



Prospects for Turkey

Ziya Meral



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkey has been going through subtle but substantial social, economic, and political changes since the late 1990s. This can be likened to metamorphosis. It has been fast transforming itself and moving to a new but open ended direction.

Although superficial readings of Turkey evolving into an Islamist state under the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) government have cooled down, current changes in its foreign policy have unleashed a new wave of arguments regarding the direction it is heading in.

This report seeks to demonstrate that this turbulent change process is key to further development of democracy in Turkey and Turkish adaptation to the realities of the 21st century.

Without an understanding of the context in which foreign policy decisions are made, it is impossible to draw inferences on the future of a country from particular policy decisions.

The key findings of this report include:

- More than any other political party in Turkey, the AKP represents the reality of Turkey; a country that wants to be an independent global actor with a flourishing democracy and economy, while also striving to maintain its values and culture.
- Eight years of AKP rule have not Islamised Turkey. The AKP has turned out to be one of the most pro-EU, pro-market economy, pro-human rights, and pro-democracy governments Turkey has ever had.
- The AKP's strong performance on economic and political issues has been tainted by intense clashes within the state structures and with opposition parties, and limited by the party's own failures in fulfilling its promises and handling opposition.
- Far from an inevitable point of contention, a proactive Turkey with a pragmatic foreign policy seeking to expand its economic and diplomatic ties in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central Asia has so much to offer not only to an unstable region but also for the US and EU.
- The outcome of the national elections in the summer of 2011, a possible large-scale Kurdish intifada, and potential fallout with key Western and Middle Eastern countries due to Turkish engagement with previously shunned states, are key challenges awaiting it.
- Turkey needs close support from the US and EU to enable a stable maturation, just as the US and EU need to keep Turkey as a close ally for their own economic and political interests.

CHAPTER I

CHANGING FACE OF TURKEY

For most foreign and domestic observers, the dynamics of a new Turkey became visible in 2002, when the newly found *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (the AKP or the AK Party) with roots in Islamism seized power within a year of its creation. This became one of the most pivotal moments in Turkish history and one that could not have been predicted.

Countless questions were asked and lively arguments were made on what was happening in Turkey and what this would mean for the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Eight years of unprecedented AKP majorities and immense tension in the country have provided enough material for such discussions.

This chapter argues that this turbulent process of change is key to further development of democracy in Turkey and to Turkish adaptation to the realities of the 21st century. An analysis of political changes in the country and Turkish politics under the AKP is followed by a deeper analysis of changes in Turkish society.

Political Evolution of Turkey

By the start of the Millennium, Turkey was at breaking point. Economic and political failures of the governing coalition were only worsened by the unashamed attempts of late Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's *Demokratik Sol Partisi* (DSP) to keep power, even when his health was dramatically deteriorating before the eyes of the public. Public tensions between the Prime Minister and the then President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer paralysed the country and eventually triggered an economic crisis in 2001.

As the economic situation in the country hit rock bottom with high inflation and unemployment rates, the coalition government was destined for failure. The last-minute employment of the US-based Turkish economist Kemal Derviş and International Monetary Fund (IMF) support saved the country from bankruptcy but did not prevent the government's eventual demise.

Although the situation gave a buzz to hopeful political parties who wished to seize the moment, something much deeper was going on in the country. Turkish society was changing and was disillusioned with all of the known political actors.

Rise of the AKP

The AKP was the brainchild of a group of young reformers who had increasingly outgrown the old school Islamism of the *Millî Görüş* and the *Refah Partisi* (RP) movements.¹ These reformers never spoke about feeble Islamist ideals of supra-national solidarity, such as an Islamic NATO, currency, or the re-establishment of a caliphate, unlike the orthodox Islamist movements from which they emerged. They were all too aware of the lofty nature of such visions and the fate of any political movement that makes them their main rally point.

Unlike the Islamists of the 20th century, they were not consumed with ideas of the Islamisation of states through adaptation of Islamic jurisprudence and religious structures. However, they were still conservative Muslims who wanted to see their moral values influence society and to address the grievances felt by dedicated Muslims. This was to be done by democratic reform, rather than by an authoritarian re-making of the country.

Their main focus was not a religious vision, like that of modern Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Their political outlook was truly secular and they were clearly comfortable with being both pious Muslims and partaking in neutral political and economic structures. They wanted exactly what Turkish society wanted: economic and democratic reforms.

Turkish society was in search of an option that would offer something new and it wanted a politics that addressed its worries and longings, not those of the rulers. Things had to change, but change had to be balanced, maintaining the values of mainstream society.

With the help of the right language focusing on economic reforms and EU accession, and with its humble origins and almost clean track record, the AKP's leadership surpassed that of any others, resulting in a phenomenal outcome in the 2002 elections.²

The AKP won about 34% of the votes, making it the first party to secure a majority since 1987 with 363 of the 550 seats in the Parliament. Only *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP) was able to pass the 10% barrier with 19.4% of votes, thus winning 178 seats in the Parliament. The remaining nine seats were shared by independent candidates. The Kurdish DEHAP, which was eventually closed down by the courts, was the only other party to increase its votes from 4.75% in 1999 to 6.23% in 2002.

The ruling coalition suffered the most, losing a combined total of some 39% compared to the 1999 elections. Bülent Ecevit's DSP, the most powerful of the ruling coalition, suffered the heaviest loss, going from 22% in 1999 to 1.22% in 2002. His coalition partner *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (MHP) lost more than 9% votes, but still maintained 8%. Islamist parties also suffered severe losses; *Fazilet Partisi* (FP) shrank to 2.48% from 15% in 1999, and the Islamo-nationalist *Büyük Birlik Partisi* (BBP) saw a further decline from 1.46% in 1999 to 1.02% in 2002.

The election turned out to be a political earthquake, causing the eventual demise of old parties and changes in party leaderships. As a newly formed party facing its first elections, the AKP was expected to win a substantial fraction of votes, but the 34% majority was not anticipated. This was an unprecedented victory, even in Kurdish and secularist cities.

1 For a detailed study of Islam and politics in Turkey see Çarköğlü, Ali & Rubin, Barry (2006), *Religion and Politics in Turkey*, NY: Routledge

2 For a full list of 2002 election results with an interactive map showing break down of votes in every city see NTVMSNBC's website. Note that this page is in Turkish; <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/modules/secim2007/secim2002/>

As will be made clear in the following section, the AKP emerged at a crucial moment in contemporary Turkish history and astutely shunned away from its old ways of thinking. As a result, it was able to ride the growing social and political tides in the country to its benefit. The AKP was not the 'maker' but only a 'reflector' of a Turkish society undergoing change.

The AKP appealed not only to Islamists, conservative Muslims, and mild nationalists, but also to the new economic classes of Anatolia, distinguished businessmen, and academics, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. It evoked an appetite for reform and change in the country. With its balance of conservatism along with pragmatism, entrepreneurialism, and commitment to EU accession, it has captured the status quo of Turkish society.

In other words, the AKP represented the common reality of Turkey, unlike the old ruling elite. The lack of a strong opposition party that had a similar appeal to the AKP meant a steady AKP rule, making Recep Tayyip Erdoğan the second longest ruling Prime Minister in Turkish history.

Who is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan?

Erdoğan was born in 1954 in Istanbul to a humble and pious family originally from Rize, northern Turkey.

Roots of his business pragmatism and religious outlook can be traced back to his school days. He received formal training at an imam-hatip high school. These state schools were originally intended only as male vocational schools in order to train religious personnel. Today the schools are co-ed and attract male and female students of conservative families and graduates are able to pursue non-religious degrees or careers. This was also the case for Erdoğan, who eventually read business administration for his undergraduate degree.

It was during his school years that Erdoğan started to show interest in politics and was active in the Islamic political scene. After a brief stint working in the private sector, Erdoğan returned to politics with the Islamist Welfare Party in 1983. He quickly climbed up party ranks, and between 1994 and 1998 served as the mayor of Istanbul. His time as mayor came to an end with a four-month prison sentence because of a poem he recited, which was seen as challenging the secular regime by the courts.

His sentencing increased Erdoğan's popularity across the country and he fast became a leading figure among the young reformers in the Welfare Party ranks, which eventually led to the founding of AKP.

Erdoğan is known for his love of football and poetry. Although he is widely perceived as sincere, warm, and friendly, his emotional temperament often leads to angry outbursts and undiplomatic declarations. He has a low threshold for criticism and regularly opens court cases against his critics, political cartoonists, and satirists.

Figure 1 Key Turkish Political Parties

<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>	Justice and Development Party	AKP
<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>	Republican People's Party	CHP
<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>	Nationalist Movement Party	MHP
<i>Demokratik Sol Partisi</i>	Democratic Left Party	DSP
<i>Baş ve Demokrasi Partisi</i>	Peace and Democracy Party	BDP
<i>Saadet Partisi</i>	Felicity Party	SP
<i>Büyük Birlik Partisi</i>	Great Union Party	BBP

The AKP's Performance

In 2002, the AKP as a party had no direct track record. Unlike other parties, it was not burdened with the failures of the past, except with its roots in Islamist movements and the Refah Party. The results of the 2002 election showed that the party was given the benefit of the doubt by the Turkish public. After eight years in office, there is enough data to assess the AKP's performance and how it has shaped the country.

Economy

Turkish society's number one concern has always been the economy, not the artificial political debates such as the alleged tension between Islam and laicism. This has especially been the case since the 2000 economic crisis.

Owing to a substantial emergency funding package from the IMF, the 2000 crisis showed early signs of recovery. However, economic prospects were shattered in 2001 by a public row between the then President, Ahmet Sezer, and Bülent Ecevit. The dispute caused a massive overnight increase in interest rates and scared investors and creditors alike, almost causing a nearly 50% devaluation of the Turkish lira, with devastating outcomes for large sections of the society.

The AKP did not have its own coherent economic agenda when it came to power in 2003 and its inexperienced policymakers were widely criticised as they were following the legacy of Kemal Derviş who had substantial experience in international and macro finance. Following some initial tensions with the IMF, the AKP eventually adopted a conciliatory attitude and sought to follow the recovery plans set in place by the previous government and the IMF.³

A key AKP success was attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to the country

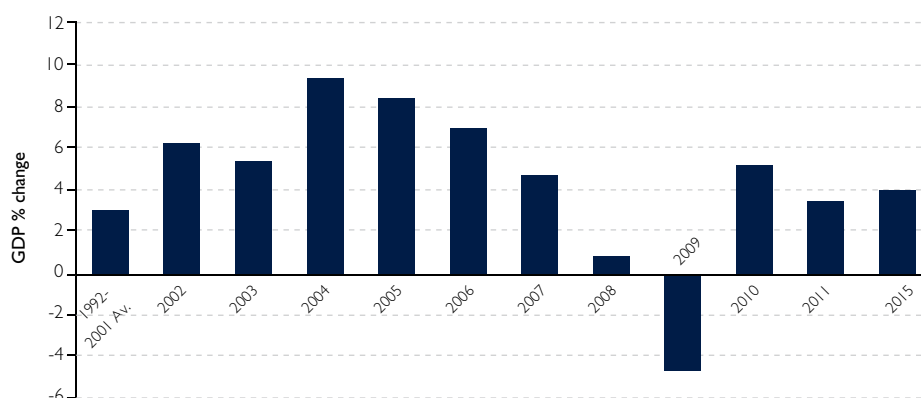
While trying to implement reforms suggested by the IMF, develop its own economic policies, and align Turkish legislation and structures with the EU accession criteria, the AKP also had to battle against state and political structures set to reject AKP initiatives. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer vetoed a record-breaking number of laws brought before him, all due to the fear that these reforms were part of a sinister AKP agenda. For example, the President vetoed legislative changes that would enable foreigners to buy real estate in the country, arguing that it undermined national security and integrity.

³ For a detailed account of AKP-IMF relations see; Marcie J. Patton, "The Economic Policies of Turkey's AKP Government: Rabbits from a Hat?", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Summer, 2006), pp. 513-536; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4330284?seq=21>

However, the AKP's strong majority in Parliament and the support from society enabled it to pursue reforms and take proactive steps to enhance the economy. A key AKP success was attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to the country. FDI went from less than \$2 billion in the first few years of the 21st century to \$20 billion in 2006.⁴

In fact, 2003-2006 saw an exhilarating recovery of the Turkish economy. The IMF recorded a steady growth of the economy of 6.2% in 2002 and 6.9% in 2006, with a peak of 9.4% in 2004. The significance of these numbers becomes clearer when they are compared to the average of 3.0% from 1992 to 2001.⁵ However, IMF records also showed a remarkable slowdown from 2006 and onwards, to 4.7% in 2007, 0.7% in 2008 and to -4.7% in 2009.

IMF Turkey Real GDP Forecasts



Source: IMF

This drop had both international and domestic causes. Externally, the global economic crisis created inevitable blows to the previously enjoyed inflow of FDI and to the volume of borrowing and trade. During that time, there was also serious political instability in the country, including the possible closure of the AKP by the Turkish courts. This caused investors and creditors to be increasingly anxious in the already present global context of insecurity.

However, as the IMF stated in its April 2010 World Economic Outlook report, Turkey recovered from the initial external shock and is projected to rebound more strongly. Owing to Turkish banking regulations and low exposure to mortgage-based securities, Turkey did not see a single bank collapse. Currently, the IMF forecasts a 5.2% growth of economy in 2010, which is higher than the 3.5% estimates of the Turkish government and the earlier 3.7% estimates of the IMF. However, it also forecasts a decline in growth to 3.4% in 2011, but a return to growth with 4.0% in 2015. International credit ranking agencies have upgraded Turkey's ranking in 2010.

4 Meral Varis Kiefer, "Turkey's Economic Future and the AKP", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 3 May 2007; <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2596>

5 *World Economic Outlook – April 2010*, IMF; <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/01/pdf/text.pdf>

The AKP remains committed to economic reforms and maintains suitable policies in changing domestic and international circumstances. The increases in Turkish account and trade deficits in 2009 and 2010 have been handled effectively and the immediate future of the Turkish economy looks promising. All forecasts see a climb in the Turkish position amongst the G20 countries.

Although the Turkish economy has been recovering under the AKP since its debt crisis early in the century, the economy continues to be the most dominant concern of Turkish society. In its 2010 poll, the International Republican Institute found that 85% of respondents believe that the most urgent problem facing Turkey today is unemployment. A further 16% referred to poverty, and 14% to inflation. The concern over unemployment, poverty, and inflation accounts for the salience of economic issues in people's minds. This is no surprise given that the unemployment rate is higher than 13%, even though the official statistics recorded a steady drop in rates in 2010.⁶ Other problems raised by the respondents were terror (46%), the Kurdish problem (10%), and education (3%).⁷

This highlights the very reason why the AKP is under pressure to enhance the Turkish economy both domestically and in its foreign engagement. The AKP's electoral successes thus far are primarily due to its economic successes and to the unwillingness of opposition parties to talk about the economy - or to offer a better economic policy.

Democracy

In addition to economic progress, a key appeal of the AKP for Turkish society has been in its promises for democratisation and protection of human rights. Large sections of Turkish society have been boldly demanding increased accountability of the state and of its military and security apparatus since the late 1990s.

The core of this demand is a change in the paradigm that has been running the country for the last 80 years. This paradigm is one in which the state has seen itself to be 'for the people in spite of the people' - a motto coined in the 1930s. The state, in other words, was constructed as an authoritarian body that already knew what was right for the nation.

The AKP's rule started with early signs of meeting this demand. The party's initial focus on the EU came automatically with a series of legal reforms and, more importantly, of efforts to change state policies, tame the police force, and engage with minorities. State policies have always been the main cause of human rights abuses in the country, even though Turkey has been quick to ratify the key United Nations human rights covenants, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and has also been a party to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The AKP desperately needed democratic reforms in order to survive, not only by simply maintaining its constituency but also by protecting itself from the anti-AKP state structures. It had to fight enormous political and legislative battles to be able to crown Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Prime Minister, while Abdullah Gül kept the post warm. It needed

6 "İşsizlikte umut!", *Radikal*, 16 July 2010; <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=1008344&Date=16.07.2010&CategoryID=80>

7 *Turkish Public Opinion Survey; May 8-16 2010*, International Republican Institute; [http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2010%20July%2012%20Survey%20of%20Turkish%20Public%20Opinion,%20May%208-16,%202010\(1\).pdf](http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2010%20July%2012%20Survey%20of%20Turkish%20Public%20Opinion,%20May%208-16,%202010(1).pdf)

democracy to elect Gül as the President and to be able to keep its doors open in the face of legal attempts to close the party.

Who is Abdullah Gül?

Gül was born in 1950 in Kayseri to a respected family, headed by his pious father, a retired mechanic.

Gül was involved with various Islamic political movements throughout his education. His undergraduate degree was in economics and in 1983; he completed a PhD in the same field. He spent two years in the UK researching for his PhD. Between 1983-2001, he worked at the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia.

He started his political career as an MP for Kayseri in 2001 with the Welfare Party where he held his seat till 2007, at which stage he became the 11th President of the Republic of Turkey. He was one of the founders of the AKP and till his appointment as the President; he held various key positions, including a brief stint as the Prime Minister and a term as the Foreign Minister.

He is widely respected in Turkey across all party lines as a wise, moderate, pragmatic, and sincere statesman. He is also recognised internationally as a sophisticated, friendly, and balanced diplomat. He has received numerous honorary degrees and awards from universities, states, and organisations around the world.

The fact that there was a single majority government in power with an inherent antipathy for the status quo of the Turkish state and a desire to become a part of the EU have emboldened and enabled intellectuals, as well as media and civil society groups. In the process, all of the taboo subjects, such as the Kurdish problem, the Armenian massacres of 1915, or criticising the armed forces and judiciary system, have become topics of intense public debate. This in itself is a sign of a maturing Turkish democracy.

However, from 2005 onwards, a combination of factors has suffocated much of the excitement from the period between 2002 and 2004. The immense political tensions in the country between the AKP and the old political and judicial elite, created a chaotic process. The use of Turkish law for political purposes to regularly stifle Turkish intellectuals challenging the state, the death threats and the accusations of betrayal of the Turkish nation so freely thrown around, caused the period between 2005 and 2008 to look like a return of Turkey before the 1980 coup. This was not helped by the AKP's inability to handle the sensitive issue of headscarves in the country in a conciliatory way.

The social and political tensions have eased following the 2007 elections and the AKP's acquittal from a closure case brought against it. Unfortunately, as Turkish society finally relaxed and anticipated things quietening, the AKP's renewed power intoxication caused serious damage to its image as a party committed to democracy. Whether it was the extremely harsh tone adopted by PM Erdoğan against anyone who criticised the AKP, a court case against intellectuals, the use of the taxman to punish unfriendly media patrons, or

the fresh come back of police and local authority aggression in the country in line with the AKP's agendas and networks, the AKP has returned to old Turkish political ways.

