



The New Turkish Foreign Policy and the Future of Turkey-EU Relations

Emiliano Alessandri

Abstract

The article refutes the often-heard argument that Ankara's recent 'activism' in the Middle East indicates that Turkey is 'drifting away from the West'. Turkey's improving relations with its neighbors (not only in the Middle East), are mainly a result of the end of the Cold War and of domestic developments which have 'unlocked' Turkey, transforming it into a more open and democratic country with an even greater stake in EU membership. At the same time, the many international and domestic changes that have occurred since Turkey was granted candidate status call for a 're-foundation' of the Turkey-EU relationship. Lacking the latter, the future of Turkey-EU relations will indeed remain uncertain.

Keywords: *Turkey / Turkish Foreign Policy / AKP Foreign Policy / European Union / Bilateral Relations*

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by Emiliano Alessandri*

The thesis of the 'drift'

For almost a decade now, the debate on Turkey has revolved around one main question: 'is the West losing Turkey'?¹ The advent to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 – the heir of the Islamist 'Virtue Party' founded at the end of the 1990s and banned by the Constitutional Court in 2001 – raised concerns about a weakening of Turkey's jealously guarded secular identity. Despite the AKP leaders' repudiation of Islamic radicalism as a political liability in the complex game of Turkish politics and the new emphasis placed on liberalization, democratization, and the goal of EU membership, many have since then feared that the new ruling elite is, in fact, pursuing a 'hidden agenda' of 'Islamization'.² The growing number of restrictions imposed on the consumption of alcohol and pornography; the repeated blows inflicted on the freedom of expression of individuals, groups, and the media; the alleged replacement of 'secular' officials in public offices with ones whose political-religious orientation is firm; the preferential treatment allegedly accorded by the government to firms 'rooted' in Islam; the attempt to allow religious identity more visibility through measures such as the lifting of the headscarf ban in universities; all this has been taken as the sign of a new dangerous trend. The clash between Turkey's ruling party and 'secular elites' during 2007-8 – which provoked a constitutional crisis over the election of the President of the Republic Abdullah Gül and which risked ending with the closure of the AKP itself – caused great apprehension among international observers and supporters of democracy in Turkey. The return of military rule to a country struggling to leave behind its dramatic history of coups and political violence looked more than just a theoretical possibility.

As events have unfolded, foreign policy has also become part of the debate on Turkey's drift. The decision of the Turkish parliament in 2003 to deny the US the use of military bases from which to launch a northern offensive in Iraq, thus facilitating a rapid and successful invasion of the country, rang as an alarm bell. Although the government had yielded to US demands, over a hundred AKP MPs joined the opposition parties to

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¹ See, among a vast literature, Philip H. Gordon, Omer Taspinar, and Soli Ozel, *Winning Turkey. How America, Europe, and Turkey Can Revive a Fading Partnership* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2008). See, more recently, Soner Cagaptay, 'Is Turkey Leaving the West?', *Foreign Affairs* (26 October 2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65634/soner-cagaptay/is-turkey-leaving-the-west>

² For an assessment of Turkey under the first AKP government, see the essays contained in M. Hakan Yavuz, ed. *The Emergence of a New Turkey. Democracy and the AK Party* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006).

block what was seen as a development patently clashing with Turkey's interest in Iraq and detrimental to Turkey's image among Muslim societies.³ The risk, as perceived by many in the AKP, was that while a new Kurdish entity could arise from the ruins of post-Saddam Iraq, Turkey would come under heavy criticism throughout the region for supporting the Bush administration in a military adventure which promised nothing less than the outbreak of a 'clash of civilizations' between the West and the 'Islamic world'. The following deterioration of US-Turkey relations is well-known and the gradual rapprochement which has taken place in the following years until Obama's most recent call for a 'model partnership' has hardly extinguished concerns over the real determinants of Turkish foreign policy.⁴

In fact, with Turkey cultivating ever closer ties with the Iranian regime, overcoming past enmities with Syria, engaging Hamas in Palestine and quarrelling with Israel, the debate has only grown more heated on whether Turkey's 'activism' in the Middle East may perhaps provide even stronger evidence than domestic, political and societal dynamics of the country's drift away from the West. An impressive amount of commentary was published only in the past year on the aims and direction of Turkish foreign policy, perhaps surpassing the literature which has been written on the same subject in the last twenty.⁵ The new fashionable argument – in many ways a more elaborate and sophisticated version of the thesis of the drift – is that Turkey's multiple and growing foreign policy initiatives would collectively be serving one single coherent design: the revival of Turkey's 'Ottoman grandeur'.⁶

The goal, it is admitted, is not the restoration of the Ottoman Empire, but nonetheless the establishment of a new Turkish cultural and economic hegemony in the former territories of the Ottoman caliphate. In so doing, Turkey would be willing to forego over eighty years of its modern history spent accrediting itself as a country that is secular, wants to be fully democratic, and 'looks to the West', to rediscover its role as a 'Muslim power', using its influence, economic connections, and historical legacies to create a

³ See, Daniel Baltrusaitis, 'When Coercion Fails: US-Turkish Burden-Sharing in Operation Iraqi Freedom', paper presented at the 2007 edition of the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Meeting.

⁴ For a discussion, see, Ian O. Lesser, 'Turkey, the United States and the Delusion of Geopolitics', *Survival* 48:3, 2006, 83-96; Joshua W. Walker, 'Reexamining the US-Turkish Alliance', *The Washington Quarterly* 31:1, Winter 2007-8, 93-109; Füsün Türkmen, 'Turkish-American Relations': A Challenging Transition', *Turkish Studies* 10:1, March 2009, 109-129; Ömer Taşpınar, 'What's Next in Turkish-American Relations?', Brookings Institution Brief, 7 December 2009, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1207_us_turkey_taspinar.aspx.

