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Panel: *Turkish membership proving the universality of European values".
Images of an attainable utopia or dangerous naiveté?*

Is Turkey turning its face from the West?

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Introduction.

Since May 2009 when Mr. Davutoğlu was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, the rhetoric and practice of Turkish foreign policy changed. As previous chief advisor of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan he has been closely associated to AKP's foreign policy since 2003 and he articulated a new vision bringing it to a new dynamic and multidimensional orientation aimed at solving chronic problems in neighbouring regions. The outcome is that today Turkey is a very influential country with strong ties with all countries around its borders such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, Russia, Lebanon, in full line with Davutoglu's personal motto: "zero problems with neighbours". Within this framework, Ankara has also taken the diplomatic initiative to manage and mediate long standing conflicts in the region. These new conditions helped to increase trade and business links between Turkey and its neighbours, thus providing stability and prosperity across Turkey's borders.

While Turkey's relations with the countries of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia are improving, the relationship with the European Union is nearly deadlocked. Facing the

continuing opposition of France, Germany and Austria to anything more than a privileged partnership, Ankara's enthusiasm for reforms has waned even if Turkish government claims it remains fully committed to accession.

The increasing feelings against *Islam* after 9/11/2001 and the changed security conditions in the Middle East, the Balkans and Southern Caucasus pushed Ankara to adopt a rhythmic diplomacy in order to build a strong dialogue with Europe and guarantee some new openings with other neighbouring areas. Nowadays, Turkey's diversification of its foreign policy goals has delivered a number of notable results. Since the electoral triumph in 2002, the AKP is consolidating the currents in Turkey's foreign policy and launching Ankara towards a more assertive and independent role in its neighborhood. Remaining institutionally anchored in the West, the new government, equipped with a huge democratic mandate and the prospect of EU accession, realized that it is convenient to forge new relations with the South and the East, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by post- Cold War scenario.

In the light of this increasing interest and activism in surrounding regions, some commentators conclude that Turkey is turning away from the West and moving towards the East pursuing a sort of a "New Ottoman" foreign policy designed to restore Turkey's regional predominance and to turn into a independent player in a multipolar world.

This paper argues that this new multilateral approach is related with the europeanization process undergoing in Turkey. In the Middle East region Turkey is playing a mediator role and its "European" vision is the only way which can produce stability. As such, a liberal approach, based on cooperation instead of confrontation, is introduced into a foreign policy embracing a zero sum strategy and thus benefiting all parties involved, including Europe. This engagement is a mean to build peace and stability in the whole area and this is a need for Turkey to continue to consolidate its internal democracy and to reach a full membership in an enlarged EU with stabilized borders, recently described by Davutoglu as "Turkey's main strategic goal". Indeed, the emergence of Turkey as center of soft power in the region is clearly in line with the European vision that democratic peace at home turns into peace in the neighbourhood.

The revitalization of Turkish relations with the world should constitute a strong point for a European stronger foreign policy agenda: Turkey is showing a new activism in economic and foreign policy and this could bring benefits for EU. In light of this, despite existing problems and ambiguities in the europeanization process, Ankara needs to be anchored to the EU's institutional framework in order to solve some domestic problems and to play a trustable mediator role, exactly as Europe needs to look at Turkey as a new and proactive soft power center in order to ensure its

borders and get benefits. In other words, Turkey's role in the region is an important point to strengthen the accession process for economic and financial reasons but also for political goals.

This issue will be enriched by interviews to scholars, academicians, AKP and opposition parties members made in current time during my staying in Turkey as researcher.

The new multifaceted approach during Davutoğlu era.

The "Depth Strategy" by current Foreign Minister Davutoğlu well describes Ankara's newfound appetite in engaging in all neighboring areas, as a mean to get a recognition for Turkey as being in the same time a European, Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea power. In fact, these multiple regional identities, as well as Turkey's historical and cultural legacy, "mandate us (Turkey) a foreign policy that is multifaceted" with the main goal "to promote good neighborly relations with all, to replace disagreement with cooperation, to seek innovative mechanism and channels to resolve regional conflicts, to encourage positive change in our region, and to build cross-cultural bridges of dialogues and understanding"¹.

