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## **THE TRANSFORMATION OF TURKEY'S SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL FACTORS**

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# THE TRANSFORMATION OF TURKEY'S SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

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Turkey's determination to participate in ESDP procedures and the negative response of the EU it received, motivated its decision to veto the EU's assured access to NATO planning facilities for crisis management.

The emergence of the European Security and Defense Policy out of the NATO concept of a European Security and Defense Identity was prompted by the hopes of the CFSP to graduate into a common European defense. It was stated in the 1994 NATO Summit Declaration and repeated in 1996 that NATO would avail its assets and capabilities for the development of an ESDI in the EU. The Strategic Concept agreed upon at the April 1999 Washington Summit, encouraged an EU security and defense dimension. The ESDP was created on the basis of the CFSP pillar of the Maastricht Treaty and relies on use of NATO capabilities and strategic planning. ESDP is a joint undertaking with EU member states to enhance their security when faced with threats defined by the Petersberg tasks. Although there are European intentions to construct an independent defence capability, there is yet no official EU decision to decouple its security system from NATO. In April 2003, Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg decided to proceed with collective planning and operational capabilities for the EU, without reliance on NATO assets and capabilities.<sup>1</sup> Although the UK insisted on a European cell within the NATO command, on 5 September 2003 European foreign ministers agreed that the EU should be endowed with a joint capacity to plan and carry out operations without depending on NATO capabilities. The Göteborg European Council endorsed the EU programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict, which will allow the Union to undertake early warning, analysis and action. The *Exercise Policy* of the EU will set requirements for categories of exercises including joint exercises with NATO. The dialogue between the latter and the EU ensures consultation, cooperation and transparency in responding to crisis and the need to manage conflict.

Turkey's fear of exclusion from the European security framework, is caused by a variety of reasons, both domestic and external. We shall attempt to examine them in the pages that follow and discuss Turkey's changing security considerations as they evolve after the end of the Cold War.

## **Domestic Causes of Change**

Virtual reality reigns in Turkish politics. Progressive of conservative tendencies are judged by their compatibility with the Kemalist tradition. Those who pass judgment are usually the guardians and exponents of Turkey's "deep state" and are hardly qualified

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<sup>1</sup> Ozlem Terzi, "Evolving European Security Capabilities and EU-Turkish Relations" in *Perceptions*, Ankara, March-May 2004, See also older paper by Nathalie Tocci & Marc Houben, "Accommodating Turkey in ESDP", CEPS Policy Brief, No. 5, May 2001.

for the task. Islamist conservatives on the other hand, may not consider progress a virtue but through their positive attitude vis a vis EU membership they have become the chief agents of movement in the inertia imposed by the Kemalist orthodoxy.

The attraction of Mr. Erdogan's followers towards the European prospect is prompted by the hope of legitimizing the Islamic position in the political spectrum of Turkey. It is also caused by a desire to free themselves from the oppressive vigilance of the system's military guardians. In practice therefore, the roles of the progressives and the conservatives have been reversed.

In his survey on Turkey's political culture, Ergun Ozbudun notes that according to a poll, 89% of the Turkish public would like to live under a democratic regime, but 41% prefer a strong leader who will even disregard the views of parliament. 55% believe that state decisions must be taken by experts rather than elected representatives and 33% have a positive view about military governments. Ozbudun's conclusions confirm the element of virtual reality in Turkish politics.<sup>2</sup> The symbiosis of contradictory principles of governance in public preferences, is certainly not confined to the Turks, but places the argument of Turkey's EU accession on a different basis. It is not westernization that will be preserved in Turkey through accession, but a new balance between the ossified exponents of virtual progress and the real agents of change.

Turkey's EU accession is a prospect that divides the Turks, not between westernizers and conservative Muslims, but through a line that runs across the two. Although, in sheer numbers those who favor accession predominate, extremists on Kemalist nationalism and Islamic orthodoxy have not said their last word. There are also those of the deep state that are still reluctant to give up their special privileges and submit their authority to the mainstream. This category in fact stands in the middle between extremists of all varieties and the moderates. Should the powerholders decide to bloc Turkey's progress to the EU, they possess the means of coercion to override the will of the majority. Mr. Erdogan and his Islamic following will therefore have to tread softly on the sensitivities of the arbiters of the Republic. The issues of the "Imam Hatip" religious schools and the treatment of adultery as a crime in the new civil code of Turkey, constituted two issues close to the hearts of Mr. Erdogan's following. Both were sacrificed in the process of appeasing the sentinels of the system. Few noticed that although the civil code did not include the criminalization of adultery, it contains provisions to persecute those who profess the withdrawal of Turkish forces from Cyprus or invoke the Armenian genocide in public.

