

**BETWEEN EUROPEANIZATION AND EURO-ASIANISM:
FOREIGN POLICY ACTIVISM IN TURKEY DURING THE AKP ERA
(For Turkish Studies-Special Issue)**

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While Turkey pursued a relatively passive or reactive foreign policy stance during the Cold War era, its post-Cold war foreign policy has been marked by subsequent waves of foreign policy activism.¹ This article argues that Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War period may be conceptualized in terms of three distinct phases: (a) an initial wave of foreign policy activism in the immediate post-Cold War context; (b) a new or second wave of foreign policy activism during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government with a strong emphasis on Europeanization; (c) the current tension between Europeanization and Eurasianism. The roots of the second wave of activism can, in fact, be traced to the pre-AKP era to the crucial Helsinki Decision on Turkey's EU candidacy and the reforms undertaken by the coalition government of 1999-2002 particularly in the aftermath of the deep financial crisis of 2001. However, the AKP era itself has not been homogenous in terms of foreign policy behavior.² Our central contention is that there is considerable continuity in terms of foreign policy activism and a multilateral approach to policy making during the AKP era. Yet, at the same time a certain discontinuity or rupture may be identified towards the middle of the first AKP government signifying shift from *a commitment to deep Europeanization to loose Europeanization and a parallel shift to what may be classified as soft Euro-asianism.*

The prominent strategist Brzezinski portrayed Eurasia as a “grand chessboard,” where both regional and global actors compete arduously to enhance their geo-strategic and economic interests.³ Turkey is clearly a pivotal country in this grand chess board, which tries to reconcile its long-lasting European orientation with a countervailing trend towards Euro-asianism. Moreover, there are significant tensions on the domestic front in trying to balance different components of its identity, cultural, geographical, historical, and strategic factors, as well as in struggling to consolidate democracy, while preserving secularism in a predominantly Muslim society. The critical equilibrium, which will emerge on both fronts and the interaction of these domestic and international factors will also ultimately determine the path of the new wave of activism in Turkish Foreign policy.

Foreign Policy Activism during the AKP Era: The Distinguishing Elements

The AKP’s emphasis on democratization and the use of soft power is all the more striking in the post 9/11 context, during which there has been a significant shift away from democratization to “securitization” at the global level. This process has been expedited by the rise of new challenges including international terror and religious extremism, proliferation of threats coming from non-state actors and intensification of globalization. From a comparative perspective, the following elements render AKP style policy activism quite distinct from the earlier wave of foreign policy activism during the 1990s.

The Europeanization process whose roots can be traced to the mid-1990s is pursued with a far greater degree of consistency and vigor especially in the so-called golden years of the AKP, the period from November 2002 to the opening of accession negotiations (December 2004/ October 2005). The positive effects of the deep Europeanization process manifested itself in three interrelated and mutually supporting areas. First, this was one of the successful periods of economic growth in recent Turkish economic history. Turkey experienced significant economic growth. The EU anchor together with the IMF induced reforms were instrumental in generating monetary and fiscal discipline, as well as important regulatory reforms which in turn contributed to the achievement of single digit inflation and high rates of economic growth. Indeed, Turkey managed to attract significant amounts of foreign direct investment, for the first time, during this particular period.⁴ Second, the golden age was characterized by major reforms on the democratization front. Turkey took giant steps in the direction of democratic consolidation by a series of major reforms building upon the initiatives of the earlier administration (which involved such key steps as eliminating the death penalty) and dealing with its perennial Kurdish problems through a series of democratic openings that involved the extension of cultural and language rights to its citizens of Kurdish origin.⁵ The third area affected Europeanization is conduct of foreign policy.⁶

AKP's foreign policy style is characterized by greater emphasis on the use of soft power and developing friendly relations with all neighbors. One significant policy initiative has been targeting "zero problems" with Turkey's neighbors signaling a deviation from the classical fixed positions of Turkish foreign policy. This divergence is particularly evident in the context of the Cyprus dispute. The AKP government has displayed considerable

willingness in resolving the Cyprus dispute along the lines of the UN/Annan Plan as part of an attempt to find an internationally acceptable solution to the Cyprus issue. Moreover, in the conducive environment ensuing Öcalan's capture in 1999 and Beşir al-Asad's ascendance to power, there has been a striking improvement in both the political and economic relations with Syria. There is now even a free trade agreement further integrating the economies of these avid adversaries of the 1990s, during which Syria played the "terror card" backing the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against "the water card" of Turkey.⁷ Another good example is relations with Georgia, which displays a substantial increase in economic interdependence as clearly revealed by the use of Batum airport as a domestic one by Turkey and the growth of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project.

This multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy was very much influenced by Ahmet Davutoğlu's "strategic depth" perspective.⁸ Foreign policy is perceived no longer as a series of bilateral relations or foreign policy moves, but as a series of mutually reinforcing and interlocking processes. In this respect, Davutoğlu argues that in order to formulate a long-lasting strategic perspective, one needs to take into account "historical depth" which provides a sound assessment of the links between the past, present and the future, as well as a "geographical depth" penetrating into the intricate dynamics of the relations between domestic, regional and global factors.⁹ The geo-cultural, geo-political and geo-economic factors that contribute to the strategic depth of a country could only be genuinely interpreted at the intersection of these historical and geographic paradigms. Moreover, making an analogy of a bow and an arrow, he argues that the further Turkey strains its bow in Asia, the more distant and precise would its arrow extend into Europe.

Hence, he states that “If Turkey does not have a solid stance in Asia, it would have very limited chances with the EU.”¹⁰

The major premise of this argument is that Turkey is a “central country” strategically located in the core of the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Hence, Turkey has multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character or a single region, necessitating it to extend its influence simultaneously to Europe, Middle East, Balkans, The Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Asia, The Caspian and the Mediterranean. As such, it also needs to go beyond a parochial approach to national security and to become a security and stability provider for its neighboring regions. Consequently, Turkey’s engagements from Central Asia to Africa, from the EU to the OIC, as well as its bid for UN Security Council Membership and quest for becoming a key player in regional energy politics are all parts of this new foreign policy vision, which while somewhat maintaining Turkey’s traditional Western orientation, has a strong Eurasian and Middle East component.¹¹

In the context of this much more pro-active approach towards the Middle East and Eurasia, an attempt is made to develop friendly relations with the Arab world. A major move in this regard is to participate and play a leadership role in the Organization of the Islamic Conference.¹² The AKP’S Islamist roots in this context constitute an asset. The crucial March 1 decision not to allow US troops through Turkish territory during the March 2003 invasion of Iraq and Turkey’s EU membership drive generates considerable interest in the Arab world. This is developing into a kind of rapprochement between Turkey and the Arab world, rather similar to the on-going rapprochement process with Greece. Indeed, the AKP government displays considerable pro-active behavior in both

spheres, although admittedly the rapprochement with Greece predates the AKP government.

There has also been a strong, but at the same time a more pragmatic drive to develop diplomatic and economic relations with Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union. There are significant efforts to revive the BSEC project. Relations with Russia are buoyant especially since Putin became the president. The role of Turkey as an important energy corridor is being developed further and a number of concrete steps are being taken in this direction building on the achievements of the previous decade.¹³ On the one hand, Turkey has substantial dependency on Russian natural gas for its domestic consumption leading to cooperation and major joint energy projects such as Blue Stream. On the other hand, the push towards turning Turkey into a major energy hub as a transit country has increased competition with Russia over energy issues as clearly revealed by the Russian opposition to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project strongly backed by the United States.

In a world of rapidly increasing energy demand, the global struggle over the access to and the control of energy resources has been intensifying. Consequently, “the energy ellipse,” encompassing both the Caspian region and the Persian Gulf that contains over two-thirds of the global proven petroleum reserves and more than 40 percent of the world’s proven natural gas resources, is like a strategic “jack-pot.” In shaping the intricate dynamics of the Eurasian energy geopolitics, there are three major issues which are of critical importance for all key players (i) the amount of energy reserves available for extraction; (ii) the ownership of the resource; and (iii) the distribution routes

determining direct and environmental costs. In this respect, Russia, the US, the EU, and China are the main global actors with significant interests and influence in these areas; while Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran are emerging as important regional actors in Eurasia. The challenging task of transporting land-locked Caspian energy to the international markets further complicates the delicate dynamics between energy producers, energy transit countries and energy consumers turning “pipeline politics” into an indispensable part of energy security. In this respect, Turkey has a persistently increasing significance as an energy transit country.

The East-West Energy Corridor, which has been initiated through intensive collaboration between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the United States, forms a critical part of these initiatives. The Energy Corridor aims primarily at transporting the Caucasian and Central Asian crude oil and natural gas to international markets via safe alternative routes to Russia and Iran. The major components of this major energy outlet, include BTC crude oil pipeline, the Shah-Deniz natural gas pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum), as well as the other Trans-Caspian Natural Gas Pipeline projects (i.e. the Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector Project), railroads and complementary infrastructure.

