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## AKP's "new" foreign policy between vision and pragmatism

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This paper is a considerably enlarged and updated version of a panel contribution delivered at the GPoT/LSE conference on “Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy” in London, 4 December 2009.

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“Turkish foreign policy today is undoubtedly far more proactive and multi-dimensional than at any time in the history of the republic.” (Aydın Düzgit/Tocci, 2009:1) This statement is an accurate characterization of Turkey’s actual foreign policy under the AKP government. And it is often also mentioned that this policy is accompanied by attempts at a de-securitization of important domestic policy issues such as the Kurdish question or the dealing with historic legacies of the modern republic. This remark, explicitly or implicitly, points to an assumed link between domestic and foreign policy that is relevant for the pursuance of a certain foreign policy.

One can further notice that this foreign policy as well as its domestic base is also one that is most controversially debated among Turkish and foreign analysts and politicians. This debate, however, is almost exclusively focussed on the normative and policy-oriented question if Turkey is leaving the West and instead turning to the East, i.e. entering the camp of Islamic states (and how this could probably be prevented). There are certain reasons for this way of reading Turkey’s recent foreign policy activities. First, the AKP and their leading figures have their roots in Turkey’s movement of political Islam. Second, Turkey’s new foreign policy activities strongly focus on a re-evaluation and re-positioning of Turkey’s role in the Middle East, i.e. an “Islamic” region. Third, in doing so, Turkey often follows a line that diverts from the Western, i.e. mainly American, approach towards that region and some of its main actors. Fourth, the AKP’s domestic policy of democratizing reforms brings with it a considerable weakening of the traditional secular-Kemalist structure of the Turkish state and, fifth, Turkish public opinion displays continuous anti-Western attitudes, especially after the American-led war on Iraq of Saddam Hussein. (cf. Cağaptay 2009a, 2009b; Buğra Kanat 2010)

In this paper, I do not want to take argument with this way of short-sighted and policy-driven criticism of AKP’s foreign policy. Instead, I will try to understand this policy by a closer inspection of its ideational underpinning, i.e. the vision of “strategic depth” and by trying to understand how far the actual foreign policy is driven by this vision and what its record so far is. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the implications of the new foreign policy approach for Turkey’s accession process to the EU.

## The vision: a foreign policy of „strategic depth“

The AKP foreign policy is based on an ideational (or ideological) foundation which has been developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu was a professor of International Relations at various Turkish universities who first became chief foreign policy advisor to the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2002 and then was promoted to the position of foreign minister in May 2009. His theoretical thinking is strongly informed by classical geopolitics

(cf. Davutoğlu 1998). In his more recent works, he put a greater emphasis on cultural-historical analyses in developing the concept of “strategic depth” as the conceptual basis for a contemporary Turkish foreign policy that stands up to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (cf. Davutoğlu, 2001)

“Strategic depth” is a rather elusive analysis-based but, nevertheless, rather prescriptive and policy-oriented concept that is essentially based on a comprehensive historic-cultural reading of Turkey’s position in international politics. It basically serves as a justification of a more diversified and more active Turkish foreign policy by opening the conceptual horizon to the full realm of modern Turkey’s Ottoman past. In a way, it is positively bringing history back into contemporary thinking about modern Turkish foreign policy. This approach, therefore, contrasts with the established Kemalist belief that Ottoman history is not really relevant for contemporary Turkey and, if at all, only in a negative sense. The main argument of this “new” approach is less about how national history and culture generally matter in the foreign policy of nations but more about that they should matter (in a specific way) in Turkish foreign policy. In this sense, “strategic depth” rather offers the intellectual underpinning of a certain vision of contemporary Turkish foreign policy than an analytical concept for the explanation of foreign policy as such in a scholarly sense.

The concept as presented by Davutoğlu is an essentialist approach first, by its recourse to geopolitical categories which by their very nature tend to be essentialist and, second, as it tends to take as absolute a certain reading or narrative of Turkey’s cultural-historical development. It neglects the fact that there are always different readings of what constitutes the “strategic depth” of a certain country, i.e. that there is no such thing as the one and only “strategic depth” because there is also not the one and only history or geography of a specific country. The discussion about if and how far Turkey belongs to Europe is a good example for this fact. The same holds true for a country’s specific “culture” as can be seen, for instance, with regard to the discussion about German “Leitkultur” (leading culture) or the intense debate about the cultural foundations of the European Union in the context of Turkey’s accession process. Furthermore, political conclusions to be drawn from *the* “strategic depth” of a country can considerably differ. In the end, the concept of “strategic depth” is then reduced to the commonplace that a country’s foreign policy is also somehow influenced by its geography, history and culture. This opens the way for a politically influenced prescriptive use of the “strategic depth” concept but contributes little to the general understanding of modern states’ foreign policy.

For Davutoğlu, Turkey’s contemporary foreign policy has to be informed by the country’s “strategic depth” in geographic, historic and cultural terms. Geographically Turkey is seen as a “central country” in the midst of Afro-Eurasia’s vast land masses. This unique location endows it with multiple identities as, “a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Cas-

pian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country.” (Davutoğlu, 2008:79) Historic and cultural heritage support such a characterization and even extend it in the direction of Africa.

It is, however, difficult to define what the peculiarities of these different identities are. To give a meaningful and comprehensive definition of Turkey’s identity is as difficult and problematic as defining Europe’s identity. What is the concrete meaning of speaking of Turkey as a “Caucasian” or as a “Middle Eastern” country? Nevertheless, in the view of the “strategic depth”-approach the historical and cultural elements complement the geographic element and together they form an encompassing “centrality” of Turkey and its role in international politics. All this, however, has little to do with modern social science in the field of International Relations but rather delivers a pseudo-scientific, however, politically highly influential rationalization for a specific prescription of Turkey’s foreign policy.

This approach is akin to late foreign minister İsmail Cem’s conception of a multidimensional foreign policy. Without any explicit recourse to scholarly concepts, he wrote already in 1998:

“It is worthwhile to note that there are twenty-six countries with which we shared for centuries a common history, a common state and a common fate. ... In this vast socio-political geography, Turkey, ... has optimal conditions to contribute to stability and to enjoy the opportunities presented by the new “Eurasian Order”. By virtue of its historical and cultural attributes and its privileged double-identity, European as well as Asian, Turkey is firmly positioned to become the strategic “Centre” of Eurasia.” (Cem, 1998)

And this justification and definition of Turkey’s foreign policy goal to be reached during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century shows a great similarity with a political assignment for Turkey developed at the same time by the American political strategist and former security policy adviser to President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski who declared Turkey to be a “pivotal” country for Eurasia’s political development in the post- Cold War era. (cf. Brzezinski, 1998)

In Davutoğlu’s view, Turkey’s “centrality” asks for a multidimensional and multidirectional foreign policy that refrains from favouring one relationship over another. Turkey’s should rather aim at

“providing security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighbouring regions. Turkey should guarantee its own security and stability by taking on a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs.” (Davutoğlu 2008: 79)

Such an approach is no longer guided by the idea of establishing Turkey as a “bridge” between Europe and the Middle East, or between the West and the Muslim World. First and foremost, Turkish foreign policy should be aimed at consolidating national security, stability and welfare by projecting these features into its broader neighbourhood and by supplementing these efforts by a broader international engagement with those countries/regions in the world that are seen as crucial for the international development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Bridge building”

can be one element of such a policy but not under all circumstances and not as the priority function of Turkish foreign policy.

Another feature of this new vision of Turkish foreign policy is the abandoning of the exclusive Western orientation of Turkey. Turkey is no longer perceived as a state at the periphery of the European system or as a “front state” of the Atlantic Alliance that is firmly rooted in the West. Turkey’s primary policy goal is neither defined as following a policy that has to be always fully compatible with the basic lines of “Western” policies.

This, however, does not mean a complete turning away from the West. Relations with the West and its inclusion in most of the Western international organizations remain of high importance for Turkey but they now have to share their former preferential position in an equal manner with countries in the broader neighbourhood and beyond. Turkey is not so much in search of political and economic alternatives but follows a course that will broaden the country’s area of political and economic activities for the sake of Turkey’s national interests. “It is an attempt to balance and broaden the horizons of Kemalism and its over-obsession with Turkey’s Western identity and trajectory.” (Taşpınar, 2008:14) AKP’s new policy is, first and foremost, Turkey-centered with open horizons into all directions. And all this is done with the main aim of establishing Turkey as an important actor on the international scene and not just in the context of the Western (alliance) system.

In this view, Turkey’s identity, too, is no longer defined exclusively as that of a “Western or European country” as has traditionally been the case during the period of Kemalist domination. (cf. Öymen, 2001; Ciddi, 2009) Davutoğlu sees Turkey as a country that shares fundamental values with the EU as an important ingredient of its “strategic depth” and multiple identities thus buttressing the development of Turkey’s “soft power” on which its regional influence is based. But it, surely, is not just accidental that the foreign minister avoids using the terms “Westernization” but instead speaks of a commonness between Turkey and the EU in terms of universal values that are cherished by both when he argues in favour of Turkish membership of the EU. (cf. Davutoğlu, 2009) Equally, progress in Turkey’s accession process is hardly ever termed by the AKP leadership as further “Europeanization” but as a strengthening of Turkey’s democracy. (for an exemption, cf. Bağış, 2010) In a similar way, the AKP never speaks of Turkey as a member of the “European family” whereas in relations with Middle Eastern countries and societies these are often approached as Muslim “brother countries”. (Ersoy, 2010:124)

It is, thus, not surprising that the new AKP foreign policy is sometimes termed by various analysts as being “neo-Ottoman”. (cf. Fisher Onar, 2009, Taşpınar, 2008) This term is often understood as ascribing a strong religious, i.e. Islamic, underpinning to that policy. Such a view, however, is flawed in two ways. First, Ottomanism in its original historical emanation as a liberal political movement in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century put greater emphasis on

the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character of the Ottoman Empire and on constitutionalism as the main elements that should be used to secure the survival and the “re-birth” of the empire rather than emphasizing Islam as the main element of “imperial commonness”. (cf. Berkes, 1998:202-222; Mardin, 1962)

Secondly, modern or neo-Ottomanism, as an intellectual idea that has been proposed to characterize the foreign policy of Turgut Özal, is not so much concerned with Islam but with a repositioning of Turkey in the international order after the end of the Cold War by a re-discovering of Turkey’s historical bonds to that former multi-national and multi-ethnic “community” of the Ottoman Empire in its contemporary form, i.e. a multitude of (nation-)states in all of Turkey’s immediate neighbourhood and not only in the West. (cf. Borovalı, 1998; Laciner, 2009; Ataman, 2008) In this perspective, “neo-Ottomanism” is much less a well-defined ideational construct than a label for a foreign policy that extends Turkey’s sphere of interest to areas that formerly were part of the Ottoman empire or part of its sphere of influence. Neo-Ottomanism, thus, neither indicates a certain political or ideological preference nor an exclusive geographic focus of Turkey’s foreign policy, not to speak of a well-defined analytical concept.

