy and the Balkans: Implications on Transatlantic Security

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Outline

- Turkey has been increasingly using its significant soft power potential to consolidate its political, economic, and cultural influence in the Balkans.
- Over the past couple of years, Turkey's already active foreign policy approach towards the Balkans has gained further momentum and ambition, which many pundits and scholars have labeled as "Neo-Ottomanism".
- A key question emerges out of this recent activism in Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans:
 - Are the Turkish interests compatible with the ones of the transatlantic partners? Or does this new activism lead to competition with the Euro-Atlantic security frameworks?
- Drawing on a recent fieldwork conducted in the Balkans, this presentation first discusses the factors contributing to and hindering the soft power potential of Turkey. It then explores the recent track record of the Turkish foreign policy in the region, and concludes with an analysis of the implications of this recent activism in Turkish foreign policy on transatlantic security.



Factors Influencing the Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans

- The legacy of the Ottoman Empire
- Close historical and cultural ties with the countries in the region
 - There are Turkish minorities living in the Balkans and people Balkan origins living in Turkey
- The need for peace, stability, and security in the region
 - Since the 1990s, Turkey has been playing an active role as a regional actor in the Balkans
 - As put by one diplomat, it is a “natural hinterland” for Turkish influence, as the country considers itself a Balkan state
- Turkey has contributed significantly to the international community’s efforts to establish peace in the post-conflict zones in the Balkans
 - It has been among the biggest contributors to the peacekeeping operations in the region
 - Its historical affiliation with the countries in the region has proven to be a priceless asset for these missions
- In the 1990s, Turkey played an active role in the establishment of the regional stability and integration initiatives such as the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, Stability Pact, South-East European Cooperation Process, and NATO-led South East Europe Initiative.
- More recently, the emphasis has shifted to establishing peace and stability for the sake of guarding the country’s economic interests in the region.
 - As put by one interviewee, the country wants to consolidate its economic power in the region, before the countries in the region become EU members.



Sources of Turkish Soft Power Potential

- With its 80 million population, of which 99% are Muslim, Turkey has significant soft power potential in the Balkans.
- Turkey has been “present at the creation” of the Euro-Atlantic Security Frameworks.
 - It is a NATO member since 1952.
 - It is among the founding members of the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG) in 1976 to promote European cooperation on armaments and R&D in defense technologies.
 - Following the transfer of the IEPG functions to the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG) in WEU, Turkey acquired “Associate Member” status in the WEU in 1992.
- As an EU candidate country and a long-lasting member of NATO, Turkey plays an important role in the projection of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, human rights, and trade liberalization in the Balkans.



Sources of Turkish Soft Power Potential

- Turkish TV series, movies, and broadcasting channels has become increasingly popular around the Balkans
 - Creating curiosity and tourism potential
 - Emphasizing the attractiveness of a “Turkish model” – a balanced mix of Islam, democracy, free market, and modernity.
- Visa-free travel with all Balkan countries (now with the exception of Croatia)
 - An increasing number of people from the Balkans visit Turkey, learn Turkish, and aspire to the Turkish lifestyle.
- The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) has been able to run a complementary policy by increasing cooperation with Muslim organizations in the Balkans and restoring Ottoman monuments, libraries, and mosques.
- Turkey allocates a considerable amount of development assistance to the region.
- Turkish schools and universities in the region, educating young people and the future elites of the region.



Sources of Turkish Soft Power Potential

- Turkey has consistently managed to transform its cultural soft power in the Balkans into an economic one.
- Turkey's geographical proximity reduces the transportation costs.
 - Every year about 151,000 Turkish trucks pass through the Balkans.
- The similarities in consumption habits between the people in Turkey and the Balkans make the region a very profitable market for Turkish companies.
 - At the June 2010 summit of the SEECP in Istanbul, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu expressed Turkey's eagerness to make the region "a hub for infrastructure, transportation, and energy projects as well as financial transaction."
- Accordingly, Turkish companies flourish in the finance, manufacturing, construction, medical, and insurance sectors in the Balkan markets.
 - Turkish companies increasingly win the bidding offers for privatization of state-owned enterprises in the Balkans.
 - The trade volume between Turkey and the Balkans, which was around 2.9 billion USD in 2000, increased to 18.4 billion USD in 2011.
 - While the trade volume between Turkey and Serbia was 568 million USD in 2011, it is 596 million USD in 2012.



Does this Increased Soft Power Translate into Increased Diplomatic and Political Weight?