⁵ See, among many others, Mustafa Akyol, 'Is Turkey Abandoning the West?', *Hurriyet*, 5 July 2009, www.arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=-635405; 'Turkey and the Middle East. Looking East and South', *The Economist*, 31 October 2009, 49-50; Patrick Seale, 'The Rise and Rise of Turkey', *The New York Times* 4 November 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/05/opinion/05iht-edseale.html>; Nick Danforth, 'How the West Lost Turkey', *Foreign Policy* 25 November 2009, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/25/how_the_west_lost_turkey.

⁶ See, among many contributions to the subject, Nora Fisher Onar, 'Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy', EDAM Discussion Paper Series, (October 2009), http://www.gmfus.org/doc/Discussion%20Paper%20Series_Fisher.pdf. The argument has soon fascinated the media. See, for instance, Delphine Strauss, 'Turkey's Ottoman Mission', *Financial Times* 23 November 2009, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/af859474-d868-11de-b63a-00144feabdc0.html>.

unified 'Islamic space'.⁷ Turkey's recently-acquired leadership of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and its prominent role within the 'D-8', better known as the 'G-8 of the Muslim world', are seen as a clear manifestation of this ambition.⁸

To a close look, however, the whole argument about Turkey drifting away from the West to pursue its alleged 'Islamic vocation' is a flawed one unfortunately based on a prejudiced and poor understanding of current trends and on a misleading reconstruction of past developments.

Drift or 'Unlocking'?

A quick glance at history would reveal that Turkey had started to change not really in 2002, but some twenty years earlier, in the 1980s. It was with Turgut Özal, World Bank economist and founder of the Motherland Party (ANAP), that Turkey began steering the wheel towards more pluralism internally and greater openness towards the outside world. Özal's 'opening' had multiple long-term consequences. While Özal is accredited domestically with smoothing out the military's disengagement from politics after the 1980 coup, in foreign policy 'Özalism' entailed a rediscovery of Turkey's identity as a Muslim country and a reevaluation of Turkey's past as empire.⁹ Such re-appreciation of critical elements of the Turkish heritage, which had been too hastily buried after the establishment of the secular Republic in 1924, was not aimed at altering Turkey's Western orientation. On the contrary, the recognition of all pieces of Turkish history and all faces of Turkey's identity was seen as allowing a reaffirmation of Turkey's choice for the West on a more solid and honest basis.

Özal revived Turkey's interest in European integration, as this was seen critical for its further development as an economy and as a democracy. At the same time and with no apparent contradiction, Özal and his top aides worked so that Turkey could in time return to be a leader of the Muslim world, on the grounds that 'Turkified Islam' would provide Muslim communities a more certain path to progress. This led to a series of new foreign policy initiatives, including in the Middle East.¹⁰

⁷ The simplifications made by this thesis are manifold, starting with the same assumption that the Ottoman Empire's defining identity was 'Muslim'. For a discussion, Nekati Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Beylerbeyi, Istanbul : Press Isis, 2008).

⁸ The 'Developing 8', or 'D-8', is an economic development alliance bringing together various predominantly Muslim countries, such as Iran and Pakistan, for the purpose of strengthening their mutual relations and enhancing their position individually and collectively on the world stage. The D-8 was founded in 1997 by Islamist Turkish prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan. On Turkey's engagement in the OIC, see the Statement by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, at the 36th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, May 23-25, 2009, Damascus. The speech is available at http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-at-the-36th-session-of-the-oic-council-of-foreign-ministers.en.mfa.

⁹ For a recent analysis, see 'The Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism', *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, March 2009, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/333/turgut-ozal-period-in-turkish-foreign-policy-ozalism.html>. See also, Berdal Aral, 'Dispensing with Tradition? Turkish Politics and International Society during the Özal Decade', *Middle Eastern Studies* 37:1, 2001, 72-88

¹⁰ See, Muhittin Ataman, 'Leadership Change: Özal's Leadership and Restructuring in Turkish Foreign Policy', *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 7:1, Spring 2008, 120-153.

The end of the Cold War, a transition which Özal navigated as Turkey's new president, only reinforced the emerging consensus that Turkey could not remain 'prisoner of its national project' in a sort of self-imposed entrenchment. Turkey's inclusion in the Western camp during the bipolar era was not at all 'un-natural'. It was on the contrary consistent with Atatürk's project of 'modernization through Westernization'. Turkey was, however, 'sealed' for sixty years in the Western bloc.¹¹ Its role as the bulwark against Soviet expansionism on 'NATO's southern flank' meant that its external relations were heavily constrained.¹² Most of Turkey's neighbors to the East and to the South were part of the Soviet bloc or fell under the Soviet sphere of influence at some point. A partial exception was Iran, although it became one of the West's most resolute rivals after the Khomeini revolution, and therefore also a problem for Turkey.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fading of the bipolar era, Turkey found itself in the position – and in many ways it was also forced – to deal with its neighbors.¹³ The initial approach was, in fact, often confrontational. Greek-Turkish relations, which had been plagued by conflict also during the Cold War, did not completely improve until the end of the 1990s, after the solution of the Öcalan case and the catalytic impact of the so-called 'earthquake diplomacy'.¹⁴ Turkish-Syrian relations too remained tense throughout the 1990s and it was only with the crisis of October 1998 that a new era of dialogue unfolded, based on a common commitment against Kurdish separatism.¹⁵ In other cases, disputes dating back to pre-republican times, which the Cold War had partly frozen, re-surfaced. This was true with Armenia, for instance, which rekindled its territorial claims on Turkey while demanding official acknowledgment of the genocide of its people during World War I.¹⁶