The 7<sup>th</sup> package of reforms that went through the Turkish parliament in 2003 was the work of Mr. Erdogan's government in order to adjust Turkey to the *aquis communautaire*. The most important feature of this package is the transformation of the National Security Council from a body of political decision-making, into an advisory council of the government. The NSC consists of the Prime Minister, the most important ministers, the Chief of General Staff and the Chiefs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. The true power in this body however had traditionally resided with the General Secretariat, headed by a General. Under the new legislation the position will go to a

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<sup>2</sup> Ergun Ozbudun, "Political Culture and Democracy in Turkey", in Indra de Soysa & Peter Zervakis (eds) *Does Culture Matter?*, Bonn, ZEI, 2002.

deputy-Prime Minister of the government. It remains to be seen whether this piece of legislation will diminish the influence of the military in Turkish decision-making significantly.

### **External Factors of Change**

Samuel Huntington termed Turkey a “torn country” between East and West but failed to acknowledge the more relevant division on EU membership that cuts across the divide of secular and religious Turks. The outcome of the argument will also decide the future of Turkey as an “insulator” state or a military force that will attempt to mold the region according to its own priorities. As an “insulator” Turkey has acted as the buffer between Asia and Europe, or a neutral zone between political Islam and western secular democracies.<sup>3</sup>

With the exception of the Alexandretta-Iskenderun annexation of 1938, Kemalist leaders have since the foundation of Turkey, followed the “insulator” prescription rather than that of the regional hegemon. During the Second World War, Ismet Inonu, a close associate of Ataturk, maintained Turkey’s neutrality until Soviet threats obliged its leaders to join the western alliance. The invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the persistence of Turkish military presence on the island, constituted the beginning of a more assertive Turkish policy in the eastern Mediterranean. The military regime under General Kenan Evren, initiated an unprecedented in the Republic opening towards Islam and the Turkish head of state assumed the vice-presidency of the Islamic conference in Casablanca (1984). Evren also encouraged domestic Islam as a counterweight to left-wing radicalism that has swept Turkey in the severities. The post-cold war period initially generated a reconsideration of the country’s position in the western alliance. This was soon dispelled by the Gulf War and Turgut Ozal’s relationship with the United States generated a new assertiveness that made the Turks less amenable to European options. Being closer to the priorities of the US, they put distance between European interests and their own and increased Turkish regional exceptionalism.

Arabs and Iranians have had few reasons to feel solidarity with their coreligionist neighbor as Turkey became Israel’s most important partner in the Middle East. The 2003 war in Iraq and the ongoing occupation of the country poses a major security dilemma to Turkey. A Kurdish entity in its southeastern borders, supported by the US, may become a source of great Turkish worry. On the outbreak of the war, Turkey refused passage to US troops through its territory. Given US reliance on the only dependable ally in Iraq, it will not be surprising if the Americans extend autonomy to the Kurds in a future Iraqi federation. Such a development may cause further tension between the two NATO allies and encourage Turkey to come closer to the EU.

Mr. Erdogan’s policy vis a vis the EU has enhanced Turkey’s role as an “insulator” of the continent from external turmoil. The factors, however, that will affect its future as an “insulator”, or a regional hegemon, are many: US policy, relations with Russia, Middle East developments, Iranians and Arabs, are but a few. Greece has so far chosen

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<sup>3</sup> Barry Buzan & Ole Weaver, *Regions & Power*, Cambridge, 2003, pp 391-395.

to support Turkey in its European quest as a major acculturation process that will bring its neighbor into the western mode of behavior.

Turkey's position within three "security-consuming" regions (The Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus) is a major challenge for this country's EU accession.<sup>4</sup> Should Turkey become part of the Union, then a region of violence, terrorism, criminality, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, ethnic strife and economic backwardness, will become the front line of the European Community. On the other hand, Turkey would have to assume the responsibility of the gatekeeper of the continent by denying passage to illegal immigrants and human trafficking into Greece, via land or sea. The EU imposes strong rules on candidates over border management, civil and criminal judicial cooperation, visa regimes and management of asylum seekers.

