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"Turkey's foreign policy: Balancing its new role as a potential regional power with its EU membership perspective. A study in contradictions".

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TABLE OF CONTENTS**PART A**Page nr.

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	4
I. <u>FOREWORD (A Turkish Identity Struggle)</u>	5
II. <u>CHAPTER 1 (The road to EU)</u>	8
1. Enlargement Fatigue Implications.	8
2. Obstacles to full accession.	9
3. Failure of the EU perspective.	10
III. <u>CHAPTER 2 (Political shift to Islam)</u>	
1. Rise of AKP.	11
2. Concept of Strategic Depth.	12
3. Regional Power Policy Initialization.	14

PART B

IV. <u>CHAPTER 3 (Regional Policy in the Middle East)</u>	
1. Middle East general.....	15
2. Syria.	15
3. Iran.	17
4. Israel.....	18
5. Iraq.	19
6. Other countries.	20
7. Middle East overall assessment.	21
V. <u>CHAPTER 4 (The South Caucasus Region)</u>	
1. Caucasus general.....	22
2. Armenia.	22
3. Azerbaijan.	23
4. Russia.	24
5. Caucasus Overall.	25
VI. <u>CHAPTER 5 (A Balkan regional power)</u>	
1. General.....	26
2. Bulgaria.	26
3. Bosnia Herzegovina.	28
4. Albania- Kosovo.	29
5. Serbia.	30

6.	Others.....	31
7.	Overall.....	32

PART C

VII. CONCLUSION

a.	Flourishing Economy.....	33
b.	Military Power.....	35
c.	Diplomatic Supremacy.....	36

VIII. EPILOGUE..... 37

<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>.....	39
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PART A

INTRODUCTION

Since World War II, many Turks have immigrated to Europe, where they have failed to assimilate partly by choice and partly because the European systems have not facilitated assimilation¹. This failure of assimilation is considered by many to have its roots in the traditional fight between the “advanced” West and the “retarded” East and is not only creating unease in Europe but it provokes controversy in Turkish domestic affairs as well.

Today’s political scene in Turkey is quite more complicated than the oversimplified explanation of the traditional struggle between Islamists and Secularists. What is important to note is that the Islamic intervention in politics is not only re-emerging from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, but it is also directly affecting the applied foreign policy due to the revival of what is called the “Pan Ottomanism”² doctrine. Through the “zero problems with neighbors” foreign affairs policy, soft powers conquer started being initialized both in harmonization and in contradiction with the Ottoman Empire’s hard power application. It is not for the physical expansion of the conquered territory this time, but for the strategic influence of the region following the dream of the transformation of the country to an emerging regional power by acquiring the necessary strategic depth. The emerging understanding is that Turkey is a regional power and an agenda-setter, and that it can – and should – stand up to the West in pursuit of that role.

This study argues that it is a difficult task to combine two contradicting, for a Muslim country, objectives, namely emerging as a regional power while at the same time trying to access a union of non – Muslim states as a member country. This is a contradictory stance since accession by definition implies the voluntarily handover of a part of national sovereignty to the, non – Muslim, other club members. Since this attempt has recently emerged, and especially a decade after the conclusion of the cold war era, when Turkey realized the urgent need to regain its lost geopolitical value, the bibliography on this issue is limited and mainly focused around the current Turkish foreign minister’s book “Strategic Depth”. There are a big number of scientific articles and publications which cover dispersed parts of this issue and the effort in this study is concentrated in combining all available publications and bibliography and by closely monitoring all the evolving events in which Turkey is interfering in its close neighborhood, to analyze these contradictions that show up in every different case. The methodology which is used is based on an initial introduction focusing on the Turkish Islamic identity which could constitute the most important obstacle for the EU accession and at the same time constitute the main pillar for the emergence of a regional power, and then continues following a counterclockwise

¹ Olivier Roy (2005) *Turkey today: a European country?* USA, Anthem Press, pp. 44

² B. Lewis (1968) *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London, pp. 124

geographical trajectory touching one by one each of the three main geographical regions that surround Turkey. In each different region and for each major country, a brief “Turkish intervention” analysis is trying to show the emerging contradictions between the role of the regional power and the role of an EU member country.

Each regional analysis starts with a general view, continues with a short brief analysis concerning major countries only and also contains a separate assessment which is basically a conclusion for that specific area. An additional conclusion chapter is addressing the potential failure of the three main pillars that uphold the existence of a regional power and at the same time endanger European accessibility of a country, namely economic, military and diplomatic superiority. Although Turkish foreign policy has lately been extremely active and in regions beyond its close neighbourhood and especially, USA, Africa and many European countries, those were not included in this case study since, with the exception of Greece, which is omitted for obvious reasons, those countries do not constitute coherent geographical regions that can immediately and directly affect or be affected by the Turkish potential geopolitical shift. On the contrary, indications presented in this study show that Turkey’s close neighbourhood will not easily ,or even at all, accept its leading role, since they realize that the country does not have the potential to lead before resolving its own domestic problems³. At the same time the EU’s non acceptance combined with the regional power strategy failure, bear the danger of regional and international political isolation and even worst of possible national unrest, destabilization and probable dissolution, as the recent Kurdish call for autonomy has loudly demonstrated. If such a thing occurs then instead of experiencing the resurrection of the Ottoman Empire in a regional soft power role we could be witnessing the resurrection of the “Sick man of Europe”⁴

I. FOREWORD (A Turkish identity struggle)

“National identity has always been Turkey's pressing issue, and is still guaranteed to provoke controversy. Kemal Ataturk founded the republic on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Overnight, he abolished a 700-year-old system of government, changed the alphabet and dress code, and looked one direction: towards the West. For him, to modernise was to westernise, and becoming an accepted part of Europe was the ultimate goal. And all of this was to be imposed on an overwhelmingly Muslim society”⁵

The immediate and total abolishment of centuries long norms and practices which were well-embedded in people’s hearts and minds was an

³ F. Stephen Larrabee, (2003) Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish foreign policy in an age of uncertainty* Center for Middle East Public Policy Rand Corporation, pp.108

⁴ The phrase "sick man of Europe" is commonly attributed to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, referring to the Ottoman Empire, because it was increasingly falling under the financial control of the European powers and had lost territory in a series of disastrous wars.(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sick_man_of_Europe)

⁵ The Rageh Omaar Report: *Turkey's New Visionary* ,
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/05/201051216450683494.html>

attempt to extract the main characteristics of the country's national identity (language and Islamic religion) from its genitival code with a shock therapy treatment which was proved to be something more than an experiment gone wrong⁶. A never ending struggle between the religious and the secular identity of the country has commenced at that time which has led (and still does) many Turks to question the very cornerstones of their society and daring to ask: Who are we?⁷ Answering this has become a challenge both inside and outside the country as the region was directly involved in all geopolitical changes and competitions of great powers attempting to directly or indirectly exercise their control and influence on this highly valued strategic part of the world.

The suppression of the nation's identity, carried through Ataturk's legacy to army, judiciary and educational authorities, lasted for about four decades after his death in 1938, when in the 1970s, a counter-revolution started in the region that argued for reintegrating Islam into the governance of Muslim countries. Turkey has initially resisted the change and the side effects of its changing environment due to the second major military intervention of 1980 (first one was in 1960) which was the longest, the bloodiest and the most influential affecting the country's politics ,through the then established and still standing constitution, until today. The secularist/Europeanist vision created by Ataturk⁸ was safe for the moment but was in deep collision, since its creation, with the suppressed Muslim identity of central Anatolia people who's own existence and well being was neglected in favour of the welfare of Istanbul's elite, and in collision with the Islamist regimes that found their way to power at that time in Turkey's close neighbourhood and in places like Iran.

It was inevitable that this process would affect Turkey and once more answering the identity question has become even more difficult especially after 2002, November 3rd when what is called "Turkey's Islamic Revolution"⁹ took place. It was the time when Mr Recep Tayip Erdogan's party of justice and reconciliation – development (AKP- Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi), swept to power in governmental elections while bearing all the political heritage characteristics of Erodgan's spiritual father and mentor Necmettin Erbakan (a pro Islamic politician and a "*persona non grata*" for the then country's pro secular regime and especially the military). This was a defining moment because the AKP is not simply a secular Europeanist party. Its exact views were and still are hotly debated, with many inside and outside of Turkey claiming that its formal moderation hides a radical-Islamist agenda.¹⁰

⁶ Poulton hugh (1997) *The Top Hat, the Grey Wolf, and the Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* ,New York University Press, pp. 97

⁷ The Rageh Omaar Report: *Turkey's New Visionary*, op.cit.

⁸ George Friedman, *Geopolitical Journey part 5 Turkey*, pp.3

http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101122_geopolitical_journey_part_5_turkey

⁹ Michael Rubin July/August 2010 , *Turkey From Ally to an enemy*,

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/turkey--from-ally-to-enemy-15464>

¹⁰ *Geopolitical Journey, Part 5: Turkey*, op.cit

Erdogan's government did close to nothing to avoid the hidden Islamic agenda controversy, but on the contrary it moved on to reform a number of hot issues like the headscarf university ban, the alcohol consumption within the big city's limits and the rise of the prices of alcoholic beverages, while at the same time using Turkey's European prospective as an excuse¹¹, moved even deeper to question the military's authority and the judiciary powers, both being the safe guards and the watch dogs of the kemalist heritage of pro secular, pro western and pro European ideology. In addition to that, after forming in 2003 the first single party government in many years of low and of questionable credibility coalition governments, the AKP enthusiastically moved to the adoption of a road map for full membership in the EU, which included an IMF-backed stabilization program and a number of painful reforms which have gradually paid off, leading to a flourishing and dynamically developing competent economy in the region.¹²

Together with the uninterrupted economic growth and stability, which has successfully resisted global economic crisis, came the development of a new foreign policy having all the characteristics of an emerging regional power and of growing regional influence which involves redefining the country's internal and regional relations to Islam. This has already alarmed to the maximum possible extend the domestic secularists as well as inhabitants of countries who feel threatened by Turks — or Muslims — living among them and who are frightened by the spectre of terrorism. In spite all this negative posture and the not so Turkey friendly developing climate within the EU, the appointed in 2007 minister of foreign affairs prof. Ahmet Davutoglu "does not believe that being a Muslim clashes with being European. We are proud of our religion and identity but at the same time we are part of European culture and European history and we are proud of that identity as well, he says"¹³.

Reaching 2011, with Turkey waiting still at the gates of the EU, in what it seems like a third attempt to conquer Vienna, and the Erdogan government having fully imposed its will on domestic issues (with the abolishment of the anti AKP military leadership in August 2011 and the historical and first time ever for the Turkish standards, resignation of four high ranking generals), the process of growing Turkish regional influence is exacerbating internal political tensions as well as straining old alliances and opening the door to new ones¹⁴. It is creating anxiety inside and outside the country about what Turkey is becoming and whether it is a good thing or not. The transformation from an underdeveloped country emerging from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire to a major power is happening before our eyes and forces us to rephrase the Turkish identity question into a new one: "Is the West's increasingly loveless marriage with Turkey finally headed toward acrimonious divorce?"¹⁵

¹¹ Mesut Ozcan (2008) *Harmonizing foreign policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East* London: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., pp. 61

¹² *Erdogan's Economic Revolution*, <http://lecercle.lesechos.fr/node/35870>

¹³ *Turkey's new visionary*, op.cit.