After the not-so-successful outcome of the 2009 elections, the AKP sought to pick up its EU drive and refresh its initiatives on key problems of Turkish democracy, minorities, and the constitution of the country.

On the issue of minorities, the AKP launched two key initiatives to address the problems faced by Alevis - an ethno-religious minority group - and the aptly named 'Kurdish problem'. The AKP has been speculating with reforms on these issues ever since 2002. The party took significant risks in allowing the use of Kurdish in broadcasting and private teaching institutions.

In 2007, the AKP started an 'Alevi opening', in the form of a long series of meetings, consultations, and working groups.⁸ However, the initiative has not bore any real fruit and the official stand of the Turkish state continues to enforce a single interpretation of Islam as well as to deny Alevis their right to define their own religion and have their meeting places, called *cemevi*, registered as official places of worship. It is only after a recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights, that children of Alevi parents have been able to opt out of compulsory Islamic religious education, which teaches only the state approved Hanefi creed, a mainstream branch of Sunni Islam.

If the outcome of the Alevi openings has caused disappointment, the failure of the Kurdish initiative has certainly been detrimental for Turkey. The AKP's silence over the closure of the Kurdish party DTP, arrests of hundreds of Kurdish local politicians, and harsh prison sentences given to juvenile Kurds who joined demonstrations has caused substantial damage to the party's popularity among Kurds. These have overshadowed all of the steps the AKP has taken on the topic thus far.

A substantial portion of Kurds in Turkey are younger than 18 years old, and unemployment among Kurds is much higher than the national average. 30 years of armed conflict have taught the current generation of Kurdish politicians and adults that violence is ultimately not the solution and that Kurds have to raise their concerns within democratic structures. The youth has no experience of living under the State of Emergency (referred to as OHAL in Turkish), which the Turkish state enforced in Kurdish populated Eastern Turkey between 1987 and 2002 due to increasing armed clashes with the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (PKK). The OHAL and the cycles of violence between security forces and Kurdish guerrillas led to gross human rights violations in the region. The lack of personal experience of how armed conflict escalates the problems makes attractive for the disillusioned youth to join the ranks of the PKK.

This has provided the fading PKK a boost in recruitment and a powerful argument that the Turkish state cannot be trusted to democratically solve the Kurds' problems. In fact, the PKK had every reason to argue so. Ex-PKK fighters, who trusted the AKP's promise of amnesty if they were to return to Turkey and leave their weapons behind, were arrested and taken to courts. It was therefore no surprise that 2010 has seen fresh attacks by the PKK on civilian and military targets, breaking the de facto cease-fire which was in place since 1999.

⁸ For a detailed study, see Talha Kose, "Alevi opening and the democratization initiative in Turkey", *SETA Policy Report*, No.3, March 2010; <http://www.setav.org/Ups/dosya/28899.pdf>

Although the AKP has often tried to do something about minority issues, it has limited itself to symbolic achievements rather than real solutions to the problems.

On the constitution reform front, the AKP finally brought a series of proposed changes to the Turkish Parliament in 2010. This has caused intense debates at Parliament due to the refusal of opposition parties to change the undemocratic aspects of the military and state-friendly constitution of 1982. Although all of the proposed changes are democratic and palatable to the EU, opposition parties have sought to use the process as a pre-election build-up against the AKP. Eventually, a milder reform package has been finalised and the public will vote on the proposed changes in a referendum in September 2010.

Although this in itself is a major development, critics rightly point out that the changes do not go deep enough. Turkish Constitutional Court has already blocked amendments to reform Turkish judicial structures, even though the constitution itself does not allow the court to assess the content of the proposed reforms. Ironically, the court has demonstrated why the reforms are vital to strengthen the rule of law in the country.

Human Rights

The return of armed conflict with the PKK has signalled that although domestic and international attention on the country focuses on economy, foreign policy, and power plays in the country, a host of serious human rights concerns remain unchanged.

The European Court of Human Rights stated that in terms of pending applications as of January 2010, Turkey has had the second highest number of complaints lodged. This echoes a common trend in the Turkish track record at the court. According to the data on violation judgments by country for the period between 1959 and 2009, Turkey topped the chart with 18.81% of all violation judgments, followed by Italy with 16.57%, and Russia with 6.34%. Within this time frame, 2,295 judgments were entered for Turkey and in only 46 cases did the court find no violations.⁹

Physical and psychological torture and arbitrary and disproportional use of force still continue, especially in Eastern Turkey. In a report released in 2010 by the Human Rights Foundations of Turkey (TIHVP), a Turkish NGO that provides help for torture victims, it was disclosed that 264 individuals reported torture and gross mistreatment in 2009, compared to 310 in 2006 and 258 in 2008.¹⁰

A survey of treatments of the 406 recent torture victims reported by TIHVP shows a long list of torture techniques currently in use by the police and Gendarme forces. These include severe beating, mock executions, death threats, exposure to cold, chemical materials, pressured water, denial of food and water, sleep deprivation, incommunicado and solitary detention, and pulling of facial hair. While the number of mistreatment and torture cases is still substantial, under the AKP administration, there has been a substantial improvement on the police compliance with human rights standards.

The European Court of Human Rights stated that in terms of pending applications as of January 2010, Turkey has had the second highest number of complaints lodged

⁹ "Turkey is worst human rights violator; ECtHR says"; Today's Zaman, 29 January 2010 <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-199996-turkey-is-worst-human-rights-violator-ecthr-says.html>

¹⁰ "Hani işkence bitmişti!"; Radikal, 15 July 2010; <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=1008159&Date=15.07.2010&CategoryID=77>

Currently, Turkey has about one million internally displaced persons, mostly Kurds relocated to various parts of the country, either as a result of direct state pressure or escape from armed conflict.¹¹

The number of non-Muslims has declined to less than 80,000 from millions within 70 years. From 2005 until now, the country has witnessed a wave of attacks on non-Muslims; killing priests, journalists, laymen, and workers of non-Muslim organisations. Most non-Muslims in the country continue to fear for their personal safety and future of their communities. They continue to be banned from employment by the state and are not represented politically.¹²

The AKP has inherited all of these problems and there is no evidence to claim that the situation has worsened under the AKP. We can in fact state that Turkey is more democratic and more respectful to human rights in 2010 than it was in 2002, whether through its legislative alignment with the EU or through its strengthening of independent civil society and independent media. Yet, Turkey still has inherent problems with its minorities and Turkish democracy still has a long way to go on its road to maturation.

AKP's demons

The mixed bag of the AKP's successes and failures also includes a list of concerns regularly raised by the public or by critical media outlets. While some of these concerns reflect actual problems with the party's performance or attitude, some are caused by the party's failure to communicate its decisions effectively and some are simply exaggerated by opposition groups. The most common failures attributed to the AKP are detailed below.

Tayyip Erdoğan: The PM's style, his humble background and piety mixed with his entrepreneurial spirit appeals to a significant portion of the public. However, there have been concerns regarding the effects that power and influence have had on him, as his temperament and bravado often leads him to impulsive outbursts, disproportionate responses, a loss of close allies, and an unwillingness to listen and negotiate.

Institutionalisation: The AKP, just like any other Turkish political party, has actively placed its supporters and members throughout the civil service and critical sectors, as well as various institutions. This continues to cause concern amidst the secularist and nationalist circles. However, nepotism has always been a key element in Turkish politics, and the claims of an 'Islamist take over' of Turkish state structures remain to be based on weak anecdotal evidence.

Links with Islamic sects and Islamist movements: The AKP remains to be supported and warmly perceived by various pious groups, and leaders of these groups are often seen meeting with the AKP officials. The most significant of these groups is the Gülen movement, which has publicly backed the AKP on numerous occasions. It is a positive indication that most of these groups back the modernising AKP rather than the more classic Islamist parties, such as the Saadet Partisi (SP) and religio-nationalist Büyük Birlik Partisi (BBP). Nevertheless, their influence and control over the AKP remains questionable.

¹¹ *Country Operations Profile- Turkey, 2010*, UNHCR; <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>

¹² For further information on non-Muslim minorities in Turkey see *International Religious Freedom Report 2009- Turkey*, US Department of State, 26 October 2009; <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/130299.htm>

Control over business and media: There are worries over a strong AKP reaction towards major businesses and wealthy families in Turkey. A recent clash with the Doğan group, which owns one of the major media corporations in the country, and its hefty punishment through the 'taxman' has caused concern and fear within the business world. Local and nation-wide domestic businesses often express anxiety over how government contracts and permissions are given, and how secularist or non-AKP businesses are pressured or subjected to arbitrary regulations.

Half-hearted commitment to democracy: Although the AKP has demonstrated extraordinary performance on democratic reforms and alignment of Turkey with EU standards, it has often not gone far enough. For example, although it has been the boldest government in curbing military involvement in politics and changing the military-friendly constitution of 1982, it has not removed key blocks to democracy, such as the 10% threshold that prevents minority parties from entering the Turkish Parliament. Similarly, the AKP has taken ground-breaking steps towards ethnic and religious pluralism and addressing the problems of minorities. However, it has not gone far enough to ensure that they are not discriminated against or living in fear, or that they play an active role in state structures and public life.

Messiah complex: Although the AKP has addressed almost all of the social taboos in the country, such as the Kurdish problem, the treatment of non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim minorities, and the headscarf ban, it has always done so with an exclusivist attitude and without a willingness to unite opposing voices or directly engage with those communities. For example, the AKP did not substantially engage with Kurdish politicians and significant actors in its move to 'solve' the Kurdish problem.

The gap between elites and local executors: The AKP's leadership often reflects a democratic and pluralistic attitude towards minorities and a friendly face to the world. While the party leadership is almost exclusively made of pious and conservative members, they are frequently able to separate their own religious and cultural views from their positions and the rest of the society. However, this is not the case at the grassroots level; especially in municipalities run by the AKP outside of the major cities of the country. There have been reports of intimidation of non-practicing Muslims and their businesses, such as restaurants and shops that sell alcohol.

Start of AKP's decline?

Concerns about the AKP cannot override the note-worthy achievements of the party thus far. However, similar to the second law of thermodynamics, every political movement inevitably reaches the point of stagnation. This has also proven to be true for the AKP.

Although the party went from a substantial victory in the 2002 elections to a record-breaking victory in 2007, the outcome of the 2009 local elections served as a wake-up call for the party. Although they still won the majority of votes by 39%, this signaled an 8% drop in votes compared to the 2007 elections.¹³

¹³ For a detailed analysis of 2009 local elections see; Ali Çarkoğlu, "Turkey's Local Elections of 2009: Results, Trends and the Future", *SETA Policy Brief*, May 2009, No. 1; http://setadc.org/pdfs/SETA_Policy_Report_1_Turkeys_Local_Elections_of_2009.pdf

The election also showed a steady increase in votes for other parties. Combined votes of the MHP and CHP surpassed those of the AKP. The Islamist Saadet Party and the now closed Kurdish DTP, gained significant levels of new votes. One of the most worrying drops was the AKP's vote in Kayseri, which went from 72% in 2007 to 60% in 2009. This 12% loss was a major concern, since the city had been an AKP strong-hold and a rising centre of Anatolian commerce, which was key for the AKP's successes.

The drop in votes suggests that although the AKP maintained a core constituency, swing voters were opting for other parties which reflected more hard-line solutions to their concerns, whether it be more Islamist, nationalist, or Kurdish. This showed the public's disillusionment with the AKP and its ever reforming image.

AKP's promises of EU accession left the country high and dry, as did their poorly planned and executed attempts to address the deep political problems within the country, such as the headscarf ban

For so many reasons, the outcome of the 2009 elections was not a surprise. During 2007 and 2008, the AKP leadership adopted an aggressive tone, which was due in part to the outcome of the 2007 elections and the inability of the Kemalist elites to oust the AKP with public demonstrations and a feeble closure case. At that conjecture, PM Erdoğan acted unilaterally and autocratically to the point of alienating his own close ranks. Erdoğan's Putin-like power reflexes included pressure on the media and punishment of those that were critical of the AKP.

Society also noticed an unprecedented wealth of the new elite of Turkey, while the country's unemployment rate was high. Businessmen, small time merchants, and shop owners reported nepotism in business deals and obtaining various government permits, along with pressure to align themselves with the party - or perish. This perception became all the more problematic with PM Erdoğan's regular statements that the global economic recession had bypassed Turkey, although the record-high unemployment and the increasing cost of living caused the public to think the opposite.

The AKP's promises of EU accession left the country high and dry, as did their poorly planned and executed attempts to address the deep political problems within the country, such as the headscarf ban. The AKP was fast becoming just like the parties that the Turkish public shook off in 2002.

Votes could no longer be taken for granted in a society that showed an increasing pattern of non-ideological and rational voting for parties which can offer solutions. The AKP either had to renew its momentum for change in order to maintain its image, or to witness a steady decline in its votes, which would weaken its power relative to unfriendly state structures and opposition parties.

By shuffling the cabinet following the 2009 elections, the AKP did what every government around the world does when it wants to give an impression of change. In addition to key changes in finance and foreign policy, it sought to gain public support by increasing efforts to access the EU, taking bold foreign policy steps to enhance the economy, and give a sense of national pride. It also took promising initiatives toward the never-ending Kurdish and Alevi issues, and held numerous small friendly meetings with artists, journalists, and politicians.

As mentioned, both the Kurdish and Alevi initiatives did not produce any tangible outcomes and caused serious damage to the AKP's appeal. Even though the current polls

suggest a varying popularity rating for the AKP and there are ambitious claims that the summer 2011 national elections might see the end of an unbroken AKP rule, the party is far from disappearing or losing its power.

Who is Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu?

Kılıçdaroğlu was born in 1948 in Tunceli to a family of seven children with Alevi and Kurdish origins.

He graduated from Gazi University in Ankara in 1981, where he read economics. During his student days he was involved with leftist and socialist political groups. Upon graduation, he entered civil service and spent a year in France on duty. He had an illustrious career in the ministry of finance and the social security administration.

In 1999, Kılıçdaroğlu retired from civil service to enter politics with the *Demokratik Sol Parti* (DSP) - the Democratic Left Party, but was not offered a seat by the party. Following a stint as a lecturer and board member of a private bank, Kılıçdaroğlu was invited to join the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP) – the Republican People's Party. He won a seat as an MP for Istanbul in 2002 and kept it in the 2007 elections.

In 2009, he ran for Mayor of Istanbul. Although he lost the election to an AKP candidate by a slight margin, the CHP's votes witnessed a record increase. Kılıçdaroğlu has benefited tremendously from his humble family background and from framing his campaign around pronounced corruption accusations against the AKP.

He emerged as CHP's new leader in May 2010, when Deniz Baykal had to leave office because of a sex-tape scandal. Although Kılıçdaroğlu has not yet lived up to the expectations of a radical reformation of the CHP, the change in leadership has boosted CHP's votes.

Despite concerns over the AKP's nepotism towards the loyal segments of the business world, the business community is generally happy about Turkish economic performance and the AKP's pragmatic attitude on trade and investment issues. Much of the AKP's conservative constituency dislikes PM Erdoğan's angry outbursts, since it is believed that a pious man should not act irately. Nevertheless, his verbal duels with Israel and his strong stand on the June 2010 flotilla crisis provided a boost for the AKP's appeal with conservative Muslim cohorts.

Though the old secularist elite is disturbed by Turkey's rapprochement with previously shunned Middle Eastern countries, a majority of Turks are proud of the independent stand shown by the AKP and the Turkish clout shown in the region and beyond.

However, more than all of this, there is still no viable opposition able to appeal to the larger segments of society in the way that the AKP is able to. Even though the recent abrupt change of the CHP's leadership has raised hopes, it has not increased its popularity enough to be able to oust the AKP.

It was anticipated that the CHP's new leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was going to change the party's old way of thinking by adopting a more reform-minded and progressive outlook along with a sense of defending the secular nation. So far, he has only echoed the party's old policies. The old policies and discourse used by the former leader of the party, Deniz Baykal, was the very reason why the party never assumed power under his leadership.

The CHP and other political parties seem to be set in a pre-2002 modus operandi in the hope that the same rhetoric will work in outing the AKP in 2011.

Social Evolution of Turkey

Islamists versus Secularists?

The AKP's ground breaking victory has posed major questions about the future of Turkey. Western commentators read the developments through the 'Islamists versus the Free World' lens due to their own domestic concerns regarding militant Islamism. Domestic demonstrations against the AKP seemed to prove the same point. Millions of Turks marched throughout major cities, carrying Turkish flags and pictures of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, chanting 'Turkey is laic and will remain laic'. Although the international media closely reported the turbulent political storms in Turkey, there were strong signals all along that the major political and social changes in Turkey were not about Islam and democracy.

During one of the most crowded marches against the AKP, which was organised in Izmir - a CHP stronghold - TV cameras focused on a woman in her late forties who was wearing a traditional headscarf and carrying a picture of Atatürk. The anchorwoman sarcastically asked why the elderly woman joined the march and whether she was worried about Turkey's future. The elderly woman, with full enthusiasm, declared that she was there to defend the Turkish nation and Atatürk's legacy, and said 'Turkey is laic, and will remain laic, Inshallah [God willing]'.

Although her apparent naivety in evoking God's providence to help maintain a secular country was a point of ridicule for some staunch secularist Turkish commentators, it reflected the descriptive reality of religion in Turkey. A Muslim woman had no problem with being a Muslim and wanting to live in a secular state. In fact, her participation at a public protest reflected her belief in democracy, which gives the individual the right to personally express their political opinion.

It was a substantial lack of domestic knowledge or prejudices that caused, and still causes, foreign commentators to read their own concerns into Turkey, rather than allowing the reality of the nation to lead them to see contemporary Turkey as it is. That is why without an understanding of the place of Islam, and its political expression within the country, an analysis of the AKP and the ongoing transformations in Turkey is troublesome.

The Anatomy of Turkish Islam

The religious topography of Turkey is dominated by Islam with 99% of Turks referring to themselves as Muslims, a majority of whom are Sunnis. Although it is a fully secular country in its law, state, and political structures, secularism in Turkey means state-control and monopoly of religion. The Turkish state, via its education system and Religious Affairs Directorate, enforces a particular interpretation of Islam.

Due to cultural, historical, and geo-political reasons, Islam has been filtered through a unique Turkish lens for most Turks. It differs dramatically from its Middle Eastern and Asian counterparts in its social, political, and religious attitudes. Although different versions of political Islam have shown themselves in Turkish politics, Turkish Islam has proven to be largely immune to radicalisation and militant jihad.

The dynamic relationship of Islam, cultural conservatism, and political activism in Turkey can be grouped into three categories: the dominant majority, significant minority, and marginal minority.¹⁴

The dominant majority can also be referred to as traditional or conservative. For the vast majority of Muslims in Turkey, Islam is an element of what it means to be a Turk and is the framework of conservatism. Religion is a personal manner, not a demand for a religion based society. That is why the majority of Muslims in Turkey show a lack of support for Islamism, terror, and the implementation of Shari'a law.

