

SGIR 2010. Stockholm, September 9-11, 2010
Section 33 – The Debate on Turkey – Creating an inclusive or exclusive Europe?
Slot TA25. R458 – Turkey is not European Period
Thursday, 9.00am – 10.45am

When Turkish "greatness" meets EU values: how perceptions influence the Turkey-EU relationship.

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Abstract

This paper attempts to focus on an issue largely ignored or at least masked by the more virulent tone of debating the Islam/Christian incompatibilities that fuel this debate: the Turkish “greatness”. Furthermore the issue has been largely ignored in favour of the more attractive topic of Turkey’s unwillingness or even incapacity to adopt the values championed by the European Union: democracy, human and minority rights etc. These same detracting voices point out toward the AK Party as the primary source of Turkish “inconsistencies” in transforming the Turkish state into a credible European candidate for membership. The Turkish “greatness” factor was successively identified as pan-Turkism, neo-Ottomanism and lately as pan-Islamism by the western media while inside the Turkish society is known as a process of “loose Europeanization” term used by the Turkish elites. While the term “greatness” seldom appears in the Turkish media many Turkish nationalist commentators as well as part of the Turkish people refer to it as “the good old days”, the days when Turkey was respected and treated as a great power. Pre WWII European powers relinquished, at least in part, their status for the benefit of a bigger common idea of a united Europe, a single voice in the international arena. Is this another European value that Turkey fails to grasp? Prof. Davutoglu’s “Strategic depth” approach is pushing forward an active foreign policy in the Middle East meant to provide Turkey with a status of a regional power and thus distancing itself even farther from the way Europeans understand and see the future of the EU. Is Turkish “greatness” too hard to swallow on top of the other concerns displayed by the Europeans or is it just another way Turkey is trying to squeeze its entrance as a full member in the family of the European Union? Is it Turkish “greatness” deeply rooted into the consciousness of the Turkish people or it is just another bargaining tool used by the AKP in its bumpy way to EU accession?

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ⁱⁱ The author wishes to thank for the financial support provided from programs co-financed by The SECTORAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT, Contract POS DRU 6/1.5/S/3 – „DOCTORAL STUDIES, A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND HUMANISTIC STUDIES”

Introduction

In a paper presented a year ago at METU University in Ankara¹ I was addressing several factors I believed were bound to influence the Turkish foreign policy in the near future. Among them I was mentioning the quest of the Turkish leadership in the last years for being acknowledged as a regional power and the apparent ambition of pacifying the region all by itself. Other factors mentioned were the weakness to outside pressures from countries all around its borders – particularly those who keep Turkey captive because of the Kurdish issue, the lack of a model for securing a “pax turcica” in a region convoluted by extreme differences in culture, religion and military power and a chronic inability of the Turks in communicating effectively its foreign policy agenda particularly vis-à-vis its western partners. I was also pointing out to the Turkish willingness to interpret or reinterpret the concept of “bridge” one of the major axis of Turkish foreign policy. A much more sensible subject about the pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism and neo-Ottomanism² deserved much more attention for several reasons. Firstly, because these issues negatively influence the perception of Turkey and the Turkish foreign policy. Secondly because they represent concepts that could hardly be explained in the few pages of a research paper. Finally, even though as an outsider to the Turkish society I may benefit from a certain detachment, I am quite aware of the limitations of not being a Turk or a Muslim when dealing with matters of nationality or faith. Still I believe this is an opportunity to engage the topic from a particular perspective that may, hopefully, allow me to get a concept across and fulfil my promise to stand behind my argument presented a year ago with a broader and more detailed presentation of that issue.

Since the end of the Cold War Turkey has taken significant steps out of the self-imposed, Kemalist, restraint in dealing with the Muslim and the Arab world. Today many question Turkey’s allegiance to the western values³ on the basis of the internal political struggle between the republican, secular establishment and the AKP a party of Islamic orientation. They also question Turkey’s foreign policy of the last years mainly because of the new wave of activism doubled by an apparent lack of willingness to follow its western allies in their foreign policy choices. Recent examples, like the vote against economic sanctions for Iran or the deterioration of relations with Israel are used as proof of such theories. Inside and outside adversaries of the newly found Turkish independence and activism in the regional and international arena successively called it pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism or neo-Ottomanism.

This paper argues that all these three concepts are in fact the same symptoms of a distress that has tormented the Turkish collective mind since the inception of the Turkish Republic. At the beginning of the 1990’s the significant changes in the geopolitical conditions of the continent allowed those symptoms to burst open under the concept of Turkish “greatness”. The concept may give an answer to the direction the Turkish foreign policy took in the last 20 years and explain the rapport between “greatness” and the selected critiques it brought upon it.