A successful conduct of Turkish foreign policy along the lines of the vision of “strategic depth” according to Davutoğlu, has to be guided by a set of five principles: (a) *providing a balance between democracy and security in Turkey*. This points to the domestic policy prerequisites of Turkey’s foreign policy. In order to successfully project stability and welfare to its neighbourhood, Turkey has to enjoy democratic stability at home. This implies that there are no greater political and social cleavages in the country or, if there are, that these cleavages have to be narrowed or overcome by appropriate democratic domestic policies that stress civil liberties. (b) *a “zero problem policy” toward Turkey’s neighbours*. This implies a non-confrontational approach to neighbouring countries and severe efforts at peacefully solving existing differences or conflicts by stressing re-conciliation and win-win policies. Such a policy would reduce or eliminate any serious threat to Turkey coming from an immediate neighbour. (c) *the development of relations with Turkey’s neighbouring regions and beyond*. This implies a foreign policy outreach that goes beyond immediate neighbouring countries but puts these relations into a broader regional framework. In this way, Turkey is able to influence not only bilateral relations but also, and more importantly, regional developments in its wider neighbourhood. Turkey would establish itself as a “regional power”. (d) *adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy*. This principle implies the avoidance of exclusive alignments. Turkey, instead, should nourish good relations with all relevant actors in the shaping of contemporary international relations. (e) *a “rhythmic diplomacy”*. This is a term which seems to be a vague or uncommon label for the parallel increase of diplomatic activities in bilateral and multilateral relations. It is not quite clear how it is distinguished from a multidimensional for-

eign policy unless one interprets it as the “operational part” of the former. (Davutoğlu, 2008:79-84)

As a result of this foreign policy of “strategic depth”, that has been consistently followed by the AKP government since 2002, Davutoğlu states that

“Turkey now enjoys an image as a responsible state which provides order and security to the region, one that prioritizes democracy and liberties, while dealing competently with security problems at home. Turkey’s aim is to intervene consistently in global issues using international platforms, which signifies a transformation for Turkey from a central country to a global power.” (Davutoğlu, 2008:83)

## The policy: vision-based pragmatism

It is, however, arguable if at all or how much a country’s foreign policy is the result of the underlying ideational conceptualization. There is, of course, never a one-to-one transformation of concepts into concrete policy. Practical foreign policy has always to adapt underlying visions in a pragmatic way to the realities on the ground. On the other hand, there is also rather seldom a concrete foreign policy without certain, often only implicit, reference to a kind of ideational framework. This holds even true for so-called “realpolitik”.

Therefore, it can be argued that much of Turkey’s new foreign policy is due to a fundamentally changed – or “new” – international and regional political framework in which Turkey today has to conduct its foreign policy. The end of the bipolar Cold War-system, the events of “9/11”, the Iraq war, or the U.S.-led war against international, i.e. radical Islamist, terrorism are only some of the indicators for this radically changed political environment. All these events/developments and their political fall-out had important direct consequences for Turkey that required political reactions. The imperatives of change had to be accepted as a challenge that demanded certain changes of Turkey’s foreign policy by any Turkish government of whatever political orientation. (cf. Sanberk, 2010)

The concrete reactions to these challenges were, however, influenced by the respective governments’ perception of international events. This perception, in turn, has been influenced by the ideational basis or foreign policy vision of the government. Until the coming to power of the AKP in 2002, Turkey’s foreign policy, under the dominant influence of the established Kemalist state elite, was mainly security-driven and inward-looking trying to retain the national and international status quo as far as possible. (cf. Hale, 2000:191-322) This approach was seen as the best way to continue with the overall policy goal of “Westernization” and express Turkey’s basic identity as a “Western” country.



The AKP governments, under the influence of the new vision of “strategic depth” changed Turkey’s foreign policy approach towards a more open and pro-active one. Changes in the international environment are now generally seen as a chance for Turkey to play a greater role in shaping international developments. This greater openness to the outside world has been accompanied by a greater openness towards domestic change as well. In general, the AKP’s policy has been characterized by a process of external and domestic de-securitization of newly arising and some old political challenges.

## Domestic policy

The AKP governments embarked on a domestic policy that aims at a fundamental change, at least at a fundamental re-framing, of Turkey’s domestic political and societal landscape. For this purpose, the first two AKP cabinets, based on a broad societal “coalition” of its own followers and large segments of the metropolitan liberal forces, undertook a policy of thriving “Europeanization”. In order to fulfil the political requirements for the start of accession negotiations with the European Union, the governments of Abdullah Gül and Tayyip Erdoğan managed to change the constitutional and legal order of Turkey within the short time period between November 2002 and December 2004 in a more fundamental way than its predecessors had managed to do in the two decades before. In this way, much of the democratic and liberal essence of the EU member states’ political systems became part of Turkey’s legal system. (cf. Özbudun, 2004; Grigoriadis, 2009) This policy was supported and stabilized by the continuation of an IMF-linked economic reform and stabilization process which made Turkey’s development an economic success story.

However, the democratisation drive of AKP lost considerable momentum after spring 2005. The government seemed to succumb to the nationalist revival which again brought to the fore of public attention and debate such “classical” issues of Turkish domestic and foreign policy as the Kurdish question and the Armenian problem which are closely related to the equally deeply engrained suspicion against foreign powers that are said to aim at undermining the national integrity of the Turkish Republic. (cf. Grigoriadis, 2006; Guida, 2008) The AKP and its government did little to stem the nationalist tide which fatally culminated in the murder of Hrant Dink and a demagogic public campaign against Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk in early 2007.

This lack of active democratisation policy led to a certain cooling down of sympathies for the AKP among the liberal secularists of Turkey’s metropolitan middle classes. In the end, traditional secularist Kemalist forces saw a chance in waging again a fully fledged “*Kulturkampf*” against the AKP and its followers. Although Tayyip Erdoğan and his party scored a triumphant victory in the early elections of July 2007 they missed the opportunity to reinstate

themselves as a government of democratic and liberalising change when the prime minister tacitly dropped the project of a “civilian constitution” in Winter 2007/2008. Instead, he gave the AKP’s democratisation policy an explicit conservative-religious twist by turning his attention to the issue of lifting the “türban” ban on universities with which he finally failed before the Constitutional Court. This move, however, revitalised Kemalist efforts at continuing the “*Kulturkampf*” with renewed determination. The AKP could only with difficulties survive a closure case before the Constitutional Court in summer 2008.

Since then, democratic reform initiatives have regained some momentum in AKP’s domestic policy. In 2009, the “democratic initiative” for a solution of the Kurdish problem gained some results before having gotten stuck again in political controversies between the government and the Kemalist opposition which have been complicated by political manoeuvring of Kurdish forces, PKK and civilian groups alike. The closure of the Kurdish DTP by the constitutional court in December 2009 made the situation even more difficult. (cf. Zaman, 2010a; Özel, 2009) As regards constitutional reforms, the government has taken up again its efforts to further liberalise Turkey’s political system. However, also with its new reform package it does not address the crucial issue of how to get rid of the illiberal fundamentals of the constitution of 1982. (cf. Alessandri/Taşpınar, 2010; Yazıcı, 2010) These continue to provide an opportunity for the Kemalist opposition forces, to, time and again, intervene in the political reform process with the argument of protecting the constitutionally guaranteed secular order of the republic. Under such circumstances, efforts at reforming the judicial system of the country, especially the high judiciary, can easily be defamed as an attempt by the AKP government to get rid of its strongest secular adversary in the ongoing “*Kulturkampf*”.

One feature, however, is new in these developments. For the first time in the Republican history, the “*Kulturkampf*” takes place without the possibility of a military intervention. This is a consequence of the constant decline of the armed forces’ standing in public opinion due to a series of political defeats against the government since summer 2007 and the alleged and partially proven involvement of parts of the military leadership in efforts to overthrow the elected governments. These issues have come to the fore by the fall outs of the *Ergenekon* trial. (cf. Open Source Center, 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Zaman, 2009)

The political neutralization of the armed forces enhances the chance of the conservative-religious majority of Turkey’s population to definitely establish themselves as the leading social and political force in the country. For the first time in Republican history, the democratic process seems to be the unhindered force for the definition of the longer-term development of Turkey’s society and politics. There is a real chance that modernisation and social engineering from above can be replaced by much more cumbersome but also more sustainable social developments and democratisation from below. This will even more be the case, if the AKP

government can continue with its successful economic policy after largely having overcome the consequences of the world-wide financial and economic crisis of 2008/2009.

As a conclusion, we can state that, since November 2002, successive AKP governments have succeeded in democratising and liberalising the Turkish state and society to a considerable extent. Turkey has become a much more “open” state and society, still existing severe democratic deficiencies notwithstanding. This has had also repercussions on the style of foreign policy making. Turkish foreign policy is no longer exclusive “state policy”. Although there is still a rather underdeveloped national foreign policy discourse, including parliamentary debates, the range of political actors that want to have a say in foreign policy formulation has been considerably broadened. “Business organizations, civil society, intellectuals, think-tanks, and other actors now provide input into the foreign policy making process.” (Aras, 2009:10)

However, although AKP’s policy of democratising reforms to a certain extent led to a more “open” Turkey it has not yet been very successful in breaking Turkey’s shell of a typical “Westphalian state” that places strong emphasis on features such as nation, sovereignty, and statehood. The difficulties in getting the “Kurdish initiative” broadly accepted even by their own party grassroots, or prevailing reluctance against the “Armenian opening” as well as the seemingly inability to solve the problem of reopening the Greek-Orthodox Halki Seminary in Istanbul (cf. Macar/Gökaçtı, 2009) are witness to this shortcomings of AKP’s democratisation drive. The AKP’s policies seem more to aim at giving the Turkish state a new ideational content – “conservative democracy” instead of “secularist Kemalism” – than at creating a “new” Turkish state and society characterized by “embedded liberal democracy” (cf. Merkel, 2004) in substantive terms.