The significant minority could also be called the devoted or politically active to impact society with Islamic ideals. Although an exact ratio is difficult to ascertain, this group forms around 30% of Muslims and has a broad range of differing theological and political attitudes. However, a serious devotion to Islamic practices and values is a common thread, although their political inclinations differ from each other.

The most significant movement within this category is the increasingly powerful Gülen movement, named after a US based retired imam, Fethullah Gülen. This movement, and its affiliates, own widely read and watched media outlets, civil society organisations, and promote a modern expression of Islam, along with an over-used language of tolerance. The movement owns scores of schools across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa that promote its views within a secular education philosophy. Questions remain about their sources of income. However, thus far the movement has been a positive force of reform and renewal particularly for Turkish Islam, even though the movement and friendly media tend to exaggerate its global influence.

The Gülen movement and Muslims in this category form a part of the core AKP constituency. This significant minority wants to influence Turkish politics with Islamic values and conservatism, but does not seek the creation of an Islamic state. According to them, Islam is a principle of personal piety and lifestyle, and can be lived out in harmony with the modern world. Thus a Muslim should pursue socio-economic and educational advancement, and promote democracy and human rights for others, as well as for him or herself. This group has increasing parallelism with Protestant Christianity.

The marginal minority, which constitutes around 10% of Turkey's population, could also be referred to as Islamist. It includes sects and organisations with classical Islamist attitudes and demands for the implementation of Shari'a law. These supporters often live a ghetto-like lifestyle, dominating certain neighborhoods in big cities and small towns, and enforcing a strong religious and social norm. The borders separating the marginal minority from the significant minority are dynamic, and at particular conjunctions, the marginal groups and attitudes find increasing support from their significant co-religionists.

¹⁴ These are broad categories I use as a break down of multi-layers of religion and politics in Turkey. The ratios presented are not based on any specific empirical data, but are to be taken as rough medians of multiple studies on religiosity in Turkey and voting patterns.

This showed itself in the significant increase in votes for SP in the March 2009 election. SP attracted 1.2 million votes in 2004, which fell to 820,000 in 2007, then climbed to two million in 2009. This shows the loss of votes from the AKP to the marginal minority position. The primary reason for this is that this constituency does not find the AKP Islamic enough, and criticises its failure to solve the headscarf ban and enforce a more Islamic social vision. The AKP regularly seeks to prevent a further loss of votes to this group and to prevent itself being undermined by the more Islamist parties. PM Erdoğan's aggressive comments on the Israel-Gaza issue and the June 2010 flotilla crisis are often conscious efforts to retain such votes.

Although the AKP's initial victory in 2002 seemed to forecast a future Islamisation of Turkey, there is no strong evidence that Turkey has become more religious, even after eight years under its rule. Anecdotal observations of visiting foreigners and secularist Turks on the increasing number of women wearing headscarves are not sufficient evidence of an Islamised Turkey.

Although the AKP's initial victory in 2002 seemed to forecast a future Islamisation of Turkey, there is no strong evidence that Turkey has become more religious, even after eight years under its rule

Leaving aside the question of whether or not there is an empirical basis to assert such a claim, or whether an increase in women wearing headscarves is a legitimate measurement of religiosity in a Muslim country, social scientific studies conducted in Turkey signal substantial change in the religious outlook of the country. In fact, at some levels, one can find interesting data on the AKP's role in modernising and mainstreaming radical Islamist voices in the country.

In 2009, the 'Religiosity in Turkey' research conducted by two faculty members at the Sabanci University, known for their secular stands, found that the ratio of those who want a Shari'a based state has fallen from 26% in 1999 to 10% in 2009.¹⁵ This reflects the neutralising effect that the AKP has had on religiosity on Turkey. Previous governments' aggressive stands against conservative Muslims only hardened religious attitudes. When a religion-friendly government was in place, most religious individuals had not seen the need for an Islamist state.

Although the AKP has not taken a single legislative, judicial, or executive step towards bringing Islamic jurisprudence into the country or enforcing piety on the public, non-AKP voting sections of Turkish society continue to feel intimidated by religious Muslims. In 2008, the Turkish media widely debated the topic of 'neighborhood pressure' (*mahalle baskısı*), a phrase used to refer to the idea that secular Turks were being increasingly pressured by their local communities to conform to an Islamic lifestyle, in particular, to stop drinking alcohol, wear headscarves, and fast during Ramadan.

The *mahalle baskısı* debate emerged during the closure case brought against the AKP and was a political claim rather than a scientifically observed social trend. There have always been such tensions in Turkey, particularly between its urban and rural settings and subcultures. There is still no evidence linking the ever-present social tensions in Turkey to a sinister Islamisation project by the AKP. However, it is true that various AKP-related local municipalities have sought to ban or pressure shops and restaurants from selling alcohol, and

¹⁵ "Türk halkına göre 'dinsel eşitlik' teori düzeyinde kaldığı sürece sorun yok!", *Radikal*, 18 November 2009; <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=HaberYazdir&ArticleID=964940>

that the AKP's dominance has previously led passive religious groups to find the courage to assert their way of life in their spheres of influence.

Political and Social Chaos

The main tension, which utilised a discourse of secularism versus Islamism for a populist appeal, was a power struggle between the old and new rulers, between the Istanbul-Izmir-Ankara triangle and Anatolia, and between the status quo guardians of the state and the progressive voices demanding a more liberal and democratic country.

The power struggle had two theatres: a) public attempts to evoke a 'national reflex,' a phrase used by military officials to urge the society to oust the AKP; and b) bureaucratic and political battles that took place behind closed doors between the government, state structures, and armed forces.

Politics of public symbolism

Ever since the lack of support shown by the US for a new military coup against the Refah party government, the Turkish Armed Forces and its Kemalist civilian supporters knew that the era of ceasing of executive powers by military officials had ended. This pushed the Armed Forces to pursue social engineering and subtle political campaigns in order to achieve its desired goals and maintain its power in politics. The result was the removal of the Refah party, in what Turkish commentators called a 'post-modern coup'.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the same strategy has unfolded since the unanticipated victory of the AKP in 2002. In an extremely organised way, countless demonstrations against the AKP took place in all major Turkish cities, particularly in 2007. The organising civil society groups were all known to have direct links with the Armed Forces and nationalist movements. Rather than being political marches or protests against the AKP, the public reactions were framed as the defense of a nation from a siege within by dark powers who were destroying the very fundamentals of the Turkish Republic and the legacy of Atatürk.

Deniz Baykal, the then leader of the CHP, the AKP's main opposition party, regularly declared that Ankara would not be crossed, just as the Turks did not allow the Gallipoli to be crossed by invading forces after WWI. The dangerous historical metaphor drew feeble parallels between contemporary domestic Turkish politics and that of a war context of invasion by foreign powers. Thus, what the CHP wanted was not simply votes to govern the country, but a 'national reflex' of the society to rise up in defense of the Turkish nation.

Meanwhile, books claiming that PM Erdoğan and President Gül were actually Jewish and that they had links with secret international networks topped the charts along with never ending articles, books, and media scare-mongering that Turkey was facing an immediate Islamist revolution like Iran or morphing into Malaysia. Talk of Turkey becoming like these two hardline Islamic countries reflected the profound ignorance regarding Iran and Malaysia's unique contexts.

Attempts to find internal enemies by use of imagined foreign enemies continued, reaching dangerous levels. The most 'sophisticated' addition to the list of internal enemies was the postmodern intellectuals, who were declared to be anti-state by a Turkish general, since these intellectuals did not believe in nation states.

Attempts to create a nationalistic social wave included theatrical symbolisms through the unprecedented use of giant Turkish flags across the country and images of Kemal Atatürk. Every funeral of a Turkish soldier killed by the Kurdish PKK terrorist organisation was used against the AKP with slogans chanted against it. This was despite the fact that the AKP was not to blame for the more than twenty-year-old conflict. In reality, it had been one of the most proactive governments in addressing the Kurdish issue.

In the public battle over social perceptions and narratives, the AKP has wisely focused on its image as a reforming democratic party, which is committed to making Turkey a member of the EU. In response to accusations of making Turkey a backward looking Islamist state, the AKP was able to show its record in EU accession talks, which had been much more successful than previous governments. The AKP also sought to show the recovery of the Turkish economy, decreasing inflation, a massive leap in direct foreign investment to the country, and an overall increase in trade volume as its pivotal achievements.

In the July 2007 general elections, the AKP won with a record breaking 47% of votes and 340 seats in the Turkish Parliament. An increase in its votes reflected an unprecedented level of reaction against the anti-democratic attitudes of the state structures. It showed that not only had the era of military coups ended, but that post-modern coups were not welcome either.

Battles in high places

Extravagant public statements and shows were signals of intense battles fought behind closed doors. From the start, the AKP government found itself in not-so-subtle fights with the armed forces - a judicial elite formed of staunch secularists and bureaucrats undermining its policy decisions and its applications. However, the record breaking victory of the AKP in the 2007 elections came as a major shock and pushed the anti-AKP circles to unleash a final and major legal attempt to oust them.

Judicial attempts to remove the AKP from power started in 2002 when a Public Prosecutor asked the Supreme Court for its closure on the grounds that the Party violated a political party's law. The court eventually rejected the case and the accusations were dropped. In March 2008, a much stronger case was brought against the AKP by the Supreme Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor, who argued that the AKP had become a focal point for 'anti-secular activities,' which were triggered by the Party's attempts to remove the headscarf ban and the election of Abdullah Gül as President. The prosecutor not only asked for the closure of the AKP, but for a political ban on all of its leadership, including Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül.

Although the lengthy document submitted by the prosecutor included citations from speeches made by PM Erdoğan, it included hardly any substantial evidence against the AKP or its leadership. As a result, in July 2008, the Court ruled against closing the AKP and banning its leadership. However, the Court displayed its own political outlook by deciding to make cuts on the money that the Party received from the treasury in accordance with the financial support provided to political parties, even though it found them to be in no breach of the constitution or political party's law.

The quick decision of the Court spared Turkey from a digression into economic and political chaos. The outcomes of the 2007 election and 2008 court case came as a shock to the old elite, as it clearly marked the end of the political tools available to remove the AKP.

However, it also opened a new chapter of the AKP's revenge. Starting with the election victory in 2007, the AKP found the strength to take action against previous untouchables in Turkey. Contemporary Turkish history is full of rumours of secret networks formed by military, intelligence, and state officials, as well as journalists, academics, and civil society groups. They have been attributed to numerous extra-judicial killings, political appointments, irregular legal judgments, and organised media disinformation campaigns. These groups are referred to as 'deep state,' which alludes to their perceived powers as the actual rulers of the country beyond the democratically elected politicians.

The outcomes of the 2007 election and 2008 court case came as a shock to the old elite, as it clearly marked the end of the political tools available to remove the AKP

From the summer of 2008 until early 2010, Turkey was shaken by waves of high level arrests under operation names of Ergenekon, Sledge Hammer, and Cage. High ranking military officials - generals, admirals, and chiefs of forces, were rounded up along with writers, journalists, academics, and lawyers.

In fact, some of these individuals or bodies they represented were directly or indirectly linked to arbitrary court cases and death threats against Turkish intellectuals and fatal attacks on non-Muslim minorities. Following the arrests and clamp down on the activities of civil society groups, minorities and liberal intellectuals have reported a significant drop in the pressures and intimidation they faced.

The Social Cost of Engineered Battles

These power battles came with a high social price, in addition to causing massive unrest amongst foreign investors and countries who worryingly watched the unfolding drama.

Firstly, it has polarised Turkish society. It found itself under pressure to choose between two camps, which presented themselves to be detrimentally different from each other. Both parties argued that what was at stake was the complete making or breaking of the nation. Accusations of betrayal of the nation and selling out to foreign powers became easily used tag lines for anyone who wanted to raise an objection or did not want to uncritically belong to one of the two camps. Most people were trapped in the middle as the gap between the two poles widened. This turned necessary and healthy political discussions into fierce personal attacks and accusations.

Secondly, and much more worryingly, the witch hunt for internal and external enemies, and regular declarations by trusted officials on the 'imminent danger' of the collapse of the Turkish nation, caused extremely xenophobic attitudes towards the outside world and domestic minorities.

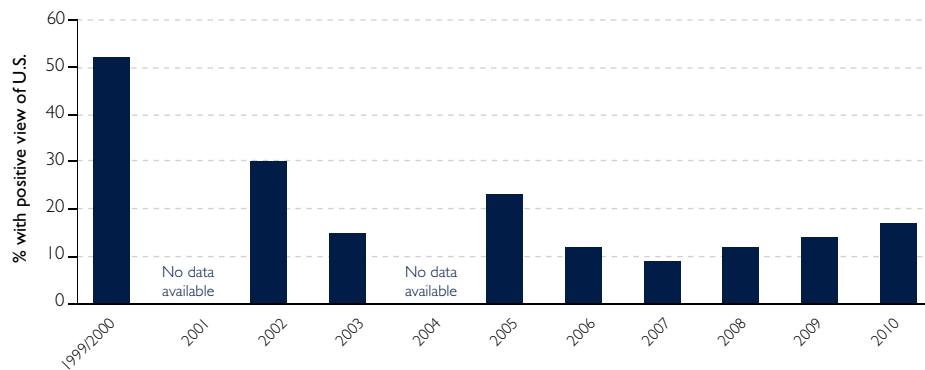
In 2008, Pew Global Attitudes Project also recorded a sharp increase in anti-Christian and anti-Semitic feelings in the country: 74% looked unfavourably towards Christians, and 76% look unfavourably towards Jews.¹⁶ Turkey tops the list of countries for anti-Christian

¹⁶ "Unfavourable views of Jews and Muslims on the increase in Europe", *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*, 17 September 2008; <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/262.pdf>

attitudes, followed by 60% in Pakistan, 55% in China, and 46% in Egypt. Pew's 2004 survey had recorded 'only' a 49% negative attitude of Turks towards Christians, rising in subsequent surveys in 2005 and 2006, until it reached 74% in 2008. Ironically, Turkey has one of the smallest numbers of Christians in the world, less than 80,000 Christians in a country of over 70 million people.

The massive leap of anti non-Muslim feelings also showed itself in anti-American feelings. The Pew Global Attitudes Survey found a sharp decline in favorable views towards the US. In 1999/2000, 52% of Turks looked favorably towards the US, whereas the ratio fell to 30% in 2002, 15% in 2003, with a slight improvement in 2005 with 23% and another decrease in 2006 to 12%, a further decrease to 9% in 2007, with a slight improvement from 12% in 2008, and finally up to 17% in 2010.¹⁷

Decline in US favourability in Turkey



Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project

This decline has put Turkey at the top of the list of polls measuring anti-American attitudes, much higher than Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This is a puzzling phenomenon as Turks have no actual grievances against the US since there has been no armed conflict, or even a major diplomatic clash between the two countries. Although the invasion of Iraq was the start of the rise of an anti-American sentiment in the country, the record low anti-US feelings from 2005 to 2008 reflect the turbulent domestic scene that portrayed the US as the silent engine behind all of the conspiracy theories.

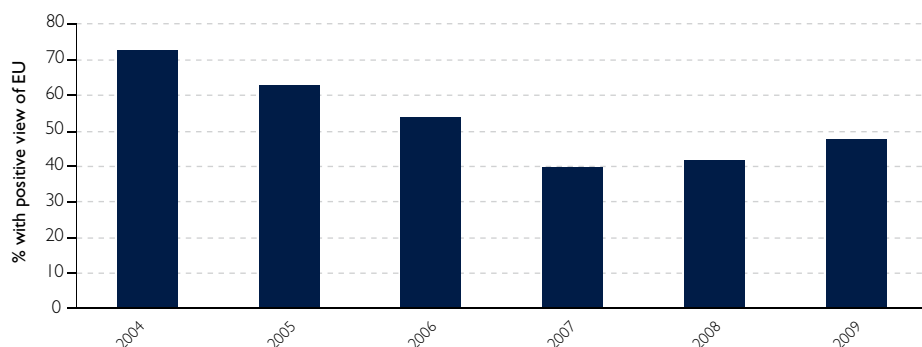
An extremely chaotic 2006 to 2008 period also saw a sharp decline in support for the Turkish EU bid. The German Marshall Fund's 2009 Transatlantic Trends survey found that 48% of Turks looked favorably towards Turkish accession to the EU, even though only 32% of Turks looked favorably towards the EU.¹⁸ Although the 48% in 2009 was an improvement from the 42% in 2008 and the 40% in 2007, it is still a massive decline

¹⁷ "Obama More Popular Abroad Than At Home, Global Image of U.S. Continues to Benefit", *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*, 17 June 2010; <http://pewglobal.org/2010/06/17/obama-more-popular-abroad-than-at-home/>

¹⁸ *Transatlantic Trends 2009*, German Marshall Fund; http://www.gmfus.org/trends/doc/2009_English_Key.pdf

from the 73% in 2004.¹⁹ This dramatic loss of confidence has been primarily caused by the perceived Turkish humiliation in the negotiation process, and the perceived cultural and religious prejudices of the EU countries against Turks.

Decline in EU favourability in Turkey



Source: German Marshall Fund

However, both of the surveys on Turkish views towards non Muslims, the US, and the EU show an unprecedented low in 2007 and a slight improvement from 2008 onwards. This illustrates the extremely negative effects of the dangerous social and political battles fought in the country.

Far from simply being unhealthy social attitudes, these negative trends have had substantial domestic and external outcomes. Domestically, the outcome of the growing waves of anti-non-Muslim attitudes in the country has been numerous attacks on non-Muslim worship centers, clergymen, businesses, and individuals. By and large, these attacks have only caused material damage but some have been fatal and resulted in the deaths of Turkish and non-Turkish Christians.

Externally, it has blocked substantial portions of Turkish society, and even journalists, commentators, and politicians, from perceiving and understanding the world as it is. Seeking complicated conspiracy theories within every domestic or international event has become a 'wise' and preferred analysis, and has provided a quick way out of facing the true problems in the country.

Disinformation campaigns in the press by allies of the AKP and Kemalist camps, and flamboyant discourses with sinister political acts have completely confused and disoriented the nation. The surreal image of these battles kept the people's focus away from two important issues: the vulnerabilities of the Turkish economy; and signs of rekindling tensions between Turks and Kurds and a large scale Kurdish intifada on the horizon. The battles also misled foreign commentators who were inclined to see a global clash between the West

¹⁹ It is worth pointing out that although 48% is a major decline, it is still a reasonably high ratio. This becomes clear in comparison with the findings of the Eurobarometer of the European Commission, which measures public opinion across the EU. The 2006 report found that only a EU wide average of 53% thought that the EU membership was a good thing. Only 34% in UK, 36% in Austria, 39% in Finland and 49% in Sweden thought EU membership to be good for their countries. See: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf

and Islam. Beyond the sterile discussion on Islamism and secularism, Turkey was undergoing a deep and radical change.