In this respect, completion of the BTC pipeline project has been particularly significant. It is important to emphasize, however, that the inauguration of this project predates the AKP era. On September 5, 1997, President Heydar Aliyev, with strong backing from Turkey and the US, has formed a working group for initiating this main pipeline. At the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November 1999, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan reached an agreement, with the endorsement of the US President Bill Clinton, for building a major

exportation pipeline through Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC).¹⁴ On September 18, 2002, the foundation of the BTC exportation pipeline has been laid with an official ceremony. When the BTC project was finally completed in 2006, it had a total length of 1767 kilometers and cost approximately 4 billion dollars. 443 kilometers of the pipeline lies in Azerbaijan, 248 of it in Gurcistan and 1076 of it in Turkey.¹⁵ When Kazakhstan also expressed the possibility for its joining the pipeline by 2010, it raised the expectations that the capacity of the pipeline could eventually reach 75 million tons.¹⁶ Consequently, BTC opened a new East-West energy corridor providing an alternative energy route to Russia and Iran for crude oil. Hence, it also enhanced the geo-political significance of Turkey by turning it into a critical energy corridor.¹⁷

Emphasis on Turkey's global role becomes much more pronounced during the AKP era. Turkey's historical legacies and geo-political position provides considerable advantages, which allows her to play a global role that is more far-reaching and extensive than a typical global power. Turkey's role as a bridge between the Christian and the Islamic worlds and as a facilitator of inter-cultural dialogue is emphasized at a time of rising tensions and Islamophobia at the societal level in the West in the post 9/11 global environment.

In this respect, the AKP government significantly supported and promoted the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative. This project was initially proposed by the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero during his speech at the UN general Assembly on 21 September 2004. Following his defeat of the conservative Aznar government on a foreign policy platform in the aftermath of the March 2004 Madrid bombings, Zapatero raised this proposal as an

alternative approach to combat international terrorism. Upon the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's recommendation to include a Muslim country in leading this initiative, the Turkish government accepted the Spanish invitation to co-sponsor the proposal. Hence, on 14 July 2005 the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative was formally launched under UN auspices. Kofi Annan stated the goal of this project to "respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community-both at the institutional and civil society levels- to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization which potentially threaten world peace."¹⁸ After being invited to a leadership role, Turkey has become a more vocal advocate of the project than even Spain, promoting it at numerous international platforms such as the EU General Affairs Council Meeting on March 2006, during the Arab League Summit on 28 March 2006, and the World Economic Forum on 20-21 May 2006.¹⁹ Despite its limited concrete achievements, the value attached to Turkey's Eastern heritage and Islamic identity, as well as its ties with the West, also appealed to the domestic audience.

The strong and persistent government support for this project also went hand in hand with the new discourse in Turkish foreign policy highlighting "moral/normative aspect" beyond the confines of narrow "self-interest" indicative of a pronounced desire to assume a more global role and global responsibility. Within this framework, Turkey has tried to act within a framework of what Davutoglu named as "rhythmic diplomacy," pushing for a sustained pro-activism in the field of diplomacy and trying to achieve a more active role in International organizations and opening up to new areas where Turkish contacts have been limited in the past.²⁰ Turkey has hosted the NATO and OIC Summits. It has been actively promoting its case to become a UN Security Council member. As a result of

Turkey's opening to Africa, now Turkey has an observer status in the African Union. The relations are not only activated at the state level, but there is also the involvement of civil society. For instance, one of Turkey's business confederations, TUSKON (Confederation of Businessman and Industrialists of Turkey), in conformity with the new Africa policy, has taken the initiative to organize the Africa summit, bringing high numbers of African ministers and businessmen to Turkey.

Last but not least, relations with the US experienced a dramatic downturn during the early part of the AKP government. Indeed, this represents a fundamental shift from the basic foreign policy orientation of the 1990s, in the context of which, relations with the United States and Israel constituted the primary axis of Turkish foreign policy. Relations with the US were critical up to March, 2001. The US (in association with IMF) played a key part in Turkey's post-economic crisis recovery process and also assumed a crucial role in Turkey's drive for EU membership. Moreover, the US support for the BTC project was very decisive. However, there has been a certain lag in readjusting Turkish-American relations to the changing dynamics and new challenges of the post-9/11 era giving way to new areas of converging and diverging interests.

Particularly, the developments in Iraq served as a "critical litmus test" for the bilateral relations.²¹ On the one hand, the American leadership viewed the war in Iraq as a crucial step to restructure a new regional and global order after 9/11. On the other hand, Turkey being a neighbor of Iraq and an integral part of this already very volatile region perceived the war to be source of great risks, especially given the ambiguity of American plans concerning the post-war conditions in Iraq. Relations have particularly deteriorated after

the March 1, 2003 Parliamentary decision not permitting the deployment of US troops to Iraq via Turkish territory. Moreover, the rise of across the border PKK terror originating from northern Iraq after the US invasion further increased the tensions. The period between March 1, 2003 and November 5, 2007, marked the lowest point in the relations since the US arms embargo of 1975-1978 and the reservoirs of trust on both sides were highly depleted. Nevertheless, there is also a wide range of converging interests, which highlighted the persisting significance of Transatlantic relations, including achieving peace and stability in Iraq and the Middle East, energy security, enlargement of NATO, collaboration in the peace-keeping operations in the Balkans and the fight against international terrorism. Hence, significant attempts have been made to reconstruct the relationship and the Turkey-US-EU triangle seems to have paid dividends in terms of securing active US support in the struggle against the PKK in the final months of 2007 also putting the relations once again on a more constructive path.