In his 2002 book, the current Foreign Minister well articulated these efforts to improve relations with all neighbors in line with AKP's desire to harmonize European and Islamic identities. Since Turkey is located at the center of important "geo-cultural basins" concerning the West, Middle East, Balkans and Central Asia, it should pursue an active policy taking advantage of all opportunities existing in these areas. According to his point of view - as was during the Ottoman Empire- Turkey must play a epicenter role in the regional events "rediscovering its historic and geographic identity", "balancing the approach towards all global and regional actors" and building "strong economic linkages with all regional states"²

Under the AKP umbrella, not only Turkish trade with neighbors increased, but also historical critical relations with countries like Russia, Syria, Iran and Greece improved a lot. A great number of ambitious mediation efforts show that Ankara is willing to emerge as a key regional player and all these negotiations demonstrate that AKP is pursuing its "zero problems" policy with neighbors improving its relations with explicitly Islamic regimes, but also reaching non Islamic governments³. Making clear that its policy is not driven by Islamic feeling, Davutoğlu aims to balance Turkey's strategic relationships rather than prioritize relations with international

¹ A. Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 42, n. 6, November 2006.

² A. Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007" in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, n.1, 2008, pp.77-96.

A. Davutoğlu, *Statejik Derinlik*, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001

³ K. Buğra Kanat, "AK Party's Foreign Policy: Is Turkey Turning Away from the West?" in *Insight Turkey*, vol.12, n.1, 2010, pp. 205-225

organizations framework and Turkish historical western orientation. In this trend must be recognized a deep degree of pragmatism which underlines a significant degree of continuity with respect to AKP'S foreign policy activism⁴.

However, in analyzing Turkish international relations during the AKP era, it is possible to identify two different phases. During the first period (2002-2005) on the ground of previous governments AKP pushed for Turkey's full membership of the EU and improved its economic and democratic performances. After 2005 it is possible to perceive a certain loss of enthusiasm on the focal point of joining EU and a deviation towards a soft eastern strategy. AKP has not been homogenous in terms of foreign policy behavior and while in its first wave the foreign policy activism put strong emphasis on Europeanization, recent developments increase tensions between Europeanization and Eurasianism. In this context this shift does not mean a reorientation of foreign policy, but shows a new activism with respect to all neighboring areas without gravitating firmly around EU axis as it was in the past. What distinguishes this strategy is that the western orientation is still a strong element of Turkish foreign policy but will continue in a more flexible form⁵.

A great number of factors play a central role in this important change. First, there are significant tensions on the domestic front, trying to balance different components of Turkey's identity and cultural, historical and strategic factors. Turkey, in fact, is struggling to consolidate democracy while preserving secularism and it will be the interaction of these domestic factors to determine the critical equilibrium and the path of new activism in Turkish foreign policy.⁶ In the past years Turkey's foreign policy transformed from being that of a "hard power" to a "soft power" and recent internal and external developments contributed to Ankara's soft power potential⁷. In other words, there is a close relationship between the degree of securization of Turkish foreign policy - which is traditionally related with the Kemalist legacy, the foundation of the Republic and the role of military - and the current orientation of AKP abroad⁸

In this framework, deterrence of possible internal and external challengers through the adoption of coercive strategies marked the path of past security practices. Following the collapse of communism and the emerging of regional instabilities in the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East, the Western credentials of Turkey's identity were questioned and given that the EU considers

⁴ W. Hale, "Turkey and the Middle East in the New Era" in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 11, n.3, 2009, pp. 143-159.

⁵ Z. Öniş and Y. Şuhnaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era" in *Turkish Studies*, vol. 10, n.1, March 2009, pp. 7-24.

⁶ S. Çağaptay, "Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey: New Elections, Troubling Trends" in *Washington Institute Policy Focus*, n. 67, April 2007.

⁷ T. Oğuzlu, "Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Relations" in *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.61, n. 1, 2007, pp. 81-97

⁸ N. Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: from Atatürk to the AKP" in *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 83-95.

liberal democratic transformation as the main criteria of membership, Turkey accelerated the process of desecuritisation and worked to increase its soft power, a *sine qua non* condition to gain credibility to western eyes⁹.