The first part of this paper follows chronologically the developments in the Turkish foreign policy in the stages of pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism and neo-Ottomanism and their

connection to the concept offered here. The second part makes a parallel between European shared sovereignty and Turkish “greatness” and how this link influences the EU-Turkey relationship.

Who’s greatness?

Giving a straight answer to this question proved to be more than a challenge particularly in the case of a modern state at the beginning of the 21st century. Even more difficult was to identify the features composing this concept for a country to which I am not accustomed to neither by measure of history, size or wealth nor by its religion and civilisation. Framing the concept in such terms surely is driving the discussion towards a constructivist approach. When compared to Europe and the European Union the parallel is half justifiable as the continent witnessed a transformation much better explained through a liberal-constructivist approach where institutions play a part as important as the concepts themselves. Is it then such a comparison acceptable or relevant? At least in part it should be. Tracing common features is one way to support such an approach. So is the measure employed as the paper relates to the same body of institutions and values to which both the European states and Turkey relate. If such a paper can contribute to a better understanding of the differences in perceptions Europe and Turkey face, relevance is self-evident. If not then it remains a simple exercise to no one’s avail. As a work in progress this idea has to “pass the test”, build up on critiques and fine tune on the readers input.

Azamet is the Turkish word for greatness, grandeur, grandness, pride, magnificence, lordliness, ostentation, hauteur, loftiness, overbearance, pomposity. Many of those epithets could be easily associated with the Ottoman Empire and the Sublime Porte, or with other European Imperial house for that matter. Over time empires have disappeared but many modern countries hang to that imperial past for different reasons. With Turkey things were different. After Mustafa Kemal imposed the Turkish Republic and a societal transformation hardly seen in another country in the world Turkey appeared to have succeeded a clean break from its imperial past. For almost 70 years Turkey turned its back to its former imperial glory and territories and ostentatiously chose the west. Since the 1920’s Turkey struggled to modernize and catch up with the continent but somehow always lingered behind continental Europe. There have been several milestones that Turkey missed in its quest for political and social modernisation. Guardians of an imposed secularist regime the Turkish military and bureaucracy reacted violently to regime change and foreign policy that bore the signs of a rapprochement with its imperial territories.

There are several European countries that at some point in their history enjoyed “greatness” as they were considered the biggest powers in Europe whether economically, militarily or both. These countries have aspired and reached “greatness” on the world stage and many countries and nations near or far have paid a price in this process. But the devastation of the WWII and the rise of the two antagonist superpowers altered their position in Europe and the world. That does not mean that those countries ever forgot their former glory or that it wouldn’t like to see it revived. In France there is hardly any Gaullist speech in

the years after the war that does not mention directly or not the “Gloire de la France”. France still claims a political leadership in Europe while Germany claims an economical one both asserting themselves as the engine of Europe. Yet in the interest of peace and prosperity formal enemies let differences aside and agreed to share sovereignty in a number of issues. Over the years the list has grown and many other European states have joined in the hope that sharing sovereignty will bring them prosperity and peace. Solitary greatness has been substituted for common greatness. Today the EU wants to be a major actor and a world player promoting its own values, ideas and institutions alongside other major political and military actors.

Ataturk’s legacy, the frailness of the Turkey Republic and the advent of Soviet superpower in its backyard kept this sentiment out of public and governmental sphere. Turkey played the card of a western ally mimicking European democracies and values in exchange for guaranteed security and opportunities for economic development. To its best interest it cushioned under the Kemalist establishment any desire to play an international or even regional role almost always following the directions set by the West in its foreign policy. Yet no matter how deeply entrenched were the Kemalists precepts the hundreds of years of “greatness” were bound to remain instilled in the Turkish consciousness. Common Turks still talk about the “good old times” when Ottomans ruled over Balkans or the Arabs. One can hardly miss the thousands of remainders of its flamboyant history and no matter how modernised and westernised the country became those signs constantly reminded the difference between its days of glory and its modern unassuming posture. The reminiscences of the good old times were waiting to surface only delayed by unripe political circumstances.