¹⁴ *Geopolitical Journey*, Part 5: Turkey, op.cit.

¹⁵ *How the West Lost Turkey*, pp. 1

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/25/how_the_west_lost_turkey?page=0,0

II. CHAPTER 1 (The road to EU or the road to nowhere ?)

“In Greek mythology, King Sisyphus was sentenced to eternal senseless labour as a punishment for insulting the gods. Until the end of time, he must push an enormous stone up the hill only to have it roll back over and over again. Turkey’s efforts to join the EU can be compared to Sisyphus’s fruitless labour. Turkey was granted candidate status in December 1999 — 50 years after it first applied for membership — but has managed 12 years later to close only one chapter of the accession negotiations. Despite uphill movement by Ankara, the stone keeps rolling back down again to block Turkey’s entrance to the EU”.¹⁶

1. Enlargement Fatigue Implications

In Turkey’s case it is not only the “enlargement fatigue” which is blocking the country’s integration procedure but also the “membership fatigue” phenomenon which is expressed by the increasing reluctance of the Turkish society to join the European club mainly due to the constant and everlasting evaluations and the changing position of the finishing line which is being moved further and further from its initial location. With its application for full EEC membership being accepted in 1987 after having applied in 1959, European Commission denied the beginning of accession negotiations in 1989 due to Cyprus issue. It was declared eligible to become a member of the European Union in 1995 and after ten years, in 2005, it was announced the official starting of the screening process and the adoption by the Council of a revised Accession Partnership for Turkey. Since then and until this day (September 2011) 14 out of the 35 chapters were opened for negotiation out of which only was successfully closed. 14 have not yet been opened and 8 are indefinitely frozen due to the situation in Cyprus.

After all this, what it has come to constitute a common view and attitude in Turkish public nowadays is that the EU path is more like an endless “Long and Winding Road”¹⁷ and this eternal knocking on EU’s door has to come to an end. Turkish people feel that they are being treated in an unfair way when they compare themselves with the ex-Soviet bloc democracies which have surpassed Turkey in accessing the EU¹⁸. This realpolitik game goes beyond their logic and instead of realising that, besides the political reasons which mandated the quick acceptance of those countries, it was also the adjustability of their economies to the European standards, they still view the union as the Christian, anti Islamic, prejudiced group which will never allow a Muslim country to join.

¹⁶ Dominika Kruszewska, FPIF June 7, 2011, *Turkey the Sisyphus of Europe? – Analysis*, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/turkey-the-sisyphus-of-europe-analysis-07062011/>

¹⁷ Ritsa Panagiotou,, 2011, *SEE in the EU: the Long and Winding Road*, SEE PSPA class lecture.

¹⁸ Dietrich Jung, Catharina Raudvere (2008) *Religion, politics, and Turkey's EU accession*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 77

Ankara feels frustrated in its dealings with Brussels and believes that EU accession is becoming increasingly elusive, given the unresolved Cyprus dispute and the continued questioning of Turkey's eligibility by EU leaders such as France's Nicolas Sarkozy, Germany's Angela Merkel and others like the Austrian government. The euro zone's economic difficulties further undermine the EU's attractiveness. As a result, the post-war partnership between Turkey and the West maybe coming to an end. "Devoid of the real prospect of EU membership, Turkey's priority is to establish its own role as a regional power, preferably but not necessarily with the support of the West."¹⁹

2. Obstacles to full accession

One of the main challenges which constitute "stumbling blocs"²⁰ for Turkey's full accession is the unresolved Cyprus issue and the still pending implementation on behalf of the Turkish government, of the already ratified by the parliament, additional protocol which will be allowing cargo ships bearing the Cyprus flag to access Turkish harbors. Even if a commonly accepted solution is found for the Cyprus problem the reluctance of the European leaders and the public opinion will be the next major obstacle to overcome. Countries like France, Germany and Austria, who are already severely affected by the massive immigration of people of Islamic religion and are suffering from their non-adjustability to the European norms and habits, are far from welcoming Turkey as a full member of the union. A similar stance is recorded in many surveys within Turkey itself which leads to the rhetoric question: "Can the Turkish reality live up to this European dream?" Can the EU compromise without betraying its founding ideals? The German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Trends survey²¹ from 2010 shows that only 30 percent of Turks think Turkey has "enough common values with the West to be part of it." A majority of EU respondents (58 percent) agrees with this lack of compatibility. In Germany, the country most impacted by Turkish immigration, the number of those who think Turkish values differ too much from European ones for Turkey to become a member is as high as 73 percent. As democratic governments, European member states are held accountable by their publics and need to be responsive to opinion polls when making policy decisions.²² Additionally, concerns over the country's size (immediately affecting the quality majority voting system), the democratic credentials, the migration issue and mainly the cultural – religious differences, have forced some of the most adamant opposers of the Turkish membership, to adopt the referendum solution for the final ratification of the accession treaty (instead of the parliament approval) and thus imposing an additional obstacle in Turkey's way.²³

What also imposes another major and difficult to overcome obstacle is the 30 years old (and counting) unresolved Kurdish issue. "The

¹⁹ Sinan Ülgen, *Turkey has won little*, EDAM, <http://www.euractiv.com/fr/elargissement/fin-du-partenariat-entre-la-turquie-et-loccident-analysis-494807>

²⁰ Ritsa Panagiotou, 2011, *Enlarging to Turkey The ultimate challenge*, SEE PSPA class lecture.

²¹ <http://trends.gmfus.org/>

²² *Turkey The Sisyphus Of Europe? – Analysis*, op.cit.

²³ Ritsa Panagiotou, *Enlarging to Turkey*, op.cit.

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) launched a guerrilla campaign in 1984 for an ethnic homeland in the Kurdish heartland in the southeast. Thousands died and hundreds of thousands became refugees in the ensuing conflict with the PKK, which Turkey, the US and the European Union deem a terrorist organisation²⁴. In spite the AKP's "Kurdish initiative" launched in 2009 the continuation of fighting until today raises high concerns within the EU since the "Kurdish problem" represents not only an oppressed minority issue but also a severe security threat

3. Failure of the EU perspective

The categorical exclusion of Turkey from a European security identity and/or EU accession negotiations would have abrupt and serious consequences. Turkey's withdrawal of its application for EU membership might paralyze the operational functionality of Europe's security architecture – especially if Turkey's unique location and regional relationships are kept in mind. Besides a lack of future cooperation in the case of a crisis in the region, Turkey might also refuse to share its intelligence data with European terrorism task forces. In addition, it could potentially make use of its veto right to prevent the EU from utilizing certain NATO assets.²⁵

But in spite of all that the EU cannot overlook Turkey's failure to meet European standards for freedom of the press, treatment of minorities, and common foreign policy objectives. The process requires the EU to master a balancing act between pressuring Turkey to pursue reforms and preventing the candidate from drifting away from its European dream and into Eastern politics. It also presents Turkey with a challenge to find a way to simultaneously look both East and West, reflecting its geopolitical position and national identity.²⁶ It is a true fact that Turkey's EU membership has stalled, but "the cold shoulder from Europe has been compensated by the warm embrace of them Arab Spring."²⁷

"Travelling abroad on his first trip as president, Barack Obama showed that he considered Turkey more firmly part of the Islamic world than of Europe. "I want to make sure that we end before the call to prayer, so we have about half an hour". Obama was not simply demonstrating cultural sensitivity. The fact is that Turkey has changed. Today Turkey is an Islamic republic whose government saw fit to facilitate the May 31 flotilla raid on Israel's blockade of Gaza. Turkey is now more aligned to Iran than to the democracies of Europe. Whereas Iran's Islamic revolution shocked the world with its suddenness in 1979, Turkey's Islamic revolution has been as slow and deliberate as to pass almost

²⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1022222.stm

²⁵ ISN Insights, April 2011, *Turkey New Role In Geostrategic Landscape Of Euro-Muslim Relations – Analysis*, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/turkeys-new-role-in-geostrategic-landscape-of-euro-muslim-relations-analysis-07042011/>

²⁶ *Turkey The Sisyphus Of Europe?* – Analysis, op.cit.

²⁷ *Turkey as a model*, <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=190784>

unnoticed. Nevertheless [failure of the EU perspective seems like giving birth to], the Islamic Republic of Turkey [which] could be a reality—and a danger”.²⁸

III. **CHAPTER 2 (Political shift to Islam)**

1. **Rise of AKP**

“Turkey has not been immune to the changes that have transformed the religiopolitical landscape of the Muslim world in recent decades, which include an increase of religiosity and an upsurge in the political expression of Islam. These trends were generated by a variety of factors, including the emergence of a religious entrepreneurial sector and of a dominant political party with Islamic roots”²⁹.

For the first time in 2002 parliamentary elections a major shift towards political Islam took place after the counting of the results of the electoral procedure. An overwhelming victory for the pro- Islamic AKP³⁰ party brought the beginning of a new era in Turkish politics both foreign and domestic. “The growing strength of political Islam in Turkey (or rather, of politics informed by Islam) has been largely a response to internal factors, particularly the democratization and socioeconomic transformation of Turkish society over the past several decades”³¹. Truth is that political Islam was always there. It has never left the country’s main political scene and especially since the 80’s it could be found, in one form or another, in all governmental coalitions and administrations that ruled the country. But whenever there was a revival tendency or an Islamic rooted party raised higher than expected the secularist watch dog in the form of the chief of armed forces of the Turkish general staff was there to intervene, to punish to abolish and to restore the secular order. It was actually back in 1982³² after Kenan Evren’s military intervention that the path to state - controlled Islamic political forces was opened and was supported by the military regime as an effective barrier to the phenomenon that was then conceived as uncontrolled expansion of the communist threat. The deep ,rooted in the ottoman era traditional, struggle between the underdeveloped periphery (mainly the pro Islamic Central Anatolia and South Eastern regions) and the pro Western center (Istanbul, Izmir and other big cities habituated mostly by a mixture of foreigners and Turks) , found the way to express itself by the means of the Neo Ottomanism policy.

It is in this very Ottoman legacy where the core of the AKP party can be traced, at a time when the caliphate abolishment was taking place and a

²⁸ *Geopolitical Journey, Part 5: Turkey*, op.cit

²⁹ Angel Rabasa · F. Stephen Larrabee (2008) *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND National Defence and Research Institute

³⁰ Which was to be repeated in both the elections of 2007 and in 2011 June, when the ruling party achieved the impressive 49,8% of the total vote.

³¹ *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, op.cit.

³² ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ (1995) Η Τουρκία σήμερα. Πολιτεία, κοινωνία, οικονομικά, εξωτερική πολιτική. Αθήνα, ΠΑΠΙΑΖΗΣΗΣ pp. 229

small group of Kemal's "misguided children" formed an opposition group within the first party and decided not to abolish completely their religion identity and their anti-secular character³³. So, Islam was always there and not restricted to the private sphere as modernizers wished, but it continued to play its crucial role hidden in the deep conscience of the majority of Turkish population who deliberately have chosen not to follow the westernization path. After the complete dissolution of the Ottoman Empire the AKP's predecessors preserved and carried until today the three main things which characterized the Ottomans.³⁴ Absolute submission to any form of power, insensitive to any form of extreme violence and absolutely hesitant and resistant to any form of radical change. It is this last characteristic which was neglected by Kemal Ataturk and it is AKP's absolute sovereignty in politics, which 88 years after the official declaration of the independence of the modern Turkish state and the abolishment of the caliphate³⁵, confirms the failure of the Kemalist regime's reforms and the failure of the country's enforced westernization. Erdogan himself has stressed in many occasions and especially after each electoral victory the fact that Turkey might be shifting away from what the west could have in mind. Either said as a warning towards the hostile, anti-Turk EU or said as a true fact, the image of the prime minister's wife covered with a headscarf and entering the presidential kiosk in the Cankaya area, located in the center of Ankara, is an image that no one could ever imagine a couple of years ago. And it is this very image that verifies that the AKP's full dominance is in effect in Turkey today.

2. Concept of Strategic Depth

It was only in recent years, especially since the aforementioned reelection of the ruling party (AKP) to power in 2007 and in particular after Prof. Ahmet Davutoğlu's (who at the time of his appointment was not a Member of Parliament) assignment as Foreign Minister, that Turkey has shown a significant attempt to adapt to the developing geostrategic situation. The country is developing a multi-faceted foreign policy by taking initiatives and intervening in multiple fronts ranging from the Middle East to the Caucasus and from the Balkans to China, the USA and Africa. The apparent mobility of the Turkish Foreign Policy can be understood by appealing to the work of its current Foreign Minister Principal exponent and his book entitled "Strategic Depth" (*Stratejik Derinlik*). In this particular study, the writer expresses his country's clear intention to become a regional power by strengthening its geostrategic position³⁶, by undertaking its (self-perceived) historical role in the region to the detriment of its neighbor states and furthermore by going to such extremes as opposing the interests of the USA and Russia in the region.

Back in 2009, an address of Turkey's Foreign Minister to Turkish ambassadors is indicative of Turkey's intention and foreign policy planning. Prof.

³³ Christos Teazis, 2011, *İkincilerin Cumhuriyeti (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)*, İstanbul, Mızrak İletişim ve Yayıncılık / Politik Dizi, pp. 34

³⁴ Andrew Wheatcroft (1993), *The Ottomans- Dissolving Issues*, London ,Penguin books, pp.87

³⁵ 29th October 1923

³⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009) *Stratejik Derinlik*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları ,pp. 34

Davutoğlu presented Turkey's vision for the future not simply in the role of a regional power, but that of an active element in all important global issues. He also employed a paraphrased quote of Kemal Atatürk in order to delineate the role he ascribes to diplomacy and the new doctrine he wishes to introduce to it. Kemal Atatürk had stated, in answer to criticisms he had received concerning his decision to withdraw military forces from the frontlines during the Greek Expeditionary Force's advance into Asia Minor³⁷, that "there is no line of defense, there is surface defense; this surface is the entirety of the Motherland"³⁸. In a similar address to the Turkish ambassadors, the Turkish Foreign Minister stated that 'there is no line diplomacy, but surface diplomacy; this surface is the entire globe'.

By proclaiming itself as a "moderate Islamic country"³⁹, Turkey nowadays is desperately trying to find its new role in the environment that the ending of the cold war era has shaped around its geographical location. Having being used by the US (as a NATO member country) as the forward line of defense against a potential soviet advance against the heart of Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Turkey feels like it is being used again as an example of moderate Islamic country, for the rest of the Muslim countries (some of which constitute part of the axe of evil according to the US assessment) in a desperate American attempt to promote peace, democracy and US interest in the area⁴⁰. Having realized that and in attempt to cut the US umbilical cord, since taking power in democratic elections in 2002, AKP is leading Turkey in a new direction, both domestically and in terms of foreign policy. This direction includes rapprochement with Iran; working more closely with the Islamist regime of Sudan despite the indictment of its president on genocide charges; supporting the Hamas movement which rules Gaza; and fostering stronger ties with Russia and China. Turkey's leaders have distanced themselves from the United States and have deliberately worked to undermine relations with the country's former friend and ally Israel while failing to reach a breakthrough with neighbouring Armenia.⁴¹ Turkish frustration with the European Union's haughtiness and the United States' perceived indifference opened a window of opportunity for Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to begin implementing a policy described in his book "Strategic Depth". In his work, Davutoğlu emphasizes a "zero problems with neighbours" approach to regional foreign policy relations. Thus, Turkey's new foreign policy concept is to emerge as a regional hegemony through developing economic presence, interdependence, and a conspicuously important diplomatic role.

³⁷ Asia Minor operations front was active from 1919 to 1922 and it was the major front of what the Turks call "independence war" (Istiklal Savasi).

³⁸ Zurcher Erik J (1993), *Turkey: A Modern History*. London, I. B. Tauris & co. Ltd, pp56-58

³⁹ A title that present MP is denouncing since he states that if such a term accepted then the existence of radical Islam is implied

⁴⁰ Morton Abramowitz (2000) *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy* USA, Century Foundation Press, pp. 117.

⁴¹ ARIEL COHEN, *Washington concerned as Turkey is leaving the West*, published in hurriyetdailynews, January 9, 2011, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=washington-concerned-as-turkey-leaving-the-west-2011-01-09>.

3. Regional Power Policy Initialization

Concerning the prospects Turkey could utilize to increase its global influence, the Turkish government states that every kind of crisis could prove an opportunity; therefore Turkey should send a message to the world that it is capable of a positive intervention in the region, owing to the fact that there is no other country which occupies a similar geographical location⁴². As a result of this, everyone should be active on all fronts, while Turkish diplomacy is comparable only to that of five or six other countries in the world.

According to Turkish Foreign Ministry's planning, the country has to become a flexible "multi-regional" actor by attempting to counterbalance its dependence to the West and forming multiple alliances in order to gain significant influence in its immediate region⁴³. At the same time, the ultimate goal of turning the country into a powerful "shaper" of developments necessitates an increased effort to achieve self-sufficient military power and a robust war industry, so that it can initiate forming alliances and the "rules of war", thus acting as "suzerain". The ultimate goal is placing all countries in Turkey's extended region (Central Asia, Balkans, the Middle East) under a sphere of influence and control in the of the Ottoman Empire, by application of a policy of "soft power" and "Strategic Superiority"⁴⁴. The Turkish Foreign Ministry is active in certain regions of the planet in which it considers that, for whatever reason; there exists either a geostrategic vacuum or fertile ground for striking diplomatic deals.

IV. CHAPTER 3 (Regional Policy in the Middle East)

1. Middle East General

"One of the unexpected consequences of the unrest in the Middle East is the elevation of Turkey's role in the Middle East, making Ankara a potential regional power".⁴⁵

Turkey's expansion towards the Middle East has started well in advance before the 2011 events and the Arab uprisings. The area is having both a strategic and a symbolic importance for the last successor state of the Ottoman Empire. It is considered as the a place where the dominant civilisation is that of the Islamic origin and since this was the basic characteristic of the expansion of the Ottomans, today's Turkey believes that its historical heritage dictates a dominant role in this area of highly geostrategic value⁴⁶. Turkey believes that it has to chase a new cultural political and economic opening which is necessary not only for securing the country's own integrity but also for establishing the area's peaceful future in an attempt to resolve in a dynamic way, as Alexander

⁴² Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 87

⁴³ Ibid pp. 95

⁴⁴ Ibid pp. 98

⁴⁵ SONER ÇAĞAPTAY, *Arab Revolt Makes Turkey a Regional Power* published February 16, 2011 in <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=arab-revolt-makes-turkey-a-regional-power-2011-02-16>

⁴⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* pp 212

the Great has done ages ago in the same area⁴⁷, the Gordion Knot which is the best possible resemblance to the middle east's today situation.

Other than the Ottoman historical heritage, Turkey is trying to pursue an adjustability policy to the shaping of the new geopolitical environment in the Middle East. The two major wars in the Muslim world being fought by the United States do not seem to proceed satisfactorily, and while the main goal had been reached — there were no further attacks on the United States — the effort to maintain or create non-Islamic regimes in the region is not succeeding⁴⁸. Now the United States is withdrawing from the region, leaving behind instability and an increasingly powerful and self-confident Turkey. In the end, the economic and military strength of Turkey had to transform it into a major regional force spreading over all the countries in the region, by mediating in conflicts, by promoting role model democracies, by suggesting politics and regime's changes and by trying to be directly involved in the domestic affairs⁴⁹ of each state in an attempt to establish its hegemonic role and attitude in each different case that different countries in the area constitute.

2. Syria.

A major crisis broke out ten years ago, concerning Turkey's allegations that Syria harbored PKK terrorists within its borders, which almost led to armed conflict, after two Turkish Army Corps assembled at the Syrian border. Such crises between the two countries were considered as being a thing of the past. Just before the breakout of the Arab world revolt in 2011, older disputes concerning the harbor of Alexandretta (İskenderun) and the Hatay region⁵⁰ have softened, at least officially, resulting to the new image of bilateral relations being characterized by cooperation on a military level (e.g. military exercises), energy matters, and an agreement to lift visa requirements for traveling between the two countries. It is worth noticing that Turkey, at least before the Arab spring used to take complete advantage of Syria's need to alleviate its own economic and international isolation, while the latter was seeing this as an opportunity to upgrade its status in the Arab world using Turkey's foreign policy as a vehicle.

One could imagine that the events of the spring 2011 could change all that and would undermine Turkey's regional efforts. On the contrary Turkish ministry of foreign affairs has decided not only to closely follow the developing unrest in Syrian's domestic political scene, but also to get energetically involved in it by condemning Assad's regime and its alleged massacres against its own people by suggesting democratic reforms and regime change if necessary, in a careful attempt not to be alienated from the international tendency, expressed mainly by the US's reaction on the Syrian uprising. Official statements have

⁴⁷ Gordion archaeological site is located 80km west of Ankara.

⁴⁸ *Turkey Elections and Strained U.S. Relations*, STRATFOR global Intelligence June 14, 2011 <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110613-turkeys-elections-and-strained-us-relations>

⁴⁹ Mesut Ozcan, *Harmonizing foreign policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, op.cit. pp. 131

⁵⁰ Both regions, despite having a dense Arab population, were given to Turkey as a result of the post WWII international agreements.

made clear to president Assad that Turkey will not tolerate the murder of innocent Muslim people in front of her own eyes as it was tolerated by the total world in the case of Bosnia⁵¹. Syrian regime's reactions were characterized as "atrocities" by the ministry of foreign affairs and Syrian president was warned that his actions might threaten Syria's relationship with Turkey.