3. Loss of Momentum of the Europeanization Drive: Retreat to “Soft-Euro-Asianism”?

In analyzing Turkey-EU Relations during the AKP era we may identify two distinct sub-phases. The first phase from the end of 2002 to roughly the end of 2005 corresponds to the Golden Age of Europeanization in Turkey. During this period, the AKP government built on the foundations laid by the previous coalition government and pushed single-mindedly for Turkey's full-membership and the associated set of economic and democratization reforms. There appears to be a significant degree of continuity with respect to foreign policy activism during the post-2005 era. Yet, the second sub-phase

corresponds to a certain loss of enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the government to what was previously the focal point of Turkish foreign policy efforts, namely joining the EU as a full-member. Indeed, one may go further and argue that the foreign policy stance of the AKP government in the post-2005 era deviated from an all out Europeanization drive to a possible retreat to what could be described as a kind of “loose Europeanization” or “soft Euroasianism” strategy.²² “Soft-Euroasianism”, in this context, does not refer simply to shift of foreign policy orientation in a direction focusing more on the former Soviet space and the Middle East. Rather, it means that foreign policy activism is pursued with respect to all neighboring regions, but with no firm EU axis as was previously the case. What makes it distinct from “hard Euroasianism” is that the western orientation and the Atlanticist element of Turkish foreign policy continues, but in a looser and more flexible form.

To an outside observer, the loss of enthusiasm for the EU membership project in Turkey both on the part of the government and the public at large within a short space of time represents quite a paradox and deserves an explanation. Indeed, there was no single turning point, but several interrelated turning points and a number of factors were at work to bring about this dramatic change of mood both on the part of the AKP elite as well as the public at large.

The intense debate generated in core EU countries such as France and Germany in the aftermath of the critical Brussels Summit has helped to create a serious nationalistic backlash in Turkey and strengthened the hands of anti-EU, anti-reform groups both within the state and the society at large. The media representations of Europe in Turkey

as a monolithic bloc contributed to this change of mood. The increasing questioning of the very basis of Turkish membership and Turkey's European credentials by influential political figures in the very core of Europe such as Sarkozy in France and Merkel in Germany at a time when the decision to open up accession negotiations had already been taken made a deep impact in terms of influencing public opinion in Turkish domestic politics. Indeed, there was a striking drop in public support for EU membership from a peak of 74 % in 2002 to around 50% by 2006 and 2007.²³ The fact that Europe was also going through a constitutional stalemate was also an important influence. The rejection of the proposed Constitutional Treaty in the French and Dutch referenda injected an additional mood of pessimism. Again, media representations or misrepresentations of the constitutional crisis in Turkey played a role in terms of contributing to growing Euro-skepticism by helping to project the EU as an unattractive, crisis-ridden project. There is no doubt that the EU has been going through a deep identity crisis in recent years concerning the future course of the integration process. Even though this identity crisis was only partly related to the question of Turkey's inclusion as a full-member, the fact that it has coincided with a crucial phase of the country's accession process proved to be a rather unfortunate development. The identity crisis in the EU was clearly instrumental in reducing the political will on the part of the pro-EU actors in Turkey, helping to tilt the delicate balance in favor of those forces in the Turkish state and the society, which were deeply skeptical of the EU integration process in any case.

Some of the key decisions of the EU concerning Turkish accession also exercised a profound impact in terms of undermining enthusiasm at the elite level and the public at large. The first of these was the clause on *the possibility of permanent safeguards on full*

labor mobility following Turkey's accession to the EU as a full member. This immediately generated criticism even among the most vocal supporters of Turkey's EU membership as a clear case of *unfair treatment*.²⁴ Whilst a temporary safeguard on labor mobility, such as the seven year transition period on the new Eastern European members, was quite understandable, the imposition of a permanent safeguard effectively meant that Turkey would be relegated to a second division status, special partner position even if it were to become a full-member.

On top of the labor mobility issue, the failure of the EU to fulfill its promises to the Turkish Cypriots in return for their co-operative attitude towards the resolution of the Cyprus conflict along the lines of the UN plan for re-unification of the island generated yet another major blow. The EU's failure to deal with the Cyprus conflict problem on an equitable basis was increasingly interpreted even among key members of the pro-EU, pro-reform coalition in Turkey as yet another case of *unfair treatment*. The fact that the negotiations process was partially suspended due to the Cyprus dispute and specifically failure to open its ports to vessels from The Republic of Cyprus proved to be the ultimate blow in this context. The EU's unbalanced approach to the Cyprus dispute appeared to confirm the widely held perceptions among the Turkish elites and the general public that Cyprus was being used as creating yet another obstacle on the path of Turkey's full-membership, the important point being that the Cyprus issue was in itself not critical and was being used as an instrument of exclusion.