Turkish coming of age?

On some levels, the deep social and political tensions in Turkey are contextual, but most of them are actually reflected in global trends since WWII and are not Turkey specific.

Weakening of state power

The 20th century has not only witnessed the extraordinary power exercises of the modern states, but also their previously unimaginable demise. The globalisation process, development of independent media, and public disillusionment with utopias and grand narratives deeply shook the appeal and parameters of state power. This is also the case for Turkey.

Prior to the AKP's unexpected victory in 2002, Turkey had been ruled by a close-knit community of political elite. Although the parliamentary system and multi-party elections involved a sense of electoral democracy, the state, with its powerful judicial, military, and executive arms, remained beyond public accountability and maintained rigid political and social boundaries. With high levels of absolute trust in the society to state structures and with regular official disinformation campaigns, aptly named as 'psychological warfare' by the Turkish armed forces, Turkish society seemed to be easily lead or muted by the state.

However, the AKP's victory in 2007 and the ever-increasing failures of the old elite of the state to lead an uprising against the AKP reflected growing frustrations of society towards its self-declared rulers. Increasing freedom of expression in the country, the emergence of strong civil society groups, and the EU accession process have all given a strong voice to the general public. Since 2002, the red tape of the previous political power has been crossed, such as public criticisms of the performance of Armed Forces in its combats with the PKK. Similarly, there has not been a single social taboo that has not been discussed, including the 'Kurdish problem' and the Armenian genocide of 1915.

Undoubtedly, the strong social empowerment of the previously muted masses and the attempts of the elite to maintain their power have been chaotic and explosive - signs of a maturing democracy. Individuals are fast emerging as independent opinion holders, whether in politics or religious belief. This ushers in a new phase in Turkish politics, which is forcing the political actors to search for new venues and political languages.

Collapse of 19th century Secularism

Since the 1960s, it has become clear that the 19th century vision of the place of religion is no longer plausible. Classic secularism envisioned a) the separation of religion from state affairs, b) creation of a 'neutral' public space by limiting religion to the private sphere, and c) ultimate disappearance of religion as science and atheistic humanist values are 'proven' to be the ultimate truth. However, although the vast majority of the world has internalised and actualised secular state structures, religion still remains as integral an element of human existence in the 21st century as it always has been and continues to be one of the most powerful social forces.

The Turkish state has enforced a strict vision of secularism along the same lines far from its start. Unlike the American and European vision of separation of state and religion, the Turkish state sought to control religion, enforcing an officially sanctioned version of Islam and excluding all other Islamic and non-Islamic faiths and traditions from the public space. The growing appeal of political Islam in Turkey since the 1970s was a signal of the disparity between the values of the masses with their rulers and their disillusionment with modernisation. However, modernist political Islam has also failed in the 20th century, with its weak and meaningless rhetoric and inability to cope with the realities of a global world. In Turkey too, Islamism has lost its wide appeal along with the Refah Party and the Erbakan government.

The 21st century has demanded a new synergy of religion, social conservatism, openness to global engagement, and economic gain. The AKP's victory and its continual appeal, not only in Turkey but all across the Islamic world, reflect the collapse of the 19th century's visions that religion will and should die out. Yet, it also reflects the collapse of 20th century's religious politics pursuing the reestablishment of some imagined pure and glorious moment in the past.

However, modernist political Islam has also failed in the 20th century, with its weak and meaningless rhetoric and inability to cope with the realities of a global world

Collapse of 'homogenised nation' ideologies

One of the hallmarks of the 20th century's political visions has been the creation of homogenised nations, formed by idealised imageries of one race, one language, and one religion. However, the 20th century has not only seen the dark side of nation-making in the forms of ethnic cleansing and genocide, but also the limitations and ultimate failures. Previously muted ethnic minorities and indigenous people groups have been empowered with the development of international human rights law and supra-national accountability structures. This unleashed a global wind of demands for minority rights, including demands for land and creation of independent regions and new countries.

Turkey has not been spared from this global trend. The collapse of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire gave birth to a nation state with a strict self-definition of Turkish identity. This was easier said than done as millions of Kurds, Circassians, Armenians, and other non-Muslim populations were not ethnic Turks. The official state policies for the forming of a Turkish nation meant the refusal of acceptance of minority communities and strong pressures for conformity. Yet, after more than 80 years of enforcement of a nationhood vision, the ethnic landscape of Turkey remains as polarised as it was when the Republic was founded. The emergence of modern Kurdish nationalism since the 1970s and the subsequent armed conflict between Turkey and Kurdish militants has shown the limits of modern nation making.

With ongoing debates on "Turkishness", citizenship, rather than ethnic dominance or independence, is emerging as a strong alternative to post-20th century political visions.

Politics beyond political allegiance

Voting patterns in national and local elections as well as fluctuations of the AKP's popularity ratings demonstrate an important factor about contemporary Turkey. Society is demanding

a new kind of politics, focused on reform, freedoms, and economic gain, while maintaining its social values. It is demanding leaders that will make Turkey proud and make it an important global actor. Only the AKP has demonstrated awareness and adaptation to this demand. Rather than adapting to a similar outlook and posing a secular-based alternative to the AKP, opposition parties have sought to win votes in creating imaginary fights against an Islamist takeover of the country or foreign powers who are trying to destroy Turkey from within.

In this process, political languages of the left and right and of socialism have been emptied of meaning and coherent political vision. Nationalistic right wing movements have been reduced to marginal voices, using sharp rhetoric, which maintains a small constituency but marginalises them from the mainstream patriotic and conservative segments. Political Islam as a macro-vision has failed and has modernised itself to personal piety and conservative-friendly pragmatism, though marginal groups exist as sects. Modernist visions of society and state power have crumbled. Politics as defined by the 20th century has come to a de facto end, even though the old elite continues its attempt to revert back to its historical ascendancy.

Liberalisation and tandem Radicalisation

The process of globalisation has created two seemingly contradictory but organically linked social processes - awareness of the world and the technology to engage with it. This has given a growing number of people experiences that were previously only available to a privileged few. This in turn has caused a cosmopolitan outlook that cherishes differences and sees a brotherhood or a shared nomos with people from other countries, religions, and cultures. Yet, the same daunting exposure to the world's fast-changing social and cultural norms has triggered fundamentalism, and radical ideologies, that offer to defend their followers from sinister global conspiracies.

This also applies to Turkey. Citizens of Turkey have discovered the complexity of the world first hand through growing economic engagement of Turkish businesses in trade and direct investment in other countries, frequent attendance to international conferences and the emergence of cheap foreign travel. The past two generations have been actively encouraged to learn foreign languages and live and study abroad. This process, which started under the privatisation and free market reforms of the Ozal government, has transformed Turkey.

The result is two-fold, in line with the global trends. On one hand, there is an emerging cosmopolitan Turkey sharing an open outlook to 'others' and the world, and can be seen in practising Muslims as well as atheistic Leftist circles. On the other hand, there are hardening marginal communities, which offer a precise definition of Turkishness, Islam, and simple solutions for extremely complicated problems. These can also be seen in Islamist, nationalistic, and leftist circles. They offer a comfortable identity and a seemingly coherent narrative to make sense of rapid changes in Turkey.

Currently, Turkey is forming its political and social horizon for the 21st century. There are strong indications that the next face of Turkish politics will be a contention between ethno-nationalism and cosmopolitanism based on equal citizenship. This will cut through socio-economic classes, ethnic groups, and traditional political divides. Thus, nationalist

Turks will find allies among nationalist Kurds against the alignment of liberal Turks and Kurds. Similarly, traditional Islamists will find good company among traditional nationalists worried about 'westernisation' of the country while pragmatic Muslims and progressive secularists will see each other as key business partners.

Turkish society will find itself in increasing contention over social conservativeness versus liberal accommodation of values, practices, and cultural expressions. While a significant portion of the urban and affluent society will be cosmopolitanised and feel at home in a multi-ethnic Turkey, the remaining portion of the country will feel alienated and threatened. As Turkey hosts more and more immigrants from the larger Middle East, Africa, and Asia, politics of foreign workers stealing local jobs will become vote-winning discourses.

Public accountability will continue to be strengthened, which will force politicians to focus on performance and providing the best service to the voters, rather than seeking votes through ethnic or ideological allegiance. As more parties adapt to the realities of the 21st century, thus bringing a break to the AKP's dominance, subsequent governments will have short-lived coalitions or weak majorities, regularly finding themselves under pressure to offer reform and meet the perceived needs of voters. Votes will shift much more swiftly between parties, as individual consumers will increasingly be looking for parties that meet their interests, rather than stay with parties that demand allegiance in return for nothing.

None of these are prescriptive aspirations for the future, but descriptions of the direction to which the current trends are taking Turkey. A careful reader will recognise that the projections in the paragraphs above sound extremely similar to contemporary European politics. This is indeed the case. In 2023 when the Republic of Turkey celebrates 100 years of independence, it will be much closer to a late-modern European country than to a Wahhabi Islamist one.

CHAPTER 2

CHANGING FACE OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

From the very beginning, the AKP government has attracted doom prophecies, mainly by worried foreign observers claiming that Turkey is turning into an Islamic country and will soon shut its doors to the world. Eight years into AKP rule, similar projections are still being heard.

Although superficial readings of Turkey as evolving into an Islamist state under the AKP have become less frequent, current changes in Turkish foreign policy have unleashed a new wave of arguments regarding the direction of the country. For those set upon seeing Turkey in a fight for its soul between Islamist and secularist poles, the country's new diplomatic initiatives with various Middle Eastern countries provide no more proof that Turkey is slowly turning away from the 'West'.

This section of the report seeks to provide a healthy and nuanced framework for placing the changes in Turkish foreign policy in context, and making sense of its decisions before offering an analysis of its limitations and potential.

Demands of a brand new conjuncture

There are three major sets of factors that demanded a radical change in Turkish foreign policy: stagnant Turkish EU accession, changing balances in Caucasus and the Middle East, and domestic pressure.

Factors pushing a change in foreign policy

EU accession fatigue

Formal ties between Turkey and Europe began with a partnership agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963. Turkey officially applied to become a member of the EEC, the precursor to the EU, in 1987. In 1995, Turkey and the EU entered a Customs Union, which harmonises common custom tariff, import, and export rules for EU countries. The EU decided to formally start membership negotiations with Turkey in 2005.

Under the Copenhagen Criteria, negotiation talks include a candidate country's progress, which require a country to align itself with EU structures, rules, regulations, and obligations; to share the political and economic vision of the EU; and to have democratic governance, rule of law, respect for human rights and a stable market economy. The EU opens 'chapters' on these areas in order to assess progress, enter detailed negotiations, and make further demands. Since 2005, only 13 out of 35 chapters have been opened for negotiation and only one of them has been successfully closed. Eight chapters remain frozen due to Turkish refusal to allow Cyprus to use Turkish transportation hubs.

From 2002 to 2007, the AKP has shown an exceptional commitment to further Turkey's EU bid. In fact, within a very short time, they have achieved remarkable progress in aligning Turkish laws and practices with the EU. Until 2005, the Turkish public has demonstrated an overwhelming desire to become an EU state.

However, two major factors have increasingly slowed down this momentum. Firstly, the in-house debate in Europe over Turkish membership has continued to pose a blockade to the opening of new chapters. France, Germany, and Austria outrightly rejected Turkey's membership, instead promoting a 'privileged status' for Turkey. The Republic of Cyprus has also regularly blocked its progress and continues to ask for freezing of further chapters, even though Greece continues to support Turkey's membership in the EU. Italy, the UK, and Spain, as well as the United States, have continued to promote Turkey's accession.

The divided opinion within the EU has communicated mixed messages to Turkey. This, in addition to the fact that even if Turkey meets all of the criteria, candidacy is still not guaranteed, is causing disillusionment amongst the Turkish people. The offer of a 'privileged status' is not acceptable to Turkey, as it is perceived as being Europe's way of squeezing the best out of Turkey without providing them anything in return. Also, swift and problematic Bulgarian membership into the EU has caused feelings of humiliation, and has been perceived as cultural and religious discrimination by the Turkish public.

Secondly, the domestic political thunderstorms surrounding the election of President Gül, the headscarf debate, the closure case brought against the AKP, and immense debates on Islam versus secularism in the country have made EU accession talks a cheap political tool. Opposition parties and Kemalist elites often used the AKP's commitment to EU reforms in arguments to show that the AKP was selling-out Turkey. Ironically, the AKP was accused of both making Turkey an Islamist state in its close relationship with Arab countries and also for selling Turkey to Europe. The polarised domestic context and increasing social paranoia about 'foreign powers' caused the EU candidacy process to be seen as a cunning attempt to destroy Turkey in the eyes of large sections of the population.

Changing Neighbourhood

It became clear to Turkey that although EU membership was still in its own best strategic interest, it wouldn't happen for at least another 10 years; and even if Turkey achieved all the desired improvements and changes, it might still never be an EU member. This raised the

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economic principle of diversification of investments. As the signs of economic crisis within the EU and an anticipated lapse of the Euro were amplified, Turkey realised that it needed to make sure it had other engagement options.

Although the Middle East has had a turbulent existence since WWI, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks shook the relative regional stability and power balances. The United States' Afghan and Iraq campaigns altered the region, resulting in many unforeseen developments. The biggest being the re-emergence of Iran as a regional actor and power source, placing pressure on the reconstruction of Iraq and political developments in Lebanon and Syria. Islamist militant and political groups have increased their public appeal across the region since 9/11. The heavy-handed responses of regional governments, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, to dissent and discontent have only weakened their rule. This made Islamist groups viable domestic opposition parties, which promised justice, equality and 'freedom' from Western aggression.

Iran's political boldness and Russia's desire to flex its diplomatic and military muscle raised concerns over energy supplies. Turkey anxiously watched when gas supplies to Europe were damaged during the Ukraine-Russia tensions, and realised how easily Russia could threaten to reduce gas supplies. This was seen in the threats over the US advance defence missile systems that were planned to be based in Eastern Europe and the recent Russia-Belarus debates over debt. The need for Turkey to reconsider its policies towards countries that supply it with energy, or serve as an energy route, became acute during the 2008-2009 Russia-Georgia crisis. Turkey has increasingly become aware of the reality that it can no longer remain passive, but must proactively seek to ensure stability in its own neighbourhood. This was displayed in Turkish initiatives to bring Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan together to enhance relationships in the region.

Changes in the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Middle East also opened up new markets for Turkey. Previously problematic venues, such as Libya, showed signs of openness and stability in engaging with the rest of the world. The lucrative sovereign funds of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) countries and their markets, which were ripe for Turkish exports and businesses, became a desired target. In fact, a breeze of liberal economic attitudes had hit the region, including Turkey's long shunned neighbour, Syria. Turkey simply had to act in order to have its share of the new economic opportunities and secure itself in the face of possible future risks.

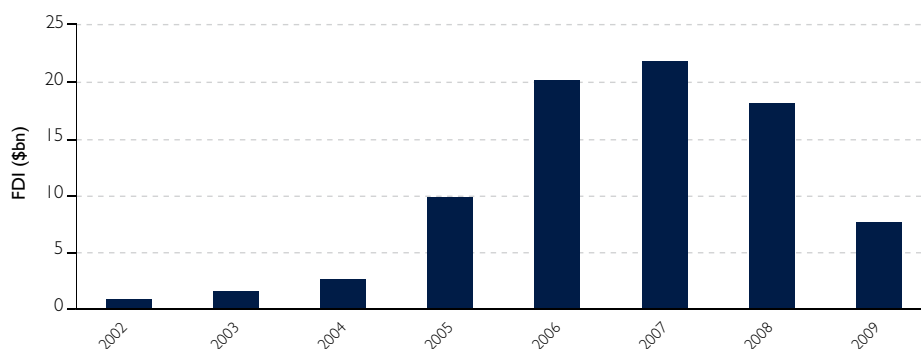
Domestic Pressure

As previously mentioned, the strong EU commitment in Turkey of the early 2000s has fallen dramatically to a current estimation of 40%, if not less. This was only furthered by increasing anti-American sentiment in the country. Some groups have called for a more isolationist form of nationalism; nevertheless, the dominant attitude that has emerged is a desire for Turks to be glorious and powerful once again. In popular imaginings, stories of 'crazy Turks' who fought a war of independence against all the odds and won became best sellers. These were backed by popular TV shows, newspaper columns and 'scholarly' books arguing that Turkey was facing a similar lynching by foreign powers as it did during WWI. Turkey had to face the challenge. Rather than accept capitulations from foreign powers, Turkey needed

to be the one controlling them. As a famous piece of graffiti that showed itself widely in Ankara stated: "Let the World be Turks!"

Loud expressions of re-emerging nationalistic fever overshadowed two deeper pressures on the AKP, which were the appetite of burgeoning medium-sized businesses in the country, and the overall development of the Turkish economy. Since the 1990s, Turkish businesses have increasingly ventured into foreign lands, either in the construction business or the export of Turkish goods. These, along with changing regulations in Turkey and various bilateral agreements, have made the Turkish private sector an ambitious steam engine, often challenging Turkish foreign policy directly and indirectly. This is clear in the case of changing Turkish policies towards the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, which is dealt with in detail below. Long before official decisions to engage with the region were taken, Turkish businesses were already there and asking for improvement of relations. The AKP not only had to feed the appetite of Turkish businesses, but also had to demonstrate substantial economic victories. The first and short-term phase of this was the AKP's remarkable speed in attracting a massive increase in foreign investment into the country, from \$1.1 billion in 2002 to some \$22 billion by 2007.²⁰

FDI in Turkey



Source: Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey

The AKP had to respond to these domestic, social, and economic pressures for its own political survival. It has always demonstrated a sensitivity and perception of the reforms demanded by Turkish society. That is exactly why the AKP's pro-EU stance won so many votes in 2002 and sustained a growing constituency. When the public's attitude questioned the EU project and wanted to see an independent Turkey with more economic opportunities, the AKP quieted its initial EU focus and undertook initiatives to demonstrate an independent Turkey, which sought to be a regional power and a major global economic player. In this process, the AKP's appeal continued to attract mainstream nationalists, liberals, non-Muslims, and Islamists alike.

²⁰ For a break down on FDI inflow volume see Turkish Prime Ministry's Investment Support and Promotion Agency's records; <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/investmentguide/investorsguide/Pages/FDIinTurkey.aspx>

Just as in the domestic political context, the AKP found itself at an extraordinary juncture in international events. The AKP had no option but to seize the moment. With Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, they had the intellectual and diplomatic clout to do so.