Looking at the domestic causes of this transformation the main element to be considered is the changing character of civilian military relationship, following the desecuritisation process promoted by the government in which previously securitized issues were gradually redefined as political issues. More politicization, in fact, could increase civilian primacy in the process and help prioritize negotiations and consensus building as the most important point of conflict resolution.¹⁰ Without any doubt, this internal dynamics were affected by the logic of Turkish internal politics based on the important lesson of “February 28 Process”¹¹ following a military-led “post modern *coup*” and it was under these conditions that emerged the AKP with the aim to stay in power trying to civilize as much as possible the internal and external politics and adopting a multilateral and cooperative approach on the foreign issues¹².

AKP Government, in fact, believes that Turkey, as legitimated successor of the Ottoman Empire, should play a responsible and proactive role in the maintenance of regional peace and stability and that this course of action is the only way to demonstrate its relevance to the West by helping Western efforts to deal with emerging security threats. As it said before, Turkey’s soft power has been positively affected by recent developments in the Middle East and by the EU accession process.¹³ Once the EU decided to formally start accession talks in 2005, people in the Middle East seriously considered the idea that Turkey’s potential accession could help to develop and modernize them and the region. As the EU contributed to peace and stability in Central and Eastern Europe through its enlargement process, Turkey could contribute to regional stability in the Middle East and in other critical areas by carrying European style and international standards in the area.

Turkey’s soft power identity is nowadays visible in its relations with neighbors: from the economic diplomacy of current government to its repeated calls to further enhance democracy and freedom in the region.

⁹ L. K. Yanik, “The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: “Bridging” Turkey’s Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War” in *Geopolitics*, vol. 14, 2009, pp.531-549.

¹⁰ T. Oğuzlu, “Middle Easternization of Turkey’s Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?” in *Turkish Studies*, vol. 9, n.1, March 2008, pp. 3-20.

¹¹ The February 28 process followed by a military memorandum forced Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to resign without suspending Parliament or Constitution. This event signed the end of Islamic oriented government in Turkey.

¹² W. Hale, “Turkey and the Middle East in the New Era” in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 11, n.3, 2009, pp. 143-159.

¹³ T. Oğuzlu e M. Kibaroglu, “Is the Westernization Process Losing Pace?” in *Turkish Studies*, vol. 10, n.4, pp. 577-593, December 2009.

To a significant extent, the evolution of Turkish foreign policy has been conditioned not only by domestic trends but also by U.S. policies in the Middle East and by the EU approach towards Turkey. Since the end of the Soviet threat the interests that bound Turkey and U.S have grown significantly weaker and this became clear in March 2003 when Turkish Parliament refused to help Washington and voted against the opening of a northern front for the intervention in Iraq. In this decision, Turkey clearly showed that concerns about domestic politics, public opinion, good neighborly relations and regional stability had the precedence over the strategic relationship with the American partner. As far as the EU is concerned, the picture is more interesting because the logic of integration has led Turkey to improve its soft power policy for dissolving regional conflicts and consolidating regional alliances through the pursuit of economic interdependence. At the same time, however, the growing anxiety about the exact nature of Turkey's future relationship with the EU had added additional currency to the idea of pursuing a multifaceted foreign policy¹⁴.

Indeed, there is a consistent consensus that Turkey is a regional actor following its own right and interests to define its hegemonic position inside the international community. This new orientation suggests that rather than looking outside through the prisms of the West, Turkey should make use of its links with the West to pursue its interests abroad through a rather instrumental approach. On the government side, in fact, the EU accession process is seen from this perspective: its value depends on the realization of Turkish economic interests abroad and of democratic dynamics domestically¹⁵. This underlines that EU accession process contributes to the improvement of Turkey's domestic stability, attracts foreign investments and supports the interest-based logic of AKP. It must be considered, moreover, that unlike the previous Islamic parties AKP does not share an euroskepticism and considers Turkey belonging both to European and Islamic civilizations- even if they do not recognize themselves as European and their aim is to integrate the Islamic culture in the European sphere¹⁶.

The intense debate about Turkey's economical interests and the frustration linked to the slowing accession process generated a serious nationalistic backlash in Turkey and strengthened some anti-EU and antireform feelings. Without any doubts these negative signals originated from the accusations made to Europe to be willing to get rid of Turkey's accession process and push Ankara away from the Europeanization process, but even if some important domestic factors weaken the commitment to membership, AKP declares that its attachment to the EU does not

¹⁴ W. Hale and E.Özbudun, *Islamism, Deamocracy and Liberalism in Turkey...*, op. cit., pp. 120-121.