The negative external environment originating from the EU front was amplified by a process which involved a steady deterioration of relations with the United States which

has traditionally been a key element in Turkey's relations with the EU. The growing instability in Iraq and the human costs of the Iraq War were interpreted as a direct consequence of American unilateralism and aggression that contributed to a major increase in anti-American and anti-West sentiments, given the fact that culturally there is no strong demarcation between "Europe" and the United States as distinct entities in the Turkish context. The mutually reinforcing tendency is to view the EU and the US as part of the same, mutually interlocking "West" or Western civilization, to which Turkey aspires to be a part.²⁵

While the negative and ambiguous signals originating from the EU and "the West", in general, were of critical importance in swinging the pendulum away from the Europeanization drive, there were also important domestic factors at work. A key element in this context was the weakening commitment of the AKP leadership to the goal of full EU membership. We should take into account here the Islamist roots of the AKP. There is no doubt that the party has been significantly transformed as it has tried progressively to move towards the "center" of Turkish politics, which became even more evident in the context of 2007 general elections whereby the liberal representation within the AKP has increased markedly. One should take into account the fact that the AKP represents a broad coalition of interests encompassing liberal and nationalistic elements on top of its religious conservative core. Indeed, one of the key elements on the party's political agenda is the issue of "religious freedoms". Arguably, the party leadership realized, through encounters with some of the key decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, that the domain for action for a religion-based party within the EU is clearly circumscribed.²⁶ This might also have been instrumental in re-shaping the attitudes of the

party leadership to the question of EU membership. Evidence of this loss of enthusiasm is evident by the fact that the AKP government has not actively pushed for some of the key reforms emphasized by the EU. These include the failure to repeal the notorious article 301 of the penal code and the opening up of the Halki Seminary as part of the protection of the rights of the Christian minorities.

The elections of July 2007 represented a major opportunity for the AKP to revitalize the Europeanization and reform agenda. The party emerged from the election with an even larger coalition of support and this broad-based public support could have been utilized to re-activate a large-scale reform agenda. Yet, with an exaggerated sense of its own power and a diminished sense of the importance of the EU anchor, the party leadership clearly missed an opportunity during the fall of 2007. The party's focus increasingly shifted towards the promotion of fundamental religious freedoms such as allowing female students to wear the headscarf in the universities. Arguably, the crucial mistake here was to present these issues in an isolated fashion and not as part of a broader reform package. This, in turn, helped to create a very serious backlash and even alienated liberal opinion which had hitherto been quite supportive of the AKP's reformist and moderate credentials.²⁷ Ironically, the optimistic mood of the immediate post-election era was replaced by a serious re-polarization of the Turkish society culminating with the Constitutional Court case involving the closure of the AKP on the grounds of violating the very basis of the secular constitutional order. The consequences of these developments for Turkey-EU relations have been quite negative. From a European perspective this set of events appeared to raise fundamental questions about Turkey's democratic credentials has clearly empowered elements in European society which are

committed to the exclusion of Turkey on the grounds of culture and identity in any case, and leaving pro-Turkey elements in a highly defensive position.

The decision of the Constitutional Court of July 30, 2008 can be interpreted as an important positive development for the future course of Turkey's deep Europeanization process. The Court issued a serious warning but refrained from banning the governing party which had received 47 percent of the popular vote.²⁸ If, indeed, the party had been closed down this would have had very serious negative ramifications in terms of its impact in the European decision making circles possibly resulting in the suspension of negotiations with Turkey altogether. Needless to say, once the negotiation process had broken down it would have been very difficult to reinitiate the process once again. This would have effectively implied the end of Turkish membership hopes at least for the foreseeable future. On the domestic front, the possible closure of the party would most probably have resulted in serious economic and political instability which would have rendered the relations with the EU even more problematic. On an optimistic note, the Court decision may induce the AKP government to revitalize its Europeanization and reform agenda. But, we should not assume this to be an inevitable outcome. The role of agency constitutes a critical factor at this point. A lot will depend on how key actors such as the party leadership perceive and interpret the signals. It may be premature at this point to suggest that the AKP will automatically rediscover its early momentum and embark on a new era of deep Europeanization in the coming years.