Therefore it remains an open question what will be the final outcome of this process. The AKP is not a representative of liberal democratic forces but one of religiously tainted conservatism with a strong belief in the absolute rightness of its political philosophy or ideology. Therefore, there is also still the possibility that in Turkey’s democracy the domination of an absolutist “civil religion”, i.e. secular Kemalism, will be replaced by an equally absolutist religiously tainted dogma, i.e. “democratic conservatism”. The main difference between the two would be that the latter, most likely, would represent the political and social attitudes of the people’s majority, but it would also have to be practiced in a more open and liberal social climate. Nevertheless, as further consolidation of political and societal liberalism and pluralism would be the victim of such a development, the continuation of deep and hardly reconcilable political and societal cleavages is, however, well likely. Turkey would continue to be a “defective democracy” of sorts.

This, in turn raises the question of how firm the domestic base of Turkey’s new foreign policy would really be. An answer to this question is rather difficult to give. Everybody agrees

that in democratic societies there is a connection between the domestic situation of a state and its foreign policy. But how exactly this relationship functions, is very much debated as can, for instance, be shown by the intense scholarly debate about the feature of “democratic peace”. (Hasenclever/Wagner, 2004; Ish-Shalom, 2006) Therefore, nobody really knows how much of democratic saturation is necessary for Turkey to conduct a successful foreign policy of “strategic depth”. Is the actual level of democratic reform sufficient for this purpose or are more reforms necessary and what kind of reforms?

## **Foreign policy**

Following the vision of “strategic depth” in adapting Turkey’s foreign policy to the new challenges of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the AKP government made good progress in “realizing its objective of strengthening Turkey’s position in international politics through gradually forming, if not broadening, regional spheres of influence.” (Ersoy, 2010:123) It is, however, a much to be debated question if this was mainly the result of a change of circumstances and Turkey’s political environment or if it was mainly due to a new approach, a new ideational underpinning of Turkish foreign policy. The most likely explanation is that it was both, to different degrees for different foreign policy issues at different times.

### *Iraq*

A good example of this is AKP’s policy towards Iraq. (cf. Hale, 2007; Taşpınar, 2008:17-21) Although the newly elected government was reluctant to openly and unreservedly follow the U.S. in its military move against Saddam’s regime it also did not refuse outright Turkish support for Bush’s policy. Party grassroots and large part of Turkish public opinion, however, strongly objected to the American plans as did the more Islamic wing of the party leadership. Nevertheless, the motion that narrowly failed to get a sufficient majority in Turkish parliament on 1 March 2003 asked for Turkish support of the U.S. invasion. And after the defeat of Saddam’s regime, AKP’s policy towards the issue, driven by traditional national security considerations, sought to gain influence on events in Iraq by a largely antagonistic approach towards the emerging Kurdish political entity in northern Iraq. Turkey’s continuous efforts at rallying Iraq’s neighbours behind a policy of securing the country’s territorial integrity was much less driven by an effort at creating a peaceful and stable regional order including all relevant political actors but much more influenced by national security policy concerns with regard to the Kurdish issue. This had little to do with having “zero problems” with a neighbouring country.

This approach, including Turkey's efforts at preventing the city of Kirkuk to be incorporated into the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), only gave place to a more conciliatory policy after the U.S. administration's decision to withdraw the majority of its troops from Iraq by 2011. Under this perspective, Turkey was forced to undertake stronger efforts at preventing an implosion of Iraqi statehood. Therefore, the AKP government also established closer ties with the KRG besides its continuous efforts at fostering reconciliation and cooperation between feuding Arab factions in Iraq. Furthermore, strengthening ties with the KRG was also instrumental in curbing the role of the PKK which had re-established itself as a force of permanent terrorist irritation in Turkey's south-eastern provinces. Besides that, better relations with the KRG greatly contributed to boost regional trans-border trade and other economic activities thus helping to ameliorate economic and social problems in Turkey's south-east. Relations with Baghdad, too, improved steadily, the normalization reaching its peak in September 2009 when both states established a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council and signed more than 40 bilateral agreements on a broad variety of issues. In early 2010 Turkey opened a consulate general in the KRG's capital of Erbil. (cf. Kirişci et al., 2010:6) In sum, Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq under the AKP government was at least as much driven by events on the ground, decisions by the U.S. administrations and traditional national security concerns than by a conscious effort at implementing a policy of "strategic depth" and only rather late reached a level that can be termed "zero problems among neighbours". There is no guarantee that this relation would not deteriorate again after the American troop withdrawal and a parallel rise in inner-Iraqi destabilizing conflicts.

However, paradoxically, the 1 March 2003 failure of the Gül government became the turning point of Turkey's foreign policy. It severely damaged relations with the U.S. and at the same time improved Turkey's standing in the Arab regional public by freeing it from the image of being Washington's "poodle" in the Middle East, thus opening the path for a greater Turkish political activity in the region. Seven years later, the AKP government has firmly established Turkey as a major actor in regional politics. The government is known for its ability to uphold equally good relations with all important actors in the region from the United States to Hamas. This has enabled Ankara to act as an intermediate facilitator between Syria and Israel as well as between the competing factions in Lebanon or in the efforts to end the Gaza war. The price of Ankara's upgrading in the Arab neighbourhood was, however, a reconfiguration of Turkish-American relations marked by lasting political distance between Ankara and Washington plus a severe deterioration in relations with Israel. (cf. Hale, 2009; Kirişci et al., 2010)

## *Syria*

Turkey's relations with Syria are exemplary for this new situation. From a decade-old tense relationship which was about to turn into open military confrontation in 1998 over the continued Syrian support for the PKK relations have changed to an almost zero problem-situation. Various high-level visits starting with Turkish President Sezer's participation in the funeral ceremonies of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in 2000 are witness to this improvement. Turkey supported Syrian interests in getting rid of the image of a "rogue state" when it acted as a facilitator in efforts aimed at bringing about direct Israeli-Syrian peace talks in 2008. (cf. Elanchenny, 2008:5-7; Hale 2009:151-53) Although this mission could not be accomplished due to Israel's attack on Gaza and the ensuing hardening of Israeli regional politics after the electoral success of more nationalist parties this nearly successful mission contributed a lot to boost Turkey's standing in the region and beyond.

Ankara followed-on by further developing its good political relations with Syria with a comprehensive conciliatory approach to bilateral relations. These culminated in an agreement of visa-free travel between the two countries in October 2009 and the establishment of a Strategic Cooperation Council as a framework for regular meetings between the governments modelled after the Turkish-Iraqi Cooperation Council. The improving relations to both countries, Syria and Iraq, also enabled the AKP government to undertake efforts at easing Iraqi-Syrian tensions about Syria's alleged implications in certain terrorist activities in Baghdad.

The progress in bilateral political relations is accompanied by a considerable improvement of economic exchanges between the two countries including plans for energy cooperation, especially by extending the "Arabian Gas Pipeline" from Syria into Turkey. Even the long-time contentious issues of the use of the Euphrates waters and the status of the Turkish province of Hatay do not seem to be real stumbling blocks for a continuation of broad-based good neighbourly relation any longer. As a result of these developments, the AKP government in less than a decade successfully turned a national security problem into a positive element in its attempts at stabilizing the regional order in the Middle East.

## *Iran*

Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbours not only improved to the Arab side but with Iran as well. This improvement was, however, not that spectacular as in the case of Syria. Turkey and Iran have shared a neighbourly relation of convenience with ups and downs since long but there was never a feeling of "brotherhood" or friendship between Ankara and Teheran. (cf. Aras, 2001) In more recent time, relations have been dominated by mutual security considerations with regard to the Kurdish issue and keeping Iraq's territorial integrity, eco-

conomic relations, mainly in the field of energy, and issues of regional stability in the context of Iran's nuclear policy. Both countries relations with the United States are the dominant intermittent factor in the bilateral relationship.

A Turkey-Iran High Security Commission was established already in 1988 in the course of Turkey's fight against the PKK, mainly as a confidence-building measure in order, on the one side, to stop repeated Turkish incursions into Iranian borderlands to fight PKK groups that took refuge there and, on the other side, to assuage repeatedly voiced Turkish concerns, that Teheran instrumentalised the PKK against an ideologically adversary regime. This arrangement got an enhanced significance after the fall of the Saddam regime when Iran was confronted with terrorist activities of the Freedom Party of Kurdistan (PEJAK), a sister terrorist organization of the PPK which both operated from bases in the Kandil mountains in northern Iraq. In February 2008, both countries signed a memorandum on security cooperation including the sharing of intelligence between their armed forces engaged in the fight against the Kurdish terrorist organisations. These efforts went along with continued cooperation in the framework of the "Iraq Neighbours Group" created by Turkey in early 2003 that tries to coordinate political measures among the major Middle Eastern states to prevent the dismemberment of Iraq. (cf. Altunışık, 2006; Aras/Karakaya Polat, 2009; Hale 2009)

Over the past decade, Turkish-Iranian economic relations improved considerably due to agreements in the field of energy. Already in the late 1990s, Ankara, against strong American resistance, concluded an agreement with Teheran about the delivery of Iranian natural gas to Turkey which made Iran the second largest gas supplier of Turkey after Russia. Although this agreement never functioned to the full satisfaction of both sides, energy cooperation got another boost through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2008 which foresees Turkish TPAO's participation in the development of Iran's largest natural gas field, South Pars in the Persian Sea, as well as the construction of a new pipeline for the transportation of the gas to Turkey parallel to the existing pipeline of 2001. (cf. Kinnander, 2010) Turkish hopes to extend this scheme toward providing Europe with gas from Iran via the planned Nabucco pipeline still meet strong American disapproval and consequent European reluctance. (cf. Güngör, 2008)

Turkey's political reactions to Iran's ongoing nuclear program are another point of friction in the AKP government's relation with the US administration and, to a certain extent, its European partners as well. Torn between its interest in having "zero problems" with Iran, on the one hand, and its obligations for solidarity with its partners in the Western alliance, on the other hand, Ankara tries to undertake an act of "zero problems-balancing" by offering its good services as a "neutral" interlocutor and mediator to both sides. In 2007 Ankara organized a meeting between the EU High Representative Javier Solana and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani which, however, did not lead to an agreement between the antagonistic sides.