¹⁵S. Larrabee, 'HowTurkey is Rediscovering the Middle East', *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009, http://www.europesworld.org/NewEnglish/Home_old/Article/tabid/191/ArticleType/ArticleView/ArticleID/21503/Default.aspx

¹⁶ W. Hale and E.Özbudun, *Islamism, Deamocracy and Liberalism in Turkey...*, op. cit., pp. 120-121.

change¹⁷.. Arguably, the fact that AKP represents a broad coalition of interests, encompassing liberals and nationalistic elements in a conservative framework, reshaped the attitudes of the party to EU membership. Indeed, since 2007 AKP government has not pushed for key reforms requested by the EU. Together with the strong polarization of Turkish society this evidences a loss of enthusiasm and has had quite negative effects on the whole process.¹⁸

What seems to be a shifting point of Turkish relations towards Europe and the West in a time of disappointment and weakening of relations with the EU, in reality stresses the co-existence of both Europeanization and Euro-Asianism in Turkish foreign policy. The main horizon of Turkish foreign policy has always been the West, with the EU as main reference point since 1990s, but in parallel with this alignment Turkey has taken the role of regional power based on its soft power and a multilateralist approach¹⁹. The political leadership is attempting to exploit linkages between different dimensions of foreign policy mediating in various conflict situations and becoming important in enhancing its status as pivotal power in surrounding regions. The AKP foreign policy particularly emphasizes this mediator or peace-making in the Middle East opening some channel of dialogues and facilitating some diplomatic contacts²⁰.

In addition and connected to these diplomatic initiatives the economy become stronger. The significant trade and investment linkages which characterize Turkey's foreign economic relations with all neighbors countries context enable Turkey to deploy its soft power resources much more effectively. The importance of these growing economic interactions is particularly reflected in foreign policy initiatives involving new actors related with the democratization process. Then, in this new era Turkey's proactive foreign policy is much more convincing and does not mean the rejection of the Europeanization project. What it indicates, however, is that EU is not the center of Turkey's external relations anymore. At least not the only one²¹.

Nowadays Turkey is taking every chance to pursue its own national interests. Rather than turning away from the West, Ankara is thus realizing that its neighborhood consists not only in Europe but also in the Middle East, the Balkan and the wider Black Sea regions. This new trend is breaking away from the old Kemalist notion of Turkey as a country surrounded by enemies and

¹⁷ K. Barysch, "Can Turkey Combine EU accession and Regional *leadership*?" , Centre for European Reform Policy Brief, January 2010.

¹⁸ M. J. Patton, "AKP Reform Fatigue in Turkey: What has happened to EU Process?" in *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 12, n. 3, Novembre 2007, pp. 339-358.

S. Kiniklioğlu, "Stockholm broken promises and the EU" in *Today's Zaman*, 3 February 2010.

³² A. Finkel, "EU tutelage" in *Today's Zaman*, 16 February 2010.

¹⁹ Z. Öniş and Y. Şuhnaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era"..., op. cit.

²⁰ C. Çandar, "Turkey's Soft Power Strategy: A New Vision for a Multipolar World" in SETA Brief, n. 38, December, 2009.

²¹ I. Safi, AKP deputy general secretary, my interview, Ankara, April 2010.

strategically located in the West and emphasizes the cooperation between Ankara and the neighbors in order to guarantee stability in the region²².

However, there are some limits to the effectiveness of this rhythmic diplomacy causing counterproductive impacts, especially if it is managed unilaterally without considering policy alignment with Europe and USA. The recent crisis between Israel and Turkey, bilateral relations with Iran and the diplomatic contacts with Hamas, all conducted unilaterally, reduced the legitimacy and the effectiveness to these initiatives giving way to the interpretation that Ankara is turning away from the EU. To make Turkey really democratic with a constructive foreign policy the revitalization of Ankara and Bruxelles relations should constitute a basic point of both Turkish and European agendas. Turkey, in fact, should focus on its priorities, not only to make its proactive foreign policy realistic and effective but also to keep its role in global politics as an important and pivotal actor. Today many issues fill Turkey's table and its new role and success depends on how it reacts to conflicts and changes. The Europe- inspired modernization process, in fact, would accelerate Turkey's transformation into a developed and democratic nation state. But in doing this, Turkey needs to be seen from many perspectives and not only as a deeply religious Muslim State, different from the West and with a hobbesian approach to security issues²³. Indeed, the revitalization of European accession process should help both Turkish to link its new role in a new international scenario and Europe to overcome its concerns dealing with the task of reforming its institutional structure and to deal with the challenges produced by the great enlargement of 2004-2007.