Syrian crises has provided Turkey a perfect chance to uphold its regional power role while at the same time found the opportunity to dissociate its official stance from that of the EU's by declining to back the union's draft UN Security Council resolution condemning killings and urging an arms embargo. "The [Turkish] prime minister has said the international community would need to get involved if the massacres in Syria continue ... [But] we have not been consulted on any possible UNSC resolution and I cannot comment on which course of action we would prefer," he said⁵². It is a superpower's (or regional power's) attitude to be able to separate its foreign policy from what is considered to be a common policy of an alliance and it is exactly the same attitude followed by France in the case of Libya⁵³, and it is also the exact same attitude followed by Germany in the case of Croatia⁵⁴. Both attitudes were followed without complying neither in the case of France nor in the case of Germany, with what was considered to be a common foreign and security EU policy. What Turkish ministry of foreign affairs is doing is to try to exploit very carefully the US reluctance to be engaged directly or through NATO to another remote (compared to US national territory) ground in an isolated part of the world which at this specific period of time does not seem to interest the American geostrategic plan much. Instead being directly involved, the US would welcome, promote and support its Muslim alter ego, Turkey, to take over a leading regional role in the hot periphery of the Middle East.

"Turkey has been courting Syria over the past few years and Syria has become the cornerstone of its regional policy. Syria had developed a liking for Turkey as it explored options to balance its strategic dependence on Iran by creating an alternative regional ally in Turkey. Turkey and Syria had and still have growing economic ties and Syrians now enjoy visa free travel to Turkey. Notably, in Assad's words, Turkey – not Iran – is his "best friend."⁵⁵

⁵¹ "Remember when NATO was accused by the international media and public of not being able to prevent 8,000 Muslim Bosnians from being murdered in front of the world's eyes? As a member of NATO and a country whose border is about to witness such a massacre by the Syrian army, Turkey will not allow such a thing to happen again, especially before its own eyes." *Syria: Butchery, while the world watches*, Turkish Actions to Trigger NATO Confrontation with Syria.

⁵² *EU has lost leverage on Turkey*,

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-247941-ambassador-eu-has-lost-leverage-on-turkey.html>

⁵³ When the first military strike against Gaddafi was undertaken by French military aircrafts.

⁵⁴ Germany's early decision to recognize unilaterally the independence of Croatia in 1991.

⁵⁵ Sabahat Khan April 07, 2011 *Understanding Ankara - Turkey's Resurgence Amidst Regional Unrest* INEGMA, <http://www.tajaddod.org/pdf/inegma.pdf>

3. Iran

Speaking of the devil and talking about close friends, Turkey's double role as a mediator-regulator of all issues between the West and Islam and as a regional power finds its ultimate expression in the case of Iran. It should not be forgotten that Turkey was the only country to receive an official visit by Iran's President, after the latter was officially invited. Iran's activities concerning nuclear energy (as well as a nuclear arsenal) should be seen relatively to Ankara's similar long-stated goals. As far as Turkey's role as a mediator is concerned, the USA, at least at the first stage of the Turk- Iranian approach, could not have hoped for a more ideal ally, while Turkey itself could not have hoped for a more ideal location in order to further upgrade its geostrategic role. Iran is content at the moment with Turkey's role as a mediator and protector of Muslims everywhere and could not have been more pleased by the current state of Turkish-Israeli relations.

The policy Turkey has been following with regards to Iran's nuclear ambitions suggests that the basis of Turkish foreign policy is being transformed. The fact that Turkey is the only Islamic member-state within the NATO and as well as a presumed important US ally in the region does not comply with Erdogan's stance which can bring about fundamental friction within the North Atlantic alliance in regards to regime's nuclear policy, and can have an overwhelming negative effect to Turkey's relations with the European countries and the US. In any case there is a considerable contradiction here since Turkey's support for the regime's nuclear program, the clerical dictatorial regime and the newly installed government of Ahmadinejad is in sharp contrast with the policies of the European Union and its values of democracy and human rights. Turkey can not shore up with an oppressive and obnoxious regime⁵⁶ that is against all the western values, and at the same time expect the EU to agree to its membership request. The deal with Iran⁵⁷ can be seen as testament to the fundamental changes in Turkish foreign policy introduced by the Justice and Development party. Turkey's arguments regarding its position on Iran's nuclear ambitions have focused not so much on the potential risks involved in Iran's development of nuclear weapons and its implications for Turkey's security, but on the fact that there are other countries in the region— notably Israel — that already possess nuclear weapons.

4. Israel

"Turkey's position on Israel, its former Middle Eastern ally, has shifted dramatically in the course of ... [its] geopolitical realignment. Turkey gradually abandoned its role as a neutral mediator between Israel and its Arab neighbours and has become an active supporter of Arab and Muslim causes

⁵⁶ Salah Muradi , *Erdogan's trip to Iran and Turkey's tilt towards the Islamic regime in Iran*, accessed 2009-11-05 in <http://www.pdki.org/articles1-2103-6.htm> ,This article was originally publish in www.kurdistanmedia.com in Kurdish.

⁵⁷ Turkey has suggested that Iran could ship 1,200 kilos of low-enriched uranium to Turkey for storage in return for fuel rods for use in a medical research reactor.

against Israel".⁵⁸ Bilateral relations have perhaps reached the lowest point in the two countries' history. After the incident between prime ministers during the Davos summit, with the pretext of the Gaza Strip operations, the exclusion of the Israeli Air force from the "Anadolu kartalı"⁵⁹ air force exercise and the latest event concerning the killing of nine Turkish nationals from Israeli special forces personnel on board a ship called "Mavi Marmara" which was attempting (as a part of a flotilla) to break the Gaza strip blockade, the list of events which brought negative developments full circle between the two countries is complete.

In this case, a foreign policy alienation (from the official EU stance) and a reorientation for a cause are taking place. Having well in advance predicted the Arab uprisings, Turkish officials saw a unique chance to exploit the Arab spring which actually resembles quite a lot to the Arab nationalism resurrection which their ancestors, the Ottomans have faced once again in the past. This time, the pro Islamic AKP government has decided to place itself strategically, leading the way of confrontation with the Arab's eternal enemy, the Jewish state. It is an attempt trying to dissolve all the suspicions amongst the Arab world concerning the role of Turkey in the region. Such suspicions were established during the long lasting alliance between Turkey, US and Israel and seem to have irreversibly changed due to Turkey's new geostrategic reorientation.

Turks themselves were never enthusiastic about their country's relationship with Israel. The military was, though, and for much of Turkey's recent history it controlled the country's foreign policy. Now, in an increasingly democratic Turkey with more power centres when it comes to foreign affairs, the temptation for politicians to pander to anti-Israel, anti-Semitic, and anti-Washington sentiment is hard to resist especially after the recent impressive Erdogan's supremacy moves over the country's military leadership.⁶⁰ Turkey's policy towards Israel is the best proof of long-standing (i.e. since the AKP's first election to power) accusations by Kemalist cadres and the General Staff concerning the existence of a hidden Islamist agenda on the part of the ruling party. But this is not a matter of misunderstanding. The foundation of Turkey's relationship with Israel had more to do with hostility toward pro-Soviet Arab governments than anything else. Those governments are nearly gone and the secular foundation of Turkey has shifted. The same is true with the United States and Europe. None of them wants Turkey to shift, but given the end of the Cold War and the rise of Islamist forces, such a shift seems to be inevitable. But what really alarms Washington is a possible strategic deviation of Turkish official policy which will potentially affect the US strategic planning in the region as the May 1st 2003 decision⁶¹ of the Turkish parliament has done during the US invasion to Iraq.

⁵⁸ COHEN, *Washington concerned as Turkey is leaving the West*, op.cit.

⁵⁹ An air force exercise under the name 'Anatolian Eagle' taking place on an annual basis in Konya/Turkey exercise range field.

⁶⁰ *How the West Lost Turkey*, op.cit.

⁶¹ It was at that day that Turkish parliament has voted not to grant access to US troops to Turkish soil in the south east of the country where a second front against Iraq would have been opened according to US Iraq

5. Iraq

Iraqi – Turkish border (North Iraq and South East Turkey) could be better described as a no-man’s land keeping in mind that it is an area habituated by mostly Kurds (probably the last world’s nation without a state of its own) and the border line was never so clear as to prevent illegal border crossings from both sides. From the Iraqi side of the border members of the so called terrorist organization of PKK are entering the Turkish soil in order to attack Turkish military targets in what they call their freedom- independence fight and from the “other side of the hill” Turkish troops are violating Iraq’s territorial integrity in their hot pursuit attempt of the insurgent elements. The area is also filled with heavy US presence, since the American military relied heavily on the local paramilitary groups of “peshmerga”⁶² after the rejection by the Turkish government in 2003, of the US request to provide an invasion corridor through that area.⁶³ It was one of the first attempts of the recently elected in 2002 AKP government to establish its Arab world leading and protecting role while at the same time was starting to sail away from the EU-US axe who was fully supportive of the armed conflict against Hussein’s infamous regime. But despite the fact that the Turkish national assembly had once again recently extended the armed force’s mandate to conduct operations in Northern Iraq for another year, the Turkish prime minister is received in every occasion in the most positive manner during his post Saddam visits in Baghdad. Many deals were signed concerning commerce, internal affairs, health, transportation, energy and environment (the most important being those concerning the use of natural gas pipelines, the extension of the Kirkuk- Yumurtalik oil pipeline and freeing up the biggest part of Euphrates’ water supply). Matters concerning the struggle against terrorism and integrity of land were also on the agenda and this was the general discourse that the hyperactive Turkish foreign policy in the area would be applied ever since, in a full implantation of the “zero problems with neighbors” doctrine.

But, in spite these good relations, conducting autonomous military operations (both in the air and on the ground) within the territory of a sovereign neighboring country and neglecting the right for self-determination to 20 million big ethnic group, is a policy shift that is leaving deliberately behind and neglecting any official European or western policy concerning issues of territorial integrity or behavior against minorities. The excuse used is that the very existence of the Turkish state is in a clear and present danger from any potential disintegration of Iraq and a possible creation of a Kurdish state. Turkish official policy is applied while forgetting that western world’s and especially Europe’s view is limited to what it seems like an everlasting and unresolved bloody dispute which in a future possible Turkish European accession will be brought not only at the gates of the EU but to its main court. Last thing that European leaders desire is to see a regional power in its attempt to establish its hegemonic role in the

invasion plan. It was the time when US Kurdish cooperation has started since the Kurds of northern Iraq have granted access to US ground forces.

⁶² Armed paramilitary groups of Kurdish origin which belong to different tribes.

⁶³ See note 53

region, to transfer its problematic burden within the EU family which it will then have a common border with unstable areas where peace and democracy come in small doses and are fragile enough.

6. Other Middle East Countries

A similar political approach is closely followed in the case of other countries in the region. By invoking its past historical Ottoman heritage and its present Muslim identity Turkey is committed consistently and with an exceptional discipline to an attempt of reviving the long gone Empire. There could not be any better chance for such an attempt other than the recent uprisings taking place in a big number of Arab countries against their authoritarian regimes. This unique opportunity was to be exploited first in the case of Libya. The international consensus for this country, where Turkish businesses have growing investments, made it relatively easy for Ankara to take a clear position. As some Western powers showed enthusiasm for wider military action both in the air and on the ground, as a NATO member Turkey was early in calling for clarity from the alliance that military intervention would be limited to the enforcing of the no-fly zone. At the same time, Ankara maintained the diplomatic pressure on Colonel Kaddafi to step down.