The fall of the Berlin Wall changed the geopolitical configuration of the continent. Turkey did not wait long to try to capitalize on the new changes and the saga of the Turkish pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism and neo-Ottomanism started in a sequence of “media waves”. In almost 20 years these concepts bore a terrible burden for the Turkish foreign policies. Because of them Turkey has been set inside a frame and logic of expansionistic, ruthless, quest for dominance in its near abroad and a tentative to counterbalance the influence of others in a region “destined” to be the fief of Turkish ambitions. Such depictions of the Turkish foreign policy are the work of Turkish and foreign analysts alike. They have served different purposes while capitalizing on each other discourses, fuelling the never ending debate of Turkish (non)Europeanism. The tone of this debate rose particularly after the AKP won elections at the beginning of 2000. On one hand there is the internal Turkish chorus of hard line Kemalists, made out of the all mighty military establishment, the academia and governmental bureaucracy bashing AKP’s “loose-Europeanisation” process in its foreign policy. Accusations of pan-Islamism, pan Turkism and neo-Ottomanism flow without much consideration for the actual facts. On the other hand foreign commentaries are less transparent but use almost the same arguments to make a point about Turkey’s case against EU acceptance. The main idea behind many of the official and unofficial discourses is that Turkey is incapable of adjusting (read rise to) its society to the European values and concepts developed inside the EU over the years. This by itself is a statement of “greatness” well concealed under a plethora of criteria destined to make EU membership a constantly moving target for the Turks.

The Turkish society stands opposite when it comes to “greatness”. The old guard sees it as epitomised by Kemal Atatürk’s society erected in the 1920’, a former oriental empire that turned away from the past to be the sole Muslim democratic and secularist country in the world with a prosperous economy and prospects of joining the exclusive European Christian club. The Muslim world today carries plenty of autocracy and religious fervour and indeed Turkey’s secularist and democratic exploits are far ahead of any other Muslim country by any western standard. Should this kind of greatness be defended at any cost, with utter disregard to human or minority and religious rights, is another matter and a new well educated part of the Turkish society has risen against it. They believe that true democracy and human rights better reflect the new Turkish ideals and push to free themselves from the restraints devised by Atatürk. In their eyes Turkish greatness lays in reforming the state so it mirrors the will of the people not the security of the state. They believe also that time has come to make peace with its imperial past and accept it with the good things and the bad things also. According to them “greatness” would only be achieved if Turkey is allowed to reach its full potential in the regional and world arena whether politically or economically. The debate between the Kemalists and the Islamists has found supporters outside Turkish borders using the Turkish discourse for their own purpose, mixing Turkish internal politics with different European interests.

Among the three views, Turkey’s future hangs into balance. Misperceptions dearly influence Turkey’s prospects of becoming an EU member in the future and maybe the issue of “greatness” will weigh heavily in the balance. Not necessarily identified with the “pan –“ and “neo –“ processes, the Turkish “greatness” carries a different kind of danger .

***The end of the Cold War and the revival of Europe and Turkey on the world stage.
Pan-Europeanism and pan-Turkism.***

The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened the door for a revival of both the European continent and Turkey. Russia’s encounter with democracy and economic reforms practically drove on its knees the former colossus in a matter of years. Former satellite countries in Central and Eastern Europe welcomed the west while former countries of the USSR declared their independence and struggled to detach their societies and economies from Russia. The EEC and later on the EU looked east to reunite the former enemies under the values of democracy, human rights and market economies. Turkey looked east as well to the Turkic countries of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the hope to rally them around the idea of a Turkish common language and culture. Integrating the states from Central and Eastern Europe proved to be a gigantic job of continuous challenges over a timespan of almost 20 years. The West successfully integrated militarily, politically and economically those countries under a pan-European and transatlantic identity. The pan-European idea is not new. Nor is the idea of pan-Turkism that has spawn in the early years of the 20th century. In the final stages of the Ottoman Empire pan-Turkism was a by-product of the Turkish nationalism that spread throughout the Empire directly related to the Turkish language but far more reaching that the actual imperial borders. Turkism, that