Without any doubt between Turkish government and some other Middle Eastern countries relations are helped by that emotional feeling based on shared values and religious beliefs. In general, however, what is pushing from behind is Turkish interest to define its own regional position regardless of previous institutional linkage with the international community²⁴. This new Davutoğlu era is marked by successful “zero sum policy” aiming to increase the economic interactions and trade exchanges and to solve historical problems.

In addition to shared basic values there are enough checks and balances within Turkey's existing relationships framework to reduce the likelihood of its departure from the Western community. The non permanent seat in the Security Council of UN (2009-2010), the historical

²² L. Elvan, AKP member of Turkish- EU joint parliamentary committee, my interview, February, 2010.

²³ T. Oğuzlu, “Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Relations”...,op.cit.

²⁴ “Israeli FM report on Turkey annoys its own envoy” in *Today's Zaman*, 28 January 2010.

B. Yinanç, “Israel's big question: Where is Turkey going?” in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 6 January 2010.

“Lieberman criticizes Turkey's anti-Israeli stance”, *Agence France-Presse* in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 9 February 2010-

“Mottaki: Threat to Iran amounts to threat to Turkey” in *Today's Zaman*, 4 February 2010. C. Sağır, “Turkey Dismisses Missile Threat from neighbouring Iran” in *Today's Zaman*, 23 December 2009.

“Turkey, Saudi Arabia denounce Israel's settlement policy” in *Today's Zaman*, 4 January 2010

NATO membership, the draft of a specific ministerial position for European negotiations inside Turkish Parliament and the recent Presidency of Mevlüt Çavusoğlu at the Assembly of Council of Europe testify not only that Turkey is still a strong western ally but also that AKP Government shows a great sense of responsibility towards its foreign policy orientation. In addition to this it must be considered that both Turkey and its Western partners share an interest to contain the spreading of radical Islam movements²⁵.

Given the strong domestic tension and the increasing suspicions about the emotional feeling between Turkish government and some Middle Eastern Countries, this task as a regional peacemaker is going to be really hard. In this perspective, the soundness and success of Davutoğlu's strategy will also be measured by its perception in internal and international public opinion. His sometimes emotional language has a big impact in the Muslim world, but it would be better if this was not be not perceived as a real shift in Turkish foreign policy from Bruxelles or Washington. Indeed, notwithstanding Erdogan's reassurances about relations with the West (Turkey "has waited for more than 50 years at the doors of a Europe not always sincere"²⁶), this does not help Turkish diplomacy to be really effective.

Having said that, Ankara's crucial role remains linked to its commitment in keeping the pace in the modernization and Europeanization processes and there is no doubt that its ability to test the coexistence between *Islam* and modern democracy is the main indicator of its growing attraction in the Muslim world²⁷. Therefore the revitalization of Turkey-EU relations should be a central issue on AKP and Bruxelles's agenda. If AKP's pragmatism is a democratic force, strongly supporting European membership and finding a good compromise between all groups at domestic level is a valid path towards increasing consensus and being trustable at public opinion eyes

Europe and Turkey

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that Turkey's new activism in foreign policy is simply a reaction to the difficulties in its relationship with the EU. In fact, the end of the Cold War created much better conditions to the adoption of a independent orientation in Turkish foreign policy and the past seven years of AKP Government have undoubtedly created a new sense of confidence in the EU process and in an autonomous stance in foreign affairs.

From Turkish side the insistence on keeping the EU perspective open is due to the fact that membership is seen as something realistic and achievable, but this accession process needs a

²⁵ M. Çavusoğlu, President of Assembly of Council of Europe, my personal interview, Ankara, April 2010.

²⁶ R. Tayipp Erdogan's speech at Jeddah, *Anatolia News Agency*, 20 January 2010.