- According to the latest Gallup Balkan Monitor (July 2011),
 - In many Balkan countries, such as Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro, people have very positive attitudes towards Turkey.
 - Even when looked at the public opinion in Serbia, young Serbs (ages 15-24) perceive Turkey as “friendlier” than their older counterparts.
- Turkey aims to capitalize on this increased cultural and economic soft power to maximize its political power in the region.
- However, whether Turkey can manage to convert its cultural and economic soft power into increased political and diplomatic leverage in the region is another question.
- Under Davutoğlu’s tenure as Turkish Foreign Minister, there has been a renewed interest in the Balkans.



Changes in the Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans

“Turkey is a natural actor in this region” A quote from Ahmet Davutoğlu, Speech at the Ministerial Meeting of the SEECF, 22 June 2010, Istanbul.

- In his 2001 book *Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)*, Davutoğlu points out that Turkey is positioned at the center of main “geo-cultural basins”, including the West, the Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Asia, and thus should create dynamic and proactive foreign policy within each of these geographies.
- Especially since 2008, there have been a large number of high-level visits between Turkey and the other countries in the Balkans, as Turkey attempts to establish itself as a mediator in the region.
- While continuing to participate in the EU and NATO post-conflict peacebuilding missions in the region, Turkey has been pursuing a more pro-active foreign policy in the Balkans since then.



A More Pro-Active Turkish Foreign Policy

- Turkey took the initiative to improve bilateral relations with Serbia
 - In October 2009 President Abdullah Gül visited Belgrade – the first official visit by a Turkish head of state in 23 years.
 - In 2009, Turkey and Serbia signed a free trade agreement.
 - Following several meetings between Turkish and Serbian officials in March 2010, the Serbian parliament passed a resolution apologizing for failing to prevent the Srebrenica massacre of 1995.
 - Trade with Serbia is soaring.
- Turkey chaired the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) during 2009-2010. The slogan of the Turkish Chairmanship of the SEECP, “From Shared History to Common Future,” is telling about Turkey’s attitude towards the Balkans.
- On April 24, 2010, the presidents of Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia signed the Istanbul Declaration on Peace and Stability in the Balkans, guaranteeing the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia.



Soft Power Hindrances?

- Limitations of the Turkish foreign policy capacity
 - As one interviewee put it, “Turkish foreign policymakers’ eyes are bigger than their stomachs”
- Turkey is seen as a biased third party, favoring the Muslim populations in the Balkans
- Need for confidence-building measures
 - to ensure that the country is perceived to be an honest broker.
 - to convince the skeptics that Turkey is not pursuing a “Neo-Ottomanist” agenda.
- Increased nationalism in the region
- Negative trends in Turkish domestic politics and human rights implementation
- Turkey’s trade potential is also not fully reached yet



A More Proactive Turkish Foreign Policy, with a Mixed Record

- Turkey initiated two trilateral consultation mechanisms, with Bosnia and Serbia, and with Bosnia and Croatia.
 - The former helped secure the appointment of a Bosnian Ambassador to Belgrade.
- Turkey successfully lobbied NATO to give Bosnia-Herzegovina a Membership Action Plan (MAP) in April 2010.
- It plays a positive role in overseeing the Dayton process through the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board.
- Turkey has also aligned itself closely with the US in opposing the closure of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Sarajevo, contrary to the stance of several EU states.
- Turkey failed to broker a new government in Sarajevo after the October 2010 parliamentary elections.
- It has been a strong supporter of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration and has encouraged NATO to invite Skopje to join even without a negotiated solution to the name dispute with Athens, and a strong supporter of Kosovo's independence.



Implications of Turkish Foreign Policy Activism on European Security Frameworks

- As we speak, the presidents of Turkey, Bosnia, and Serbia are meeting in Ankara, as a part of the third trilateral summit of this nature.
 - The first meeting was hosted by Turkish President Abdullah Gul in Istanbul on April 24, 2010, while the second meeting was hosted by then Serbian president Boris Tadic on April 26, 2011.
 - During the current summit, the leaders already signed an agreement on economic cooperation, and are discussing the possibility of establishing a trilateral board for trade.
- Does this new activism in Turkish foreign policy come at the expense of the EU and NATO's leverage in the region?
 - My fieldwork reveals that there is an overwhelming consensus among the policymakers and diplomats that this new activism is not in competition with the Euro-Atlantic frameworks.
 - One source of Turkish soft power is Turkey's EU accession prospects and its NATO membership.
- Turkey's EU membership prospects increases the credibility of Turkey in the eyes of the Balkan countries.
- Turkish government has been trying to reassure that its new activism in the Balkans will not come at the expense of its transatlantic allies.
 - Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans is concordant with the EU and NATO policies in the region.
 - Turkey supports the Membership Action Plan (MAP) of Balkan countries in NATO.
 - Turkey supports the EU membership of these countries as well.
- For the countries in the Balkans, accession to the EU remains a priority.