As the Turkish economy grew and became more open, however, the foreign policy establishment was confronted with new demands from a larger number of actors, including a plethora of new economic stakeholders calling for a diplomacy serving Turkey's expanding trade and business interests. Many invoked stability as the

¹¹ See, William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); see also, Philip Robbins, *Suits and Uniforms. Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003). On the evolution of Turkish foreign policy even during the Cold War era, see Mustafa Aydin, 'Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjunctures during the Cold War', *Middle Eastern Studies* 36:1, January 2000, 103-139.

¹² See, Ishan Gürkan, *NATO, Turkey, and the Southern Flank: A Mideastern Perspective* (New York: National Strategy Information Center Inc., 1980)

¹³ On the 'systemic' elements of Turkey's new focus on the Middle East, see, Stephen Larrabee, 'How Turkey is Rediscovering the Middle East', *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009, http://www.europesworld.org/NewEnglish/Home_old/Article/tabid/191/ArticleType/ArticleView/ArticleID/21503/Default.aspx

¹⁴ Abdullah Öcalan was the leader of the Kurdish Working Party, a terrorist organization supporting Kurdish independence. In 1999, Greek border patrols failed to stop the smuggling of Öcalan into Greece causing a crisis between the two countries terminated with the resignation of several Greek ministers. 'Earthquake diplomacy' refers to the breakthrough in bilateral relations after several earthquakes hitting the two countries in 1999 bred a new spontaneous solidarity between the two peoples. See, Mustafa Aydin and Kostas Ifantis, *Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean* (London-New York: Routledge, 2004)

¹⁵ Mahmut Bali Aykan, 'The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View', *Middle East Policy* 6, 1999, 174-192

¹⁶ Aybars Görgülü, 'Turkey-Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle', *Tesev Publications*, November 2008, http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD_OBJS/PDF/DPT/ERM/Turkey-Armenia%20Relations%20A%20Vicious%20Circle.pdf

paramount objective of the new activism. Turkey's orientation gradually shifted from confrontation to engagement – a change that was made possible by the declining influence of the Turkish military on the formulation of foreign and security policy and which was greatly favored by the developing relationship with the EU.

The quest for EU candidate status acted by itself as a moderating and disciplining factor on Turkey. Turkish elites realized that chances for a breakthrough would remain nil until relations with neighbors were normalized and disputes were set on a path of resolution. But the 'EU anchor' worked also at a deeper level as reforms undertaken to meet EU standards fostered democratization and liberalization while favoring a 'de-securitization' of issues which had plagued Turkey's relations with its neighbors in the past.¹⁷

No longer entrenched and isolated, but on the contrary faced with new internal and external demands, Turkey's approach to external relations sought reconciliation between security needs and stability goals. It recognized that confrontation could lead to sporadic victories but would never gain the status Turkey felt it deserved as one of the emerging actors of the post-Cold War era.

AKP's Turkey

What occurred in 2002 with the advent of the AKP to power was highly innovative from a domestic point of view. The new ruling party was the coalition of liberal and conservative elements within Turkish elites – mostly concentrated in the Anatolian part of the country – whose common goal was the establishment of a cultural and political hegemony alternative to the 'Kemalist' one as represented by the Republican's People Party (CHP) – Turkey's oldest party – and by the other sections of the 'secular establishment', starting with the military.¹⁸ In terms of foreign policy, by the time the new 'Anatolian elites' found themselves at the steering wheel, Turkey's projection abroad, including in the Middle East, was already a reality. What the new party did was to give full course to processes which had started in the previous years, while emphasizing even more the need for Turkey to shift its foreign policy orientation from confrontation to engagement. The emerging vision of Turkey as a 'promoter of regional stability' received particular support from the 'corporate' element of the new elite: traders and entrepreneurs who saw Turkey vicinity as a vast and under-exploited market in which to make profits as opposed to a chessboard for the game of power politics.¹⁹

¹⁷ For a complete account of the impact of 'Europeanization' on Turkey, see, Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, *Trials of Europeanization. Turkish Political Culture and the European Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also, Thomas Diez, 'Turkey, the European Union, and Security Complexes Revisited', *Mediterranean Politics* 10:2, July 2005, 167-180.

¹⁸ See, among many, Nora Onar, 'Kemalists, Islamists, and Liberals: Shifting Patterns of Confrontation and Consensus, 2002-2006' *Turkish Studies* 8:2, June 2007, 273-288; Anwar Alam, 'Islam and post-Modernism: Locating the Rise of Islamism in Turkey', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20:3, September 2009, 352-375; Meliha Benli Altunışık, 'Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, 2009, 171-194. See also, Ergun Yildirm, Husamettin Inac, Hayrettin Ozler, 'A Sociological Representation of the Justice and Development Party: Is It a Political Design or a Political Becoming?', *Turkish Studies* 8:1, Spring 2007, 5-24

¹⁹ On Turkey's Islamic economic elites, Seda Demiralp, 'The Rise of Islamic Capital and the Decline of Islamic Radicalism in Turkey', *Comparative Politics* 41:3, April 2009, 315-335.