through origins and heritage took precedence over Ottomanism and Islam, was to be found in a geographical space starting from the shores of the Adriatic Sea to the frontiers of China and the inner parts of Siberia⁴. Not surprisingly almost the same words were to be heard from Turgut Özal in the early 1990's when Turkey launched in its own eastern adventure in the former Turkic soviet states⁵. The pan-Turkism as a political movement never actually died with the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Losing its appeal, to the more successful independence and modernisation process led by Mustafa Kemal, pan-Turkism survived with the outside Turks for the most part of the period between the two world wars. It has recaptured public attention in the Republic of Turkey in the years of the WWII and later on intermittently, with peaks in the mid 60's and 70's. Even so Turkey's relation to pan-Turkism has been ambivalent. A nationalistic idea based on heritage and culture but above all on language and race pan-Turkism has been a dangerous direction since its inception. Dangerous as it has carried a certain degree of irredentism like most "pan -" ideologies do. Similarly based ideologies were used to annex Austria and important parts of Czechoslovakia by the Nazi regime in Germany with consequences known to everyone. Pan-Turkism may have been a noble idea of protecting all of the oppressed peoples of a same culture and language under a "big brother" umbrella. No one has contested the harsh conditions endured by the Turkish minority in communist Bulgaria and the peoples of Central Asia under the Soviet regime. But as conditions changed so did the perception Turkey had about pan-Turkism. If Turkish policies in Central Asia at the beginning of the 90's may have carried a dose of irredentism the episode did not last for long. Turkey soon became aware of its limitations whether political, economic or military. In the meantime Pan-Turkism proved to be a two way process. Originally devised for the benefit of the Outside Turks it soon has been transformed in a tool for the benefit of Turkey itself. This transformation process traded irredentism for cooperation. For the first time it gave Turkey a regional statute with a very significant addition to its very rigid foreign policy. Fostering links in all domains of life from culture, to language to social transformation and last but not least to economic cooperation presented Turkey with a unique opportunity to develop almost risk free a regional dimension. The first steps out of the imposed isolationism prompted Turkey to go even further in asserting its role on the international stage. Turkey followed with regional initiatives initiating the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and other initiatives in the Black Sea area. It has been a step-by-step process ever since marking the beginning of the revival of Turkey's "greatness".

Both pan-Europeanism and pan-Turkism have had many similar effects. The EEC has been primarily an economic cooperation organisation. In the process of enlargement it succeeded in bringing not only economic development but societal change and security. At the same time the EEC has been transformed to enable the political and economic integration of the new members converting it into a political union and an international actor. The Western Europe could never have imagined playing a political or security role on its own. The pan-Europeanism gave the continent the critical mass required to be able and willing to assume a role in the regional and international stage. Before 1990's Turkey could not aspire to a status other than a compliant western ally. Pan-Turkism opened the door for Turkey to engage a political and economic dialogue in the former Soviet Turkic countries. Turkey became involved in the societal transformation of those countries contributing at a linguistic, cultural and administrative level. Turkish investments in the region helped transform some of

the industrial scenery and opened new economic opportunities. The pan-Turkic project would have had better chances for success if were not for the fear of those states of substituting a big brother for another. Central and European states were willing to accept the bigger brother out of economic and cultural attraction for the west. Still the European “big brother” had already started a process of self-transformation that made easier the integration of the new member states. Turkey had no similar project nor was it willing to share sovereignty to accommodate its new found neighbourhood. Operating for the first time outside its zone of comfort Turkey was unable to take advantage of the new geostrategic framework. This happened partly because the new Turkic republics were still connected economically and militarily to Russia and partly because of the lacking experience of the Turkish leadership in manoeuvring at such a large scale. Nevertheless, as in the case of the EU, Turkey started to develop a critical mass leading to continuous involvement in regional affairs.

Neither of the two “pan - ” process were without their critics. There were many voices inside and outside the EU that looked with suspicion to the EU’s enlargement. Voices from the inside criticised the enlargement they believed will ultimately stretch the ability of the EU to function. Outside the European borders Russia never quite accepted the EU enlargement in its former controlled territories but could do little against it. Not the same was the case with Turkey where Russia successfully stopped Turkey on its path to Central Asia. Furthermore for every step Turkey has taken outside the established Kemalist framework a voice has risen to criticise it inside and outside also. Each stage in the development of Turkey’s foreign outlook triggered a counteraction. The early 1990’s adventure has been labelled immediately as Pan-Turkism, a policy with strong accents of irredentism. Years later Turkey retained a light-house position for many states in Central Asia but the Turkey-Turkic political union discourse has faded considerably since then giving way to a more benign cultural and linguistic approach. Turkey is still proud to host the Turkish Olympiads as well as supporting all sorts of Turkish institutes and foundations across the Turkic speaking world. The hard side of today’s Pan-Turkism only remains present in the policies related to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a reminiscence of the inflexible foreign policy of the Kemalist era. It seems that the early Özalist pan-Turkism has shifted towards a kind of soft Euroasianism under AKP. The shift comes at the same time with the process of “loose Europeanization”, both developed in the larger framework of “strategic depth”.

Pan-Islamism in Turkish foreign policy. Who is using who?

Turkey is overwhelmingly Muslim. Turkey is democratic and secular. It looks very much as the elephant in the china store that the Kemalist establishment could not get out of the store no matter how hard it had tried. Occasionally it moved more than it has been allowed, shook some shelves and shattered some plates. Every time Muslims have been punished by the military that had the task of cleaning up the broken pieces and keeping the shop clean for any western visitor that may have expressed some interest. But lately, due to popular support, it began moving more and more and the only thing left to do was to move the fragile secular pots out of the way. The internal struggle between the secular establishment and the AKP led to accusations of pan-Islamism in Turkey’s foreign policy.