It may be a reasonable supposition that Turkey also had an interest in encouraging political transformation in Egypt at a strategic level because of the resultant impact that could have on the regional balance of power. Specifically, a resurgent Egypt would have the potential to counterweight the rise of Iran, if not by itself then certainly in unison with an Arab alliance led by Saudi Arabia, and (more subtly) Turkey itself. All the above do not in any case coincide with any official US or Western countries' official position but what takes things over the edge is that despite the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization by both the EU and the U.S., the AKP administration has opened communication with the Islamist group. These developments make Ankara a de facto protector of the Muslim Brotherhood and a potential powerbroker in post-authoritarian era in all those countries. More importantly, if properly handled, it will provide Turkey with access to hitherto unimaginable power in the Arab world as a total.⁶⁴ But, there are many who oppose this assessment.

7. A Middle East Overall Assessment

Turkey's relations throughout the Middle East combine elements of the old and the new but it is quite debatable up to what point Turkey has emerged as a mature regional power. Its handling of events in Syria and other countries — consisting mostly of rhetoric — shows that it has yet to assume a position to influence and manage, events on its periphery⁶⁵. The Islamic world is

⁶⁴ *Arab Revolt Makes Turkey a Regional Power*, op.cit.

⁶⁵ By the time this text was written, August 2011, Turkey was undertaking an important initiative to convince President Assad to cease the killings of civilian demonstrators around Syria and leave power in a peaceful manner. A harsh warning was sent by the AKP government which was translated by many as a direct threat of armed conflict against the Syrian regime if the Turkish suggestion was to be rejected.

gradually changing its shape. From being overwhelmingly secular in political outlook, it shows signs of moving in a more religious direction which can possibly last until the main tendency is no longer secular but Islamic to varying degrees. It is inevitable for Turkey to experience the strains and pressures of the rest of the Muslim world and decide for an immediate axial shift in order to be able to position herself as the leader of the region.

What history teaches us and explains best the Turkish motives and initiatives is that one of the biggest contributions that Turkey considers of making to the global civilization is to attempt, based on her historical experience from her own cultural past, to initiate a new cultural discourse, cancelling this way its possible geocultural rejection by the western world.⁶⁶ This could be providing an explanation on why while the Turkish state strives hard to join the European Union; the government of Erdogan is becoming increasingly interested in tilting towards the Islamic world. But the question is not anymore whether Turkey would shift or to what degree. It is not a matter of shifting at all but rather a matter of emerging as a regional power while leaving behind the EU perspective, which in any case seems increasingly distant and remote. "But rising powers make older powers uneasy. They can cooperate economically and avoid military confrontation, but they are never comfortable with each other. The emerging power suspects that the greater power is trying to strangle it. The greater power suspects that the emerging power is trying to change the order of things"⁶⁷. In fact, both of these assumptions are usually true and end up in confrontation and antagonism in major geopolitical fields as the area of Caucasus for the cases of Russia and Turkey.

V. CHAPTER 4 (The South Caucasus Region)

1. Caucasus general

For decades, Turkey's foreign policy agenda was shaped by the Cold War conditions and NATO membership. The end of the bipolarity in international politics and the rapprochement of the Central and Eastern European states to the EU⁶⁸, followed by their accession in 2004, have had an important impact on Turkey's regional role and geopolitical orientation. The cost of the return of war to the South Caucasus in August 2008 has been very high for the entire region. The initiative for a "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform," or CSCP, was made public Aug. 13, 2008 by Turkish Prime Minister in Moscow. The CSCP revealed a Turkish-Russian shared desire to change the regional context with both main actors trying to impose their will not only to each other but mostly to the ex-soviet republics many of which include coherent Muslim minorities in their populations thus being directly affected by the Turkish initiatives in the region. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Turkey was

⁶⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu , *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 221

⁶⁷ *Turkey Elections and Strained U.S. Relations*, STRATFOR, op.cit.

⁶⁸ Deniz Devrim and Evelina Schulz (2009) *Turkey's Rise as a Regional Power and its Role in the European Neighbourhood* (ARI) ,ARI 108/2009 - 30/6/2009, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org>

strongly Western oriented and worked hard on its aim to start EU accession negotiations in 2005. Since then, Turkey has gradually shifted towards a more independent foreign policy approach in this region as well.

2. Armenia

Armenian–Turkish relations have been strained by a number of historical and political issues, including the Armenian Genocide⁶⁹ and the continuing Turkish attempts at its denial. Although there are currently no formal diplomatic relations between the two states, it was announced on October 10, 2009 that both countries had agreed to establish mutual diplomatic recognition. The unprecedented signing of the Turkish-Armenian protocol in 2009 although it didn't have such an impressive continuation, although it was achieved under pressure from the EU, the USA and Russia for energy policy reasons and despite the fact that it has yet to be validated by either countries parliament, was nonetheless a huge step towards reconciliation, given the bloody history between the two neighbors. This historical agreement and approach, even though it was largely due to foreign intervention and even though a large portion of the public is vehemently against it in either country, is nonetheless a far reaching success of the Turkish Foreign Ministry in the direction of “eliminating standing issues” with its neighboring countries. Beyond the obvious energy and economic benefits the agreement brings to Turkey, one should not overlook its historical dimension, concerning the matter of accusations of genocide with immediate repercussions on the subject of claiming back property and reparations on the part of the Armenian Diaspora.

The warm rapprochement of a traditional Turkish enemy signs a clear indication of the Turkish attempt on the discourse of both the zero problems with neighbors and regional power emergence policies of the pro – Islamic AKP government. The main attempt of the ministry of foreign affairs in this case it is focused on the mediator role between Azerbaijan and Armenia concerning the unresolved issue of Nagorno Karabakh ,a long lasting dispute⁷⁰ which has brought a never-ending unrest in this part of Caucasus region. Turkish efforts for the normalization of ties between the two states do not only aim to the establishment of the country in the role of the regional power but they also focus on the creation of a stable situation in this area in an effort to show to the western world that Turkey is able of reviving a kind of “Pax” Ottomanica as the sole successor state of the empire that once ruled over this part of the world.

3. Azerbaijan.

Traditionally, Ankara and Baku have had very close and cooperative relations. Azerbaijan is one of the most independent of the former

⁶⁹ Hundreds of thousands of Armenians died in 1915, when they were deported en masse from eastern Anatolia by the Ottoman Empire. They were killed by troops or died from starvation and diseases.

⁷⁰ Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war from 1988-1994 over the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh. Until today the two sides do not recognize each other's claims.

Soviet republics, and therefore avoiding complete domination by Russia has been one of Baku's primary pursuits since the Soviet Union's collapse. Turkey was a natural partner — the two countries share ethno-linguistic ties (Azerbaijanis and Turks are seen as historical brethren) and Turkey provides a counterbalance to a Russia that has been resurging throughout its periphery in recent years, not excluding the Caucasus. Turkey, while adopting its re-emerging regional power role, has begun looking elsewhere to expand its influence in this neighborhood. This included the aforementioned beginning of a process in early 2009 to normalize relations with Armenia, which happens to be Azerbaijan's arch nemesis⁷¹. The failure to bring the Armenian deal to an effective end and the fact that the protocols to normalize Turkey's ties with Armenia stalled in both countries' parliaments, where they remain stuck together with Turkey's reluctance to lose its grip on its traditional ally, have prevented a further deterioration of this strategic alliance.

The big winner out of this situation seemed to be Russia, which was able to take advantage of Turkey's attempted foray back to its old Ottoman neighborhood in the Caucasus. Turkish security guarantees to Azerbaijan came under serious question and Baku began to look to expand its energy and political cooperation with Moscow⁷². Russia had effectively dealt Ankara a reality check that it was Russia that remains the dominant power in the region, and although it seemed that Turkey lost on both counts — Armenia and Azerbaijan Mr. Davutoglu has not spelled out his last word yet concerning the Russia – Turkish relations as an effective counterbalance policy for his country western rejection from the EU circles and beyond.

4. Russia.

In 2004 Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a joint declaration of cooperation in Ankara, updated in February 2009 by Gul and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev in Moscow. In this December 2004 visit, Vladimir Putin became the first Russian president to visit Turkey in 32 years. His visit precipitated increased high-level political contact with Moscow and Turkey's relations with Russia have been improving notably since then, with Ankara and Moscow sharing business and geopolitical interests. Since then a developing and increasing cooperation with numerous agreements mainly on energy matters is taking place between Turkey and Russia. Noteworthy amongst those are the ones concerning nuclear projects, transportation of gases through pipelines and improvement of armament projects and defense cooperation. What alienates Turkey from the west (or the EU) in this case is the fact that most westerners begun to see with a critical eye any rise of a nuclear power in the region especially after the accidents on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine and in Fukosima Japan in 2011. Despite the fact that several

⁷¹ STRATFOR, *December 22, 2010, Turkey and Azerbaijan Achieve a Strategic Partnership* , http://www.stratfor.com/node/178534/geopolitical_diary/20101221-turkey-and-azerbaijan-achieve-strategic-partnership

⁷² STRATFOR *Turkey and Azerbaijan Achieve a Strategic Partnership* , op.cit.

warnings have been issued on this subject the Turkish energy policy under the directive of the prime minister himself ⁷³ remained focused on the nuclear solution which always includes the potential of developing a nuclear arsenal.

Turkish-Russian relations have been steadily developing throughout the 90s while, on a parallel track, Moscow and Ankara have been extremely cautious to prevent a spill over of tension emanating from the Caucasus into their bilateral relations.⁷⁴ What Ankara is planning with this prominent Turkish-Russian rapprochement is to try to affect positively the region on her favour of course. It strongly supports the possibility to transfer the model of economic bilateral cooperation between herself and Russia that verges on interdependence to the shared neighbourhood, the Caucasus, in order to promote her emerging regional role which again, as in the Middle East case, it is creating unrest, anxiety and hostility in the western front. A huge towards east economic opening of an EU potential member beyond the control of EU's financial agencies seems an unacceptable practice which can not be easily tolerated. Nevertheless, while the Russians aren't an immediate threat to EU countries' economies, they are an existential threat to Turkey. With a rapidly growing economy, Turkey needs energy badly and it cannot be hostage to the Russians or anyone else. As it diversifies its energy sources it will alienate a number of countries, including Russia and what some analysts see is that the sheer pressure that Russian energy policy will place on Turkey will create enough tensions between the two partners and the last thing that EU would like to see is a tension with Russia being brought at her front door.

5. Caucasus Overall

“Taking into account the existing framework of the ENP⁷⁵, new regional EU initiatives, and Turkey's EU accession negotiations, there is a need to re-assess Turkey's foreign and regional policies and its possible impact on the EU's eastern neighborhood. For the last decade, EU-Turkish relations have been mostly marked by Turkey's membership aspirations and its foreign policy agenda was very much in line with the EU's approach. However, Turkey's engagement in the south Caucasus and the Black Sea region, as well as the idea of the CSCP, are examples of a certain shift from Western-oriented policies to a more autonomous Turkish foreign policy”⁷⁶.

Turkey's Caucasus approach shows its aspirations to play an independent role in its immediate neighborhood and there are many that believe

⁷³ Russia became Turkey's largest trade partner in 2008 and there are hopes that trade could reach a volume of \$100 billion over the next five years. Such a major increase in trade would be, in part, due to the \$20 billion nuclear plant agreement signed by the two leaders in May 2010, to be built near Mersin on Turkey's southern coast.