Y. Baydar, "Is the AKP up to the task?" in *Today's Zaman*, 25 January 2010

²⁷ "Muslim World Appreciates Turkish Policies" in *Anatolia News Agency*, 15 February 2010.

symbolic dimension similar to the one which marked the origins of European Community and its last great enlargement towards the East. Nowadays the considerations which always emerge in considering Turkey's candidature are not fit for positively mobilizing public opinions. It is clear to everyone that the main argument about Turkey EU accession is dominated by identity issues based sometimes on superficial evaluations²⁸. This perception must change: Turkey has to complete the requested reforms and show a better performance, but it stands in the right position to enter in the EU for economic and political reasons. First of all, the EU has always aimed to increase its international profile and become a global power in order to exercise a direct influence in specific areas of interest. The only way to increase this role is revitalizing the relations with Turkey, the only candidate country with good relations with all surrounding regions²⁹.

Related to this aspect is Ankara's capability to better manage the integration process of that Islamic communities: a leading and mediator role possible only if Turkey preserves its secular character and engages combining *Islam* with democratic and liberal values. Moreover, concerning the economical aspects, all European Countries are good trade partners of Ankara, while Turkey holds a strategical role as hub of many important energy networks. In this crisis times of global economy, Turkey's fast growing rates could represent a valuable additional asset³⁰.

As this new Turkish strategy shows, establishing good economic relations could open the way to build stronger political, cultural and social ties with neighbors, so by accepting Turkey EU could improve its relations with countries which were previously far, thus getting some advantages while helping them to improve their standard. From this perspective, a Turkey with peaceful borders and more stable economic relations with neighboring Countries could sustain Europe's goal to increase its soft power and extend its influence in new stages³¹.

In the European perspective, therefore, Turkey has to be considered as strategic crossroad and a fundamental political, economic and military actor- it should not be forgotten that Ankara is the second military force in the NATO. In a deeply changed domestic and international context in which Turkey is a big country with a huge population, a wide market and a fast growing economy, it is obvious that its foreign policy must have goals in line with its welfare. In fact, there is no rational reason why Turkey should be restricted to only one sphere. Showing a wide and

²⁸ H. Đnač, 'Identity Problems of Turkey during the European Union Integration Process', *Journal of Economic and Social Research* 6:2, 2004, 33-62.

²⁹ E. Onen, AKP chairman of Committee on Foreign Affairs, my personal interview, Ankara, February, 2010.

³⁰ C. Marsili –Ambasciatore d'Italia in Turchia-, *Turchia in Europa SI*.

³¹ L. Elvan, my personal interview, Ankara, February 2010.

autonomous foreign policy based on a number of relations with different States is a normal goal for all developed countries willing to strengthen their positions in the international arena,³².

EU Members are divided on what conclusions to draw from the evolution of new Turkish foreign policy. All of them recognize that what Turkey is doing beyond its borders, including in the Middle East, is as important as domestic developments and it is highly valuable from the point of view of the EU's own interests³³. None of them would honestly deny that Turkey could contribute in enhancing stability and peace – a main goal of the EU as an international actor.

In the EU accession perspective this new multilateral and multifaceted trends could provide regional stability and a more peaceful environment. In pragmatical terms, however, some doubts arise since it must be recognized that it is a quite hard task playing a peace keeping and mediator role when there are some historically unresolved issues and therefore some difficulties in having a clear and transparent dialogue with all interested parts. Unfortunately, as Israeli crisis shows, AKP Government still has to improve its negotiation ability based on effective diplomatic skill to avoid emotional approaches.

Looking at Turkish domestic dynamics officially European membership remains the main goal in foreign policy even if in the last period no effective reform has been carried out and democratization efforts are at a deadlock. Although last June a new negotiating chapter was opened, the pace of the accession is slowed down by the lack of concrete efforts by AKP government to improve democratic standard and make some domestic adjustments. The most problematic point regarding current policy making in Turkey arises from the Islamic route of majority party which does not show any concrete effort to defend secularism and the Republic founding principles. On the contrary, even if they define themselves “conservative democrats”, AKP's rhetoric is permeated with traditional and religious values generating many suspicions among the people. It is undeniable that under AKP's rule Turkey has gone more conservative and since 2002 the major reforms attempts touched religious issues- as allowing women to wear headscarves (*turban*) in universities- thus aggravating the already existing polarization inside the country between secular western oriented and conservative-pious public opinions.