The AKP government did not give-up and, during various high-level visits to Teheran, tried to smooth Iran's resistance against American and growing international demands for giving-up its nuclear enrichment program or to put it, at least, under strict international monitoring by the IAEA.

In October 2009, it even offered Turkey as a place where to organize an exchange of Iranian low-enriched uranium for higher-enriched "international" nuclear fuel to be used in an Iranian "civil" reactor for purposes of medical research. This exchange was, however, stalled by Iranian "technical" demands that were not accepted by the US and its partners. (cf. Ülgen, 2010) With the hardening of the Obama administration's position in the direction of strengthening international sanctions against Iran by way of a new UN Security Council resolution the Turkish government's dilemma was growing. At the beginning of 2010, Ankara's diplomatic rhetoric against new sanctions was rising as was Prime Minister Erdoğan's insistence on Iran's right for a peaceful nuclear program and his repeated pleas for a nuclear weapons-free Middle East.

Somehow surprisingly, after renewed mediation efforts of Brazil's President Lula da Silva in the shadow of looming new and stronger UNSC sanctions the deal could be fixed in Teheran in May 2010 with Turkish participation. It was, however, too little, too late to make the international community believe that this agreement, the details of which remained a bit unclear in the beginning, could be used as a stepping stone for further talks between Iran and its international adversaries that would be able to finally solve the Iranian "nuclear problem". The U.S. the EU and the other great powers in the UNSC continued in their efforts at preparing a new package of sanctions against Iran that was finally agreed upon, against Turkish and Brazilian opposition, by the UNSC in late May.

This episode underlined the AKP government's differing perception of the Iranian "nuclear problem": This problem is seen as a general example of the unbalanced and somehow "unjust" international nuclear order as represented by the NPT regime. This system privileges the established nuclear powers without effectively being able to prevent the spread of military armed nuclear newcomers, sometimes even with the tacit approval of one or the other established nuclear state. The common silence about Israel's secret military nuclear program or the US-India nuclear cooperation is seen as a case in point. This situation erodes the legitimacy of the existing nuclear order without there being severe and comprehensive efforts of the established nuclear powers to bring about a fundamental change of this situation. Therefore, one-sided international critique against Iran's, up to now, non-military program is seen as somewhat hypocritical by Prime Minister Erdoğan and many others in the AKP leadership. At least, they think that the actual situation with regard to the Iranian nuclear program does not justify a principally inimical Turkish stand against its neighbour with whom the country shares a century-old history of pragmatically peaceful relations. Ankara, instead, prefers a



continuation of thorough efforts aimed at establishing a constructive dialogue with Tehran by also taking serious Iran's security concerns with regard to the overall regional developments. That would include addressing Israel's nuclear status as well. (Turan, 2010; Anthony, 2010)

Turkey's readiness to accept and follow the measures established by the latest UNSC resolution, in spite of its opposing vote, will contribute little to ease the concerns in certain Western (and Israeli) circles that Ankara's policy is showing a growing consensus with Teheran. This impression had already gained ground when Iranian president Ahmadinejad visited Turkey in 2008. This first and, up to now, only visit in a NATO country caused strong criticism in the United States and Israel and raised eyebrows in many a European capital. Ahmadinejad's continuing harsh confrontational behaviour in Iran's conflict with the West (and especially Israel) gave, however, no indication that it would "reward" Ankara's policy in any way. Iran's acceptance of the deal proposed by Brazil and Turkey, too, can hardly be perceived as the result of Turkish persuasion of Iran's elite. It was much more an autonomous decision of the Iranian political leadership to prevent the highly unwelcome situation that the country would become the victim of unanimous international condemnation as a continuous violator of UNSC resolutions. In this regard, Lula's and Davutoğlu's renewed efforts at mediation came at a most appropriate moment for Tehran.

Most likely, the AKP government is overestimating its influence on the Iranian leadership by equally overestimating Teheran's acknowledgement of Ankara's new foreign policy of "strategic depth". (cf. Lesser, 2010a; Lesser, 2010b) As the Obama administration and the EU member states, the Iranian leadership, too, sees Ankara as a very welcome instrument in their respective attempts to "solve" the Iranian nuclear problem according to their – highly divergent – preferences.

### *Israel*

The difficulties that Davutoğlu's new foreign policy approach can meet in a region of states with partially or totally diverging policies are also exemplified by the development of Turkish-Israeli relations over the past years. During the 1990's, these relations were regarded as positively outstanding in a more gloomy picture of Middle Eastern Affairs. (cf. Bir/Sherman, 2002; Altunışık, 2000) Under the AKP government, this relationship first continued with some ups and downs mostly influenced by the state of Israeli-Palestinian affairs. In November 2007, a meeting of Israel's president Shimon Peres with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in Ankara who both addressed the Turkish Parliament invoked the image of Turkey as a seriously concerned regional mediator. Relations, however steadily deteriorated in a way that today one can speak of a rather frosty relation, especially after Israel's military attack on Gaza at the beginning of 2009.

First serious splits had already occurred in February 2006 when the exiled leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashal, visited Turkey for “unofficial” talks with Abdullah Gül, the then foreign minister. Severe criticism, not only from Israel but also from Washington and most of the European capitals, however, did not hinder Ankara from continuing relations with Mashal. These contacts were justified with the argument that the AKP government wanted to bring Hamas to accept the right of Israel’s existence in the pre-1967 borders – an attempt that failed. Furthermore, Ankara is of the opinion that Hamas being legitimized by its 2006 electoral victory in Palestine should not be excluded from attempts at solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The situation deteriorated further with Israel’s attack on Gaza in order to punish Hamas for continued rocket attacks at Israeli soil. Prime Minister Erdoğan strongly condemned Israel’s behaviour, most notoriously in the famous “Davos incident” of January 2009 when he personally charged president Peres with Israeli crimes against humanity during the conduct of Operation *Cast Lead*. Certain attempts by both sides at smoothening out the differences notwithstanding, relations continued to be strained after the change of government in Israel. Prime Minister Netanyahu and his ultra-nationalist foreign minister Lieberman ruled out any Turkish role in Middle Eastern peace efforts after relations had been strained anew by a Turkish TV serial that showed Israeli soldiers committing crimes against humanity which caused great public annoyance in Israel. The public humiliation of Turkey’s ambassador in a meeting with deputy foreign minister Ayalon in January 2010 only served to uphold mutual disdain. (cf. Kirişci et al. 2010:7-9)

Relations reached a new low when Israeli commando forces attacked a small flotilla of ships mainly run by a Turkish Islamist human rights organization that tried, against Israeli warnings, to break the maritime blockade of the Gaza strip in early June 2010. Provoked by violent actions of a small group of “peace activists” the Israeli forces over-reacted and killed nine, injuring some more. All victims were Turkish citizens. Prime Minister Erdoğan and the whole Turkish public harshly condemned the Israeli action but the AKP government refrained from a total break of diplomatic relations although the Israeli government confronted with heavy unanimous international criticism did not apologize for the killings. In the wake of these events, Israel, however, was forced by international pressure to soften the blockade of the Gaza strip by opening the land borders for a substantial increase of the controlled deliveries of goods for daily life. (cf. Issacharoff, 2010).

This event of the “Gaza flotilla” can hardly be characterized as an example of the new Turkish foreign policy of “zero problems with neighbours”. It was a clear act of provocation that was at least tacitly approved by the AKP government although one has to admit that nobody in Ankara could have imagined the deadly sequence of events. Erdoğan’s behaviour in this affair can be regarded as another indication that actual Turkish policy toward Israel seems to be much more driven by public sentiment which clearly is pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli

than by rational policy calculations with regard to securing stability in the Middle East. One reason for this could be that Prime Minister Erdoğan seems to be interested in using the conflict-oriented policy towards Israel for the purpose of serving the improvement of his public image in view of the coming elections next year. In a certain way, negative policy towards Israel could serve the same purposes as did AKP's positive EU-policy in the early years of its reign.

At least, today Israel is seen as the only culprit in the region by the Turkish public and the Prime Minister alike. In such a situation, Erdoğan's remarks that Turkey is ready to take up its policy of good services again if Israel would stop blocking the overall peace process sound hollow in Israeli ears. Turkey's critical approach toward Israel's policy in the region, on the other side, contributed a lot to the improvement of Ankara's image in the regional Arab public and with regional governments alike. (cf. Akgün et al., 2009) This, in turn, only deepens Israeli suspicions that the AKP government has lost any interest in the continuation of the state of bilateral relations as they had been forged in the late 1990s and which had been kept rather intact into the first years of the 2000s even after AKP took over the government in Turkey. Today, a growing part of the Israeli public and leadership is convinced that Turkey under AKP is on a firm Islamist course. (cf. Rubin, 2010; Inbar 2010)

Some Western observers and analysts judge this Turkish "turn to the Middle East" as another proof of the AKP's Islamization agenda and as an alarming signal for Turkey turning its back on the West by being too tough against Israel and by not being tough enough against Tehran and regional Islamist terrorist organisations. Of course, the roots of the AKP and that of its leading personalities in Turkish political Islam play a role for the way Arab and other Muslim actors in the region perceive Turkish foreign policy. And, of course, the strong anti-Americanism and equally strong anti-Israel feelings in the Turkish public together with expressions of a general anti-Westernism in opinion polls contribute to a more favourable reception of Turkish foreign policy moves by the Arab public. But all this is more of a result of Turkish regional policy than a motivation for it.