To the surprise of many, the first AKP government invested considerable amount of its newly acquired political capital in strengthening Turkey's ties with the West, fully espousing the goal of EU membership.²⁰ The AKP came to power three years after the Helsinki Summit had granted Turkey EU candidate status and displayed from the start the firmest and most explicit pro-EU orientation of all parties. Once in government, it lived up to most expectations concerning relations with the EU. A country which had a reputation for immobility and passiveness embarked on an unprecedented process of internal reform investing in the economic, political and institutional spheres. In recognition of Turkey's efforts, the EU agreed on opening negotiations for accession in 2005.

The AKP party has since then ruled the country, winning the elections again in 2007, without wavering from the pro-EU choice made at the time of its first electoral success. Reforms to bring Turkey closer to the EU *acquis*, as many, including the EU Commission, have lamented, have slowed down after the opening of negotiations.²¹ The reasons, however, have little to do with Turkey's activism in other areas of foreign policy. In fact, since negotiations have started, Turkey-EU relations have become increasingly part of the domestic agenda as opposed to a foreign policy issue. This also helps explain much of the stalemate of the past few years. The activation and management of the reform process has inevitably created deep tensions among the different sections of the Turkish society and establishment, as all transformations create winners and losers (including among ruling elites).²² The 'struggle for power' which has torn the country apart since the early 2000s, therefore, only seems to testify to the depth and width of the change which EU integration has stimulated.

Part of the slowdown in reform, moreover, can be explained with growing frustration with the accession talks. It must be recognized, in fact, that it would be difficult for any government engaged in the laborious process of joining the EU to keep the wheels of reform moving and domestic public support high while some of the EU's top leaders regularly put into question the attainability and the desirability itself of this goal. Campaigns such as the government of France's, which have gone so far as to question Turkey's 'belonging' to Europe, have undercut the efforts made by reformers in Turkey – within and without the AKP – while making European public opinion more doubtful and apprehensive.²³

²⁰ Ziya Önis and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, 'Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era', *Turkish Studies* 10:1, March 2009, 7-24; Menderes Cinar, 'Turkey's Transformation under AKP Rule', *Muslim World* 96:3, July 2006, 469-486

²¹ Marcie J. Patton, 'AKP Reform Fatigue in Turkey: What Has Happened to the EU Process?', *Mediterranean Politics* 12:3, November 2007, 339-358.

²² See, Luigi Narbone and Nathalie Tocci, 'Running Around in Circles? The Cyclical Relationship between Turkey and the European Union', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 9:3 December 2007, 233-245.

²³ See, Rabah Aissaoui, 'History, Cultural Identity, and Difference: The Issue of Turkey's Accession to the European Union in the French National Press', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 9:1, April 2007, 1-14. For a discussion of the French debate, see Anne-Marie Le Gloannec, 'Marcus Aurelius' Foot: Looking for Turkey's Project in the EU. An Interpretation of the French Debate on Turkey' in Nathalie Tocci, ed. *Talking Turkey in Europe: Towards a Differentiated Communication Strategy*, IAI Quaderni English Series, 13, December 2008, 120-134. Data on European public opinion on Turkey can be found in several surveys, including the Eurobarometer. See, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm.

Despite this, after overcoming the closure case, the Turkish government has sent signs of a new dynamism. In fact, the past year saw several positive developments, including the appointment of a new full-time, full-fledged chief negotiator, Egemen Bağış, who unlike previous ones serves also as minister for EU affairs. This means that the Secretariat General for EU affairs, established in 2000 to follow the implementation of EU-related reforms, has been put for the first time under the direction of a high-ranking official directly reporting to the prime minister, in recognition of the fact that relations with the EU are just too broad and consuming to be effectively managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²⁴

But perhaps the most important news is the tangible progress in areas critical to the EU, such as the respect of minorities. The launch of a 'comprehensive democratic opening process' towards the Kurds, just the last of a longer series of initiatives in the same direction, has translated into important concrete actions such as the opening of new Kurdish-language media, and the granting of a growing number of cultural rights.²⁵ Until recently, a positive development had also been the representation in the Turkish parliament of moderate and pro-EU elements of the Kurdish population under the banner of the Democratic Society Party (DTP). However, the DTP's recent closure by the Constitutional Court testifies to the obstacles which supporters of change still encounter on the path to full conciliation.

Another development with positive implications for Turkey-EU relations has been the attempt to normalize relations with Armenia – with which two protocols have been signed regarding the opening of borders, embassies and future cooperation, thus laying the foundations for a new beginning after bilateral relations had remained invariably tense for over ninety years.²⁶

A Multi-Directional Foreign Policy

In truth, the weakness of the thesis of the drift can be appreciated to an even greater extent if one focuses on what Turkey is truly doing around its borders. If there is something noteworthy about Turkey's foreign policy in recent years is that it has engaged all neighbors, not only those allegedly giving Ankara an entry in Middle-Eastern affairs or boosting Turkey's image among Muslim societies.²⁷ Turkey has inaugurated a new era of cooperation with Greece, has worked for a solution of the Cyprus question (Turkey backed the reconciliation plan sponsored by Kofi Annan in

²⁴ Progress towards the adoption and implementation of EU reforms is recorded in the website of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs, see, <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=44&l=2>.