Shifting Gears

Before 2002, Prof Ahmet Davutoğlu was a relatively unknown Turkish academic. He first came into the spotlight as a foreign policy adviser and later assumed centre stage as the Foreign Minister on the 1st of May, 2009. Davutoğlu's vision, with catch phrases such as 'strategic depth' and 'zero conflict policy', argued that in addition to its 'hard power' and geo-political positioning, Turkey must also deepen its ties with its neighbours by developing an increasing 'soft power' through cultural and economic ties, and the use of its legacy and historical roots in the Middle East and North Africa.²¹

In order to actualise its potential and move into being a major regional and global actor, Turkey had to address its blocked relationships with bordering countries, engage proactively with Middle Eastern countries, and look for opportunities beyond its own region. Turkey needed to pursue EU membership, keep strong links with the US, and at the same time, diversify its investments and emerge as an independent actor. This would fulfil the never ending Turkish self-perception of being a 'bridge' between the East and the West.

Who is Ahmet Davutoğlu?

Davutoğlu was born in 1959 in Konya. Unlike key founders of the AKP, he has no background in politics or no known participation in Islamist movements. He holds multiple degrees in social sciences, including a PhD in political science and international relations from the Boğaziçi University in Istanbul.

He is said to have turned down an academic opportunity in the US for a lectureship position at the Islamic International University in Malaysia (IIUM) from 1990 to 1995. IIUM has been initiated and partially governed by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

It was while lecturing in Malaysia that Davutoğlu came to realise the limitations of 'West' centric international relations theories. His friendship with Abdullah Gül eventually pulled him into politics - first as an adviser, then as an Ambassador in 2003, and then as Foreign Minister in 2009.

He is widely respected for being an independent thinker, an ambitious man of convictions and zeal, and likened to Henry Kissinger.

At some levels, this vision marked a significant turn for a traditionally stagnant Turkish foreign policy machine. During Davutoğlu's first year of being the FM, he undertook 100 foreign visits: 28 to Europe, 27 to the Middle East, 18 to the Balkans, nine to Asia, and eight

²¹ For a short summary of Davutoğlu's vision for Turkish foreign policy, see his recent article; Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Turkey's zero-problems foreign policy', *Foreign Policy*, 20 May 2010; http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy?page=0,0

to the US.²² The frequency of his visits and the breakdown of the countries highlight an unparalleled diversity of interest and zeal.

At the same time, these ideas and ambitions are not new. The late Foreign Minister, Ismail Cem promoted a similar proactive Turkish foreign policy and use of Turkish 'soft power' based on its identity and historical links. It was under Suleyman Demirel's leadership that Turkey became a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Pragmatic policies were integral to Turgut Ozal's premiership. What has made Davutoğlu's vision a reality is the political will demonstrated by the AKP to adopt such a major shift. A parliamentary majority gave the AKP the confidence to seize the opportunities that opened up in the Middle East from 2003 onwards.

Detailing all of the initiatives launched under Davutoğlu's influence is beyond the scope of this report but they can be summarised in three main categories: mediation, conflict-resolution, and strategic interest projects.

Mediation Projects

Along with Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and a host of Eastern European countries, Turkey has long seen itself as a bridge between the mythical West and East. Its Islamic identity, yet staunch secularism; unique synthesis of oriental and European ways; geographical charm of Istanbul's location between two continents; and its plethora of empty historical and cultural artefacts representing long vanished civilisations, have provided Turkey with a major supply of discourses. For the most part, these did not go beyond marketing Turkish tourism or disregarding major human rights concerns faced by non-Muslims and ethnic minorities in the country.

Melancholy over the lost glories of the once mighty Ottoman Empire has always been present in the country. That is why the AKP's desire to increase Turkish 'soft power' and deepen its relationships with the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa has struck a deep chord in Turkey. It also explains why various mediation initiatives have sought to push the language of 'a bridge between the East and the West' and 'where continents meet' from tourism catchphrases into actual diplomatic efforts.

FM Davutoğlu's ambitions have shown themselves in a remarkable repertoire of engagement in a short period of time. These have included high level visits to Serbia by President Gül; trilateral meetings between Serbia, Turkey, and Bosnia-Herzegovina; Turkish involvement in hosting talks between Afghan and Pakistani presidents in Istanbul; immense traffic of quiet diplomacy between Syria and Israel; attempts to hold dialogue between Hamas, Fatah, Israel, Iran, the international community, and between Sunni and Shiite groups in Iraq.

In addition to these substantial attempts at mediation between conflicting nations and groups, Turkey and Spain established an initiative named the Alliance of Civilisations (AoC) in 2005 under the auspices of The United Nations. The AoC seeks "to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and

22 Can Dündar, "Davutoğlu'nun bir yılı", Milliyet, 03 Mayıs 2010; <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/davutoglu-nun-bir-yili/can-dundar/guncel/yazardetay/03.05.2010/1232869/default.htm>

religions, and to help counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism."²³ Although thematic and global initiatives like the AoC have constructive long-term roles, they often do not have any tangible impact on current conflicts and concerns.

The AKP's foreign policy mediation projects have faced the same challenges as the AKP's domestic mediation and reconciliation initiatives. Most of these initiatives have not produced any substantial outcomes, nor has the Turkish mediation role been accepted by conflicting parties in the Middle East. As will be detailed below, Turkish attempts to mediate between Israel, Syria, and Palestinian groups have resulted in major disappointment.

A similar attitude shows itself in Turkish desires to improve Syria-Iraq-Iran relations, where none of the parties see the need or place for Turkey in 'Arab affairs'. The Turkish desire to be the peace broker between Iran and the international community has also not resulted in any substantial outcome. In fact, the outcome of Turkey and Brazil brokering a low uranium enrichment deal with Iran, which is dealt with in detail below, has put Turkey at odds with Europe and the US, and is the latest addition in efforts by Iran to mislead third parties in order to gain time to advance its nuclear programme.

There are three major reasons for this. Firstly, perceived Turkish 'soft power' in the region has no actual political power, unlike American soft and hard power in the region, which makes the US the only country with enough clout to be a mediator. Secondly, Turkey's own inability to solve long term domestic and international tensions blocks its credibility and know-how in brokering complex resolutions. Thirdly, ethnic and religious fault lines in the region automatically limit Turkey's organic relationships with the Middle East, even while the economic relations with the region are deepening.

Conflict-Resolution projects

Although its results have been limited, the AKP has undertaken unprecedented efforts to address Turkey's own long standing problematic relations with Greece, the Gordian knots of Cyprus, and Armenia.

The AKP has undertaken unprecedented efforts to address Turkey's own long standing problematic relations with Greece, the Gordian knots of Cyprus, and Armenia

An early expression of Davutoğlu's policy of good relationships with Turkey's neighbours was the development of a Turkish-Greek rapprochement. Ever since WWI, both countries have had a turbulent relationship due to the legacy of the war, treatment of Turkish and Greek minorities, naval and air borders in the Aegean, the Cyprus issue, and practical support from Greek intelligence agencies and army officials to the PKK. Turkey and Greece have returned from the brink of war numerous times since WWII, including during the 1995/1996 crisis over Imia/Kardak Island. Regular dog fights between Turkish and Greek jets in the disputed airspace have caused a loss of life and military hardware.

However, since 1999, Greece and Turkey have pursued increasing mutual confidence building measures on a host of low and high level issues, ranging from commerce and health to military matters. Greece's continual support for

²³ For more information on the AoC, see: <http://www.unaoc.org/>

Turkey's EU accession has been a pivotal aspect of a renewed trust between the two countries, alongside their continual engagement within NATO and the OSCE.

Turkey warmly welcomed the Greek government's strong reaction to the involvement of Greek diplomats and intelligence officers with the PKK after it emerged that the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan had a Greek Cypriot passport and was hosted at the Greek Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. Eventually, Ocalan was kidnapped and was flown to Turkey by the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) in 1999. Three Greek ministers and intelligence officers involved with plans to smuggle Abdullah Ocalan first into Greece, and then into South Africa to secure him asylum, were forced to resign.²⁴

The late Foreign Minister, Ismail Cem played a key role in shifting Turkish policies towards Greece and earning the confidence of the then Greek Foreign Minister, George Papandreou. The Turkish and Greek public found themselves in unprecedented neighbourly support and help in the 1999 earthquakes that hit both countries. Popular music songs featuring Greek and Turkish musicians singing in duo became a common feature, as were the increasing number of tourists who were discovering the similarities between Greeks and Turks. The AKP has continued the promising changes in Greek-Turkish relations.

In October 2009, PM George Papandreou visited Turkey. While there, he also visited the cemetery where the late FM Ismail Cem is buried and left a branch on his grave from the olive tree that Cem and Papandreou had planted together in Athens.²⁵ In May 2010, PM Erdoğan visited Athens with 10 ministers and 80 businessmen, signing some 21 bilateral agreements on a host of issues, including talks of mutual cutting of defence expenditure.

The desire for normalisation comes from a host of shared interests, ranging from the stability of the Aegean Sea, increasing trade, handling massive flows of illegal immigrants, and human and narcotic trafficking into the EU through Turkey and Greece. It also emerges from an awareness of the unsustainable defence spenditure of both countries. This has become a much more important variable as the Greek economy is currently facing near bankruptcy. Both countries now seem set to leave the past behind, including putting an end to intimidating jet flights over the Aegean Sea.

However, Turkish and Greek rapprochement continues to be shackled by the Cyprus issue. Although Athens and Ankara are keen on resolving this, the reality on the ground for the Greek Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) continues to cause frequent dead blocks. The AKP has continued Turkish refusal to officially recognise the Greek Republic of Cyprus and open Turkish and TRNC ports and airspace to Cypriot vessels. However, the AKP and the recently ousted TRNC government under Mehmet Ali Talat have demonstrated a compromising and bold attitude in backing the so-called Annan plan (brokered by previous UN General Secretary Kofi Annan), even agreeing on a major withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island if certain conditions were met.

24 For a detailed account of the crisis and intelligence operations see "Fiasco in Nairobi: Greek Intelligence and the Capture of PKK Leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999", *Studies in Intelligence*, Center for the *Study of Intelligence*, Central Agency of Intelligence, Vol 53 Number 1, March 2009

25 "Papandreou visits grave of old friend Ismail Cem", *Today's Zaman*, 10 October 2009; <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-189457-102-papandreou-visits-grave-of-old-friend-ismail-cem.html>

Given that the economic embargo brings an unsustainable economic and political dependence of the TRNC to Turkey, Turkey continues to demand its lifting as a condition for its acknowledgement of the Republic of Cyprus.

Currently, the future of the Cyprus talks is ambiguous as the new Derviş Eroğlu government of the Turkish Republic Northern Cyprus has a history of a hard line nationalist attitude. Both at the EU and UN levels, there is a wide spread feeling that a pivotal opportunity has been lost with the 'no' vote in Greek Cyprus to the Annan Plan in 2004.²⁶ Whether the maximalist attitudes on both sides of the island will evolve into a more mature compromise is difficult to anticipate in the short-term. However, the AKP's desire to minimise historical tensions and perceptions within Greece and solve the Cyprus problem continues to signal a possibility of substantial, if not final, solution in the near future to a long standing conflict.

Another initially promising and almost historic AKP initiative has been its effort to engage with Armenia. The border between Armenia and Turkey was shut in 1993 over the Karabakh crisis between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ongoing yearly diplomatic crises over the acknowledgement of the events of 1915 as genocide by third party countries have only deepened mutual feelings of aggression in both countries. The situations of Armenians in Turkey, and especially the tragic murder of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in Istanbul in 2007, have continued to send negative messages about Turks and Turkey to the dispersed Armenian communities around the world.

However, the murder of Hrant Dink has also served as a wake up call to Turkish intellectuals and society, and has triggered immense in house debates on the historical treatment of Armenians and Turkish-Armenian relations. An apology campaign for 1915 started by a group of Turkish intellectuals attracted more than 30,000 signatures. Debates on the Armenian massacres became frequent features in the Turkish media, with an increasing number of Turkish writers referring to the event as genocide.

Hrant Dink's murder and the subsequent 2008-2009 Georgia-Russia crisis, have strengthened the AKP's willingness to have a 'zero conflict' policy. As early as 2002, Turkey eased visa restrictions on Armenians, and from 2005 onwards, Turkey opened its airspace for limited flights to Armenia. Quiet talks between the two countries since 2007, and the commitment of the Obama administration to build the relationship between the two countries have resulted in of Gül's landmark visit to Armenia. In 2009, President Sargsyan became the first Armenian president to visit Turkey for the second qualifier game between the two countries. The so called 'football diplomacy' provided a chance for high level meetings between the two countries and the often missing personal engagement between the respective governments.

The spring of 2009 was full of promising anticipation in Ankara and Yerevan, as the rumours of an immediate deal to open the borders and establish diplomatic relations were widespread owing to the promising signals from meetings in Switzerland. In October 2009, Armenia and Turkey signed protocols in Geneva.²⁷ Although the final text reflected a compromise and omission of major concerns, it nevertheless represented progress. However, owing largely to the pressure from Azerbaijan on Turkey to include the Nagorno

²⁶ "Cyprus 'spurns historic chance'", BBC, 25 April 2004; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3656753.stm>

²⁷ Zerin Elci and Jeff Mason, "Armenia-Turkey sign peace deal, pitfalls ahead", *Reuters*, 10 October 2010; <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5990YV20091010>

Karabakh issue as part of its rapprochement talks with Armenia, the protocols are currently frozen. Both countries have expressed a desire for ongoing quiet talks and that the current standoff does not mean the end of the desired full reestablishment of diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries.

Strategic Interest Projects

One of the most groundbreaking strategic interest projects has been the lucrative transformation of Russian and Turkish relations. The upgraded relations between the two countries started with the signing of the 2001 Eurasia Action Plan under late FM Ismail Cem, and started to bear fruit under the AKP and President Medvedev's pragmatic engagement policies. President Putin's visit to Turkey in 2004 was the first head of the Russian state to visit the country in 32 years. This and various visits to Russia by Gül, and meetings between PM Erdoğan and the Russian government were the only visible signs of deepening diplomatic and economic relations between the countries.

Since the early 1990s, the trade volume between the two countries has skyrocketed to more than \$35 billion in 2010 from around \$20 billion in 2006 and \$11 billion in 2004. At a press conference during Putin's visit to Turkey in June 2010, Putin and Erdoğan publicly stated that both countries aim to increase their promising economic relationship to a volume of \$100 billion.²⁸ Although gas and oil still makes up a substantial portion of Russian imports to Turkey, the lucrative construction deals taken on by Turkish firms in Russia, as well as exports of Turkish goods and mass influx of Russian tourists into Turkey, are increasingly deepening the relationship between the two countries.

The latest Turkish-Russian initiatives seek to take these further, including the construction and maintenance of a Russian nuclear power plant in Turkey and cancellation of visa requirements for each country's citizens. It is also remarkably important to point out that the 2009 Joint Declaration signed by Presidents Gül and Medvedev includes plans to further collaborate on security, terrorism, and military technology, as well as naval cooperation in the Black Sea.²⁹

In other areas, Russia and Turkey have evolved from possible adversaries, to potential competitors, and now to business partners. What this means politically is open to skepticism as there are a host of regional issues on which the two countries are set to differ from each other. Although Russian and Turkish views on Iraq and Iran overlap, and stability in Caucasus is key for both countries, closeness of Turkish-American and Turkish-European relations, as well as Turkish involvement with alternative energy routes that undermine European dependence to Russian gas, will always be a potential bone of contention between Russia and Turkey. Similarly, the traditional attitude of Russia on the Cyprus issue, which often undermined Turkish efforts for a solution and the protection of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, still remains, even with the passing remarks by Russian officials that the economic embargo of the Turkish part of Cyprus was unjust.

²⁸ See the full text of the press conference at; <http://www.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/pressconferences/10922/>

²⁹ *Joint Declaration between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Progress towards a New Stage in Relations and Further Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership*, Moscow, 13 February 2009; http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-declaration-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-russian-federation-on-progress-towards-a-new-stage-in-relations-and-further-deepening-of-friendship-and-multidimensional-partnership_-moscow_-13-february-2009.en.mfa

There has also been a quiet revolution in the Turkish engagement with the Iraqi Kurdistan. The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the invasion of Iraq caused major concerns in Turkey. Turkey's own domestic problems with Kurds meant that the possibility of an emerging Kurdistan on its borders would have serious complications for domestic security. That is why the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent US policies in the country, which gave birth to a semi-independent Kurdish region, were met with strong Turkish opposition and tensions between the US and Turkey. Ongoing Turkish military operations against the PKK targets in Northern Iraq also caused negative reactions from the Iraqi Kurds, who have long raised objections to the treatment of Kurds in Iraq. Also, the US feared that the Turkish military operations could add more complication to an already chaotic scenario.

However, as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) achieved major success in stabilising Northern Iraq, and shifting from ethnic-minority politics to nation-making politics, it emerged as a prime market for Turkish export, transportation, and construction companies. The KRG and Turkey increasingly came to see engagement with each other as *sine qua non*.

Positive signals from both sides evolved into meetings between Turkish and Kurdish officials in Turkey and Iraq from 2008 onwards. In March 2008, Iraqi President and Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani held a three day official visit to Turkey. He was welcomed at the highest levels of Turkish state and was instrumental in trust building between two parties. In

The KRG and Turkey increasingly came to see engagement with each other as *sine qua non*

March 2009, Gül met with Kurdish leaders during his visit to Iraq – this was a major milestone in Iraqi-Turkish and Turkish-Kurdish relations. Since then, Turkey has opened a General Counsel in the KRG's capital Erbil, thus symbolically and practically upgrading its diplomatic relations with the KRG. Meanwhile, Turkish firms dominate the Iraqi Kurdish region with trade and construction.

Turkish-Iraqi trade volume went from a mere \$940 million in 2003 to \$3.5 billion in 2007, with a target goal of \$20 billion by the end of 2010.

In June 2010, Massoud Barzani, President of the KRG and leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party, officially visited Turkey with his cabinet ministers and held high-level meetings on a range of issues from the economy to security. This once more marked a complete volte-face in Turkish foreign policy towards the KRG. During his visit, Mr Marzani received a warm welcome by Turkish commentators and officials in his condemnation of PKK terror and praise of the AKP's Kurdish initiatives.

Currently, a free-trade agreement between Turkey and the KRG is being worked out, and if it is finalised, will provide a further stabilising effect, both for the larger Iraq and for Iraqi Kurdish-Turkish relations. Turkish Airlines is getting ready for regular flights to Erbil. However, these positive developments have two possible future fall out points: the future of Kirkuk and the presence of the PKK in Northern Iraq. Nevertheless, the dramatic change in relations between the KRG and Turkey reflect the pragmatist nature of the AKP's foreign policy.³⁰

The latest example of the strategic interest projects is the recent political declaration signed between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey in June 2010. The agreement proposes

³⁰ For a detailed study of changing Turkish policies on Iraq, see Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq: Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan", United States Institute of Peace, *Special Report* 237, May 2010

the setting up of a “Quadripartite High Level Cooperation Council”, a free-trade zone, and a waiving of visa requirements between these countries.³¹ The Council will meet annually at ministerial levels, including the Prime Ministers of the member countries, and seek to expand engagement between them. The Quadripartite will also be open for other countries to eventually join.