An Alternative Scenario...

- **Uncertainty and stalemate in Turkey's EU accession process**
 - Five chapters are currently blocked by a French veto, and eight chapters have been frozen (one of these chapters intersects with the five chapters blocked by France)
 - The Council also decided that no chapter would be provisionally closed until Turkey has fulfilled its commitment regarding the Additional Protocol.
- **Growing sentiment among the political elites and in the public opinion in Turkey that Turkey no longer needs the EU, as much as the EU needs Turkey.**
- **Therefore, if Turkey's accession to the EU remains deadlocked, Ankara might be tempted to split with the EU in order to enhance its own independent role in the region.**
 - As the uncertainties revolving around prospects for Turkish accession into the EU increase over time, Turkey will most likely continue to remain skeptical of the Euro-Atlantic infrastructures in its immediate neighborhood.
- **The impact of the ongoing European financial crisis?**
 - In April 2012, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Babacan said "Balkans should be a single economic zone in which borders and visas were lifted, more free trade agreements were made, customs duties and quotas were removed".
- **But for the foreseeable future, Balkan leaders will try to avoid creating the impression that by moving closer to Turkey they are surrendering their EU membership aspirations.**



The Euro-Atlantic Security Integration Track Record of the Western Balkans

- Albania and Croatia has already joined NATO in 2009.
- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joined the MAP in 1999 and aspires to join the Alliance.
 - At the April 2008 Bucharest Summit, Allies recognized the hard work and commitment, and agreed that an invitation to the country will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the issue over the country's name has been reached with Greece.
- Serbia has been a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) since December 2006.
- Montenegro joined the PfP in December 2006, and joined the MAP in 2009.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the PfP in 2006, and was invited to MAP in 2010, pending the resolution of a key issue concerning immovable defense property.
 - At the Chicago Summit in May 2012, Allied leaders welcomed the political agreement reached on 9 March 2012 on the registration of immovable defense property as state property.
 - They welcomed the initial steps taken regarding implementation and urged the political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to further their efforts to work constructively to implement the agreement without delay in order to start its first MAP cycle as soon as possible.



The Euro-Atlantic Security Integration Track Record of the Western Balkans

- EU is an important actor in the region.
- Stabilization and Association Process is the comprehensive framework for the countries in the region for their accession into the EU. It has three aims: to stabilize countries and encourage their swift transition to market economies; promoting regional cooperation; and membership into the EU.
- Instrument for Pre-Accession Funding: 11.5 billion Euros, intended for transition, institution-building, regional integration.
- CSDP elements such as civilian missions and military missions.



Loosing Momentum?

- Croatia is set to join the EU in July 2013.
- Candidates for the EU membership include FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.
- There is some reluctance on the part of the EU vis-à-vis the enlargement process, due to the ongoing economic crisis and the enlargement fatigue.
- There is backsliding or stagnation in democratization in the region.
 - Besides Montenegro, no other country has the prospects of joining the EU for the next 10 years.
 - Albania also applied for membership but is still waiting for candidacy.
 - Kosovo, BiH, and Macedonia – no clear trajectory of progress.
 - Social reality
 - No clear prospect of significant change in the political system
 - Economic problems especially after the global economic crisis



The Need for a Euro-Atlantic Vision for the Region

- We need momentum in the EU and NATO enlargement processes, against the background of the economic crisis.
 - This is where an active Turkish engagement might contribute.
- Euro-Atlantic integration and enlargement of NATO and the EU are seen as pathways to maintaining stability, peace, and establishing democracy in the Balkans.
- NATO enlargement is neither a replacement for EU enlargement, nor a replacement for increased Turkish engagement in the region.
 - They all go hand in hand with each other.
- Nevertheless, there should be increased coordination between these actors in leading the stabilization and reform processes.



Conclusion

- Establishing open and democratic institutions, and consolidating peace and stability in the region are key priorities for NATO and the EU.
 - Such priorities are also shared by Turkey.
- The economic aspect of the story is of great concern to Turkey.
- Change in the region will not exclusively come from the EU, nor from NATO.
- Human linkage, cultural interactions, and trade relations between Turkey and the rest of the Balkans are very important.
- With this comparative advantage, Turkey may contribute to the stalled reform processes.
 - It can act as an agent for change, contributing to the democratization and reform processes in the Balkans.