²⁵ See, Nicholas Birch, 'Turkey Seeks Kurdish Reconciliation', *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, 14 November 2009, 254:16, A8; for an account of the evolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey in recent years, see, Ertan Efeğil, 'Turkey's New Approaches towards the PKK, Iraqi Kurds and the Kurdish Question', *Insight Turkey* 10:3, 2008, 53-73. See also, Mesut Yegen, "'Prospective Turks" or "Pseudo-Citizens": Kurds in Turkey', *Middle East Journal* 63:4, Autumn 2009, 597-615

²⁶ For a discussion, Alexander Iskandaryan, 'Armenian-Turkish Rapprochement: Timing Matters', *Insight Turkey* 11:3, 2009, 37-44

²⁷ Turkey's opening with Armenia has in fact had as its most immediate effects a deterioration of Turkey's close relations with Azerbaijan, a Muslim country culturally close to Turkey.

2004), and has acted as a stabilizer in the regions of strategic importance to the EU such as the Black sea and Caspian sea.²⁸ Turkey has also offered to mediate between Russia and Georgia after the war in August 2008 while putting forward initiatives to solve frozen conflicts in the Caucasus at large.²⁹

In the Middle East what we have seen in recent years is not Turkey plotting with other Muslim countries to build some kind of 'Islamic bloc', but rather a growing competition for influence between Turkey and other major regional actors such as Iran and Egypt. There is no clear center of gravity today in the Middle East. Both Iran and Turkey have found new venues for influence – as well faced as new challenges – as a result of the extreme destabilization brought about by US policies, which especially during the first term of the Bush administration have disrupted the fragile balances of the region without creating new ones. Turkey-Iranian cooperation – nothing too new if one puts recent developments in historical perspective – has been driven by the need to address issues of common concern in a peaceful and constructive manner, thus avoiding that competition for influence become a source of international tension and conflict.³⁰ Whether we like it or not, the interests of Turkey and Iran are intertwined on a host of critical issues, from energy relations to the future of Iraq.³¹

Turkey's policy on Iraq exemplifies its new foreign approach. Turkey was forced to deal with Iraq because the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime raised the specter of a Kurdish state rising next to Turkey's borders, the first step towards the likely secession of the Kurdish-dominated southeast regions of the country.³² After initially adopting a tough approach, which has included military incursions to stop trans-border activities of the Kurdish Working Party (PKK) – recognized as a terrorist organization by America and the EU alike – Turkey has decided to throw its weight behind the birth of a new Iraq. This choice has led to a substantial improvement in the relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds, which both parties and the international community recognize as a success of historic significance.³³ On opposed barricades for years, now Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish authorities cooperate on a range of political and security issues, while energy and trade relations are expanding. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Turkish government has heralded these successes as the manifestation of a more general ambition to turn problems and liabilities into new opportunities.

²⁸ Ziya Önis and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, Greek-Turkish Rapprochement: Rhetoric or Reality? *Political Science Quarterly* 123:1, 2008, 123-149; On Turkey's contribution to the EU neighborhood policy, see Michele Comelli, Attila Eralp and Çigdem Üstün, *The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Southern Mediterranean* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University Press, 2009).

²⁹ Deniz Devrim and Evelina Schulz, 'The Caucasus: Which Role for Turkey in the European Neighborhood?', *Insight Turkey* 11:3, 2009, 177-193.

³⁰ See, Ertan Efeğil and Leonard A. Stone, 'Iran and Turkey in Central Asia: Opportunities for Rapprochement in the Post-Cold War Era', *Journal of Third World Studies* 20:11, Spring 2003, 55-77

³¹ On the specific issue of Iranian nuclear question, see Mustafa Kibaroglu and Baris Caglar, 'Implications of a Nuclear Iran for Turkey', *Middle East Policy*, 15:4, Winter 2008, 59-80.

³² Robert Olson, 'Relations among Turkey, Iraq, Kurdistan-Iraq, the Wider Middle East, and Iran', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 17:4, 2006, 13-45.

³³ Tarik Oğuzlu, 'Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives', *Insight Turkey* 10:3, 2008, 5-22; L. Darren Logan, 'Thoughts on Iraqi Kurdistan: Present Realities, Future Hope', *Iran and the Caucasus* 13:1, 2009, 161-186.

Developing relations, such as the one with Syria, confirm this attitude. Turkey has managed to significantly improve the bilateral relationship with former rival Syria – up to the lift of VISA requirements in 2009 – while at the same time supporting broader goals of regional stability. Between 2007 and 2008, Turkey mediated between Syria and Israel with the objective of averting a new conflict in the heart of the Middle East.³⁴ While after the ‘Gaza offensive’ Turkey was precluded from continuing to play this role, the improvement of Turkey-Syrian relations has not stopped, producing a series of positive spillovers which may help the conversion of Damascus from a ‘rogue state’ to a responsible stakeholder.

Changing Contexts, New Issues

Is, therefore, the ‘rise of Turkey’ all good news, contributing to greater international stability and making Turkey-West relations only more important and valuable? It would be a mistake to respond to this question with an uncritical and unreserved yes. As it is the consequence of broad systemic changes and complex internal dynamics, the new Turkish foreign policy opens a whole set of new issues that should be addressed in an unbiased but nonetheless careful manner. There is, in particular, the urgent need for a candid review of the Turkey-EU relations.

According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of the new Turkish foreign policy, renowned scholar of geopolitics and now Turkey’s foreign minister, the challenge for Turkey in the twenty-first century is to redefine its place in ‘Afro-Eurasia’, considering itself at the center of several intersecting geopolitical regions as opposed to an appendix of Europe and an outpost of the West.³⁵ Although presented as a ‘rediscovery’ of Turkey’s traditional role as a ‘bridge’ between civilizations of the West and the East, Davutoğlu’s interpretation of Turkey’s vocation betrays an ambition which is in many respects novel. It deals, in fact, with a new Turkey-centered and self-assured approach, reassessing notions such as ‘Europe’ and the ‘West’, and institutions such as the EU and NATO, in terms of how they fit with Turkey’s own course instead than the other way around.³⁶ This introduces a new element to the picture as compared with the context in which Turkey-EU relations used to be conceptualized and carried out during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath.