After the American military intervention against Saddam's Iraq lastingly overturned the regional political order and balances, Turkey had no choice but to engage itself in the efforts at re-establishing some kind of order and balance in the Middle East. This is simply the result of the fact, that these events take place immediately at Turkey's doorsteps. Any other behaviour would mean a severe neglect of the country's national interests. In this situation, Davutoğlu's concept of "strategic depth" with its multidimensional pro-active foreign policy is the appropriate approach to such a challenge. This conclusion would, however, have been much more shared by Turkey's Western partners if the rhetoric and behaviour of Prime Minister Erdoğan would not have evoked a distorted image of what this new foreign policy is about by, time and again, showing his personal Islamic inclinations. (cf. İdiz, 2009)

The picture and Erdoğan's behaviour is, however, quite different when it comes to Turkey's relations with non-Middle Eastern neighbouring countries. This is, for instance, the case concerning the remarkable improvement of Turkish-Russian relations during the past decade. The Russian president Vladimir Putin's visit to Ankara in December 2004, the first one of a Russian president after 32 years, marked a watershed in Turkey's relations with Russia. It was reciprocated by Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Moscow in January 2005. Since then, Erdoğan and Putin have met ten times. Overall relations have grown stronger with trade and other economic relations, energy policy, regional policy with regard to the Caucasus and the Black Sea region, and a common feeling of "alienation from other influential actors on the world stage" being the main drivers behind that development. However, the respective Russian and Turkish foreign policy outlook with regard to possible zones of influence overlap to such a degree in a number of strategically important regions that a high potential for frictions between Ankara and Moscow is imminent. (cf. Kınıkioğlu, 2006; Torbakov, 2007)

Economic relations that started with Turkish construction activities and with Russian suitcase trade in the 1990s expanded over a broad range of economic fields. Today, Russia is the largest trading partner of Turkey with a total trade volume of USD 38 billion in 2008. The majority of this trade is in Russian exports of energy raw materials which also causes a heavy trade deficit for Turkey. Over 60 percent of Turkey's consumption of natural gas is provided by Russia's Gazprom, about one third of Turkey's oil consumption is provided by Russia as is a considerable part of Turkey's coal import. On the other hand, almost 16 000 Turkish workers are sent to Russia, mainly by Turkish construction firms which are the strongest foreign factor in Russia's construction market.

In addition about 3 million Russian tourists visit Turkey annually, mostly the country's southern shores. They spend, in general, more money during their holidays than do European, especially German, tourists. During another visit of Russia's president to Turkey in May 2010, an agreement on mutual visa-free travels for 30 days was concluded which could further boost the number of Russian tourists and business contacts. Twenty years after the breakdown of the Soviet system, Turkish-Russian economic relations are stronger than ever. (cf. Aras, 2010)

Energy is, however, not only a field of bilateral economic relations. It is also part of the broader regional energy game in which Russia and Turkey are important players. On the one hand, Ankara is interested in reducing its energy dependence of Russian exports, especially in natural gas. Therefore, it is vividly interested in the development of the European "Southern Energy Corridor" by which mainly natural gas would be transported from Central Asia and the Caspian Basin and/or the Middle East to Europe bypassing Russia. (cf. Winrow, 2009) Of course, this scheme is met with Russian resistance. On the other hand, as European plans are

encountering a lot of problems, especially the *Nabucco* pipeline which is the backbone of the Southern Corridor, the AKP government is, at the same time, also engaging Turkey in Russian counter-measures by offering its Exclusive Economic Zone in the Black Sea for Gazprom's exploration about the route of the competing pipeline project "South Stream". Furthermore, Erdoğan's government secured Russian co-operation in the establishment of the Trans-Anatolian oil pipeline with which Caspian and/or Russian oil would be transported from Turkey's Black Sea coast to its Mediterranean oil port of Ceyhan thus bypassing the heavily congested Turkish Straits and reducing the risk of a serious environmental catastrophe in the *megapolis* of Istanbul in case of a severe tanker accident. Moreover, the Turkish government seems ready to have Russian firms build the first Turkish nuclear power plant by way of an inter-governmental agreement that has been discussed during Prime Minister Erdoğan's latest visit to Moscow in January 2010 and taken a step further during Prime Minister Medvedev's visit in May. (cf. Kramer, 2010; Whitmore, 2010)

This policy of following multiple options in its energy policy may be a special case of a "multi-dimensional" foreign policy of "strategic depth". It can, however, also be regarded as an example of "hedging policy" within the framework of *realpolitik*. It is an interesting question at all, how relations with Russia fit into the new Turkish foreign policy concept. Russia clearly belongs to a different geo-political entity than Turkey: It is the central power of the Eurasian "Heartland" whereas Turkey clearly belongs to the Eurasian "Rimland", to take up central analytical categories of Davutoğlu's favoured theoretical approach to international politics. In the view of the "strategic depth" approach we are, then, talking about relations between two "centres", – however, two centres of rather different weight to the disadvantage of Turkey. With this regard, the basic mode of conduct of a policy of "strategic depth" seems to advise a co-operative behaviour with the aim of reducing bilateral problems as much as possible. It may be this co-operative behaviour of two geo-political "centres" in their mutual relations that causes some circles in the West, who also tend to view international politics mainly in geo-political terms, to perceive a danger of a new "axis" developing between Moscow, Ankara, and Teheran, which also has been raved about by certain Euro-skeptic Kemalist circles in Turkey. (cf. Torbakov, 2007:9-11; Kınıklıoğlu, 2006:3) Such an "axis of the excluded", (Hill/Taşpınar, 2006) however, seems highly unlikely given, first, Turkey's still existing strong ties with the West and, secondly, the great potential of political differences with Moscow not only in the field of energy but also in broader regional affairs in the Caucasus.

### *Southern Caucasus*

Turkish politics toward the Caucasian neighbourhood is multidimensional but not free of potential incompatibilities. Relations with Armenia are troubled by the decade-old controversies over Armenian allegations of genocide committed by the Ottoman regime in 1915 against

Armenians living in the empire at that time. Besides this, there is Turkey's strong ethno-culturally based solidarity with Azerbaijan in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Baku and Yerevan which led to Ankara closing its borders to Armenia. In addition, Azerbaijan is the most important and, up to now, only source of Turkish oil and gas supply from the Caspian region. In a similar manner, Georgia has become the main transit country for these energy transports via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines. After the finishing of the Baku-Kars railway line which is projected for 2011, Georgia will further improve its role as the main land-based gateway to Central Asia for Turkey.

Russia is the main regional ally of Armenia with Russian troops providing Armenian border security and Moscow acts as a pro-Armenian advocate in the leadership troika of the Minsk Group that has been installed in order to find a solution for the Karabakh conflict. Moscow is also the main outside supporter of the Abkhaz and Ossetian insurgency against Georgia. This support culminated in Russia's military intervention in Georgia in summer 2008 to bring about the independence of these two parts of Georgian territory which threatened to uproot the complete regional balance. (cf. Kelkitli, 2008) Ankara reacted with the proposition of a Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform that aimed at easing the intra-regional tension and finding a solution to the manifold and overlapping conflicts by regional actors only, i.e. by excluding the US and the EU from direct involvement. This scheme has brought no concrete results yet not the least because Ankara's rather limited leverage over the other participants. (cf. Aliriza, 2008)

The Turkish AKP government does a delicate political balancing act between its various regional interests and constraints. Ankara, at the same time, tries not to deeply antagonize Russia in Caucasian affairs, not to disappoint its Azerbaijani "cousins", to show solidarity with Georgia against the Russian pressure without domestically alienating its own large Abkhazian minority, and to improve relations with Armenia against strong domestic and Azerbaijani resistance. Turkey's main motivations for this kind of "multidimensional" regional policy are to secure stability in the Southern Caucasus and improve its political influence there, mainly in order to support its energy policy schemes and to contain Russian attempts at recapturing its "lost territories" in the area.

All this should be achieved by Turkish attempts at implementing its "zero problems with neighbours"-policy also in the Caucasus. The limits of that approach have come to the fore in Ankara's most recent movements at reconciliation with Armenia. The so-called "football diplomacy" led to the signing of two protocols in October 2009 which were intended to open the Turkish-Armenian border, re-establish normal bilateral relations, and to sort out all existing differences between the two countries. (cf. Göksel, 2009) This switch in Turkey's policy towards Armenia was welcomed by the US and Russia alike (also by the EU) as an important contribution to foster security and stability in the Southern Caucasus.

From the very beginning, the protocols, however, met with fierce criticism from Turkey's nationalist circles with the main opposition party, the nationalist-Kemalist CHP, announcing to do everything to defeat their parliamentary passage in Turkey's National Assembly. This criticism was "congenially" met by the Armenian exile organizations and their supporters at home who both put enormous pressure on the government in Yerevan to refrain from any conciliatory move unless Turkey would have acknowledged the genocide first. More important, however, was the equally strong Azerbaijani opposition with Baku threatening to end energy cooperation with Ankara if the opening of borders would not be accompanied by Armenian concessions in the Karabakh conflict. Prime Minister Erdoğan and foreign minister Davutoğlu tried in vain to assuage the Azerbaijani leadership. Finally the Turkish government was forced to reiterate its formerly stated link between potential conciliation with Armenia and progress in the Karabakh conflict. This was rejected by Yerevan. When efforts of the Minsk Group to reduce the gap between Armenia's and Azerbaijani positions failed once again, a stalemate in Turkey's normalization efforts with Armenia was the consequence.

A, in Turkish eyes, somehow ambiguous wording in a ruling of the Armenian constitutional court of January 2010 with regard to the Armenian-Turkish border provided the AKP government with a welcome excuse to put the ratification process of the two protocols on hold until Armenia would have delivered the clarifications thought necessary by the Turkish government. Yerevan regarded this request as an unacceptable pre-condition for the protocols to come into force, and thus, the situation now seems to be in a dead end. In any case, Erdoğan and his government is, for the moment, relieved of the task to convince important groups at home and the Azerbaijani government of the necessity to agree to the envisaged Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. (cf. Zaman, 2010b)

The complicated development of events leads one to the conclusion that Ankara somehow underestimated the complexity and the difficulties that are connected with attempts at inducing changes of the regional situation in the Southern Caucasus. In any case, it is not that easy, as Davutoğlu may have thought, to apply a policy of "zero problems with neighbours" in a neighbourhood that is severely ridden by deep-going conflicts between various neighbours and where, at the same time, important extra-regional powers aim at gaining or expanding their influence in regional affairs. Under actual international circumstances this is even more so as the "energy element" has a prominent place in the "regional equation".