Given some current Islamic drifts in the AKP policies, it should be an imperative for EU keeping Ankara close to the western sphere and not basing the logic of accession process only to Cyprus issues and identity questions: what is at stake in Turkey is an important balance which is

³² Zeynep Karahan Uslu, former President of Turkish euro mediterranean committee, my personal interview, February 2010, Ankara.

³³ C.Üstün, “Foreign Policy in the EU and Joint Interests with Turkey”, Policy Brief, May 2009, available at <http://acesstr.ces.metu.edu.tr/dosya/ustun1.pdf>.
E. Bağıs, speech at Media Economic Forum, Istanbul, 3 July 2010.

going to determine the next course of Turkish domestic and international policy and European holding³⁴.

If the goal is not to lose Turkey, Europe has even more than the US a role to play: a European Turkey represents the winning card for renewing the image and soft power attraction of the Old Continent in this globalized era. From the other side, Europe represents the main anchor to avoid unpleasant shifting in Turkish westernization and democratization process.

Concluding Remark.

Some concerns about Turkey's direction first came up after the AK Party was elected and encouraged internal reform. The intensity of Prime Minister Erdogan's anger at Israel (which became clear at the Davos Forum in February 2009) and Turkey's growing proximity with Iran raised in the West a new dimension of suspicions and concerns about Turkish foreign policy orientation. These concerns reached a new peak last 3 June with the flotilla incident and the Turkish vote against UN Security Council resolution against Iran's nuclear program, following the "deal" signed by Turkey, Brazil and Teheran. Now the main debate in Western circles is if Turkey is really moving away from the West or it is merely taking independent positions regarding some critical issues while remaining committed to the Western alliance.

Comparing with the past now Turkey is a stronger country inclined to wield its influence globally. This because international conditions and dynamics are changed and because Turkey is trying to carry out "good policies" domestically and abroad, which reflect some important and positive changes within the Turkish society. Decades of pro-market policies have transformed Turkey in the 16th largest economy in the world; migration from rural areas to the cities and an expanding middle class also have huge political implications. In other words, a more prosperous and confident Turkey wants an independent diplomacy to follow its national interests. With AKP and the new Davutoğlu's strategy Turkey is experimenting a new course in its international policy, breaking out from the rigid Kemalist schemes based on security while preserving the main principles of the Atatürk heritage: "peace at home, peace in the world".

If historically Turkish foreign policy was oriented only towards western side since the birth of the Republic, with the end of Cold War and the recent dynamics Turkey is trying to take all chances and shape its strategy following its own national interests. To be a proactive regional and global player Ankara increases its relations with neighboring areas and widens its perspectives without moving away from the West. The alliance with the West is still a strategic imperative and

³⁴ Z. Öniş and Y. Şuhnaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era"..., op. cit.

the AKP Government is pursuing not a “New Ottoman” but a “New Turkish” foreign policy, rediscovering Turkey’s central position.

Even if in the past, some other governments tried to liberalize Turkish foreign policy³⁵, but under AKP’s rule for the first time Turkish orientation is questioned since the birth of the Republic. This generates confusion and concerns about Turkish foreign policy orientations both internally and at international level: Ankara must clarify its commitment to the Western values and avoid exasperating internal and international tensions, using a moderate and diplomatic language

On the other side, the current divisions within the EU and European fatigue to gain a political consensus about Turkish accession shows that Europe is not politically ready to speak with a one voice about Turkey and its foreign policy orientation. Therefore it is appropriate to ask what the EU and the international community are willing and ready to do with Turkey. Right now the suspicions in western circles make a great noise but the only way to go forward avoiding the risk of losing Turkish efforts towards democracy and modernization is to recognize Ankara as an emerging regional power with its own interests outside the western area. Instead of accusing Turkish new activism, the EU and the US should revitalize Turkey’s relations with the West, starting with a new powerful relaunch of the EU accession process.

³⁵ it is due consider the Ismail Cem, Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2002, on February 2002 promoted the OIC-EU joint Forum, challenging the conceptual definition of “clash among civilizations” and showing the centrality of Turkey in both side.

Cfr. “Brief Summary of the Proceedings of the OIC-EU Joint Forum” by Republic of Turkey-Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/brief-summary-of-the-proceedings-of-the-oic-eu-joint-forum.en.mfa>.