The EU Council, after pondering for many years, granted Turkey candidate status in 1999, bringing to a conclusion a reflection which European governments had started in

³⁴ Bülent Aras and Rabia Karakaya, ‘From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey’s Relations with Syria and Iran’, *Security Dialogue* 39:5, October 2008, 495-515.

³⁵ Davutoğlu’s most famous work, ‘Strategic Depth’ is still to be translated into English. A discussion of its main theses can be found in Joshua Walker, ‘Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy Doctrine’, *Insight Turkey*, 9:3, 2007, 25-36. On Davutoğlu’s foreign policy vision when he was advisor to the prime minister, see Ahmet Davutoglu, ‘Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007’, *Insight Turkey* 10:1, 2008, 77-96. For a recent analysis of his vision and policies, see Aras Bülent, ‘The Davutoğlu Era in Foreign Policy’, *Insight Turkey* 11:3, 2009, 127-142.

³⁶ See, Ian Lesser, ‘The New Turkish Lexicon’, German Marshall Fund of the US, ‘On Turkey’ Series, 3 November 2009, http://www.gmfus.org/doc/Lesser_OnTurkey_1109_final.pdf.

the 1950s, when Turkey first expressed its interest in joining.³⁷ Turkey's membership was discussed in the context of the policy of enlargement in the 1990s, which was carried out under the appealing and powerful paradigm of the 're-unification of Europe', presented as the natural and inevitable consequence of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

In truth, arguments were slowly adjusted to the evolving reality of post-Cold War Europe and then to the post-9/11 discourse, and Turkey was offered as the successful example of a peaceful and fruitful encounter between democracy and Islam. But the way Turkey was debated in the 1990s up to the opening of negotiations in 2005 was nonetheless deeply influenced by a mindset still incapable of really looking at Turkey's future independent of the 'service' it offered the West during the Cold War, identifying the elements of a new way forward and not just the roots and foundations of this relationship.³⁸ The common argument was that, having loyally 'served' the West for over sixty years through institutions such as NATO, Turkey 'deserved' membership. This helps explain why a non-EU member like the US was the most outspoken among Western countries about the need for the EU to overcome existing skepticism and let Turkey in.³⁹ With the Middle East sliding towards instability and extremism, moreover, the point was made that EU membership would ensure that the West remained Turkey's gravitational center, sparing Turkey the challenge of repositioning itself in the highly fluid and uncertain context of the post-bipolar world.⁴⁰

As far as Turkey was concerned, the issue was really one of 'belonging'. EU membership would provide the ultimate confirmation of the success of Turkey's experiment with secularization, modernization, and democracy. Admission to the EU would confirm more fully than the participation in organizations such as NATO and the Council of Europe that Atatürk's choice for the West after World War I had truly paid off, setting Turkey on track for a full return as protagonist of the European scene, as had been the case at the time of the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ This close link between Turkey's national psychology and the issue of membership meant that until a few years ago, failure to join the EU would mean the failure of Turkey as a national project to Turkish leaders and the Turkish people alike.⁴²

This is hardly the case today. Government and main opposition leaders repeat the formula 'nothing but membership' at each and every occasion, but it sounds far more like the resented response to the 'privileged partnership' alternative proposed by the French government than a profession of faith in the European perspective.

³⁷ For an overview of the issues accompanying the evolution of Turkey-EU relations, see, among a vast literature, Meltem Muğtuçler-Bacı and Yannis A. Stivachtis, ed. *Turkey-European Union Relations: Dilemmas, Opportunities, and Constraints* (Lanham: Lexington Books, c2008)

³⁸ See, Neill Nugent, 'The EU's Response to Turkey's Membership Application: Not Just a Weighing of Costs and Benefits', *Journal of European Integration* 29:4, September 2007, 481-502

³⁹ Ziya Önis and Suhan Yılmaz, 'The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?', *Middle East Journal* 59:2, Spring 2005, 265-284

⁴⁰ Bill Park, 'Between Europe, the US, and the Middle East: Turkey and European Security in the Wake of the Iraq Crisis', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 5:3, 2007, 493-516.

⁴¹ See, Susannah Verney, 'National Identity and Political Change on Turkey's Road to EU Membership', *Journal of Southern Europe and Balkans*, 9:3, December 2007, 213-221.

⁴² Hüsamettin İnaç, 'Identity Problems of Turkey during the European Union Integration Process', *Journal of Economic and Social Research* 6:2, 2004, 33-62.

An important dimension of this change, as pointed out already, is frustration with the uncertain and stagnant EU accession process. Endless debate among EU members about Turkey's 'qualifications' as a European country has not only disquieted, but depressed the Turkish people, depriving Turkish elites of one of the main leverages for reform: public support.⁴³ The accession process is also finding difficulties, no doubt, because the government has encountered various sources of domestic resistance, including among its own constituencies. As the adoption of the EU *acquis* compels Turkey to reform in depth its own internal structures – as is the case with labor relations and labor law, for instance – opposition is gathering from those stakeholders who have reasons to prefer the status quo. Further protest arises from those sections of the establishment that have ruled Turkey in the past decades, such as the military, which has already faced a significant loss of status and influence since the country has embarked on EU-driven reforms.⁴⁴

While complicating the task of Turkish reformers, European skepticism has also translated into concrete actions of sabotage of the negotiations. It is often neglected that besides the eight chapters that are kept frozen as a result of the unsolved and increasingly intricate question of Cyprus, five others are unilaterally blocked by France, as their opening would allow Turkey to address issues directly pertaining to membership, such as financial and other economic matters.⁴⁵

Faced with these problems, it is understandable that the Turkish government has felt the need to 'diversify' its portfolio, exploring other relations beside the one with the EU.