Although time will show the full potential of this agreement, it will be a solid framework for increasing regional economic engagement. For example, merely days after the signing of the joint political declaration between Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, telecommunication companies from Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey signed a major deal to construct an overland fiber optic network between Damascus, Amman, Jeddah, and Istanbul. The project, named JADI Link after the initials of the cities in which it will be based, will offer a major alternative to current underwater cables in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. This will make Turkey an information high-way bridge, connecting the information flow of the region with Europe and Asia.

This and similar deals are signifiers of increasing engagement between Arab and Turkish countries. In the opening of the 5th Turkish-Arabic Economic Forum in June 2010, PM Erdoğan stated;

While our trade volume with Arab countries was \$7 billion in 2002, we have raised this to \$37 billion in 2007. This means a 48% increase. In spite of the global economic crisis in 2009, we kept our trade at \$29 billion. Today, more than two thousand companies from Arab countries contribute to their own and Turkish economies by investing in various field in Turkey. Between 2002 and 2009, \$6.3 billion worth of direct investment capital entered Turkey from Arab countries. While in 2002, 400,000 Arab tourists visited Turkey, this number reached 1,420,000 in 2009. I know that Turkish soap operas are being widely watched in the Arab world. I know that our potential is much harder. Every one of my brothers who will engage in trade with Turkey should know that all of the doors are wide open.³²

During his opening address, PM Erdoğan also quoted lines from a Turkish poet who wrote the Turkish national anthem: “Turk cannot live without the Arab, who says ‘can live’ is insane. The Turk is both the right eye and the right hand of the Arab.” With this citation, as well as the allusion to the popularity of Turkish television productions in the Arab world and reference to Arab businessmen as ‘my brothers’, PM Erdoğan invokes a soft cultural and historical appeal. However, the vast majority of his talk on Turkish-Arab relations focused on the increasing economic exchange, not an ideological Turk-Arab brotherhood.

Once again, this reflects how the AKP government seeks to use a host of cultural and historical discourses for an extremely pragmatist goal, not with any specific group but with all of its neighbours. Utilisation of common history and shared heritage is not limited to Turkish- Arab relations. The 2009 Turkish-Russian Joint Declaration states:

31 “Turkey Agrees to plans for Arab ‘free trade zone’”, *BBC*, 10 June 2010; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10290025>

32 “Türk Arapsız yaşayamaz, kim ki yaşar der, delidir!”, *Radikal*, 11 June 2010

Considering the fact that the history of Turkish-Russian relations dating back to 500 years is the common heritage of both peoples and constitutes the solid foundations of the existing friendly relations and partnership between the two countries, both parties will take the necessary precautions for the preservation and accessibility of their respective national monuments located in each other's countries, which constitute the historical, cultural and spiritual heritage of each party. Within this context, both Parties will provide assistance reciprocally to build new military cemeteries and to restore the existing ones in their respective countries.³³

The desire to form a common Turkish-Russian historical bond is problematic as the cited 500 years of 'common heritage' includes wars and eras of animosity or frozen relations. Similarly, this discourse does not ask for camaraderie or ideological unity. It is only used to provide a language primarily for economic diplomatic relations, and secondarily, current diplomatic relations.

All of these; mediation, conflict resolution, and strategic interest projects highlight a strong pragmatic and ambitious turn in Turkish foreign policy. The AKP government has sought to advance Turkish national interest by diversifying its investments and addressing the dead-lock issues. Throughout all of this, Turkey has demonstrated a rational calculation of cost and benefit, not ideological realignment. This is a crucial point to consider when analysing the controversial steps it has recently taken.

Risky Adventures

Many of the AKP's initiatives have caused cautious enthusiasm in Europe, the US, the Middle East, and Turkey. A pragmatic Turkey, seeking to address its own demons and use its geopolitical luxuries to bring stability and reconciliation, could be a major positive power in a chaotic region. However, the same desire for multi-dimensional pragmatic engagement has inevitably included organisations and countries that are shunned by the EU and US and much of the world.

While Israel and the Middle East Quartet have pursued a policy of isolation and embargo following the takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas, the AKP has welcomed the Hamas leadership and continued to engage with it. This was primarily due to FM Davutoğlu's desire to be a trusted peace broker in the conflict. Following the flotilla crisis between Israel and Turkey in June 2010, PM Erdoğan has publicly stated that Hamas was not a terrorist organisation but a democratically elected political liberation movement. The AKP demonstrated similarly friendly relations with Hezbollah alongside deepening its ties with Lebanon, drawing reactions from the US and Israel.

The AKP's desire to engage with all relevant actors and to advance Turkish economic interests included Sudan. Unlike most countries which have economic and energy ties with Sudan, the Erdoğan government has chosen a much more public rapprochement, including

³³ *Joint Declaration between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Progress towards a New Stage in Relations and Further Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership*, Moscow, 13 February 2009; http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-declaration-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-russian-federation-on-progress-towards-a-new-stage-in-relations-and-further-deepening-of-friendship-and-multidimensional-partnership_-moscow_-13-february-2009.en.mfa

a state visit by Erdoğan to Sudan in 2006. Following his return, Erdoğan has stunned both the Turkish public and the international community by stating that he did not see a genocide while he was in Sudan, arguing that no Muslim would commit genocide.

In 2008, President Omar Bashir of Sudan visited Turkey and was given a high-level state welcome. Although the primary aim of the Turkish engagement was economic, PM Erdoğan's public statements, and the fact that Turkey welcomed a President who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide caused deep concerns both in Turkey and around the world. Turkish economic engagement with Sudan remains to be miniscule, as 2008 estimates put the trade volume between the two countries at a mere \$240 million.³⁴ Following strong EU pressure, Omar Bashir's proposed visit to Turkey to attend an OIC meeting in 2009 was cancelled.

While Turkey's engagements with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Sudan are not substantial and only offer a limited mediation role and economic opportunities for Turkey, Turkish rapprochement with Syria has major implications for the Middle East. Turkey and Syria had a distant relationship, suffering from a lack of trust until early 2000. Syrian refuge given to PKK fighters was always a point of contention, as well as the historical claims over the south-east borders of Turkey. The slow-paced trust-building measures dating back to the late FM Ismail Cem have increasingly bore fruit under the AKP. Between 2003 and 2010, more than 50 agreements were signed between Syria and Turkey³⁵ and in 2009; visa requirements were waived between the countries. Trade between two countries doubled between 2007 and 2009 to around \$4 billion.³⁶

The inclusion of Syria into the Quadripartite High Level Cooperation Council has been the latest signal of not only the changing Turkish attitudes towards Syria, but also of changing attitudes of Syria which is increasingly willing to shake off its previous image and policies and grab its share of the new opportunities emerging in the region since the invasion of Iraq. Although Turkey rapprochement with Syria has raised eyebrows, a host of countries - including the US - have been working on improving their own relations with the country.

Turkish Iranian relations

The most contentious part of the shift in Turkish foreign policy has been its relationship with Iran. It has caused deep worries in the West and Middle East, and many have read it as another example of a Turkish shift of alliance. However, there is nothing new about Turkish-Iranian engagement.

This can be seen all the way back to the border contentions between the two countries following WWI, which were followed by a relative calm under Reza Shah's rule. This was unsettled by the implications of the British-Russian invasion in WWII and tensions over the Kurds and Azeris. The cooling of relations between the two countries during the initial years of the Cold War were again strained with the rule of Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadegh. Fears of a Communist takeover of Iran led Turkey to back British and American plans to overthrow the Iranian government and reconstitute the Shah.

34 Cengiz Aktar, "Today's Lesson: Omar Al Bashir", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 13 November 2009; <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=todays-lesson-omar-al-bashir-2009-11-13>

35 Comelie Pivariu, "Turkey and its foreign policy in the time of Gül-Erdoğan-Davutoğlu", *World Security Network*, 17 March 2010

36 F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey's New Geopolitics", *Survival*, 52:2, pp 166, 25 March 2010

Although the Shah's return normalised the Turkish-Iranian relations and opened the way for various defence agreements, the 1960 military coup in Turkey put it on hold. Deepening Turkish-Iraqi relations, Iranian involvement with the Kurds in Iraq, and the Alevis and Kurds in Turkey and Iran's responses to Turkish economic and energy needs during the Cyprus crisis caused further contention.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was forecasted to be the end of the relationship between the two countries, but the same story of contention, collaboration and competition continued. The Revolution meant a fading of Iran's geo-political role for Turkey, but the new regime's political strength eased Turkish worries over a breakdown of unity in Iran. While duly recognising the new Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey kept a cautious relationship with the new state, and contentious issues of the Kurds, Armenians, and Azeris have continued since 1979.

However, the pragmatism of Turgut Ozal's government in Turkey shifted the focus of Turkish-Iran relations to trade and energy. With the collapse of the USSR, Turkey and Iran found themselves competing against each other in the lucrative Central Asian market. However, this pragmatic trade link between the two countries has continued throughout stormy public protests in Turkey regarding Iranian covert operations in Turkey against Iranian opposition figures, Iranian support to Islamist groups in Turkey, and the hosting of the Kurdish terror organisation, the PKK.

Turkish-Iranian relations continued to be calm during the Khatami presidency, as Iran renounced its previous policies of supporting subversive groups in Turkey and both countries found deepening their trade relations to be mutually beneficial. This has never sat comfortably with the old elite of Turkey, including the Turkish Armed Forces, who have continually expressed their mistrust towards Iran and the need for closer ties with Israel and the US. For various reasons, the ideological, religious, and ethnic elements of secular Sunni Turkey and theocratic Shiite Iran could have caused a major clash, but did not. Currently, the Turkish-Iranian trade volume is estimated to be around \$10 billion dollars, a majority of which is energy imports from Iran.³⁷

This is a key point to hold on to while trying to make sense of the love affair between the Erdoğan and Ahmedinejad governments. The AKP government has not taken a dramatically different approach to Iran, but has only sought to deepen Turkish economic interests and to fulfil its dream of becoming a peace broker in the region by offering to be a middle man between Iran, the US, and the EU. In the ever changing story of the Middle East, Turkish-Iranian relations have once again become cooperative as both countries have found themselves facing similar challenges of an unstable Iraq and eyeing similar economic and political opportunities.

The two fold Turkish ambition to maximise economic gains and to become an influential middleman in the region becomes clear in two hotly contested Turkish-Iranian initiatives: natural gas imports and the uranium enrichment deal.

³⁷ A similar ideological difference but a keen commitment for trade development with Iran can be seen in German – Iranian relations. German exports to Iran has been on a steady increase reaching to \$5.7 billion in 2008, making Germany the second highest exporter to Iran after China. (See, *Wall Street Journal*, Vanessa Fuhrmans, "German firms feel pressure over Tehran trade", 3 October 2009) Even with the increasing scrutiny on the engagement of German businesses in Iran by the US and growing diplomatic pressure to tighten sanctions against Iran, Germany is continuing to enjoy a high share of the Iranian market.

Turkey's desire to export natural gas from Iran can be traced back to the Tansu Ciller government in the mid 1990s and the subsequent Islamist Refah Party government under Necmettin Erbakan.³⁸ Iranian natural gas has never been a steady and substantial supply for meeting Turkish energy needs. Due to a combination of technical and political reasons, Iranian gas has been slow to come and has had abrupt cut-offs, such as the January 2008 cut which lasted almost a month and caused tensions between Iran and Turkey. Turkish desires to include Iran as a provider for the Nabucco pipeline project have always been met with protest by the US and some parts of Europe. Although there were expectations that a deal between Turkey and Iran would finally be reached during President Ahmedinejad's visit to Turkey in 2008, it was not.

The Russian-Georgian crisis in 2008 and the Russian-Ukrainian tensions confirmed the AKP government's desire to increase gas provision from Iran, the second biggest natural gas supplier to Turkey. Turkey, like Europe, does not want to develop an absolute dependency on Russian supplies, and thus give Russia a strong political weapon. However, Turkey is equally reluctant to depend exclusively on the unreliable Iranian supply.

With the recent energy deals signed with Azerbaijan and Russia, it is clear that the Turkish priority is to be a neutral energy route, and thus not only meet its own energy needs, but also profit from its production and consumption. On the one hand, Turkey entertains cooperating with Russia in its plan to sideline Ukraine as a transport channel for Russian gas. On the other hand, Turkey is helping Europe to diminish its dependency on Russian gas with the Nabucco pipeline plans. Turkish desire to emerge as a trusted energy link between Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia is both welcomed and envied by all of the actors in the region - even by Iran.

The second example is the uranium enrichment deal signed by Brazil, Iran, and Turkey in May 2010. At a first glance, the deal is a diplomatic breakthrough and success for Brazilian and Turkish diplomacy. No one has been able to solicit such a major compromise from Iran. The deal secured an Iranian pledge to hand over 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey, where it would be processed into energy rods and returned to Iran.

The idea of uranium enrichment by a third party was suggested to Iran by the Vienna group a year earlier, and was rejected by Iran. The plan would have ensured a civilian use level of nuclear material proved that Iranian ambitions were peaceful and eased the worries of the international community. Iran rejected the deal after a long series of deliberations about the exchange of LEU, due to its lack of trust in the Vienna group. Although Iranian concern over having its uranium stolen may have been understandable, it was clear that Iran was set to refuse such a deal from the start. It only continued negotiations in order to gain time and obtain further 'evidence' that it was being victimised by an imperial West.

Although 1,200 kilograms of LEU might have meant a substantial part of Iranian nuclear deposits two years ago, today that amount would not be enough to ensure that Iran has no

The Russian-Georgian crisis in 2008 and the Russian-Ukrainian tensions confirmed the AKP government's desire to increase gas provision from Iran, the second biggest natural gas supplier to Turkey

38 See Daphne McCurdy, "Turkish-Iranian Relations; When Opposites Attract", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Volume 7, Number 2, pp.86; <http://www.turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2008-02-policy/dmc.pdf>

further reserves. In fact, when the Iranian foreign ministry declared that Iran would continue its own uranium enrichment up to 20% (the minimum needed for nuclear weapons) a day after the public signing of the deal, it was clear that this was only a delaying tactic.

Since the Iranian nuclear program remains clandestine and Iran continues to refuse the IAEA full access to monitor it, it is no surprise that the US and the EU have not welcomed the deal as a major breakthrough, especially since the Brazil-Turkey-Iran deal will not hinder Iran from developing nuclear weapons. US diplomacy secured a UN Security Council vote in favour of a fourth wave of sanctions against Iran in June 2010 in which Turkey and Brazil voted against.³⁹ The agreed sanctions were targeted towards specific economic and military ventures, especially associated with the Revolutionary Guards, but excluding the energy sector. Before and after the voting process, Iran made threats regarding the Brazil-Turkey enrichment deal, which had no clout in the discussions.

During the discussions before the vote at the Security Council, Brazil and Turkey continued to argue that diplomatic options had not yet been exhausted. The two countries were against further sanctions and claimed that the uranium enrichment deal could be pursued. FM Davutoğlu has continually argued that the only UNSC country bordering Iran is Turkey and that sanctions will hurt it. Both Brazil and Turkey remain optimistic that the uranium enrichment deal will come to fruition itself and that time will show the positive role played by these countries in easing the tensions.

Turkey's lead role in the enrichment deal and its ongoing refusal of sanctions has been read by Western commentators as supporting Iran and its nuclear ambitions. Such a reading ignores many important factors. Brazil and Turkey, the two countries that have approached Iran on this issue, have no ideological or geo-political links. They are both temporary members of the UN Security Council. Most importantly, they are both increasingly ambitious G20 countries and are eyeing new economic opportunities and want to assert their own power in a larger arena.

Turkey still has no interest in having its own nuclear arsenal and wants a nuclear free Middle East. It is true that PM Erdoğan's history of worrisome verbal eruptions has blurred Western perceptions of Iranian-Turkish relations. PM Erdoğan continues to express his belief in the civilian ambitions of an Iranian nuclear programme and continues to criticise the 'hypocrisy' of the West in allowing Israel to maintain nuclear weapons while reacting vehemently to other countries' 'peaceful' nuclear ambitions.

An analysis of the ups and down of the natural gas and uranium enrichment deals highlights the public support shown to the Ahmedinejad government by the Turkish government, which is driven by a desire for economic and political gain, not comradeship. A Turkish government opting for Iran and eliminating the US and the EU is not realistic or sensible. The potential Turkish gain from the Iran market and supplies can never match the possible losses Turkey might face in other fronts due to its relations with Iran.

Yet, one cannot help but point out the explosion of trade links between the two countries since the change in the AKP's foreign policy. High level meetings between Iranian and Turkish trade authorities have included talks on opening Turkish banks in Iran. Turkish

³⁹ Louis Charbonneau & Patrick Worsnip, "U.N. council hits defiant Iran with new sanctions", *Reuters*, 9 June 2010 <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6575A820100609>

exports to Iran have soared, particularly in 2008. The most remarkable of the new areas of commerce has been the automotive industry. The Turkish daily paper, *Today's Zaman*, reported that "Iran imported 145 million dollars worth of cars in the first seven months of 2008, a 167% increase on the previous year's figure."⁴⁰

The boost of import industries and good political will between the two governments has also led to talks of long-term civilian investments in both countries, focusing on opening of factories and partaking in privatisation projects. However, the Turkcell and TAV experiences in Iran have scared Turkish businesses, who are weary of corruption and political instability in the country. Also, Turkish companies with direct relations with the US and European markets are afraid of the losses caused by sanctions and current US regulations regarding trade with Iran. This means that the economic scope of Turkish-Iranian relations will continue to focus largely on energy imports from Iran, supplemented by short-term export of goods from Turkey.

The most direct political gain from the AKP initiatives for Turkey has been Iran's official declaration of the Kurdish PKK as a terror organisation during PM Erdoğan's visit in July 2004. This marked a dramatic shift from the 1990s, when Iraq offered asylum to more than a thousand PKK fighters and backed groups engaged in undermining the Turkish state. The change of policies on the Kurdish issue reflects tensions in neighbouring Iraq and the domestic insurgency caused by the Kurdish PJAK in Iran. Both the PJAK and the PKK are known to have close ties. Iran has continually accused the US of empowering Iranian Kurds and PJAK in their attempts to undermine Iran. Now that an independent Kurdistan in Iraq looks like a possibility, Iran has no option but to confront – together with Turkey – a common enemy.