⁷⁴ Dr. Burcu Gültekin Punsmann (2010) *Caucasus to bridge between Turkey, Russia*.

www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=thinking-about-the-caucasus-as-a-land-bridge-between-t

⁷⁵ European Neighbourhood Policy

⁷⁶ Deniz Devrim, Evelina Schulz 30/6/2009 *The Caucasus: which role for Turkey in the European neighborhood?* <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org>

that those efforts should be seen as contradictory to its traditional Western-oriented policies. Turkey not only shows its interest in having an impact on the political agenda in the South Caucasus, but it also represents its ambitions to influence regional politics. This is where a contradiction can emerge since the initiatives coming from the EU and Turkey overlap in geographical scope⁷⁷. When it comes to EU, its engagement has not been visible in recent years and a slow but constantly increasing interest for the region started being developed especially after the EU enlargement in 2007. It is this vacuum that Turkey achieved to effectively exploit with the initiation of the CSCP which is interpreted as a tool that could be used by countries for pushing their own geopolitical orientations and not for promoting a common vision for the region. Additionally since the CSCP initiative does not deliberately include any Western power, it is perceived by some as a dominion attempt over the region by mainly Turkey since she has generated the specific policy platform. Turkey's new foreign policy approach is considered by the Europeans as a policy aiming to impose its own visions on the region; and this is why Turkey's renewed efforts as a regional power are not very much in line with the EU foreign policy.

“The efforts to find a solution carried out by Turkey in the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian conflict by proposing the CSCP is therefore a concrete example of a new approach in Turkey's foreign policy. The platform is indeed part of a broader initiative to assert Turkish geopolitical influence not only in the Caucasus region but also in other surrounding regions”⁷⁸ like for example the Middle East and the Balkans.

VI. CHAPTER 5 (A Balkan regional power)

“Turkey is presently among the most active external political actors in the Western Balkans. For this, Ankara has received both praise and criticism from the Western Balkans itself, but also from other external actors in the region.”⁷⁹ In many occasions during its innumerable recent visits to the Balkans area, the Turkish minister of foreign affairs has made clear its country's strategy for this region by addressing both Muslim and non-Muslim populations in different countries in what is considered to be a controversial foreign policy extension for the Balkans region. In a place where the Ottoman dominance has not left the best possible memories Mr. Davutoglu was trying to explain to the locals his country's new geostrategic role as the epicenter of the new geostrategic reshuffling ,which is based mainly to the fact that it considers itself as the heir to the Ottoman Empire⁸⁰. Although the attempt is not a new one for this region it is the concept of the strategic depth combined with the “zero problems with neighbors” doctrine that have hyper activated the AKP government in the Balkans especially after the pro Islamic administration's successful efforts to dispose of the old Kemalist “siege mentality”⁸¹ that used to describe Turkey as

⁷⁷ ibid

⁷⁸ *The Caucasus: which role for Turkey in the European neighbourhood?* op.cit.

⁷⁹ Žarko N. Petrovic (2011) *Turkey's new approach to western Balkans*. ISAC Fund, Belgrade, Serbia

⁸⁰ Παπούλια Βασιλική (2003) *Από την αυτοκρατορία στο εθνικό κράτος*, Θεσσαλονίκη, ΒΑΝΙΑΣ, pp 317

⁸¹ *Turkey's new approach to western Balkans*. op.cit.

being surrounded by traitors and enemies, and start pursuing a more pro-active foreign policy.

1. Bulgaria

“Relations between Turkey and Bulgaria have experienced a comprehensive development during the last decade as the new regime has abandoned the old leadership's coercive policy towards the Turkish people in Bulgaria.”⁸². Apart from this official stance, by systematically exploiting the Turkish minority of Bulgaria, Turkey has achieved a position of being able to regulate and intervene in internal and foreign politics of the country. The above provide Turkey with immediate possibilities of taking advantage of Bulgaria in the event of any sort of military conflict, of any creation of asymmetric threats and/or humanitarian disasters, while it should be assumed that Ankara is able to influence directly decision making and orientation of Bulgarian policy to the direction it wishes due to the existence of Turkish origin representatives in the Bulgarian parliament. Turkish minority party has managed under the direct guidance of Turkish ministry of foreign affairs to play a crucial role in Bulgarian domestic political life and although the Bulgarian public opinion does not share the government's official enthusiasm for the Turk-Bulgarian friendship, it still needs to comply by the EU rules referring to human rights as far as political representation of minorities is concerned.

In line with its policy to regain influence in the regions it ruled in the past, Turkey had to turn its full attention to Bulgaria. As Turkey's northwestern neighbor, Bulgaria plays an important role in connecting Turkey to Europe. This is why a parallel attempt is focusing on the close cooperation especially on energy trade and exports areas since what Turkey sees in Bulgaria is its immediate exit gateway not only to the Balkans region but since 2007, to the EU itself. Government leaders from Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria signed the transit agreement for the 2,050-mile NABUCCO⁸³ natural gas pipeline on July 13 2009 in Ankara. Although the pipeline is one way Europe is attempting to diversify its energy needs away from Russia, a major unrest was created both in EU and Bulgaria since the potential natural gas suppliers for the pipeline, like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, are delaying until they have firm support from Turkey which being the key player in the project, prefers to keep it at a nebulous stage, thus affording Ankara the political leverage with which to play all sides — Europe, Russia and Bulgaria — keeping itself in the middle as the invaluable partner.

What also makes EU unhappy in this case is exactly the fact that Turkey is attempting through the lift of the visa regime between the two countries to use Bulgaria as a kind of EU back door since the non visa requirement will facilitate the flow of Turkey's exports to Europe, something that Turkey has implemented with some countries in the Middle East and wants to implement in

⁸² http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-bulgaria.en.mfa

⁸³ http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20090714_azerbaijan_turkmenistan_nabucco_impasse

Europe. Last but not least the west has laid its critical eye on the fact that Turkey has already been extremely active in southeastern Europe and as in other cases, between other causes in the Bulgarian case is also seeking the country's support for its initiative in the Bosnian reconciliation process.

2. Bosnia-Herzegovina

BiH and the Bosniaks always had a privileged place on the Turkish foreign policy agenda. Turkey was during the 1990s a staunch supporter of the NATO intervention in BiH and has been a major contributor to international military and policing operations in the country⁸⁴. Despite not having a say in European security matters, it is currently the sixth contributor to the EUFOR-Althea mission, and has some 225 personnel in the Multinational battalion, including 48 officers in the Integrated Police Unit (IPU), and personnel in the Liaison and Observation Teams currently stationed in seven cities of BiH. It strongly supports BiH's NATO membership as a way to guarantee its territorial integrity. Turkey also represents the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) tasked with supervising the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.⁸⁵

Turkey has in several occasions demonstrated its backing of Bosnia-Herzegovina — and specifically of the Muslim Bosniaks — and again recently by undermining effectively, with the help of the Turk-American lobby the constitutional reform process in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the so-called Butmir process⁸⁶. This was one of the many annoying signs for the European Union, which was enthusiastically taking charge of the process. In addition to that Turkey has been able to use tensions among Bosnia-Herzegovina's ethnic groups to exert influence in the Western Balkans by trying to act as a mediator. What EU sees in all that is a part of Turkey's plan to reassert itself geopolitically and show Europe that not only without Turkey the Western Balkans will not see lasting political stability but also, Turkey can move independently and form any kind of alliances covering the whole spectrum of inter-state agreements with those elements in the Balkans that constitute the continuation of its historical relations with the region.

Turkish mediation efforts ,pursued in 2009 and 2010 to establish triangular consultation between Sarajevo, Belgrade and Zagreb, have been interpreted as a demonstration that Ankara is supporting the Bosniaks, in the same way in which Zagreb and Belgrade are supporting their ethnic kin in BiH. While the Bosniaks see Turkish presence as guaranteeing their interest for a unified state, Bosnian Serbs see it as an obstacle to the preservation of the Dayton-Paris system in BiH, which they so unyieldingly defend. For this reason, the Bosnian Serbs see a strong Turkish political involvement as running against their interest, while Bosnian Croats see it as undermining the prospects of

⁸⁴ http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Turkey%27s_new_approach_to_the_Western_Balkans.pdf

⁸⁵ *Turkey's new approach to western Balkans*. op.cit.

⁸⁶ http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20100831_surveying_turkish_influence_western_balkans

securing a “third entity” in BiH⁸⁷. In fact, the existing ethnic cleavage in BiH poses a considerable obstacle to coherent Turkish policy in the country which at the same time keeps the EU unhappy by not compromising with its official line of keeping equal distances from all ethnic entities.

3. Albania- Kosovo

“Relations between Turkey and Albania are excellent. Turkey’s strong support and assistance to Albania following the regime change, together with the strong historical ties, constitutes a solid base to develop bilateral relations. The views and policy approaches of two countries on regional and international issues are almost identical. Moreover, the ties of kinship between Turkish and Albanian societies reinforce the trust of Albanian society to our country”⁸⁸.

In Albania, Turkish schools are among the best and largest private schools attended by approximately 3,000 students per year. Reversely, Turkish universities receive Albanian students, according to some unofficial estimates up to 1000–1500. Similarly, 100 students per year from Kosovo receive state scholarships from Turkey to attend Turkish universities.⁸⁹ Turkish Armed forces have provided continuous assistance for the education and training of a large number of Albanian military officers in Turkish universities and military academies⁹⁰ and Turkey was the main assistance provider during Albania’s NATO admission procedure with close cooperation on matters of officer training and with a multitude of bilateral agreements on defense issues like the provision of grand quantities of complimentary modern military equipment and the conduction of multiple trainings and mutual military exercises.

Other than the academic and the military sectors there is a flourishing economical cooperation with a big number of agreements the most recent being lifting visa requirements for travel between the two countries. The Turkish president paid an historical official visit to Albania in December 2009. This kind of keen interest displayed by Turkey is mainly due, like in the case of Bosnia, to the presence of a significant percentage of Muslims. Turkish businesses have thrived in Albania and in Kosovo. Turkish companies are attempting to purchase large stakes in the privatization of Kosovo’s largest public utility companies dealing with energy, telecommunications and banking. Turkey’s Calik Group, owner of the "National Commercial Bank" (Banka Kombetare Tregtare-BKT) in Albania and Kosovo, has opened 13 branches in Kosovo⁹¹.

⁸⁷ According to the Gallup Balkan Monitor, just about 40% of the BiH population consider Turkey to be a “friendly country” (in Serbia 15%, Croatia 24%, Albania 73%, Kosovo 85%, Rep. of Macedonia 80%).