Turkey had always had a particular relation to Islam. In 1517 the Ottomans incursion in Cairo turned the Sultan into a Caliph and the Empire into an Islamic Caliphate. However many countries under Ottoman rule remained Christian as the Turks were more interested in economic benefits than religious proselytism. This has not been the Arab or the Persian case.

When Kemal Ataturk looked to reform the Turkish society it aimed mainly at severing the ties of the people with religion. It did that by changing the language both in writing and speaking by limiting the access of the public to the Arabic text and “cleaning” the language out of Arabic and Persian words. It substituted the “peace inside, war outside” Islamic calling with “peace at home, peace in the world” and sacrificed an important minority for the benefit of a unique and strong Turkish identity. But Islam, as any other faith, cannot be suppressed for long and Ataturk did not succeed either. What it did succeed though was to give the Turks a sentiment of national identity and a very strong one too. This in turn led to the development of a pan-Islamist approach that differs from the other Muslim countries. As a political instrument pan-Islamism has been associated with the nationalist movements like pan-Turkism and pan-Arabism. In the case of Turkey this link is displayed in three different ways. The first one is a popular one, carrying a big dose of wishful thinking, where Pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism are very well linked together. They imagine a Turkish-Islamic Union under Turkish leadership capable of bringing peace prosperity and love to the world. Much more ambitious than pan-Turkism such a union would bring together the entire Islamic world from Morocco and Chad to Indonesia and the Russian extreme north-east under Turkish ruling. However unrealistic such a view it plays a part in the Turkish collective consciousness. Another pan-Islamist view is much more real and has to do with Islamic activism in its most dangerous form: the “Muslim Brotherhood”. Present in all the Muslim countries it champions the ruling of the Qur’an and Sunnah in public and private life and the establishment of a unique Caliphate to rule over the entire Islamic world. Accused of taking over the Turkish foreign policy by influencing the AKP the Muslim Brotherhood is suspected to have orchestrated the anti-Israel policy. But a closer look reveals that Pan-Islamism works against the Turkish “greatness”. If someday there will be a unique Caliphate it will be for sure turned with the face towards Mecca and not Istanbul. The words of the Prophet will always be read in Arabic not in Turkish and any pan-Islamist movement, under Arabic leadership or not, will have to meet the Turkish “greatness”. Between the two “greatness” will win every time. Turkish nationalism is probably one of Atatürk legacies that will survive indefinitely. There is also a third political way that the Turkish leadership has embraced voluntarily. Supporters of the oppressed Palestinians, the Turkish prime-minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and president Abdullah Gül, were hailed around the Middle East as defenders of the Muslim world. Thus Turkey has gain a certain prestige among the Muslims states by transforming Turkey in a champion of the Muslim cause. It was a shrewd move that transformed Turkey’s pariah image of a Muslim state that persecuted Muslims.

It is unclear how deep is the relation between the “Muslim Brotherhood” and the AKP or who influence who and to what degree. It is more likely that both use each other to achieve political goals of their own. But in the long term the pan-Islamism and the Turkish “greatness” cannot coexist outside the utopia devised by people like Adnan Oktar. More likely that the AKP is actually using the “Muslim Brotherhood” and not vice-versa because it

helps Turkey to gain a lot of weight in the Muslim fora and this can only add to the Turkish “greatness” on its path to regional and international recognition.

“Strategic Depth”, neo-Ottomanism and the pursuit of “greatness”

There is a close link among the three elements in the title. The mastermind behind the new Turkish foreign policy, prof. Ahmet Davutoğlu, embarked in a very ambitious project that he detailed in his book “Stratejik Derinlik”. Wrote even before the AKP came into power, the book details prof. Davutoğlu’s vision of a Turkey no longer at the periphery of Europe and the Middle East. Instead Turkey is seen as a reference, a centre capable to play an important regional and international role. To this purpose, Turkey should gain “depth” in accordance to its economic size and political interests. The concept speaks for the first time about a Turkish sphere of influence. Thus Turkey should be, at the same time, a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country. This approach claims a Turkish space not only geographically but also historically placing Turkey in its epicentre. It envisages a new philosophy of security in which Turkey is not only providing security for itself but also to the countries around it. Following the logic of the “Strategic Depth”, Turkey should feel much better in their own skin than 20 years ago. It has already done much for the revival of Turkey in regional and international affairs, sign that “greatness” was not far away. The “Strategic Depth” offered Turkish foreign policy way out of a self-imposed trap.