4. Turkey's Pivotal Role as a Benign Regional Power: The AKP's Foreign Policy in the Light of the Previous Wave of Foreign Policy Activism

There exist considerable elements of *continuity* in Turkish foreign policy in the immediate post-Cold War and the AKP eras, as well as within the AKP period itself. Hence, it would be ahistorical to claim that there is a complete rupture in Turkish foreign policy with the AKP government in power in the post-2002 era. Indeed the Europeanization and the Eurasian elements in Turkish foreign policy co-existed during both periods. Indeed, what seems to be striking is a swing of pendulum in the direction of Eurasianism in periods of disappointment and weakening of relations with the European Union. This was certainly the case in the early 1990s, when Turkey's membership bid for the EU was rejected at a time when the EU appeared to embrace the post-communist Eastern Europe in a new wave of Eastern Enlargement. This also seems to be the case in the recent period, where the issue of Turkish membership becomes a focal point of debate within the EU's internal constitutional stalemate. This is sending negative signals to Turkey which, in turn, dampens its enthusiasm for implementing the changes necessary for a successful membership drive. Beyond the continuities, however, important differences can be identified.

Arguably the main axis of Turkish foreign policy during the 1990s was the Turkey-US-Israel triangle. In the AKP era, the EU has become the principal reference point of Turkish foreign policy. Second, in parallel to this new alignment, Turkey also taking on the role of a benign regional power, which is based on the use of "soft power" resources.

Joseph Nye defines “soft power” as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” arising from a country's culture, political ideas and policies, whereas “hard power” is “the ability to coerce” based on a country's military and economic might.²⁹ The multilateralist approach and the perceived legitimacy of the policies also enhance soft power.

For instance, the recent improvement in Turkey's relations with Syria is a very good manifestation of this change. Throughout the 1990s, both for Turkey and Syria the perception of the other as an unreliable neighbor determined the context of the Turkish-Syrian relations. Primary sources of contention between Turkey and Syria have been Syria's logistical support to the PKK and its territorial claims over the Hatay province of Turkey. In return, Syria has been very concerned about Turkey's ambitious hydraulic-based South East Anatolia (GAP) regional development project with adverse implications regarding its water problems leading to a discourse highlighting conflict, which depicted Tigris and Euphrates as “rivers of fire.” Although the official foreign policy line of Turkey maintained the separation of water issue from terrorism, according to analysts, in this period, Syria played the “terror card” against the “water card” of Turkey.³⁰

However, in the period following the capture of Ocalan in 1999, and particularly since Baser al-Asad's ascendance to power and the AKP government's initiatives, there has been a radical improvement in bilateral relations. Suddenly despite the increasingly adverse impacts of climate change and increasing demand for water, the conflictual discourse concerning the water issue has receded to the background for the time being. Moreover, in comparison with the confrontational approach of the US towards Syria

following 9/11, Turkish policy towards Syria is much more aligned with the EU's approach of engagement.

In another very significant example, in the fall of 2007, Turkey favored diplomatic channels before resorting to unilateral power in the recent crisis in Northern Iraq over the cross border operations against PKK terrorists. Emphasis on multilateralism constitutes a striking feature of the new era. This has been particularly evident in the AKP's attempts to deal with the Kurdish conflict. A number of important multilateral initiatives preceded the use of hard power to deal with the PKK helping to generate considerable international support for its actions in the process. In order to increase the constructive involvement of regional countries for the future of Iraq, Turkey took the leadership in the "neighboring countries" initiative. For instance, Turkey has signed a special agreement with the Arab countries during the meeting of Extended Neighboring Countries of Iraq, which was held in Istanbul on November 2, 2007.³¹ This agreement included plans for coordinating and institutionalizing the relations among Iraq's neighbors through the establishment of a Turkish-Arab forum. This process, not only assisted to confirm the legitimacy of the new Iraqi government, but also helped to treat the future of Iraq as an international, rather than a purely American issue, within the framework of United Nations with more active involvement from regional powers.

During the 1990s, Turkish foreign policy was much more identity-based and emotionally charged. In the new era, foreign policy becomes more pragmatic. This kind of shift is particularly evident in Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan and the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. During the early 1990s, Turkey has attempted to play a

leadership/ big brother role for these Republics newly liberated from the Soviet rule. In the new era, the relationship with these countries continues to be friendly and yet is grounded on more pragmatic grounds of mutual economic interests. Hence, a possible confrontation with Russia through an over-activist approach towards the rest of the post-Soviet space is effectively avoided.

The new developments in the Caucasus, marked by Russia's attack on Georgia during a brief war in August 2008, when Georgia attempted to recapture by force its separatist pro-Moscow region of South Ossetia, will lead to an extremely complicated period in the region. Despite the US and EU condemnation for going far beyond the disputed area and deploying troops and bombing deep inside Georgia proper, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has defended the Russian actions stating that "Russia has returned to the world stage as a responsible state which can defend its citizens."³² Moreover, Russia has recognized the two pro-Russian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. These actions reveal that a resurgent Russia will display and increasingly assertive foreign policy and in the new confrontation between the United States and Russia, Turkey will be confronted once again with the challenging task of striking a delicate balance between its alliance with the United States and NATO and its relations with Russia to which Turkey is heavily dependent for its energy needs. Recent reassertion of Russian power may also have the unintended consequence of revitalizing Turkey's Europeanization agenda.