⁸⁸ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-albania.en.mfa

⁸⁹ Doga Ulas Eralp, *SETA Policy Brief, Kosovo and Turkey: What Lies Ahead?*

<http://www.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=52483&q=kosovo-and-turkey-what-lies-ahead>

⁹⁰ *Turkey’s new approach to western Balkans*. Op.cit

⁹¹ *Calik Group nearing final steps in Albtelecom’s acquisition*,

<http://www.albanianeconomy.com/news/2006/09/12/calik-group-nearing-final-steps-in-albtelecoms-acquisition/>

Turkey displays intensive activity and a constant presence in both Albania and Kosovo in a simultaneous effort to support the Muslim element in both places and rise once again as the protector of the suppressed “leftovers” of the Ottoman past. Reportedly, there have even been semi-official and unofficial requests to Albania and Kosovo for revisiting their outlook on Ottoman history, generally negatively portrayed in their history books.⁹² Turkey is aware that today, the Western Balkan region looks towards the EU for integration and resolution to its long-standing problems. Turkish politicians try to show, for obvious reasons, that they do not attempt, despite contentious statements, to suggest a competition with the EU in the region since there are those who believe that Turkey would not only loose, but it would also permanently jeopardize its EU accession prospects. But what the active involvement of Turkey in the region shows, is that the EU perspective is deliberately neglected and an independent approach that often reaches the limit of provocation is carefully and systematically exercised in the Balkans. In this furious attempt traditional foes are also approached since the aspired Empire used to be supposedly merciful also to its non-Muslims subjects like for example the Serbs.

4. Serbia

Serbia and Turkey have entered into an Agreement on Economic Cooperation, establishing a joint Economic Cooperation Committee on a ministerial level, focusing on trade relations. A Free Trade Agreement entered into force on 1 September 2010. Apart from the increase in trade turnover, the goals of this agreement include the liberalization of public procurement and services, intellectual property protection, and an increase and diversification of Serbian trade export to Turkey. Several large investment and infrastructure projects have been discussed including; a sale and/or partnership between the Serbian national air-carrier JAT and Turkish Airlines, and an agreement to build part of the planned Belgrade–South Adriatic highway. In addition, Turkey is working towards reconstructing several regional roads mainly through the Sanžak region. A loan-based agreement entered into force in July 2010 and there is an initiative to form an Industrial park on Peštera high land for which the Tutin municipality has secured 150 ha and TİKA⁹³ has earmarked €1 million⁹⁴. Turkish investors are also considering other projects, including infrastructure and retail deals. During President Gul’s visit in October 2009, the parties reportedly agreed to a construction of an Islamic cultural centre near Belgrade⁹⁵.

⁹² <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanians-question-negative-view-of-ottomans>

⁹³ The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (Turkish: *Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TİKA) is a government department of the Prime Ministry of Turkey. TİKA is responsible for organization of the bulk of Turkey's official development assistance to developing countries. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_International_Cooperation_and_Development_Agency

⁹⁴ *Turkey’s new approach to western Balkans*. op.cit.

⁹⁵ Politika, 26 October 2010, <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/vesti-dana/Tadic-Najbolji-odnosi-s-Turkom-uistoriji.it.html>

Bilateral relations seem that are gradually being restored, despite the significant dispute on the matter of recognition of Kosovo independence. Turkey continues to increasingly cultivate relations with Serbia on all sectors, in the context of its regional policy, maintaining exclusively economic goals without any significant hope of an important revision on the part of Turkey concerning the issue of the latter's pro-Albanian and pro-Kosovo position. The attempted approaching of a not particularly friendly country is impressive and expresses the magnitude of the Turkish effort to complete its soft power dominance in the Balkans. In case that the results of this approach will turn out equally impressive and in case that they will last long enough to enable the establishment of new strategic relations between the two countries, Turkey will acquire an upgraded strategic role since it will have managed to expand its influence on the sole non-Muslim country in the region apart from FYROM.

5. Others in the Balkans

Turkish approach to the rest Balkan states is identical to the aforementioned ones. For example in the case of the other mostly non Muslim in majority country of Montenegro there is an effort who has given satisfactory bilateral relations, economic assistance , cooperation and support of the fledgling state's attempts at joining Euro-Atlantic organizations and alliances. For Croatia, a somehow traditional ally, a high level commercial, economic and military cooperation is recorded with the country, whose international prospects and ambitions as well as its attempt at internal reforms receive the support of Turkey. Similarly in Slovenia, diplomatic relations on the level of Foreign Ministers, consulting committees and military cooperation is achieved bringing the cooperation between the two in a high level. Additionally in Romania, Turkish activity includes special economic relations in the energy sector and excellent cooperation and developing bilateral relations on many inter-state issues.

Finally, traditionally good relations have been strengthened further by recent mutual visits of Defense Ministry officials of Turkey and FYROM, by cooperation in defense (training-military school student exchange-war academies), by signing several cooperation agreements, by supporting the entry and accession of the so called "Macedonian" state in international organizations and generally by providing assistance in any country's venture. The close embracement of the FYROM state and its recognition with an EU non accepted name is once again alarming the EU officials who see that despite the fact that Turkey seems to be supportive of the membership of all Western Balkan countries in NATO and the EU, in the unlikely event of the Turkish accession, an independent policy line could be followed which will include the potential of destroying completely the already fragile CFSP⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ Ioannis N. Grigoriadis (2009) *Trials of Europeanization: Turkish political culture and the European Union* Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 107

6. Overall

Rising influence in the Balkans is part of Turkey's return to geopolitical prominence under the ruling Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP). For one thing, the AKP is far more comfortable using the Western Balkans' Muslim populations as anchors for foreign policy influence than the secular Turkish governments of the 1990s.⁹⁷ Therefore, what Ankara has been trying in the Balkans is by mainly supporting the Muslim populations and by favoring the idea of a centralized Bosnia-Herzegovina dominated by Bosniaks, by lobbying on behalf of Bosniaks during the recent Butmir constitutional reform process and by being one of the first to recognize overwhelmingly Muslim Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, to anchor its position first as a Muslim protector in the area. In an October 2009 speech in Sarajevo — which raised significant concerns in neighboring Serbia, EU and USA — Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated: "For all these Muslim nationalities in these regions, Turkey is a safe haven ... Anatolia belongs to you, our Bosnian brothers and sisters. And be sure that Sarajevo is ours."⁹⁸ This does nothing more than rising the already high unrest in western capitals, which was created by the massive flow of the Turkish immigrants during last few decades mainly to Germany and it certainly does not help the image of the only EU Muslim candidate country⁹⁹. Although the initially planned goal for Turkey could be to show Europe that without Turkish involvement there will be no resolution to the Balkan security problems, Turkey seems to have failed to walk the extremely thin line between anchoring its influence among the Muslim populations of the Balkans and presenting itself as a fair arbiter between all sides, while also taking care to manage its image in the West, where it has recently been criticized for relying too much on its Islamic credentials for leadership.

The entirety of the Balkans are EU and NATO members, applicants or protectorates, sharply limiting Turkey's ability to reclaim its former realm. And this is the "best" part of Turkey's neighborhood in terms of a low cost-benefit ratio.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, the Balkans is not high on Turkey's list of geopolitical priorities. Turkey has much more immediate interests in the Middle East, where the ongoing U.S. withdrawal from Iraq is leaving a vacuum of influence that Turkey wants to fill and use to project influence throughout its Muslim backyard, and in the Caucasus, where competition is slowly intensifying with Russia. The Balkans rank below these, but are very much on Turkey's mind, especially as they relate to Ankara's relationship with Europe. However, three major factors constrain Turkey's influence in the Balkans: a paltry level of investment on the part of the Turkish business community, suspicion from a major group in the

⁹⁷ *Turkey's new approach to western Balkans*. op.cit

⁹⁸ *Surveying Turkish influence in Western Balkans*

http://www.b92.net/eng/insight/opinions.php?nav_id=69453

⁹⁹ Arikian haruk (2006) *Turkey and the EU: an awkward candidate for EU membership?* England, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. pp. 139

¹⁰⁰ Ηλιόπουλος Ηλίας (2008) *Ζητήματα Γεωπολιτικής & Διπλωματίας Ναυτικών και Ηπειρωτικών δυνάμεων στον Σύγχρονο Κόσμο*, Αθήνα, ΠΑΠΑΖΗΣΗΣ pp. 197

region (Serbs) and Turkey's internal struggle with how best to parlay the legacy of Ottoman rule into an effective strategy of influence without stirring fears in the West that Ankara is looking to recreate the Ottoman Empire¹⁰¹.

VII. CONCLUSION

Turkey is about to dynamically reappear on the global scene. The world of 2010 has presented Turkey with a neighborhood that can overwhelm it with disturbing ease should the Turks not end their isolation, and just as in the early Ottoman days, the Turks have realized that they must expand or die¹⁰². Turkey, at the end of the cold war era and after losing its main role as NATO's (and actually the Europe's) buffer zone between the Soviet bloc and the western powers has lost its geographical value, since the focus of Europe and the USA was concentrated in other regions of antagonism and of higher geopolitical value. It took the country almost two decades to realize not only the bitter truth but also the fact that in case it cared for a re-emergence in the great powers agenda it had to act. And it did. Being able to realize what are the main things that constitute a great power through history it managed to gradually develop in all the three major areas that characterize a leading country and distinguish it from the followers, namely powerful military with the ability not only to defend the homeland but to also to show a dynamic presence worldwide (or at least regionally), an hyperactive diplomacy having the flexibility to adopt to geopolitical changes by closing monitoring and assessing fluid situations and finally ,in order to achieve both the above a flourishing economy. But is this the case or can these three power generators present severe malfunction indications that could hamper both Turkey's leading regional role and its EU perspective?

1. **Flourishing Economy**

"Turkey's economy is booming. A member of the G20 group of developed and emerging economies, last year its GDP grew by 9%. The Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) predicts Turkey will have the fastest-growing economy in the OECD until 2017. Unemployment has fallen from 14.4% in 2009 to 11.5% this year, and social development programmes are beginning to tackle poverty in some of the more remote and troubled areas".¹⁰³

Turkey's achievements form a case study in successful economic development. For the first time in its modern history, Turkey not only resisted a serious global economic crisis, but also decoupled itself from the rest of Europe by rebounding strongly in 2010.¹⁰⁴ This economic prowess, together with the government's "zero problem" foreign policy, are scheduled to be the main carrier

¹⁰¹ Μάζης Θ. Ιωάννης (2002), *Γεωπολιτική Η θεωρία και η πράξη*, Αθήνα ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ-ΠΑΠΑΖΗΣΗΣ, pp 317

¹⁰² *The Geopolitics of Turkey: Searching for More*, op.cit.

¹⁰³ Irene Khan June (21, 2011) *Turkey as a model* <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=190784>

¹⁰⁴ Ibrahim Ozturk (16/06/2011) *Erdoğan's Economic Revolution* <http://lecercle.lesechos.fr/node/35870>

of Turkey's new leading regional power role. But what also constitutes a special case study is the fact that while all economic and finance indicators show this impressive development, EU economic circles estimate that it will take at least half of a century for Turkish economy to be adjusted to the EU requirements and standards. This is mainly due to macroeconomic instability recorded in many occasions under the economic criteria section in progress reports with the latest being that of 2010¹⁰⁵. The so called economic miracle is used as weapon to counterbalance the need for any IMF, WB or ECB interventions to the uncharted waters of Turkish economy. A regional power has to have an independent economy not being interlinked to any centrally controlled system or having a foreign body influencing its monetary policy and thus controlling its expenditures, investments and growth. Being able to resist somehow the recent global recession Turkey has overestimated its potential so what now seems to be a flourishing economy it may be proved to be a false indication of development leading the country to the wrong assumption that it has the ability not only to control its domestic finance issues but also to lead the region economically.