Since the April 2008 memorandum on increasing security cooperation signed by Turkey and Iran, both countries have regularly launched military operations in tandem and in full cooperation with each other against the PKK and PJAK targets. Ironically, this has pushed the US to actively work with the Turkish state to eradicate PKK terror by providing live intelligence about Kurdish group activities in Northern Iraq. US support to Turkey on Kurdish terrorism signals a mending of tensed US-Turkish relations, while simultaneously strengthening Turkish-Iranian relations.

For these political and economic reasons, the AKP government has vehemently reacted against the possibility of new sanctions against Iran. Sanctions will hurt direct Turkish economic engagement with Iran and possibly implicate Turkish businesses in breaking UN sanctions, thus risking their assets in the US and Europe. They would also force Turkey to choose between two important relationships. Even though PM Erdoğan's flamboyant public statements echo feelings of anger about Israeli and US reactions to Iranian nuclear ambitions, in the final analysis, the AKP continues to maintain a pragmatic policy of pursuing Turkish interests, not ideological solidarity.

Turkish American Relations

The potential gain Turkey has sought to acquire from a proactive engagement with previously shunned states such as Iran and Syria has been overshadowed by the tensions

⁴⁰ "Ankara warming up to Tehran," *Today's Zaman*, 14 September 2008; <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-153079-ankara-warming-up-to-tehran.html>

between the US and Turkey. There are regular public tensions between the two countries, due to yearly dramas of potential resolutions on the 1915 Armenian genocide at the US House of Representatives, human rights reports published by the US Department of State, and Turkish protests over US Middle East policies. However, none of these have raised a fundamental challenge to the relationship between the two countries.

Ever since the AKP landslide victory in 2002 and the start of reforms of Turkish foreign policy, many commentators have issued fearsome forecasts of the breakdown of Turkish-American relations. However, a more informed view of Turkish-American relations provides optimism for a more promising future.

The end of the Cold War and the changing dynamics of the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans have only increased the geo-political significance of Turkey for US foreign policy interests. The US and Turkey enjoyed a remarkable relationship in military fields until 1990, which evolved into an 'enhanced partnership' on a broader range of fields in early the 1990s. This included increasing direct US military and economic aid to Turkey, which then gradually decreased as Turkey increasingly called for 'trade not aid'. In 1997, the relationship between the two countries entered into a 'strategic partnership' under the Clinton administration. This was characterised by the "five-part agenda" which covered bilateral cooperation on energy, economic issues, security cooperation, regional cooperation, and the Aegean/Cyprus issues.⁴¹ Close US support of Turkey also included enabling IMF backing for the turbulent Turkish economy in the late 1990s.

A pivotal moment in Turkish-American relations was the 1991 Gulf War. Turkish support and direct involvement in the military campaign, alongside continuing Turkish participation in NATO operations and ongoing relations with Israel have secured Turkey a close relationship with the US. The US' desire to secure a Turkish alliance with the West, rather than with the Muslim World, and a renewed Russian desire for political dominance in the region were a major push for strong and active US support for the Turkish EU bid, especially since the late 1990s. In 1999, President Bill Clinton became the first Western leader to address the entire Turkish Parliament, and publicly repeated the US' commitment to Turkey's EU membership.

This relationship became vital after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and in the subsequent 'War on Terror'. Turkey's geo-political positioning and its identity as a Muslim-majority country in favour of democracy and friendly ties with the West were crucial in countering global militant Islamist groups. Since such groups also saw Turkey as a target, Turkey provided quiet support and cooperation on counter-terrorism. This included limited Turkish military personnel participation in the Afghanistan campaign and intelligence sharing on militant Islamist groups.

The US and Turkey did not agree about Iraq before the 9/11 attacks. The US had expressed discomfort with how sanctions on Iraq were being undermined by Turkey's desire to increase its economic engagement with it. The subsequent Turkish involvement in the Afghan campaign, and the opening of its air space and certain military bases were welcomed by the US administration. The ruling Ecevit government, cornered by the realities

41 For more information on Turkish-American relations during the Clinton administration see Rachel Prager, "Turkish-American Relations: historical context and current issues", Georgetown University, pp 8-9, 2003; <http://www.tusiad.us/content/uploaded/Pragertusiadsubmission.pdf>

of an economic crisis and incentives to support the US, began softening its public stand on the Iraq issue.

In 2002, when the AKP won a landslide victory, serious concerns were raised about the future of Turkish-Armenian relations. These were due to the AKP's Islamist roots and also due to the Turkish public's condemnation of Turkey's support of the US, especially for allowing the US military to use Turkish bases.

The relationship entered a tense phase in March 2003 when the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) refused to allow US troops to be based in Turkey for an attack on Iraq. This gave the AKP government a much stronger mandate to express its displeasure at the Iraq campaign, alongside growing Turkish public protests.

The refusal to deploy US troops via Turkey only caused a change of plans for the US. Turkey suffered the cost of the US' unwillingness to help on the Kurdish conflict and provide the much needed financial aid for its recovery from the 2001 financial crisis. The US continued to show its disappointment by a lack of interest in Turkish concerns over its support of a semi-autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq. The subsequent reduction of the number of US troops already based in Turkey, especially at the crucial Incirlik base in Adana, caused concern over the end of the 'strategic partnership' between the two countries.

This partnership was put to the test in July 2003 when a group of Turkish military personnel were captured in Northern Iraq by US soldiers and had hoods placed over the personnel's heads. This caused a major public outcry in Turkey.

The 'hood' episode came to reflect a growing resentment of the US, of American aggression in the Middle East, and a failure to address the suffering of the Palestinians. The attitude of the Turkish Left has always been anti-American, especially since the US backing of the military coup in 1980. Turkish Islamists have always expressed grievance against what was perceived as a crusade against Islam and Muslims. But the invasion of Iraq and the mistakes committed in the 'War on Terror' have rocketed anti-American sentiment in the country. Conspiracy theories in Turkey continue to portray US as the archenemy set to destroy Turkey through cunning projects.

President Obama's decision to visit Turkey for his first foreign visit gave a much needed boost to ties between the two countries - visible in a slight increase in US popularity in the country between 2008 and 2010. The visit made Turkey the first Muslim-majority country the President had visited and the platform for the President to launch his administration's public diplomacy to restore the image of the US in the Muslim world. In his talk to the Turkish Parliament,⁴² President Obama did not only woo the country and politicians with his strong affirmation of Turkey and Muslims, but also made robust comments on all of the contentious issues between the two countries, including the 1915 Armenian genocide and treatment of minorities.

This and many subsequent high-level visits between the two countries during Obama's Presidency, including one by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,⁴³ have significantly healed

42 The full text of the talk can be found at the White House's website; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-turkish-parliament>

43 Far from the diplomatic significance and outcomes of Secretary of State's visit, Mrs Clinton's interview on a women's talk show, including her honest expressions of the difficulty of her marriage, has played a major role in reconnecting of the Turkish public to their shared humanity with Americans.

the damaged relations between the two countries. President Obama's strong interest in securing ties with Turkey has not only been due to the geo-political significance of Turkey in many key US foreign policy concerns, but is also a result of; the President's desire to use his relationship with Turkey as a 'model partnership' for US relations with the Islamic world.⁴⁴

However, the honeymoon of the renewed Turkish-American relations ended primarily due to changes in Turkish foreign policy. It became clear rather early on that the Obama administration would not be able to solicit substantial Turkish support for its withdrawal plans from Afghanistan and Iraq and posting of more Turkish troops in Afghanistan. These were not unexpected outcomes.

Positive relations between Iran and Turkey, regardless of their perception by the general public, could play a major role

The vote on a resolution at the US House of Foreign Affairs Committee, which called for an official acknowledgement of the Armenian massacres of 1915 as a genocide have tested Obama administration's relationship with Turkey. It did not cause much real damage however. The administration has shown great public and private support to the AKP government, owing to the AKP's pro-EU and pro-liberal economic commitments, its desire to solve the Armenia and Cyprus issues, and to engage constructively with Iraqi Kurds.

However, Turkish engagement with Iran has increasingly become a point of contention between the countries. Initial Turkish desires to emerge as a 'middle man' in the Middle East were warmly but cautiously welcomed by the US, which has not necessarily seen Turkish involvement in Israel-Palestine, Syria, and Iran issues as a *sine qua non*. The Turkish aspirations to be included among the regional heavy weights have unintentionally placed Turkey at odds with the US on Iran-related issues.

Although President Obama launched his engagements with Iran through using more cordial language than the Bush administration did, time has made it clear that Iran would not give up its nuclear ambitions, and tougher actions were necessary. This had a caveat, as the US no longer wished to pursue a unilateral approach, but desired to involve the international community in developing effective diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran.

Within this context, positive relations between Iran and Turkey, regardless of their perception by the general public, could play a major role. However, PM Erdoğan's public affirmation of Ahmedinejad's re-election and continual statements that Iran wants only to pursue nuclear energy, and has a right to do so – or that it is hypocritical for the West to corner Iran on nuclear weapons when Israel has them – is an increasing concern in Washington. This became more tangible as Turkey outspokenly reacted against the possibility of further sanctions on Iran, primarily because of its trade interests. This was also why other members of the UN Security Council, such as Germany, China, and Russia, have also been reluctant to support further sanctions.

44 President Obama's efforts to break away with the perceived US animosity towards Islam have thus far achieved limited but significant fruits. Ironically, they backfired with the Turkish laicists. Ever since Secretary Madeleine Albright's public refusal to back a Turkish military cue against the Islamist Refah Party government in February 1997, Turkish left and nationalists have begun talking about a new US foreign policy to make Turkey a mild Islamic country in a desire to control the Middle East. Strong Obama support to AKP government and his desire to engage with the Muslim world were also perceived through these lenses. Thus, even though President's political charisma and public humility have warmed many hearts, he has also caused serious worries in the Turkish military, among the traditional elites and in secularist circles, which have previously seen Turkish American relations as vital.

The unsuccessful Iran-Turkey-Brazil uranium enrichment deal of May 2010 has placed the AKP government at odds with the US once again. Rather than being heroes of the day, Brazil and Turkey emerged as nuisances who have undermined a long history of diplomatic efforts by the US. Far from the desired goal of pursuing 'diplomatic means' and ignoring sanctions, the deal has only caused US efforts to go further. Washington, which preferred abstention was disappointed with the Turkey-Brazilian 'no' to sanctions against Iran at the UNSC.⁴⁵ However, the White House has affirmed its desire to continue to work with its 'allies' on this issue.

The uranium enrichment deal has demonstrated growing confidence in a new Turkish foreign policy, which is bound to clash with US interests in the region. However, the Obama administration shows close interest in and support of Turkey. In the National Security Strategy released by the White House in May 2010, Turkey is singled out in its European Allies section with the statement that the US "will continue to engage with Turkey on a broad range of mutual goals, especially with regard to pursuit of stability in its region."⁴⁶ This is no surprise as Turkey will be either a key ally or a block to the US pull-out strategies from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in its interaction with Iran.

The pragmatic nature of the AKP's foreign policy and the depth and significance of Turkish-American relations mean that the US and Turkey will continue to enjoy a close relationship. Turkey will become increasingly bold in its demands, and besides compromises one could also expect occasional clashes of interest. Yet the long history of close ties between the two countries, and the acute awareness that they need each other means that the US-Turkish relations as a long-term marriage of convenience with occasional romance and turbulent clashes is likely.

Turkish Israeli Relations

The most serious fallout from traditional Turkish foreign alliances has been with Israel. Given that Turkey is a Muslim country, Turkish public has always shown sympathy towards Palestinians, and anti-Semitism has been a growing concern, even though traditionally the Ottoman Empire was a refuge for Jews fleeing from persecution in Europe. However, unknown to larger sections of the Turkish public, Turkey has enjoyed strong economic and diplomatic ties with Israel, especially since the 1990s. These include joint military exercises, modernisation of military equipment, intelligence sharing and arms trade, and investment in civilian enterprises.

Until 2009, the AKP government did not interfere with these quiet exchanges with Israel. In fact, under the AKP, the trade volume as well as private investment and tourism reached their peak. In 1996, a trade agreement between Israel and Turkey lifted custom duties for various goods. This led to an increase in trade volume from an estimated \$450 million in 1996 to \$3.4 billion in 2008.

45 In its June 19-25, 2010 issue, the Economist quoted a senior American official that a proposal by Turkey to Brazil that both countries should join Lebanon in abstaining from the resolution was rejected by Brazil, which resulted in a vote against the resolution. This highlights once more that the main desire of Turkish foreign policy changes is not driven by an anti-American attitude.

46 Full text of the National Security Strategy can be found at the White House's website; http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

The largest portion of the trade involves imports of military technology from Israel for modernisation of Turkish fighter jets and tanks, and the purchase of unmanned aerial vehicles. Turkish exports to Israel, estimated to be around \$1 billion, largely involve the textile, steel, automotive, and construction sectors. The number of Israeli tourists who visited Turkey was also increasing steadily until 2008. These promising and beneficial relations have stumbled in 2009. According to Hasan Kanbolat, a columnist for *Today's Zaman*, the number of Israeli tourists visiting Turkey fell by some 40%, and the overall trade volume dropped down to an estimated \$2.5 billion.⁴⁷

The tangible decline of the Israeli-Turkish relationship can be traced back to strong reactions of the Turkish public and the AKP government to Israel's 2006 Lebanon and 2008 Gaza campaigns. In both incidents, PM Erdoğan broke the general silence shown by previous Turkish governments on Israel-Palestine issues and in his usual flamboyant language condemned Israel for committing war crimes and serious human rights abuses.

Although such feelings were always present in Turkey and among AKP ranks, the AKP continued to cultivate good relations with Israel in line with its desire to be a peace broker in the Middle East. However, besides hardening the attitude of Turkish public against Israel, the 2008 Gaza campaign also caused a strong personal disillusionment with Israel for PM Erdoğan. Away from public eyes, Turkey had been working on a deal between Israel and Syria. A few days before the Gaza campaign started, PM Erdoğan hosted the then Israeli PM Ehud Olmert in his office, where the two talked for hours with occasional phone conversations to Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. Ehud Olmert left Ankara with the promise of taking the details of the deal to his cabinet and informing Ankara on a decision in a couple of days.

This was seen as a major diplomatic achievement by the AKP government and observers. While the international community waited to hear the final details of the agreement, Israel launched the Gaza campaign. This changed the mood in the region once again and the AKP's efforts were in vain. It is clear that PM Erdoğan felt personally betrayed and manipulated by Israel, which gave assurances to Turkey while being at the brink of executing a major military offensive.

The growing tension between the two countries reached its peak when PM Erdoğan stormed off the stage at the World Economic Forum in January 2009, following remarks by Israeli President Shimon Peres. It was clear that Turkish and Israeli relations were entering a turbulent phase. Erdoğan's temperament drew criticism in Turkey and much of the world. Nevertheless, the mood in the streets across the Islamic world and Europe was sympathetic, if not supportive of Erdoğan's rebuking of Israel.

The rift continued to deepen when Israel refused to allow Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu to visit the Gaza strip on an official visit to Israel in September 2009. In retaliation, Turkey cancelled Israel's participation at a joint international air exercise in October, which Turkey hosts annually with the US, Italy, and other NATO forces. The entire exercise was called off by the US as a result.

In January 2010, the diplomatic tensions soared when the Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon summoned the Turkish ambassador to protest against an anti-Semitic episode

⁴⁷ See Hasan Kanbolat, "A look at Turkish-Israeli economic relations after the crisis", *Today's Zaman*, 03 June 2010

of a popular Turkish television drama, *Valley of the Wolves*. In a bizarre populist show of superiority, Ayalon sought to insult the Turkish Ambassador by placing him on a lower chair and by urging the media to report the lower seating of the Ambassador and the fact that the only flag on the small table was the Israeli one. When the video recordings of Mr Ayalon's instructions were aired, it caused havoc in Turkey. Turkey threatened to recall the Turkish Ambassador to Israel back to Ankara. Eventually, Israel offered an official apology and the issue did not escalate further. However, it became clear that the Netanyahu and Erdoğan governments would not be able to have a productive and friendly relationship.

Throughout 2009, defence and trade officials in both countries regularly stated that each new contract would be assessed on its own merit,⁴⁸ signalling the possibility that the flourishing trade between the two countries would not return to the peak of 2008. However, no major running contract has been cancelled and diplomatic relations between the two countries, though tense, have not been downsized.

In June 2010, Turkish-Israeli relations entered into a new crisis. The Israeli Defence Forces intercepted a flotilla of some six boats carrying humanitarian aid and an international group of activists to the Gaza strip with a theatrical operation. As the IDF troops descended on the main vessel, which was sailing under a Turkish flag, the clashes between soldiers and a group of violent activists escalated, resulting in the death of at least nine activists, who were all Turkish citizens, and wounded civilians and soldiers.

The Israeli government's failure to handle the crisis and its aftermath resulted in extremely dangerous declarations by all the ranks of Turkish state structures, including President Abdullah Gül, who declared that 'things will never be the same again'. The incident also brought attention to the ongoing blockade of Gaza and has led various Western governments, including the US and UK, to ask for an end to the blockade, as it has proven to be 'counter effective' and causing a serious humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

At the time of writing, the ultimate significance of the flotilla conflict is still difficult to establish. The Turkish government has carefully avoided making specific public threats and has focused its main efforts on developing strong pressure from the international community to urge Israel to allow an international enquiry into the incident, acknowledge failures and give an official apology. Turkish FM Davutoğlu has also used the incident to ask for a cessation of the Gaza blockade and renewed efforts to start direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Whether the outcome of the currently planned UN inquiry restores the relationship between the two countries is uncertain. It is clear that the Netanyahu and Erdoğan governments do not trust each other, and as long as both governments are in power, further clashes can be expected. Since both governments depend on right-wing and conservative constituencies which demand strong stands and reactions, it is likely that any future tensions between the countries will be met with escalated responses. As Turkish foreign policy interacts actively with Iran, Syria, Hamas, and Lebanon, Israel sees Turkey as a potential adversary. A renewed sense of pride and strength causes Turkey not to see its relationship with Israel as particularly valuable in the process of gaining on other fronts.

48 Barbara Opall-Rome and Vago Muradian, "Israel-Turkey Derails Defense Trade", *Defense News*, 18 October 2009

However, there is a long history of civilian and state interaction between the two countries which suggests that there are reasons to anticipate a recovery of Israeli-Turkish relations to a satisfactory level. From a purely rational perspective, it is still in the best interest of Israel and Turkey to maintain their ties and increase their strategic exchanges.⁴⁹ This should be all the more true for FM Davutoğlu who continues to promote a 'zero conflict' policy.

Warranted and Unwarranted Worries

Both FM Davutoğlu and PM Erdoğan remain as ambitious and zealous as they were on their first day in office. Davutoğlu's intellectual depth and Erdoğan's political will has allowed Turkey to shift gears, causing fear and envy amongst its foes and excitement amongst its friends.