The Re-Foundation of the Commitment

It would be a mistake, however, to focus on these factors only and conclude that Turkey's activism in foreign policy is simply a reaction to the difficulties in its relationship with the EU. Analysts of Turkey's internal developments have noted the emergence, especially in the last year, of a foreign policy discourse presenting 'non-alignment' as an increasingly seductive idea.⁴⁶ In fact, the new conditions that the end of the Cold War has created seem much more favorable to the adoption of a 'neutralist' orientation in Turkish foreign policy than to a 'drift'. A 'neutralist' position would allow Turkey to play its cards more freely on various tables at once. A history of sustained economic growth – the rate before the economic crisis was several points higher than the EU average – and seven years of one-party government have undoubtedly created

⁴³ For recent data, see *Transatlantic Trends 2009*, <http://www.gmfus.org/trends/index.html>. On elite opinions, see the surveys conducted by CIRCap, <http://www.gips.unisi.it/circap/documentation-data>.

⁴⁴ Tuba Unlu Bilgic, 'The Military and Europeanization Reforms in Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies* 45:5, September 2009, 803-824.

⁴⁵ On the latest developments regarding Cyprus and the prospects for a solution, Andreas Theophanous, 'The EU, Turkey, and Cyprus: What Next?' *ELIAMEP Thesis*, 7/2009, http://www.eliamep.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/ELIAMEP-Thesis-7-2009_Andreas-Theophanous-_2_3.pdf.

⁴⁶ For a discussion, see, Ian Lesser, 'The New Turkish Lexicon', cit. See also, Heinz Kramer, 'Turkey's Accession Process to the EU. The Agenda behind the Agenda', *SWP Comments*, 25, October 2009, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?asset_id=6479

a new sense of confidence in the country which the Turkish establishment has been willing to use to justify a new, more independent stance in foreign affairs.⁴⁷ In the process, certain nationalistic tendencies which have accompanied Turkey throughout the multiple phases of its recent history, seem to have been revived, leading some in the establishment to look at the EU with a certain detachment. It has become popular, for instance, to contrast the dynamism of the Turkish economy and its elites with the sluggish EU societies and their cumbersome decision-making.

Given the difficulties in carrying out domestic reform, some sectors of the Turkish elite might come to embrace the view that the key to enduring success does not really lie in further reform and democratization – as the accession process with the EU demands – but in closer and increasingly valuable relations with a plethora of international actors around Turkey and beyond.⁴⁸

In fact, such insistence on keeping the EU prospect open may no longer be due to the fact that membership is seen as something realistic and achievable, but rather to the recognition on the part of the ruling party that the continuation of the negotiations remains of critical importance in the internal struggle for power. If the process were interrupted and the prospect for membership abandoned, elements of the old Kemalist elites could hope for a swift comeback as they would be able to blame the AKP government for the failure. The weakened military, too, would all of a sudden feel less constrained as actions undertaken to re-assert its influence in Turkish politics would be seen, rightly or wrongly, as having fewer critical international implications than those undertaken in 2007 and 2008.

A new effort is needed, therefore, to re-found the commitment to the EU within the new framework of an increasingly 'multidirectional' foreign policy and in the profoundly changed domestic and international context in which Turkey finds itself. Concerns that Turkey might be 'lost' not because it is drifting towards the East but because it has become content with being aloof should be dispelled. Make no mistake: this is not a request for clarification – a sort of declaration of aims that Turkey is for some reason required to give EU and Western leaders. It is something that Turkey owes above all to itself.

Turkey is self-admittedly in the process of redefining its identity. It is more than plausible that this re-definition will not change Turkey's attitude so deeply as to question well-rooted aspirations, such as that of being more fully integrated in Europe, but new reasons have to be found and old ones, if still valid, have to be re-affirmed in the new context.

The extent to which this process of reckoning is still in its early stages is revealed by the same language and rhetoric of the current government. Davutoğlu's formulas, starting with 'strategic depth', are offered as the recognition of historical legacies concerning Turkey, which the Cold war had only interrupted, not eliminated.

⁴⁷ On Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions, see, recently, Abramovitz Morton and Henri J. Barkey, 'Turkey's Transformers. The AKP Sees Big', *Foreign Affairs* 88:6, November/December 2009, 118-128.

⁴⁸ The government has much advertised the opening of many new embassies in Africa and in Asia and growing commercial relations with countries as far as Malaysia and Indonesia.

Davutoğlu's foreign policy discourse, however, has equally stressed the novelty of the geopolitical context in which both Turkey and Europe now find themselves and the need for new paradigms.⁴⁹ An expert on Turkish history, Davutoğlu has a particular inclination for imaging Turkey's future by relating it to the past, but he nonetheless knows that Turkey's success in the years to come critically depends on its ability to come to terms with the new realities of today rather than foolishly hoping to revive Turkey's glorious past. In this respect, the fascination with 'Neo-Ottomanism' should hardly be embraced by anyone seriously caring about the future of Turkey as the ill-fated history of the Ottoman Empire is well known.⁵⁰ More neutral formulas elevated almost to mantra in the current discourse for their simplicity and generality, such as 'zero problems with neighbors', seem instead to represent a first, still incomplete, attempt to grasp the elements of the new international context rather than the conclusion of such re-assessment.