### *Eastern Mediterranean*

The AKP government has given up efforts at applying the Davutoğlu vision on its policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region. With regard to both, the Cyprus issue and relations with Greece, Ankara has fallen back to traditional Turkish policies of tit-for-tat. The deep-rooted

disappointment over the failed referendum about the Annan-Plan in April 2004 and the helpless reaction of the EU which became a victim of Greek-Cypriot intransigence after Cyprus' accession to the Union, led the Turkish government to stop any moves at a reconciliatory approach towards Nicosia. A maximum of Turkish-Cypriot "sovereignty" in a re-united Cypriot by-communal, bi-zonal federation, the continuation of Turkey's status as a guarantee power as established by the agreements of London and Zurich, and the ongoing stationing of Turkish military units in the North until a solution would have been found regained their status as indispensable elements of Turkey's approach. All these are unacceptable issues for the Greek-Cypriots who, in turn, also stuck to their "essentials" which aim at a de-facto Greek-Cypriot majority rule in a bi-zonal, bi-communal reunited federation, "essentials" that are unacceptable to the Turkish-Cypriots and the Turkish public alike. (cf. ICG, 2008; ICG, 2009)

In a very special reading of the "strategic depth" approach, the AKP's actual policy with regard to Cyprus could be seen as an attempt at emphasizing Turkey's "centrality" by downgrading the "zero problems" component. In any case, Ankara's actual policy with regard to the Cyprus issue is anything but pro-active; it is classical interest-driven realpolitik in the best "realist" tradition. The overall situation, at the moment, thus looks as if progressive momentum could only be brought about by external intervention which, however, is rather unlikely to happen.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, during his visit to Athens in May 2010, proposed to convene an international conference with the participation of the parties involved plus the UN and EU. This idea is far too vague to bring new momentum to the deadlocked situation. Unless prior movements by the parties on the island and by the Turkish government have been undertaken that would create a realistic expectation for a successful conclusion of such an international endeavour neither the UN nor the EU would be ready to engage itself in such an undertaking that was also rejected by Greek Cypriot president Christofias.

There is also little likelihood that the concurrent attempt of the European Commission at getting the EU Directive on "direct trade" with the North accepted by the Council of Ministers after a positive vote of the European Parliament would be able to create new momentum. The most likely reaction by an outvoted Greek Cypriot government would be a total blockade of Turkey's accession process as has been announced by Greek Cypriot foreign minister Kyprianou. Such a situation would rather tend to harden the existing stalemate on Cyprus than to further progress in the bi-communal talks.

Relations with Greece do not show any fundamental improvement either since the positive turn of Greece's approach toward its Aegean neighbour in 1999. (Ker-Lindsay, 2007) Both sides have got accustomed to the rather unproblematic status-quo situation of "Cold Peace" mainly created by the then foreign ministers Georgios Papandreou for the Greek side and İsmail Cem for the Turks. In a sense, the developments at the time could be seen as a forerunner



of AKP's "zero problems with neighbors"-policy. Since then, however, both sides have refrained from any bold moves at overcoming the *status quo* in the direction of a comprehensive solution of existing conflicts. (cf. Tsakonas, 2010; Anastasiou 2009)

On the surface, relations are going smoothly as long as both sides refrain from re-activating deeper running disagreements concerning the legal and political situation in the Aegean. The delimitation of the continental shelf, Greece's territorial waters, flight information competencies, and sovereignty over uninhabited islets remain on the backburner and the development of mutual trade and Greek tourism as well as a mutual public interest in reassuring the existing good climate in bilateral relations tend to dominate the governmental and public discourse. Repeated Greek allegations of aggressive behaviour of the Turkish air force over small Greek Aegean islands, Greek complaints about Turkish intransigence with regard to the re-opening of the Greek-Orthodox seminary on Hebeyliada (Halki) or concerning Turkish laxness in dealing with illegal immigrants who use the Turkish Aegean coast as a springboard to enter the EU via Greek islands are constantly met with Turkish assurances of co-operative endeavours.

As long as Turkey's accession process to the EU remains part of official policies of both parties, neither Greece nor Turkey is interested in disrupting the relatively easy-going *status quo*. This was stressed again in May 2010 when Prime Minister Erdoğan officially visited Athens accompanied by quite a number of cabinet members and a vast delegation from business circles. For the first time ever, both cabinets held a common session during which a bulk of bilateral agreements in the fields of economic, touristic, cultural, and technical cooperation were finalized. Furthermore, Turkey agreed to regularly take back a certain number of illegal immigrants to Greece who came there via Turkey.

If, however, assumptions that can be found in the scholarly literature about longer-term socialization effects of non-conflict behaviour and/or "Europeanization" triggering lasting change in bilateral relations are correct, remains to be seen. (cf. Papadopoulos, 2008; Tzimitras, 2008) The test will come when both sides will again have to address the underlying substantial disagreements in order to define their longer-term relationship either in case of Turkey's accession to the EU or in case of Turkey's definite non-membership. It is clear that in any case the development of the Cyprus issue will be an important intervening variable in determining the lasting future of Turkish-Greek relations. At the moment, it is, however, not discernible if there is a contribution of the "strategic depth" policy vision to that future at all.

“Strategic Depth”, with its great emphasis on the Ottoman period as a guide for contemporary Turkish foreign policy had also little influence on Turkey’s relations with the Balkans during the early years of AKP’s government. The Balkans that can be regarded as the heartland of the former Ottoman Empire and where millions of Turkish citizens claim to have family roots, did not receive much special attention beyond the usual business necessary for fulfilling Turkey’s role in the international endeavours aimed at restoring and keeping political stability and security in and among the states of the Western Balkans. Turkey, since the mid-1990s, thus contributed to allied troop contingents in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, later, in Kosovo and it participated in all regional political and other endeavours that aimed at fostering regional cooperation among the Balkan states and their neighbours such as the South East European Cooperation Process and the broader Black Sea Cooperation. There were, however, almost no special Turkish initiatives aimed at establishing or promoting bilateral relations to certain Balkan countries beyond supporting regional cooperation.

This low-level engagement is even more astonishing as Bosnia-Herzegovina seems to play an important role in shaping Ahmet Davutoğlu’s worldview in the post-Cold War era. For him, “the basic principles of international law have been defeated in Bosnia by a wanton pragmatism and by the medieval prejudices of Europe.” (Davutoğlu, 1998:101) This was for him the landmark of the defeat of the “New World Order” in the sense of an establishment of a “comprehensive civilisational dialogue” as the basis for creating “a globally legitimate international political order.” Consequently, the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina, for Davutoğlu, would become „a litmus test for the new power centres of the international system in the post-Cold War era.” (Davutoğlu, 1998:117f.) In this sense, Western policy in Bosnia could only be regarded as the “proof” of the degradation of the Islamic World to a second class status in world affairs and, indeed, this was how it was perceived by many a Turk not only by Davutoğlu.

However, since about two years, the Balkans has been included in Turkey’s high-level diplomacy regarding its regional neighbourhood. Diplomatic activities, including presidential visits to the region, have concentrated mainly on attempts at improving the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and on improving relations with Serbia. Besides this, Turkish activities aim at intensifying relations with Kosovo and Albania, too. A special issue of foreign minister Davutoğlu’s attention is the situation of Turkish and Muslim parts of the respective population in the region. Here, he tries to settle internal conflicts within these groups as well as to further non-problematic relations of these groups with the respective majority population in the various countries. Such activities, however, bear the risk of being interpreted by nationalist Slavs as Turkish attempts at restoring a zone of “Ottoman” influence at the cost of Slavs. Therefore, the declaration of the 24 April 2010 trilateral meeting in Istanbul of the presidents of Serbia

and Turkey, Boris Tadic and Abdullah Gül, and the president of the presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Haris Silajdzic, about their common intention to work towards “peace, prosperity and stability in the Balkans” was met with much resistance by the Serbian opposition and with open enmity by the representatives of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina. (cf. Helsinki Committee, 2010)

Such reactions show that the perception of Ottoman times among important parts of the Balkan people is still heavily influenced by the stereotype of the “Ottoman yoke” and the glorification of the national struggles for independence against the Ottomans. Such attitudes impair the possibilities of a policy of “strategic depth” toward the Balkans. The actual policy of the AKP toward the region shows all ingredients of that vision: historical, political and cultural heritage that is often emphasized especially by foreign minister Davutoğlu during his visits there, pro-active Turkish attempts at influencing the regional and international endeavours to stabilize the region by fostering good relations and cooperation among the regional states, inclusiveness of the approach toward the region, i.e., no preferential relations with one state at the cost of relations with any other regional state.

Besides that, there are also some more interest-driven motivations for Turkey’s Balkan policy. Stability and peace in the region is important for keeping open Turkey’s most important land route to the rest of Europe. Like all regional countries, Turkey, too, is an applicant/candidate for EU membership. Mutual support for reaching that goal seems to be more promising than a policy of competitive denial. With economic recovery slowly gaining ground, the region is becoming economically interesting for Turkish business, especially with regard to energy. All these are valid reasons beyond the vision of “strategic depth” for the AKP government to put a continuous emphasis on bilateral relations with the Balkan states.

## **Global Interests**

Although the vision of “strategic depth” is mainly concerned with Ottoman impacts on actual Turkish foreign policy it also clearly aims at improving Turkey’s international status in general. In Davutoğlu’s imagination, Turkey has to and is willing to become an important player at the international level, too. Therefore, the AKP undertook a wide-ranging international campaign to secure the country a seat in the UN Security Council for the period 2009/2010. (cf. Aral, 2009) Turkey also improved its activities within the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which now has a Turkish secretary-general. Ankara also succeeded in gaining the country a seat among the G-20 which is on its way to replace the G-8 as the most important informal international co-ordination mechanism. And Turkey was co-initiator with Spain of the Alliance of Civilization in 2005, which is an international forum under the auspices of the UN for the improvement of inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. (cf. Kılınç, 2009; Köse,

2009) All these developments widen the range of Turkish diplomatic activity and offer opportunities to present the country on the international scene.

They are accompanied by efforts at broadening the network of Turkish diplomatic relations, especially with regard to Africa south of the Sahara. Turkey established relations with the African Union, opened more than ten new embassies in African countries, and, being the first Turkish president ever, Abdullah Gül visited the continent. Besides this, Turkey hosted a Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit in Istanbul in August 2008. These activities are mainly aimed at the improvement of economic relations but also include activities in the cultural and educational fields. Turkish business organizations hold regular high level multinational forums with African countries and Turkey's development agency, TIKA, has expanded its activities in various African countries.

These developments are, however, overshadowed by the AKP's unrestricted solidarity with Sudanese president al-Bashir who is accused by the International Criminal Court of being responsible for genocidal activities against non-Muslim parts of Sudan's population in the region of Darfur. Prime Minister Erdoğan's remark that he did not believe in the international accusations because al-Bashir, being a Muslim, cannot commit genocide draw a lot of harsh domestic and international criticism. Many Western observers perceived this remark as another evidence of Erdoğan's pro-Islamistic attitudes.