In response to these new developments, Turkey has maintained its multidimensional and soft power approach by championing the idea of forming a "Caucasus Solidarity and

Cooperation Platform” in the wake of the Georgia-Russia war and has conducted numerous high level diplomatic contacts to promote it. The most significant of these contacts is Turkish President Abdullah Gul’s brief landmark visit to Armenia on September 6, 2008 to attend the World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey in Yerevan utilizing “football diplomacy” as an opportunity to open channels of communication, as a first step towards addressing diplomatic and political challenges in the bilateral relations, as well as promoting cooperation on broader regional issues.³³

The political leadership also attempts to exploit inter-linkages between different dimensions of foreign policy. Turkey’s mediating role in various conflict situations becomes increasingly important in enhancing its status as a pivotal regional power. AKP government particularly emphasizes this “mediator” or “facilitator” role within the context of the greater Middle East. For instance, Solana-Larjani meeting to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue took place in Turkey. Opening a functional channel of dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Turkey invited the Pakistani President Musharraf and Afghan President Karzai to meet in Turkey during May 2007. The Israeli and Palestinian Presidents Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas got together in Ankara before their critical Annapolis meeting in the US. Turkey’s also facilitated and fostered diplomatic contacts and dialogue between Pakistan and Israel, and between Israel and Syria.

However, there are also limits to the effectiveness of this “soft power” facilitator role, even causing a counter-productive impact, especially if its enacted unilaterally without considering policy alignment with the European Union or the United States. This impact was clearly revealed during Hamas leader Khalid Mishal’s visit to Turkey. In the

aftermath of Hamas' victory in Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006, at a time when no Western country or Middle Eastern state on friendly terms with the West were willing to have diplomatic contacts with Hamas, the AKP government provided the Hamas leader with a high profile endorsement by receiving the Hamas leader himself, when even the Turkish Foreign Ministry declined to extend an invitation to Mishal.³⁴ This imprudently timed and conducted initiative has been counter productive because of three reasons. First, it had a detrimental effect on Turkey's relations with Israel and also diminished the critical support of the Jewish lobby for Turkey in the US. Second, since it was conducted unilaterally, it reduced the legitimacy and effectiveness of this initiative. And finally, it gave way to the interpretation that Turkey has been moving away from aligning its foreign policy with the EU. Having learned from this experience, Turkey is more closely aligning its position with the EU in its mediation efforts during proximity talks between Syria and Israel.

In addition to the intensive diplomatic maneuvering, the economy also became stronger during the AKP era. The 1990s style foreign policy activism had been hampered by the chronic instability of the Turkish economy and recurrent financial crises. Under the AKP, given the party's strong commitment to monetary and fiscal discipline; inflation has been reduced to single digit levels and significant growth has been generated/ Hence\ this recent growth is likely to be a more durable and sustainable process/Furthermore, the significant trade and investment linkages, which characterize Turkey's foreign economic relations with all neighboring countries including Northern Iraq in a high growth context, enable Turkey to deploy her soft power resources much more effectively. The importance of these growing economic interactions and trade-investment linkages are particularly

striking in Turkey's recent relations with Greece, Iraq and Syria. The growing maturity and internationalization of Turkish private capital is reflected in foreign policy initiatives, which are no longer confined to the realm of state actors. The strength of the Turkish economy will be crucial for its ability to play a benign regional role based on soft power. In spite of recent improvements, in the overall economic performance and the growing strength of the Turkish private capital elements of vulnerability remain. The presence of a large current account deficit and the heavy dependence of the growth process on large inflows of external capital and favorable global liquidity conditions suggest there might be problems in terms of sustaining the high growth generated during the early part of the decade. Such dangers clearly highlight once again the importance of the EU anchor for the future performance of the Turkish economy especially in a new environment where global conditions for economic growth are much less favorable.

Finally, democratization of foreign policy emerges as a key element under the AKP government. New actors are involved. Foreign policy issues are opened to public debate. Previously fixed positions on a number of key issues have become the focal point of public debate, such as Cyprus, relations with Armenia, and relations with Kurds in Northern Iraq. Hence, we see a direct example in the Turkish context of how overall democratization of domestic politics can contribute towards a softening of foreign policy. In the new era, Turkey's pro-active foreign policy based on soft power also becomes much more convincing viewed from the perspective of the international community. In the 1990s Turkey often encountered the criticism of double standards. For example, when it tried to promote the rights of the Bosnians against the Serbs at a time when the rights of its own Kurdish minorities were effectively repressed in the domestic

sphere. In the new era, with the enlargement of cultural and civil rights in the domestic sphere, Turkey's pro-active foreign policy moves appear to be more convincing and on firmer ground.