Turkey's relations with Russia (Soviet Union) improved whenever the two were cut-off from the west and suffered isolation. Such was the case in the early twenties when a Soviet-Turkish pact provided comfort and security guarantees to both. Russia's current difficulties over the Ukrainian elections and Turkey's Middle East dilemma and its uncertain quest for EU accession have revived the relationship. Its depth and duration will depend on external developments with other actors, but Turkey's current switch of its main energy supply from the Middle East to Russia, is setting the foundations of a long-term relationship.

Turkey's tilt towards Europe increased as relations with the US became strained. On the other hand there are Turkish concerns that if accession negotiations fail to produce the desired outcome, the country may remain at the fringe of Europe with no formal security tie to the EU. Given Greece's own security quest within the EU and its pursuit of a mutual defense clause in past treaties, Turkey did everything it could to secure its own membership in the ESDP and make sure that NATO is maintained as the primary organization for European defense.

Up to the 1999 Helsinki European Council decisions that established the ESDP, the Western European Union (WEU) was the only institution dealing with European defense questions. The special WEU-NATO partnership created the concept of European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI). At the WEU's Rome Ministerial meeting of 1992, a new status of "Associate Member" was accorded to the member-states of NATO, but not the EU (then Iceland, Norway and Turkey). In 1994, ten central European states applying for NATO and EU membership, became WEU's "Associate" partners.

As an Associate Member, Turkey was able to participate in all standing WEU Committees except the Security Committee, and took part in all joint WEU-NATO and WEU-EU meetings. Associate Members had extensive and concrete involvement in the activities of the WEU Assembly, the WEU Institute for Security Studies in Paris and the WEU Satellite Center.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Aydın and Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe, "Waiting for December 2004: Turkish Blues for the EU", *The International Spectator*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, July-September 2004, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Pål Dunay, "Turkey and the ESDP: A Fact-Sheet", SIPRI Research Team, 2004.

In April 1999, at a time when the EU was beginning to take over WEU's role as a framework for potential European led operations, NATO's Washington Summit adopted a communique enhancing the transfer of WEU's relevant roles to the EU. The proposition came to be known as "Berlin plus". From the outset of this transfer Turkey expressed concern whether the EU would respect "existing arrangements within the EU".<sup>6</sup>

In the Helsinki European Council of December 2000 the EU assumed all practical functions of WEU and gradually took over the WEU Institute for Security Studies and the Satellite Center. Concerning non-EU states in the WEU system, the Helsinki formula offered no "co-decision" provision but envisaged "consultation" with non-EU NATO members. Views expressed by non-members would not be binding to the EU up to and including the point when a decision to launch an operation was taken.

Turkey felt that the new arrangement fell short of the benefits offered to non-EU members by the previous, WEU system. What particularly worried Turkey was the possibility that European operations, which could take place in Turkey's region, would be launched by fifteen nations (including Greece) and four non-allied states, under circumstances that were outside the control of Turkey and NATO. Other changes excluded Turkey from taking part and speaking at Council meeting and at meetings of subordinate committees – the EU's new political Security Committee (PSC) and Military Committee – where ESDP operations would be decided. Thus Turkey lost its ability to participate in European-led military operations, its participation in the EU military staff, which replaced the WEU Planning Cell, and in the EU Institute and Satellite Center.

It was under such circumstances that Turkey decided in early 2000 to use its veto power in NATO to bloc the conclusion of NATO-EU arrangements to implement "Berlin plus", until its own position was addressed. This blockage lasted for two years and delayed the progress of any ad hoc EU military operation with NATO support. It did not prevent the EU's work to develop its own ESDP structures. At the end of 2002 the EU's Copenhagen European Council played a crucial part by combining the timing of Turkey's accession negotiations with the decision not to use the ESDP against a NATO ally and to exclude Malta and Cyprus from any ESDP operations using NATO assets – because neither was a participant in Partnership for Peace.<sup>7</sup>

Turkey lifted its veto and the EU-NATO declaration on the ESDP of 16 December 2002 established a strategic partnership in crisis management and secured the interests of both institutions. The EU ensured the involvement in the ESDP of non-EU members of NATO and NATO gave EU members access to its planning capabilities.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dunay, op.cit.p.4

<sup>7</sup> For general information on the subject see: Ramazan Gozen, *Turkey's Delicate Position Between NATO and the ESDP*, SAM Papers No 1/2003, Ankara

<sup>8</sup> Terzi, op.cit. pp. 115-118