In recent years, Turkey also increased its relations with India and especially China as the emerging power houses in Asia, mainly with the aim of exploiting the favourable economic auspices of these quickly emerging markets for Turkish businesses. Relations are, however, not quite unproblematic. The situation in the Chinese province of Xinjiang where the Uyghurs, a Turkic people living also in many Central-Asian Countries, are under heavy pressure from the Chinese central authorities who accuse them of separatism, causes frictions in Turkish-Chinese relations. Ankara, for domestic policy reasons, is forced to declare its solidarity with the Uyghurs. This, in turn, annoys Beijing that accuses Turkey of solidarity with "terrorists". Nevertheless, Ankara continues to show a great interest in improving relations with China.

Turkish-Indian relations have only rather recently got greater attention in Turkish political and business circles. They are, however, not quite unproblematic as Ankara has to balance its efforts for the improvement of Pakistani-Afghani relations with relations with New Delhi. For reasons of its regional geo-political interests, India is rather reluctant towards a policy of greater understanding between Kabul and Islamabad. The organization of trilateral meetings in Istanbul that brought together president Karsai and his Pakistani counterpart with president Gül in a mediating role was not really welcomed by Delhi. It was, however, another welcome possibility to demonstrate Turkey's potential for playing a certain role in consolidating the situation in Afghanistan. This potential is also underlined by the activities of Turkey in the

framework of the International Stabilization force on the ground in Afghanistan. Turkish troops have been the only ISAF contingent which has not run into military encounters with Islamist forces. This was, however, also due to the fact that Turkey does not send combat troops to Afghanistan.

Enhanced international activities as described have gained momentum during the second period in office of the AKP government. All this is, without doubt, facilitated by the vision of “strategic depth” although it is also a rational reaction to ongoing deep running changes of the international political and economic set-up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also without the new foreign policy vision, Turkey could have ignored all these developments only for the price of political and economic disadvantages. In a world where firmly organized political “blocks” tend to disappear or, at least, to become much less clearly defined, Turkey’s foreign policy can no longer be tightly bound to the “West”. This also has repercussions on Ankara’s relations with Europe, the region to which Turkey has established its closest political, economic and societal relationship and into which it still wants to politically and economically integrate itself fully.

## “Strategic depth” and integration into the European Union

As a consequence of Turkey’s new foreign policy under the AKP government, the country has changed its approach toward the EU accession process: Turkey has largely abolished the position of being a *demandeur* and a model pupil with regard to the compliance of EU conditionality which dominated the AKP government’s behaviour between November 2002 and December 2004. Instead, Turkey’s government today again perceives accession to the EU as a process between equals. Criticism of the EU’s behaviour toward candidate Turkey is growing – formulated in more diplomatic terms by the foreign minister and with a degree of brutal openness by Prime Minister Erdoğan. The EU is accused of distancing itself under the influence of Sarkozy’s France and Merkel’s Germany from the bases of the accession process as they have been commonly agreed in October 2005. In Turkish eyes, this is a clear violation of the internationally cherished principle of “*pacta sunt servanda*”, i.e., agreements have to be kept.

At the same time, sympathy for the EU and Turkish membership is considerably rescinding in the Turkish public. All this is happening, however, no longer with an attitude of self-pity but with a self-confident declaration that the EU will have to bear the consequences of its failed policy toward Turkey. The AKP government at least can visualize a great future for Turkey without being an EU member state – and declares this ever more often.

In this picture fits also very well that the AKP leadership has got accustomed to name the EU’s “Copenhagen Criteria” for the fulfilment of the EU conditionality the “Ankara Criteria”

that would guide the self-induced process of Turkey's democratization under AKP in order to change the country into a modern and politically potent state of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In doing so, the common task within the framework of the accession process is secretly changed into a national task: (self-defined) democratization is in any case necessary and profitable for Turkey's future even it is no longer directly related to EU accession.

Nevertheless, accession to the European Union is regarded by Davutoğlu and other leading AKP politicians as being fully compatible with the AKP's vision of Turkey's role in the world:

“These two visions, the vision of Europe and the vision of Turkey, do not contradict one another. On the contrary, these visions are entirely consistent and compatible with each other. If we realize our vision of Turkey, this will provide an important contribution to our vision of Europe.” (Davutoğlu, 2009a)

It is, however, no longer regarded as a “*sine qua non*,” that is, an indispensable part of Turkish politics because Turkey's identity is no longer defined exclusively as that of a “European country” but as a country that shares fundamental values with the EU as an important ingredient of its “strategic depth” and multiple identities. Furthermore, the new foreign policy entails no preferential relationship with any country or region.

One logical consequence of that conceptual approach would be that the accession process with the EU can still lead to eventual EU membership, if and insofar as such a move fits into Turkey's idea of “strategic depth” and contributes to stabilizing or enhancing its role as an international actor in its own right. Being stripped of its former ideational or identity-related meaning, EU membership could, in theory, also be replaced by another form of relationship between Turkey and the EU if such a form would better serve the new overall vision of Turkish foreign policy.

Under such conditions, the issue of compatibility between the EU member states' and Turkey's regional and/or international aspirations will be of crucial importance for the concrete shape of the EU-Turkey relationship. Given the fact that Turkey's and the EU's respective “strategic depth” only overlap to a certain extent and mostly differ in historic and cultural terms will require a process of constant accommodation between Ankara and the EU member states in attempting to follow a common foreign policy. In a more general way, the question arises if and how far the new Turkish foreign policy conception is at all compatible with the EU's lead-idea of a common foreign and security policy.

And, indeed, one analytical (and practical political) question that has to be raised in this respect is how the new Turkey-centred approach can be made compatible with the necessity to align or even subordinate national policies to the commonly shaped policies of an integrated political union such as the EU. Even in the field of foreign and international policy, the EU strives at establishing an “ever closer union,” that is, a Common Foreign and Security Policy

that is intended to be more than just a cooperative effort of sovereign nation-states. Such an approach, at first glance, seems hardly compatible with the new Turkish foreign policy doctrine of the AKP government.

One could, however, argue with some plausibility that the EU in its actual shape will never be able to reach that goal. This would, in turn, open a much wider room of manoeuvre for EU members to follow their own national foreign policy as long as it is not diametrically opposed to some vaguely defined common foreign policy guidelines. In this reading of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, a Turkish foreign policy of "strategic depth" would not run into many difficulties in order to remain compatible with the EU approach.

If Turkey's AKP leadership should be of that opinion, it would, however, somehow create a contradiction to its often repeated argument that the EU could only become a "global power" if it would admit Turkey among its members. (cf. Davutoğlu, 2009a) An EU that is but a loosely coordinated foreign policy union will hardly ever become a global power how many members it may have. For this to happen, a rather high degree of commonness in foreign policy would be necessary – with all the accompanying restrictions for the ability of its member states to still define and follow a national foreign policy in global affairs.

This leads to some critical questions, concerning the AKP's vision for Turkish foreign policy: What is the role and meaning of EU membership in the concept of "strategic depth"? In this respect Davutoğlu's and the AKP's reasoning seems to be somewhat contradictory: On the one hand, the vision of "strategic depth" excludes preferential relations with any other state or region but, on the other hand, "full integration with the EU is and will remain the priority ... (m)embership in the EU is Turkey's strategic choice ..." (Davutoğlu, 2009b:13) Does this mean that there are other priorities and strategic choices in Turkish foreign policy, too? Which ones? And, do they have a rank order? Or is the sentence quoted nothing but a meaningless political formula?

Another question that follows from the AKP's somewhat ambiguous formulation of the concrete meaning of the vision of "strategic depth" in the context of the EU accession process is: What kind of EU is at all compatible with that approach: an EU characterized by the implementation of the ideal of an "ever closer Union" or an EU characterized by a very special way of cooperation between sovereign nation-states? How much supranationalism is compatible with the idea of Turkey as represented by the concept of "strategic depth"?

Such questions would ask for a serious political soul searching by the AKP leadership with regard to its EU policy. It is conspicuous that these questions, up to now, never have been adequately addressed by Ahmet Davutoğlu or any other AKP leader in their discourse about EU-Turkey relations. Their image of the EU carefully avoids any broader dealing with issues of the institutional construction of the EU or with issues that refer to the *finalité* of the Union

in relations to political consequences that can be drawn from the concept of “strategic depth”. They seem content to speak about the EU in terms of a “sum of shared values” (Davutoğlu, 2009a) which, in the field of international relations, would logically mainly correspond with a “normative power” EU (cf. Tocci, 2008).

In a superficial view, this would harmonize well with the image of a Turkey that also concentrates on its so-called “soft power” attributes in its foreign policy as is the general self-perception of Ankara’s actual foreign behaviour shared by Turkey’s foreign policy elite. (cf. Phar, 2008; Çandar, 2009) Does harmonization, however, be enough to found a common foreign policy – and, thus, justify membership in the Union? Harmonization, at least, seems to indicate more of parallelism than of commonness – and parallels, as everybody knows, only meet in infinity.

In this respect, leading AKP politicians have recently made some interesting but also somehow contradictory remarks. President Abdullah Gül and the Chief Negotiator with the EU, Minister of State Egemen Bağış, (in a talk given to Turkish and German scholars and specialists in EU affairs) have underlined the great importance of the ongoing accession process for the continuation of Turkey’s domestic reform process toward a fully functioning modern democracy. Bağış, in this context, also stated that Turkey would not accept anything but full membership, declaring the offer of a “privileged partnership” as an insult to his country. Both, however, at the same time, declared also that a successful closure of accession negotiations may not lead to membership because, in the very end, Turkey might choose the “Norwegian way,” that is, refuse to enter the EU. (Le Figaro, 2009)

Gül and Bağış did not elaborate further what this remark meant in a broader political perspective. They, especially, left open the politically very important question of what, then, is the rationale behind the AKP’s up-to-now strict keeping to the goal of EU membership. Mostly stripped of its identity-related justifications, what are Turkey’s interests in becoming a fully integrated EU member state? How would such a membership affect the countries “strategic depth”? Could it lead to a significant lasting shift in the underlying components of that “strategic depth”?