In a 2007 interview prof. Davutoğlu detailed the five principles guiding the new Turkish foreign affairs⁶. The first principle centred the focus of Turkish foreign policy on balancing security and democracy without one affecting the other. Secondly it advocated a “zero problem policy with Turkey’s neighbours”. A third principle in Turkish foreign policy has been the development of relations with the neighbouring regions and beyond. The fourth principle has been the adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy and the last one being rhythmic diplomacy. Davutoğlu also underlined the importance of business associations like the TUSKON, TUSIAD and MUSIAD⁷ appointed to lobby Turkey’s interests in Africa, the EU and the Muslim and Gulf countries. A special focus has been Iraq and the Middle East where another four principles were devised to tackle the regions intricacies: security for everyone not for a particular group or country, promoting dialogue as the main instrument for solving crisis with particular emphasis on the facilitating role between the different parties, economic interdependence and finally cultural coexistence and plurality. Among the usual discourse on maintaining the best of relations with its traditional allies Davutoğlu managed to squeeze into the equation Iran as an important participant in the energy security together with the US and Russia. Wrapping up Turkey would become, in his vision, an international player by 2023, one hundred years after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, with strategic interests from Chile to Indonesia, Africa to Central Asia and from the EU to the OIC in a holistic approach to foreign policy. That is by itself one of the best definitions of the Turkish “greatness” set to be achieved in a future not so distant.

“Strategic Depth” has been one of the most ambitious strategies in foreign relations and a very good example of creating a vision that carried both goals but also practical ways to measure them. A brief analysis of the five principles stated by Davutoğlu shows some

striking resemblances to EU's policies. The "zero problem policy" was a prerequisite imposed by the EU for candidate countries that has been applied to all Central and Eastern Europe countries. In fact that policy was quite strict with only one exception: the case of Cyprus. Even though not exactly in the same terms, this policy was set as a priority in EU foreign policy particularly with the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Mediterranean and Black Sea initiatives. Both the EU and Turkey looked to stabilise the regions around them through peaceful means, negotiations and economic development. Also they both struggled to change their approach from a crisis-management orientation to a political vision destined to prevent rather than cure. Strangely the EU has been hailed for its "soft-power" approach. Turkey has been blamed for its neo-Ottomanism.

Accusations of neo-Ottomanism are not what prof. Davutoğlu wanted or expected for his foreign policy vision. Acquiring "strategic depth" obviously was no easy road but neo-Ottomanism was a matter of loose interpretation at the discretion of whoever was employing it. Harsh critics went as far as accusing Turkey of a change in the nature of the state, going from discrimination of non-Muslims, to total insecurity of all citizens, to unfriendly coexistence of races and creeds⁸. Moreover it accused neo-Ottoman Turkey of being incapable and unwilling to adjust to the *aquis communautaire*. A more lenient interpretation came from other authors⁹ who saw in neo-Ottomanism three different features. Firstly the willingness to come to terms with its Muslim and Ottoman heritage at home and abroad. In his evaluation Omer Taspinar suggested a different interpretation in which secularism would be less militant. At the same time Turkey would show its own version of soft-power towards former Ottoman territories. Such a neo-Ottomanism would call for less "Turkishness" and more cosmopolitanism in which Kurds could find a place too. In his view neo-Ottomanism has brought along a sense of self-confidence and grandeur perceiving Turkey as a regional superpower. Finally it aimed at balancing the West and the Islamic world in equal way. Surprisingly, before the AKP came to power and neo-Ottomanism even appeared as a concept, foreign commentators¹⁰ thought "greatness" was eluding Turkey because of its incapacity to go beyond the Kemalist heritage. Today the Kemalist heritage is in shambles and the pursuit of "greatness" goes full steam ahead.

But neo-Ottomanism also does not give the full picture of the full extent of Turkey's ambitions. Prof. Davutoğlu made it clear that Turkish foreign interests go far beyond the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Acquiring "strategic depth" means first and foremost acquiring economic weight and any country that can play an important role in Turkey's development is fair game in the Turkish grand scheme. From this point of view Turkey does not differ from other countries in the world. The complete picture of Turkish "greatness" as seen by the mastermind of the Turkish foreign policy would probably encompass, but probably not be limited to, full membership in the EU, decisive regional influence in the development of the Caucasus and Central Asia, particularly on the energy security issue, on the same level with Russia and, if unavoidable, with Iran, a major soft-power and pacifier in the Middle East and the horn of Africa and a player the Gulf area while retaining a strong hard-power component in the privileged partnership with the US. How far ahead with this plan is Turkey at this moment is difficult to say. Turkey managed to maintain its good relations with the US and the visit of president Barack Obama cemented this perception. But things look very differently when it comes to the matter of EU membership and this is the

issue where Turkish “greatness” may play an important part not necessarily to Turkey’s benefit.