On the one hand, even the fiercest critics of Turkey acknowledge that proactive Turkish engagement and pragmatic policies have a strong stabilising effect. Even though much of the excitement about progress on Cyprus and Armenia issues have cooled down, most commentators still agree that possible solutions have never looked this tangible before. Turkish engagement with the previously shunned Iraqi Kurdistan authorities served as a fruitful economic relationship for both of the parties, as well as removed worries on previously forecasted potential fallouts with Iraqi Kurds. Although full Turkish membership to the EU appears to be at least 10 years away, the AKP's commitment to meet EU criteria can not be questioned. The AKP government has also attracted the highest levels of foreign investment to Turkey and integrated Turkey further into the global economy.

On the other hand, Turkish engagement with shunned groups, such as Hamas; its rapprochement with problematic countries, such as Syria and Iran - along with tensions with Israel and the US - have caused widespread concern about the direction in which Turkey is evolving. This was not helped by the populist and dangerous criticisms of Israel and support of Ahmedinejad's government by PM Erdoğan. Since a large portion of foreign commentators have misread the domestic tensions in Turkey as an Islamist takeover, it was no surprise that the change in Turkish foreign policy has been perceived as further proof of Turkey turning its face from the West to the East. Forecasts of the outcome of such a shift have taken an almost apocalyptic tone. For those who continue to see a Manichean battle between 'civilisations', Turkey has been slipping into the 'dark side'.

Banality of reality

However, the reality is much more mundane than commentators have portrayed it. It is in fact true that Turkey has been shifting away from a foreign policy of maintaining the status quo, but only to a matrix of maximising its own interests by diversifying its investments and relations. This dynamic is inherent to the foreign policy of every country as, ultimately, each country seeks to protect and advance its interests. In order to do so, policies have to be continually evaluated and upgraded at every juncture; new alliances have to be developed, and old and unfruitful ones have to be let go.

⁴⁹ In fact, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul stated that Turkey's military ties with Israel have not been hindered by the ongoing tension over the flotilla and that Turkey will continue to pursue defense trade with Israel. See; Umit Enginsoy, "Turkey's military programs with Israel remain in place", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 3 June 2010; www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=military-programs-with-israel-remain-in-place-2010-06-03

It was only the grandeur of the language of the Cold War that caused people to see a 'curtain' dividing the world. In today's global world, one not only struggles to pinpoint where exactly the West and the East are, but also where those mysterious boundaries of the 'free world' and the Islamic world are - or whether they exist at all. To outside commentators, the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia can be seen as a unified block of people with a common religion and outlook of the world. However, the multiplicity of languages, historical grievances, religious creeds, political aspirations, and socio-political and geo-political realities make such imagery inaccurate. Non-Western commentators who see mythical crusades against them from a monolithic 'West' commit the same mistake. Thankfully, the world is much more fragmented and non-linear than that.

Turkey remains directly linked to the West with its membership in NATO, the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Its links with the EU supersede mere customs and trade agreements. Turkish ratification of the European Convention of Human Rights places Turkish courts under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, which now serves as an appeal mechanism against decisions of the Turkish courts. The AKP government has not severed these links and has in fact made them much stronger through EU reforms and further trade agreements. The AKP continues to pursue EU membership, though with less zeal than before 2005. It actively encourages European investment in Turkey, which still accounts for the majority of foreign investment.

In comparison to the US and Europe, Turkish ties with the Muslim-majority states of East Asia and the Maghreb remain weak. The focus of renewed Turkish desires for engagement is primarily with the Middle East, which is much more fragmented than it has ever been. The divisions run along Sunni-Shiite, Arab-Farsi-Turkish, and Gulf-Levant lines, with each country of the region following bilateral or multilateral policies with particular countries, putting them at odds with each other. Turkey is not entering a new strong alliance on the other side of the curtain, but is only trying to engage with particular countries of interest, and with it, taking a great risk of losing others in the region. Since Turkey is stronger than the vast majority of the region in economic, military, industrial, and political terms, it is not looking for a new source of protection, but rather for business partners to feed its growing appetite.

The most ambitious aspect of the AKP's foreign policy is not necessarily its active engagement with the Middle East but rather its desire to be everyone's ally, to assert neutrality and to enter into pragmatic relations, not only with the Middle East, but also with Russia, Central Asia, Europe, North and Latin America, and even with Africa. In other terms, the main Turkish ambition is to emerge as an independent global actor with a strong economy, playing a role of a bridge between the East and the West. Trying to make sense of changes in Turkey through the optic of whether or not Turkey is turning its face to the Islamic world is fundamentally flawed. The main question is whether or not Turkey is punching above its weight and what its actual prospects are.

For those who continue to see a Manichean battle between 'civilisations', Turkey has been slipping into the 'dark side'

Real-life limits of Turkish ambitions

Ever since the end of the Cold War, Turkish politicians have used various types of discourse to assert Turkish influence in the Muslim world. One such form was the stress on unity amongst the Turkic nations of Central Asia following the collapse of the USSR. Such unity calls, although they fit well with the Turkish national myths of a Turkish civilisation, only resulted in limited economic gain for Turkey in the reconstruction of various Central Asian governments. The Turkish and Azerbaijani relationship has been the only 'organic' and strong relationship to emerge.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the Islamist Refah Party, the AKP has not used a pan-Islamist language of unifying the Islamic umma or the Middle East under its leadership. Neither did it use a pan-Turkish discourse of unity of Turkic people of Central Asia, which previous Turkish governments had tried. The AKP's roots in Islamist movements and public expressions of piety have not earned any extraordinary political gains for Turkey in its relations with the Muslim-majority world, except for the occasional street-level rejoicing at PM Erdoğan's angry outbursts against Israel.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, abolition of the caliphate system by the Turkish Republic and the creation of independent Arab countries have also meant the end of Turkish leadership in the Islamic community. Turkey is not seen as a flag bearer of Islam in theological, cultural, or political terms. In fact, in one of his first video messages following the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin-Laden condemned Turks for the damage they caused to Islam by ending the caliphate. The secularising effect that Turkey has had on Islam has been a deep point of criticism in the conservative camps of the Islamic world, in contrast to the handful of aspiring secular Muslim politicians who see Turkey as a model of success. Turkey remains on the periphery of the Islamic world, with no major influence in structures such as the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Unlike the rhetoric, the reality of Turkish presence within the Islamic world is unimpressive. Turkey can never lead the fragmented Middle East, let alone more than the 50 Muslim-majority countries in the world. In fact, the interaction between the GCC countries and Turkey is still limited, which further limits the Turkish presence in the Middle East.

The possibilities of Turkish premiership in global politics are also restricted. Rotating temporary seats in key organisational bodies such the UN Security Council and the promising - but limited - influence in bodies such as NATO, OECD, or OIC bring occasional opportunities for Turkey to exercise limited power over international matters.

As Turkish ambitions to become an EU country remain unresolved, the most likely successful outcome of Turkish ambitions is maintaining a strong presence among the G20 nations as a medium range economic and political actor. But even then, Turkey is not able to compete with major emerging economic powers such as India, China, and Brazil. For example, although Turkey has shown an increasing interest in Africa over the recent years, Turkey is in no place to compete with China's aggressive bidding for resources on the continent. The geo-political reality of Turkey as a part of the Middle East carries onto the centre stage of international relations. This means that Turkish soft power is tied to the

dramatic fluctuations of an unstable region, which brings the risk of short-term exaggerated successes and sudden loss of political capital.

In maturing to be a player in the Middle East, Turkey is bound to commit mistakes, anger Western and regional powers, and fall out with certain cohorts. No matter how much the AKP government longs to be a mediator on Israel-Palestine issues, it will never succeed in being the main peace broker. However, the pragmatic and rational attitude that the AKP shows both in its domestic and foreign policies means that, unlike ideological clashes that have the potential for serious damage, a clash of interests between the US, the EU, Israel, and Turkey can be handled in a pragmatic and rational way.

With its lack of blanket support and commitment to any cohort of countries, the AKP government has adapted to the reality of a global world - unlike the isolationist and modernist politics of previous Turkish governments. This means that neither the EU nor the US can take Turkish support and commitment towards cooperation for granted, and both will have to continually develop enticing ties to keep Turkey on side.

CHAPTER 3

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Domestically

As has been illustrated, Turkey has been going through a healthy democratisation process, although it is currently handicapped by various political and social limitations. Turkish economy looks set not only to recover fully from a long history of troubles but also to strengthen its position as an important emerging economy. However, autumn 2010 and 2011 have several challenges ahead which might modify the optimistic projections.

In September 2010, Turkish society will be presented with proposed changes to the Turkish constitution. Opposition parties and even the Kurdish parties seem to be set to ask their constituency for a 'no' vote. This 'no' however, is not reflective of any actual concerns these parties have on the constitutional reform package. Rather, opposition parties want to use the referendum to damage the AKP's reformer image and turn it into a pre-election reaction to the AKP government. At this stage, Turkish society seems to be largely in favour of the reforms, yet the outcome of the referendum might only be a marginal win for the AKP.

A 'no' outcome would place the AKP in the defendant corner, rather than in the role of the initiative-taking reformer. Since the 'no' would be a result of a public referendum and not of a successful coup by the old elite and state structures, the AKP would not be able to spin the outcome as an example of how the state was set to stop further democratisation in the country.

The AKP would be forced into an intense electoral campaign leading up to the national elections in the summer of 2011, trying to prove its track record of reforms and economic successes. Meanwhile, having found a new opening in public support for AKP reforms, opposition parties will increase their ever-present discourses on the AKP's 'hidden and sinister agenda' and the doom and gloom of Turkey's future. This is likely to result in a polarised public opinion, sharp verbal duels, and a potential for small-scale crises. Although they might not be overly dramatic, they would cause foreign investors to be anxious about Turkish economic and political stability.

Since the AKP has eight successful years to show to the public in comparison to the opposition that hasn't changed its communication style since the early 2000s, it is very likely that the AKP will win the 2011 elections. However, the long AKP rule and its losses in the 2009 local elections, combined with the frustration of unemployment and grievances against the AKP, will mean a drop in its votes. In other words, the AKP is still likely to hold office, though with lesser seats and more parties represented at the parliament.

The key variable, which might dramatically change the outcome of the 2011 elections, would be unrest and intensified armed conflict with the Kurds in Eastern Turkey. The AKP has been pursuing multiple options to address the Kurdish problem and demonstrated an extraordinary success in mobilising unprecedented help from the US, Syria, Iran, and Iraqi Kurdistan to eradicate the PKK from the region. The new terror attacks and casualties however, have the potential to blur reality and to create intense anger against the AKP.

Opposition parties would be able to use public frustrations on increasing terror attacks against the AKP, claiming that by allowing the Kurdish language to be used and initiating projects to address Kurdish problems, the AKP has weakened Turkey and made it vulnerable to terrorism.

This scenario would have detrimental outcomes for the AKP's votes. Voices asking for a 'strong' response to Kurdish terrorism will inevitably force the AKP to adopt a much more muscular approach. This would inevitably cause a return to pro-military sentiments in the country, searching for military power as the solution. This will cause all of the democratisation reforms to come to a halt, and might face steady erosion.

The rise of nationalism would translate into further increase in anti-EU and anti-American sentiments. More worryingly, it would escalate civilian clashes between Turks and Kurds, mob violence, and vandalism, resulting in deaths and forced migration.

Even in this context, it would be difficult to forecast the AKP's total losses as the party has been quick to re-adapt itself to social attitudes and demands. However, it would likely result in a coalition government with the AKP as the senior partner. The most plausible coalition partner for the AKP would be the nationalist MHP, given its appeal to conservative constituencies and similar attitudes on issues such as the headscarf ban. A coalition government would inevitably slow down and hamper the AKP's ability to pass necessary reforms quickly in the parliament. In turn, this would decrease its appeal and damage stability in the country.

Another potential source of tension is the ambiguity over President Abdullah Gül's successor. President Gül has set an impressive record in moving beyond his own AKP roots and meeting the standards expected from a head of state. It is widely rumoured that Erdoğan is planning to assume the highest seat in Turkish politics. Currently, it is almost impossible to predict who the next President will be but what's certain is that the process will be turbulent and a new President with strong personal political commitments might create further tensions.

Internationally

The possible scenarios for domestic policy will inevitably have implications on Turkish foreign policy. In the case of the AKP losing the election, a surge in nationalistic tones is likely

to be dominant in Turkish foreign policy. In a coalition government, the current breadth and dynamism of Turkish foreign policy will be moderated in its ambitions and might even retract to old ways of thinking. However, no subsequent government would want to harm the economic gains set in motion by the AKP.

Even if the AKP and FM Davutoğlu maintain their power over Turkish foreign policy, major challenges - with possible problematic outcomes - lie ahead.

There are already signs that while Turkey is making new friends, it is risking losing old allies. As the tensions in Israeli-Turkish relations take a theatrical form in the media, Turkey is quietly arousing envy in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. While it is attempting to solve

Even if the AKP and FM Davutoğlu maintain their power over Turkish foreign policy, major challenges - with possible problematic outcomes - lie ahead

problems in the Balkans and the Middle East, its efforts are not welcomed by all and have limited scope. It might well be that the initial excitement from a 'bolder' Turkey, challenging Israel and engaging with its Arab neighbours, will sour and Turkish ambitions will be perceived as a new phase of colonial imperialism. It is also likely that the newly found aura of trust and friendship with Iran will not remain, mainly because Turkey is likely to realise the nature of Iranian ambitions and the cost of publicly supporting the Ahmedinejad government.

Aside from the hype surrounding the new initiatives, two ever-present issues continue to be the main litmus test for Turkey's new pragmatism: Cyprus and Armenia. While Turkey is currently seen as ready for a settlement over the divided island, domestic tensions between Turkish and Greek sides of Cyprus - as well as the entanglement of EU accession talks with Greek Cypriot pressure - pose serious challenges. A settlement that would satisfy everyone and at the same time not lose votes for the AKP seems pretty dim. Yet without solving the Cyprus issue, Turkey's membership in the EU would be much more difficult than just winning over the French and Austrian public to support the Turkish bid.

If the complicated nature of the Cyprus problem accounts for the slow progress on the issue, the same can't be said about opening the borders between Armenia and Turkey and full diplomatic engagement between the two countries. Although the AKP has undertaken remarkable steps towards a solution and its efforts have been mirrored by substantial risks taken by the Armenian government, the current freeze of the rapprochement is a direct challenge to the AKP's foreign policy image. The AKP is not expected to pursue new public steps towards Armenia before the 2011 elections. How it handles - or mishandles - this issue will be the key measure of its pragmatism. Without addressing the tensions with Armenia, normalising Turkish-Armenian relations, and enabling honest discussion about history outside of the political sphere, there will always be international tensions over resolutions proposed or passed in third party countries over the events of 1915 and Turkey will lose moral and intellectual high ground on the issue.

Potential tensions over the future resolutions acknowledging the Armenian genocide at the US House of Representatives will cause tensions between the US and Turkey. In April 2011, given its electoral concerns, the AKP government might be pressured into reacting harshly against any US resolution. This would once again cause Turkish-American

relations to deteriorate, while these will already be coping with US withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, and with the possibility of a nuclear Iran.

Perhaps the largest unknown is how Turkish and EU accession talks will unfold. In the near future, it is clear that both parties prefer slow paced and inconclusive talks over a swift decision. While the EU itself remains divided on what is being offered or promised to Turkey, Turkey remains divided on whether EU membership will be a good or bad thing for the country.

The prospects of an EU membership and a clear timeline for Turkish alignment with EU criteria would be important not only to integrate Turkey with Europe but also for the European economy, neighbourhood policy, and social cohesion issues. Such an anchorage with the EU will only increase Turkey's influence and its stabilising role in the Middle East and Central Asia, which would directly mean a strong EU presence and role in the region.

However, it must be acknowledged that EU-Turkey relations might reach a breaking point over the next five years. Given that EU voices range from strong support for Turkish membership to offers of special relation or even to instances of categorical refusal, the EU will not be the partner initiating the break up. As the Turkish public increasingly feels humiliated, manipulated, and left destitute, it is likely to support politicians calling for an 'independent' and 'proud' Turkey.

A future AKP government emboldened by its own economic and diplomatic successes and pressured by the public would easily be able to stop the accession talks, as it could credibly argue that it has done its best to achieve it and that the EU failed to keep its promises. If the next Turkish government is more nationalistic, it will be likely to 'standing up for Turkey' after the 'failure' of the AKP who 'sold' the nation to Europe.

This would be a tremendous loss for both Europe and Turkey. Turkish engagement with the EU would be reduced to bilateral relations with its closest EU countries. Turkey will not be likely to cooperate on issues that are sensitive to the EU, including migration routes, asylum seekers, and energy supply deals. It would ultimately mean compromising future expansion and growth of the EU. While this would draw Turkey closer to the US, Turkey would also inevitably seek to draw closer to Russia and to various Middle Eastern states. Although Turks would continue to see themselves as 'Westerners', the collapse of talks with the EU would cause a deep rift, causing many long-term implications.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that Turkey is on a healthy path of maturing and adapting to the realities of the 21st century. The AKP government has been instrumental in unleashing this process of change.

With all of its faults and limitations, the AKP has proven to be a remarkable movement that is able to hold the realities of globalisation in harmony with conservative culture and belief. Once again, this has proven that the deep democratisation and progressive reforms in Muslim-majority states have almost always happened through conservative but reformist governments that are able to reflect realities of their societies, not through seemingly secular or Western-ally authoritarian rulers.

To this end, the AKP and Turkey not only remain a positive model for many of the discussions about the future of Muslim-majority nations, but also a *sine qua non* partner for Europe, the US, Russia, and its neighbours in the Middle East and Central Asia. Strengthening a stable fully democratic and free-market Turkey which follows pragmatic foreign policy to increase its global economic engagement and to use its influence to broker peace in an unstable region has been beneficial.

The difficulties relating to Turkish attempts to achieve a higher regional and global status must not be overlooked. It might be that Turkish desires to become more involved in the Middle East will lead to new undesirable tensions with other influence-hungry countries in the region. Turkish attempts to be independent and have a stronger diplomatic muscle might also result in a clash of interest with the EU and US.

It might be that the AKP's broad appeal will eventually weaken and the tide of Turkish politics will turn to a more isolationist nationalistic current. This would undo a host of positive developments in the country. After all, xenophobia and anti-US feelings continue to run high in the country.

However, none of these worse-case scenarios can outweigh the positive signs and future potential of Turkey and what it can offer to the international community. Far from ostracising Turkey for acting unorthodoxly, the US and EU have to draw closer to Turkey. It is in their strategic interest to have Turkey on their side for economic and political benefits. Also, this is vital for making sure that the currents in Turkey head in a positive direction. In other words, Turkey needs strong anchorage with the US and Europe to ensure its own future, while the US and Europe need equally close ties with Turkey for their own benefit.



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