Taken together, however, these statements could lead to the conclusion that, for Gül and Bağış, the accession process with its aim of membership is mainly an instrument for the improvement of Turkey’s political system and its stability but not an end in itself. If this view is correct, further questions arise: Why is Turkey not able to reform and stabilize its political system on its own? Why can the “anchor function” of the EU for Turkey’s democratization only be fulfilled by a process that aims at full membership, even if Turkey’s political leaders, at present, leave it open as to whether this would ever happen?



The argument that Turkey still needs the EU accession process as an “anchor” for the successful continuation of its domestic democratic reform process without which it will also have difficulties to follow through its new foreign policy agenda leads to various questions. It is based on the implicit assumption that the growing “EU-fatigue” among Turkey’s public would not negatively impact on an intense and broad revival of explicitly EU-inspired reform activities. However, as all analyses of Turkey’s accession process so far have convincingly shown, Turkish EU policy is mainly driven by utility-based considerations, i.e. a broad cost-benefit calculation with regard to eventual costs of Turkish compliance with EU’s conditionality of fully implementing the *acquis communautaire*. (cf. Schimmelfennig u.a., 2005:40-44)

But why should a growing part of the Turkish population accept the rising political and material costs of an intensified accession process if there is no firm belief in being adequately rewarded for such an undertaking. If “norm socialization” with EU concepts of minority rights, acceptance of societal pluralism, or freedom of religion in the general Turkish public remains as low as presently and the “logic of consequence” continues to drive Turkey’s adaptation to EU’s standards, norms, and values a revival of democratic reforms in Turkey strongly depends on a convincing increase of the EU’s credibility concerning Turkey’s eventual accession. This, however, is not in sight. (cf. Kramer, 2009)

Another question is, why Turkey is not able to improve its democratic reform process without outside incentives. What can the EU do that the Turks themselves cannot, if they would show a determined political will? In other words: What is the main reason for Turkey’s still insufficiently developed democratic standards – lacking foreign incentives or lack of own political will? The argument that national veto powers, i.e. the old established Kemalist state elites, are still in a position to block further decisive steps in the direction of more fundamental democratization is no longer convincing. After more than seven years of AKP government that brought considerable democratic reforms and social change a party that holds an absolute majority in parliament should be in a position to gather a broad popular consensus for more and more fundamental reforms. Thus, the relationship between the EU’s ability to further democratic reform as a consequence of its policy of conditionality and domestic requirements for this to happen in the case of Turkey needs a more thorough analysis.

Before this background, it is astonishingly that, under the AKP aegis and within AKP circles, the Turkish “EU debate” has kept its rigid “pro or con”-framing even in view of the successive disappointments about the EU’s behaviour in the accession process. Mirroring the equally unimaginative discussion in EU circles, the Turkish debate avoids seriously tackling the question of what could be the implications of not becoming an EU member as such an eventuality is no longer firmly excluded even by the AKP’s own new foreign policy standards.

## Conclusions

Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP government was mainly confronted with the same challenges that had also been faced by its predecessors. The response, however, was different because of a different ideational basis of its policy. The vision of "strategic depth" developed by today's Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutğlu abolished the prevailing domination of a "Western" orientation and the accompanying threat perception which tended to securitize relations with all "non-Western" neighbours. Under the new vision it was, therefore, easier for the AKP governments to approach the newly arising challenges in the regional neighbourhood as well as at the global level with a much more open mind. Thus, Turkey's government created more leeway for its responses to these challenges, i.e. it did not more or less instinctively tend to follow the "Western" line but, instead, sought to maximize the national interest by primarily looking at developments with a genuine Turkish view.

This new foreign policy approach was supported by important domestic political changes. Especially the American-led military intervention in Iraq; the American-inspired war on international terrorism after the events of "9/11" which actually took the form of a world-wide fight against militant Islamist terrorism as manifested in the war on al-Qaida; the ruthless military actions of Israel against Hizbullah and Hamas in southern Lebanon and the Gaza strip that did not effectively meet with "Western" condemnation; the "West's" continuous efforts at curbing Iran's "peaceful" nuclear program without even openly talking about Israel's status as a "hidden" nuclear power; plus the ever more clear intention of leading EU member states not to honour European commitments with regard to Turkey's process of accession to the EU – all this contributed to a fast growing disappointment in the Turkish public of the country's narrow relations with the West. (cf. German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2004ff.) General Muslim feelings of large parts of AKP's grass roots and sympathizers further added to that.

Furthermore, the almost total political bankruptcy experienced by Turkey's former political-centre elite in the general elections of November 2002, opened the political middle ground of the country to the AKP. Its policy of wide-ranging democratizing reforms in the running-up to the opening of accession negotiations with the EU in October 2005 helped a lot to consolidate this new domestic political situation. At the same time, critique on these reforms formulated by nationalist and orthodox Kemalist circles tended to further undermine the status of the "old elites" thus also consolidating the political position of the AKP and the basis for its new, primarily Turkey-centred foreign policy.

Another important factor is Turkey's economic development during the AKP's past years in power. The country experienced a marvellous economic upswing which, on the one hand, made it an attractive economic market partner for many countries in its neighbourhood and,

on the other hand, greatly improved the ability of Turkish business to growingly engage itself in international markets beyond its traditional economic partners in the West, especially in its regional neighbourhood. Although the characterization of Turkey's international role under the AKP as a "trading state" (cf. Kirişçi, 2009) seems to need a bit deeper analysis and clarification, there can be no doubt that economic considerations, or the interests of Turkey's leading business circles, including the newly-emerged Muslim business elite, are another driving force behind Turkey's "new" foreign policy.

It is before the background of and supported by these domestic developments that the AKP government could embark on implementing its policy of "strategic depth" towards the outside world. This new policy does not consist of an all-out change of Turkey's positions, behaviour, or affiliations. It is more of a realignment of established policies according to the principles set out by Ahmet Davutoğlu for the conduct of a contemporary Turkish foreign policy. None of the established relations have been scrapped but many have been re-evaluated and adapted according to newly-developed situations on the ground and/or newly-defined Turkish approaches and interests. In this view, the AKP's foreign policy is much more a policy of "visionary pragmatism" than of "visionary idealism".

The record of this policy, so far, is a rather mixed one. With regard to making Turkish foreign policy more pro-active and establish the country as a relevant actor on the regional and international scene, AKP governments, especially after Davutoğlu took over the office of foreign minister, have been quite successful. The same holds true for the broadening of Turkey's foreign policy outlook and interests beyond the "classic" orientation toward the "West".

It can be doubted, that these developments are really characterized by a turning-away from the "West" as some analysts suggest. On a first glance, however, one could, indeed, get the impression that relations with Muslim countries in the neighbourhood are flourishing while relations with Turkey's European and American allies and partners encounter a series of problems. One should, however, ask where the responsibility for such a development lies. As mentioned, Turkey's "Western" partners followed a policy toward Ankara or in the region that did much to estrange Turkey's public and new political elite alike. An EU the members of which would have unanimously and without any doubt stood by their commitments undergone at the beginning of accession negotiations would undoubtedly have prevented the severe deterioration of relations. In a similar manner, a U.S. administration that would have sent stronger and more believable signals to Ankara that it would respect Turkey's deep-going security concerns in its policy toward and in Iraq could have prevented such a deep fall of its standing in Turkish political circles. At present, Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbours may really be better than with its long-time "Western" partners but it would be flawed to attribute this situation solely to the change of Turkey's foreign policy vision or to the Islamic background of many Turkish foreign policy actors in the AKP.

As regards another of the main principles of the AKP's foreign policy of "strategic depth", a policy of zero conflict with neighbours, Turkey's balance, so far, is somewhat mixed. What stands out in this regard is the fundamental and seemingly lasting reconciliation with Syria as well as the considerable improvement of relations with all Iraqi power centres. The still pending question of the future of the city of Kirkuk as well as still unsettled issues of inner-Iraqi power-sharing, however, point to the high fragility of the status quo. A renewal of widespread inner-Iraqi fights would pose serious challenges for Ankara which may quickly come in a position to make choices between feuding parties. The positive development of relations with the immediate neighbours contrasts to a severe and lasting deterioration of relations with the former regional "strategic partner" Israel. As developments show, Israel is only interested in a Turkish partner that principally supports its position. If Ankara tends to deviate from this path, a zero problems-policy is no longer possible.

There is a remarkably improvement in relations with Russia and a certain effort at ameliorating relations with all Caucasian neighbours. Mainly based on economic considerations – securing an unhindered long-term energy provision – Turkey is engaged in a complicated balancing act between its own interest of a conflict-free and stable order in the Southern Caucasus on the one hand and, on the other hand, Russian interests in regional domination which are encountered by, sometimes ambiguous, American interests in opening the Southern Caucasus toward the "West". Furthermore, Ankara has to balance its policy with regard to conflicts in and between Caucasian states, not least the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, in which Turkey is perceived by many as a "natural" ally of Baku and in which Moscow and Washington also interfere with their own regional interests. Therefore, it does not come as surprise that the AKP's attempt of autumn 2009 at a fundamental reconciliation with Armenia ran on ground in this web of multi-fold diverging interests. The most positive effect, so far, of Turkey's initiative toward Yerevan, could, thus, be a further easing of Turkey's domestic tensions with regard to the "Armenian issue".

The Eastern Mediterranean is the one region in which Turkey did little to improve the overall situation. Especially with regard to the Cyprus problem, Ankara kept its policy on the established track after the Annan-Plan faltered in the Greek Cypriot referendum in April 2004 and the EU established the firm link between Turkey's accession process and the Cyprus problem by freezing six chapters of the accession agenda in December 2006. There was no serious effort from Ankara to reduce problems to zero. The same holds true for relations with neighbour Greece. Existing problems concerning territorial and status issues in the Aegean Sea have not been reduced to zero either but simply been put on the backburner by both sides. Rapprochement and détente between Ankara and Athens remain superficial as long as the Aegean conflicts remain unsolved.

The Aegean shadows notwithstanding, Turkey's AKP government has overall successfully managed to enhance the country's regional and international standing. Turkey is no longer regarded as a "difficult" neighbour by most of the regional states. Its various attempts at reducing regional tensions by offering its good offices as facilitator or mediator in conflicts among regional parties are taken seriously by the actors concerned. From an outsider in the region, the AKP government has changed Turkey's position to an almost fully accepted member of regional processes. It is this new – and seemingly lasting – role of Turkey which gives the country a new importance in international politics in Europe's immediate neighbourhood which can also not be neglected by the European Union and its member states, the rather unclear development of EU-Turkey relations notwithstanding.

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