“Greatness” for greatness’s sake?

It would be simplistic to think that Turkey’s emancipation on the world stage serves no other purpose than satisfying the ego of a people and its leadership. It would also be simplistic to think that “greatness” is just a by-product of a series of concepts that influenced or gathered momentum in the last 20 years of Turkish foreign policy.

In the eyes of the Turkish leadership “greatness” serves specific purposes aimed at securing Turkey’s position as a major regional and international player. The benefits are obvious, so are the challenges and threats ahead. In the context of Turkey’s relation with the EU the purpose seems quite different, serving political manoeuvring inside and outside its borders. Nevertheless it has been used as much by the Kemalists as by the Islamists as a tool to secure its place in the EU.

Republican Turkey under Kemalist leadership stressed the country’s role in securing Europe in the time of the Cold War. Secular Turkey looked to improve its stance particularly in the areas left void by the dissolution of the Soviet Union but changed nothing of its political and social structure. Instead it continuously improved its “hard-power”, military capacity, playing the card of security and its possible contribution to the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Turkey argued constantly its case based on its sheer military strength as an important addition to the military power of the EU. In order to prove its case Turkey participated in many of EU peace keeping missions demonstrating it can cooperate and align itself to European peace keeping missions.. Essentially Turkey presented the case of a democratic, secular, economically developed country with an impressive military power. The case did not stand the European test for several reasons, among them the omnipresence of the Turkish Armed Forces in the public and political space, the lack of citizen, minority and religious rights and a poor record of bilateral relations with its neighbours. Voices inside the EU even questioned the real security contribution Turkey would bring to the EU security policy¹¹. Besides neighbouring countries like Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and Syria which potentially inherit conflict, Turkey was thought to be in a natural rivalry with Russia for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. To the Turkish dismay, the report judged Turkey incapable of supplementing the lack of European capabilities in modern equipment and strategy but only adding quantitatively and not qualitatively. The AKP was confident that where Kemalist “greatness” has failed, Islamist “greatness” ought to succeed. Hence, on top of the “strategic depth”, prof. Davutoğlu added the five principles in an attempt to address the diplomatic side of the objections raised. Loyal to those principles Davutoğlu set to prove it can address European concerns and show to the world that Turkey can change not only itself but also the region in which it operates. This in turn enhanced the public perception about the grand plan of the Turkish foreign policy. In doing so it may have created, inadvertently, an image of a much bigger Turkey than it actually was and consequently jeopardising Turkey’s prospects of becoming a full member of the EU.

The new image of Turkey pacifying the region has been deemed to convey a distinct message. Because of its influence in the region Turkey would be a welcomed addition to

EU's soft-power and its interests in the Caucasus and the Middle East. From a security point of view such an argument carried enough weight to ease Turkey's acceptance, except that this judgement has been based on a security approach. But behind the EU's security concerns laid the much deeper and more important issue of EU's institutionalised structure. This was an important barrier in the EU-Turkey relationship because of how security perceptions differ. If the realist vs. liberal model proposed by Herbert Dittgen and Dirk Peters¹² is true then there is but one conclusion about Turkey's approach to becoming a EU full membership that has little to do with who is in charge of Turkey's destiny. Unfortunately neither the Kemalists nor Islamists ever succeeded in getting out of the "alliance" logic to the one of "community of law". This is why the EU has considered "everything" but membership for Turkey. In the case of an alliance Turkish "greatness" would have been considered an asset, as it was in the case of NATO. But no matter how impressive Turkish assets are on the regional or international stage they will not open the door of the EU, simply because "greatness" is the wrong bargaining tool. The fear that an integrated Turkey will always put in front "alliance" based arguments¹³ far outweighs any perceived benefits. Not Europe¹⁴ but Turkey has to adjust and learn how to operate inside a "community of law" framework that asks for shared sovereignty and cares less about Turkish importance and influence. In its path to accession shared sovereignty is one of the most difficult steps Turkey has to make. The issue of relinquishing decision making in key political and economic sectors is hardly addressed in the Turkish media except maybe for those in favour of keeping Turkey out of the EU. This is explained by two factors¹⁵, Kemalism and the Sevres Syndrome. Even if those two factors are coped with, there is still a third factor that weighs heavy in the balance, which is Turkish "greatness". Is Turkey ready to give up its status of new regional power for the more modest status of EU member and lose its sovereignty in the process? Is it ready to trade Turkish "greatness" for a European one? Without honestly considering the consequences, Turkey will not be able to make a choice. For the time being the Turks are utterly unprepared for this move and the bigger Turkey will get on the international arena the farther away from Europe they will be. Perhaps one day Turkey will find the ultimately "greatness" it can reach by simply giving it away altogether.