Economical miracles simply do not exist and what Turkey has achieved was mainly because of the existence of some unpredictable and unaccounted for factors which bear the nickname "Anatolian Tigers". A group of businessmen originated from central Anatolian region who by fanatically supporting AKP have managed to emerge in all of the country's economic sectors by doing business the "Islamic way". What this implies is a peculiarity of market economy with some special rules which amongst others enforce lending with zero rates between people that share the same religion, assisting each other to promote their enterprises between coreligionists within the country and in neighbouring states and most important denying any chance for infidels to create any antagonistic business in the area of their immediate influence and dominance. This economic miracle was thus achieved by this new political class of Sunni Muslim businessmen from Anatolia, committed to global market principles but fiercely conservative and deeply religious. They form the backbone of support for AKP and have replaced the military-backed urban elite as the new ruling class of Turkey.¹⁰⁶ Encouraged by successful political reforms and having improved the economy in its first term (2002-2007) — particularly after the 2001 economic crisis — the AKP slowly began working to weaken the TSK's ¹⁰⁷ grip over the state. But replacing, weakening or leaving aside the armed forces for a country like Turkey it might finally be proved not be such a good choice as it initially seemed, even though being a presupposition for a European democracy.

2. Military Power

"Turkish generals throughout much of Turkey's history interpreted many state laws [some of which were created during one of the several military interventions in 1980] as permitting the armed forces to intervene in civilian

¹⁰⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/tr_rapport_2010_en.pdf

¹⁰⁶ Irene Khan June *Turkey as a model* op.cit.

¹⁰⁷ Turk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (Turkish Armed Forces)

affairs whenever stability was threatened or the secular fabric of the country showed signs of unraveling”¹⁰⁸. Consequently, Turkey has experienced three military coups — in 1960, 1971 and 1980 — and one “soft coup” in 1997, when the military worked through the National Security Council to bring down the government without dissolving the parliament or suspending the Constitution. In 2003 and 2007, two general staff “suggestions” through their official website were received as warnings towards the pro Islamic AKP government and were aiming to protect the secular character of the Turkish state. The AKP spent its first five years in power from 2002 to 2007 trying to establish a working relationship with the Turkish General Staff as it made inroads into the National Security Council and started playing a role in the appointment of senior military leaders. In summer 2007, as the party prepared itself for its second election victory, the AKP’s moves against the military took a bold turn in the form of the now-infamous ERGENEKON probe. ERGENEKON investigation together with the revealed BALYOZ (sledgehammer) plot ¹⁰⁹ allowed the Islamic government not only to significantly weaken the military’s political power, but most importantly to hurt army’s public image among Turkish civilians who were shocked to find out that their favored military was planning to bomb mosques during Islam’s holiest day, Friday, in order to have the maximum number of human casualties in its attempt to undermine the Islamists in power. What was once considered unthinkable for Turks across the country was now becoming a reality: The military, the self-proclaimed vanguard of the secular state, was becoming impotent as a political force.

Turkish society, although respecting (mainly fearing) the army, has lost its confidence on the armed forces operational capability since it has been now for almost thirty years when PKK’s armed struggle has started and has cost Turkey up to 40.000 lives until today; without the powerful Turkish military (2nd largest in NATO) being able to eliminate this basic threat for the existence of whole country itself. It is estimated that continuing Kurdish insurgent operations, combined with the arrests of retired and active duty military members have not only inactivated army’s capability in intervening in politics but have also undermined armed forces moral which is directly affecting their operational status. AKP’s main arsenal in this domination fight includes two major super “guns”. Economy and EU full membership perspective. The latter could be used as a strong argument in sweeping the military out of politics as the EU dictates¹¹⁰ and after that happens, Islamists will be free from the control of the pro secular military to shift the country towards any desired direction, preferably away from the hostile anti-Muslim West. It remains in the long run to be seen whether all these will neutralize one of the three major pillars that support the existence of major/regional power namely its military power. “General Staff will remain in the

¹⁰⁸ *Islam, Secularism and the Battle for Turkey's Future*, op. cit.

http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20100525_islam_secularism_battle_turkeys_future

¹⁰⁹ The plot, called “Balyoz,” Turkish for “Sledgehammer,” allegedly involved 162 members of the armed forces, including 29 generals. The group reportedly composed a 5,000-page document in 2003, shortly after the AKP came to power, detailing plans to sow violence in the country and create the conditions for a military takeover to “get rid of every single threat to the secular order of the state.”

¹¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/tr_rapport_2010_en.pdf

shadows as long as development is on the rise and will wait for its counterattack when the AKP's ability to govern weakens"¹¹¹. Until such a time, the Turkish government will keep her fingers crossed in order to be able to counterbalance the vacuum created by a potential degrading of army's operational ability with the upgrading of its diplomatic weaponry. In any case diplomacy does not only represent the third main pillar of a regional power, but it is also the continuation of war by other means¹¹². And if the military, after its devaluation, would be proved incapable to fight the "war", then diplomacy should fill this operational gap.

3. Diplomatic Supremacy

At the diplomatic level, Ankara's objective has been to politically bolster the Turkish brand, emphasizing its importance with Western/NATO allies on the one hand, and supplementing its resurgence in the Middle East on the other. The latter has involved a set of calculations to mitigate potential risks to Turkish interests – particularly keeping in mind the Kurdish issue, regional sectarian divisions, and wider regional stability¹¹³. Turkey, by taking advantage of its geostrategic location in conjunction with its extremely active foreign policy¹¹⁴ is working on closing open fronts (Syria, Armenia), develops into an energy node, approaches the Arab world by exploiting religious sentiments, while, in an almost motherly fashion, it wholeheartedly supports Balkan countries especially those with a prominent Muslim minority or majority. At the same time, Turkey's pseudo-conflict with Israel is still maintained and bears fruit in the Muslim world, while the initial approach with Russia has developed into significant bilateral relations. In a one breath deep dive in geopolitics, it has recently undertaken a new initiative which would greatly widen its diplomatic range in its attempt to play a mediatory role between the Taliban and the allied forces in Afghanistan. It is not a surprise to anyone that the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs is chasing these objectives which lay a long distance out of his drastic range. After an interregnum of nearly a century, Turkey is trying to emerge as a regional power, and having realized that, everyone in the region is trying to draw Turkey into something different and for their own benefit.

"Syria wants Turkish mediation with Israel and in Lebanon. Azerbaijan wants Turkish support against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Israel and Saudi Arabia want Turkish support against Iran. Iran wants Turkey's support against the United States. Kosovo wants its support against Serbia. It is a rogue's gallery of supplicants, all wanting something from Turkey and all condemning Turkey when they don't get it. Not least of these is the United

¹¹¹ *Turkey's Historic Civilian-Military Power Shift*, <http://www.stratfor.com>

¹¹² "War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means", *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, 24., Carl von Clausewitz

¹¹³ Μάζης Θ. Ιωάννης (2001) *Γεωπολιτική των υδάτων στη Μέση Ανατολή (Αραβικές χώρες-Ισραήλ-Τουρκία)*, Αθήνα, ΠΑΠΑΖΗΣΗΣ pp.344

¹¹⁴ Burak Akcapar (2007) *Turkey's New European Era: Foreign Policy on the Road to EU Membership*, USA, ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD INC. pp. 219

States, which wants Turkey to play the role it used to play, as a subordinate American ally.”¹¹⁵

But it seems that this third pillar of the regional power mega-structure is suffering from both internal and external infections like the other two. Turkey simply does not have the administrative structure or the trained and experienced personnel to handle the complexities its ministry of foreign affairs is encountering. “The Turkish foreign minister wakes up in the morning to Washington’s latest demand, German pronouncements on Turkish EU membership, Israeli deals with the Greeks, Iranian probes, Russian views on energy and so on. It is a large set of issues for a nation that until recently had a relatively small foreign-policy footprint.”¹¹⁶ And as if this is not enough it is also far away from being fully trusted from any country in her close neighbourhood mainly due to its traditionally neutral¹¹⁷ geopolitical approach.

VIII. EPILOGUE

“Turkey has still not made up its mind in either joining the European Union and embracing the bloc’s democratic ideals or clinging to its traditional Islamic values of the Islamic world and the legacy of Atatürk (sic). Choosing the Islamic world and particularly warming up with the tyrannical Islamic regimes such as the clerical regime in Iran will further hinder the democratization of the Middle East and resolving the Kurdish question in the region”.¹¹⁸

Turkey wants to be seen as a reliable partner for countries in the region as much as it may want to emerge as a regional leader. Ankara has sought to maintain a balanced strategy of protecting its key relationships but also encouraging developments that it sees as progressive – a complicated task to craft together in a region that traditionally views change with suspicion. In the Turkish context, all partnerships it builds in the region will, as it sees it, inevitably reinforce its leadership status and credentials. Turkey may be hoping to come out of the regional unrest as the state to “turn to” for arbitration, leadership and indeed even inspiration. It will certainly hope to come out as a state regarded as worthy of deepening ties with in the future.¹¹⁹

The fact is that Turkey has changed. Gone and gone permanently, is secular Turkey, a unique Muslim country that straddled East and West. Yet in trying to turn its dual identity into a strategic asset, Turkey runs the perpetual risk of finding itself rejected by both sides –too Muslim and Middle Eastern for the Europeans, and too secular and pro-American for the Middle Easterners.¹²⁰ The AKP seems to have realized it went too far for EU tastes and now faces the

¹¹⁵ *Geopolitical Journey, Part 5: Turkey* op.cit.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

¹¹⁷ Weber G. Frank, (1979)*The Evasive Neutral: Germany, Britain and the Quest for a Turkish Alliance in the Second World War*, London, University of Missouri Press, introduction

¹¹⁸ Erdogan’s trip to Iran and Turkey’s tilt towards the Islamic regime in Iran

¹¹⁹ Understanding Ankara: Turkey’s Resurgence Amidst Regional Unrest – Analysis

¹²⁰ NICK DANFORTH, NOVEMBER 25, 2009 *How the West Lost Turkey*, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>

challenge to get what he can from Turkey's new friends in the East while also keeping -- and, if necessary, publicly defending -- Turkey's friends in the West.¹²¹

All these indications clearly show that Turkey's EU perspective could be easily sacrificed as a "kurban bayram"¹²² victim in this power gaining process and the big number of balls which have to be kept in the air it's not an easy task to handle, in both domestic and foreign tensions simultaneously; some internal and external politics, tension-relief choices have to be made. These choices just might include neither the west nor the EU, since when you walk in the middle of a fast speed highway you are exposed to the danger of being hit by cars heading both directions. You need to pick up one lane and choose one way soon, before any major accident occurs. Alternatively you have the choice of "abandoning" your vehicle. "Democracy is like a streetcar. When you come to your stop, you get off."¹²³

¹²¹ *ibid*

¹²² An important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide to commemorate the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience to God, before God intervened to provide him with a ram to sacrifice instead.

¹²³ Erdogan's statement as mayor of Istanbul, *Turkey from Ally to Enemy*, op.cit.

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