5. Concluding Remarks

The new wave of foreign policy activism during the AKP era has started out with a strong emphasis on Europeanization. However, the AKP era itself displays elements of continuity and change in terms of foreign policy behavior. Our central thesis is that there is significant continuity in terms of a pro-active and a multilateral approach to policy making. Yet, one is able to detect a certain rupture after the early years of the AKP government. The discontinuity is marked by a shift from a commitment to deep Europeanization to loose Europeanization and a simultaneous shift to soft Euro-asianism.

What we increasingly observe in the current era is the emergence of an implicit broad and mutually reinforcing coalition for "special partnership", which seems to be deeply rooted both in the European and Turkish contexts. This constitutes a significant danger from the point of Turkey's full-membership prospects. The proponents of Turkish membership both at home and abroad appear to be increasingly less vocal and enthusiastic compared to their Turko-skeptic and Euro-skeptic counterparts. The retreat to soft Euro-asianism certainly does not signify the abandonment of the Europeanization project altogether. What it means, however, is that the EU will no longer be at the center-stage of Turkey's external relations or foreign policy efforts. This, in turn, is likely to have dramatic repercussions for the depth and intensity of the democratization process in Turkey

especially in key areas such as a complete reordering of military-civilian relations, an extension of minority rights and a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem, as well as counteracting the deeply embedded problem of gender inequality. There is no doubt that there exists key elements within the Turkish state and Turkish society, which would be quite content with the *loose Europeanization* solution given the perceived threats posed by a *combination of deep Europeanization and deep democratization* for national sovereignty and political stability. The fears of deep Europeanization are not simply confined to the defensive nationalist camp. There also exists considerable conservatism even in the much more globally oriented AKP circles, when it comes to deep democratization agenda, as it is clearly evident from the resistance to the repealing of the article 301 of the penal code.

A final question to raise in this context is whether the retreat to *loose Europeanization/soft Euro-asianism* is likely to be reversed. The likelihood of a major reversal in the immediate term appears to be rather low. There are developments, however, which create room for optimism. For instance, the change of government in the Republic of Cyprus, followed by the decision taken on the part of the leaders of both communities in the North and the South to restart negotiations in the direction of reunification, suggest that there is a possibility of a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus conflict. Such progress may help to clear away perhaps the major hurdle on the path of Turkey's EU membership. Moreover, the recent decision of the Constitutional Court not to close the AKP might have a positive impact in terms of creating incentives for the party leadership to reactivate its commitment to deep Europeanization and the associated reform process. From a longer-term perspective, two possibly mutually reinforcing

developments may facilitate a renewed impetus to the deep Europeanization agenda. The first element of such a scenario would involve a new enlargement wave in Europe, which would incorporate the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Turkey as a country, which has already reached the point of accession negotiations will not be immune to such a process. The second element of such a scenario would involve the emergence of a strong counter-movement from the more liberal and Western-oriented segments of the Turkish society, who will place Europeanization and reform firmly on its political agenda.

Turkey will continue to be an important regional power even if its foreign policy stance is characterized by soft Euro-asianism. However, the first-best choice for Turkish foreign policy would be a commitment to deep Europeanization; in other words, making the EU membership the pivotal element or the central axis of its multi-dimensional foreign policy. The benefits of deep Europeanization have already manifested themselves in terms of (a) strong economic performance (b) major steps towards democratic consolidation and (c) foreign policy based on soft power. These three elements are clearly interdependent and tend to create a kind of virtuous cycle, which would be very difficult to sustain under the second best choice of a loose Europeanization agenda. Following the recent Constitutional Court decision, one may feel somewhat more optimistic about the future and hope that the AKP will be able to revitalize its commitment to deep Europeanization and reform which had been a hallmark of its policy in the early years of its tenure in government.

Turkey has a critical role to play for the enhancement of peace and stability in its volatile region as a pivotal power with substantial influence and capabilities. However, it can play

a more constructive and effective role, as a benign rather than a coercive power, if it successfully fulfills four challenging tasks by (1) consolidating its democracy; (2) maintaining good neighborly relations; (3) achieving a balance in its troublesome EU-Turkey-US triangle and (4) operating within a predominantly European framework while pursuing a multilateral foreign policy with extensive Eurasian ties. On all fronts, Turkey has a challenging period ahead, during which it needs to overcome numerous domestic and international obstacles, which will not only determine the future path of Turkish foreign policy, but will have very significant regional implications.

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NOTES

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¹⁴ The partner companies participating in the construction of the BTC pipeline included SOCAR, BP, Unocal, STATOIL, TPAO, ENI, Itochu, Delta Hess, TFE and INPEKS.

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