But maybe it will stick with the old framework of mind and "greatness" will come in handy for the party in power. Turkey's grand posture in the regional and international scene is the perfect palliative and a safety net if not admitted in the EU. When the deadline approaches Turkey's will have to make the choice between the "fat midget that lacks perspective and is governed by small thinkers" and the - important and influencing new - Turkey - governed by great thinkers. Turkish "greatness" will hang in the balance. Therefore the Turkish leadership will be attentive to further develop Turkish "greatness" in as many forms as possible. The trend is already catching with a part of the Turkish public who already starts questioning the relevance of an EU membership.

Conclusion

The aim among the lines of this paper was to portray the concept of "greatness" in its different forms and its purpose in the Turkish foreign policy. At one point or another in

recent history it was about pan-Turkism, or pan-Islamism or neo-Ottomanism. Many times it may have been plain pride about Turkey as a country or about its people or about its history. In many cases the difference between any of those concepts and pure nationalism has been quite narrow. But aside its name, greatness is a constant presence in the Turkish collective consciousness that can be quite easily fed and manipulated by politicians and the media alike. Turks strive for international recognition and a place among the powers of the world as many other nations do. It is a characteristic that transcends the political orientation of the country. In one way or another both the secular establishment and the new Islamic middle class have supported Turkish leadership in its quest for “greatness”.

I have argued that the concept, while being rediscovered in Turkey at the beginning of the 1990’s, was slowly abandoned in Europe. The process of political and economic integration favoured a unique institutional structure that promoted a new type of relationship among its members based on shared sovereignty. Turkey did not keep the pace with Europe much more concerned to develop a “value” that was already forfeited by the countries of the EU.

Consequently in their political dialogue the EU and Turkey used and still use different concepts and values. The paper also argues that this difference in measuring Turkey’s fit for European membership is largely overtaken by the secular – Islamist debate inside Turkey and outside it when in fact neither the Kemalists nor Islamists grasp the gap in EU-Turkey’s discourse. Both camps in Turkey refer to the same values applicable in an alliance based partnership, and both make reference to Turkish “greatness” in its secular or Islamist form as a political argument in favour of Turkish EU membership.

This is not about to change as long as Turkey does not clearly visualise its role and place inside the EU. Only when Turkey will begin to understand why some EU countries oppose its membership will be able to modify its political discourse to address those countries fears instead of offering benefits the EU does not want or need.

¹ “Juggling Seven Plates of Foreign Policy: who is the optimist now?” presented at the Middle Eastern Technical University, Ankara, 2009

² Ömer Taspınar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies – Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism”, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, *Carnegie Papers*, No. 8, September 2008, pp. 14-17.

³ Dominique Moisi, “Who lost Turkey?” *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, March 2, 2009.

⁴ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism – From Irredentism to Cooperation*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 2nd ed., 1995. pp. 30-31.

⁵ USAK, “Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism”, *USAK Yearbook of International Politic and Law*, Vol.2, 2009.

⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’ Foreign Policy Vision: An assessment of 2007”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2008, pp. 77-96

⁷ *Ibid.* p.86.

⁸ Srdja Trifkovic, “Neo-Ottoman Turkey: A Hostile Islamic Power”, March 13, 2010, <http://www.balkanstudies.org/articles/neo-ottoman-turkey-hostile-islamic-power>

⁹ Taspınar , pp.14-17.

¹⁰ Stanley Reed ont Stephen Kinzer’s book “Crescent and Star, Turkey between two worlds”, October 1, 2001, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01_40/b3751021.htm

¹¹ Giovanni Gasparini, ed., “Turkey and European Security” *IAI TESEV Report*, No. 8, February 2007, p. 65.

¹² Paul D. Williams, ed., *Security Studies – An introduction*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2008, p.42.

¹³ Simon Tisdall, "Confident Turkey looks east, not west", *The Guardian*, 26 March 2007.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ali Tekin, "Sharing Sovereignty – Turkey's Sovereignty Culture and the EU Accession". , Paper presented at the 6th Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Turin, 12-15 September, 2007.

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