It is exactly through this process of soul searching, however, that Turkish elites can find ways to re-found their commitment to the EU. This might include not only defining the Turkish interest in relation to the EU as it currently is, but also putting forward Turkey's own view of what the EU has to become so as to remain an appealing and useful community of countries with a firm rationale in the new politics of the twenty first century.

Turkey-EU Relations and Europe's Future

But this last issue is, of course, above all, up to current EU members to address. In doing so, EU leaders had better keep in mind that the future of Turkey-EU relations is inseparable from the broader question of what the EU wants to become.

EU countries are currently divided on what conclusions to draw from the evolution of new Turkish foreign policy. All of them recognize that what Turkey is doing beyond its borders, including in the Middle East, is as important as domestic developments and is overall valuable also from the point of view of the EU's own interests.⁵¹ None of them would honestly deny that Turkey is significantly contributing to expanding stability and peace – a goal that the EU itself asserts it wants promote as it rises as an international actor. Opinions, however, differ as to the implications to be drawn for Turkey-EU relations.

Some countries, such as Spain and Italy, which are already among the most convinced supporters of membership, argue that what Turkey is doing in regions such as the Caucasus and the Middle East is what the EU would wish to do but is unable to. Some are even ready to acknowledge that in many ways Turkey's policy towards its neighbors is pursuing the same objectives of the EU's neighborhood policy but more

⁴⁹ Bülent Aras, 'The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy', *Insight Turkey* 11:3, 2009, 127-142

⁵⁰ A defense against 'Neo-Ottomanism' can be found in Suat Kiniklioglu, "Neo-Ottoman Turkey?", *Project Syndicate*, December 2009, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/kiniklioglu2.

⁵¹ For a discussion, see, Cigdem Üstün, Foreign Policy in the EU and Joint Interests with Turkey, *ACCESS-TR, Policy Brief*, May 2009, <http://accessr.ces.metu.edu.tr/dosya/ustun1.pdf>. See also, Bülent Aras, 'Turkey's Rise in the Greater Middle East: Peace-Building in the Periphery', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11:1, 2009, 29-41.

effectively.⁵² To reinforce these arguments, it is also sometimes contended that a large part of what Turkey has been accomplishing in recent years is a direct result of Turkey-EU relations: it is 'Europeanization'.⁵³ Turkey, it is stressed, has in recent years come to adopt a soft-power as opposed to a hard-power approach to foreign policy. Economic opportunity and peace have become the driving forces of its external action, allowing Turkey to greatly expand its trading relations and to act as facilitator of dialogue in such realms as the Caucasus and the Arab-Israeli peace process. To European countries subscribing to this view, Turkey's activism in the Middle East is nothing to be afraid of. It is, on the contrary, a clear demonstration that Turkey would be a critical 'asset' for the EU.

For other European countries, such as Germany and France, Turkey's valuable and improving relations with its neighbors do not change the overall picture. Convergences between EU and Turkey's strategic goals, it is affirmed, cannot become a shortcut to membership. The process of integration, it is pointed out, is not a foreign policy issue but a commitment to a whole set of principles and rules – the *acquis communautaire* – ultimately involving the acceptance of a 'European way' that has only somewhat to do with foreign policy.

What is curious about the position of Germany and France is that their degree of alignment with Turkey's strategic orientation seems even greater than that of other EU countries which do not question the membership perspective. Some of Turkey's recent foreign policy initiatives have been looked at with some skepticism or even apprehension in Europe. Turkey's ever-closer relations with Iran are seen with mixed feelings by the UK which, not dissimilarly from the US, entertains fears that engagement might be confused with acquiescence or appeasement. Further, Turkey's growing difficulties with Israel have been a source of concern in Washington and London.⁵⁴ The same applies also to a certain leniency towards Russia, largely motivated by Turkey's dependence on Russian gas.⁵⁵ On all these issues, however, France and Germany are closer to Turkey. In fact, in the European context, France and Germany have been among the most determined to seek cooperation with Russia and to avert a military solution to the Iranian nuclear question through enhanced diplomatic dialogue with Tehran. It is no secret, moreover, that the French government and French public opinion are among the most unyielding in Europe in holding Israel accountable for its own responsibility for the failure of the peace process.

A similar situation occurred in 2003 when Turkey declined to support the invasion of Iraq exactly at the time when France and Germany's rejection of 'Bush's war' was seen

⁵² See, Senem Aydin Duzgit and Nathalie Tocci, 'Transforming Turkish Foreign Policy. The Quest for Regional Leadership and Europeanization', CEPS Commentary, 12 November 2009, www.ceps.eu/ceps/download/2662

⁵³ Mustafa Aydin and Sinem A. Acikmese, 'Europeanization through EU Conditionality: Understanding the New Era in Turkish Foreign Policy', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 9:3, December 2007, 263-274.

⁵⁴ On Turkish-Israeli relations, see, Gökhan Bacik, 'Turkish-Israeli Relations after Davos: A View from Turkey', *Insight Turkey* 11:2, 2009, 31-41.

⁵⁵ Lerna K. Yanik, 'Allies or Partners. An Appraisal of Turkey's Ties to Russia', *East European Quarterly* 41:3, 2007, 349-370. See, more recently, Gareth Winrow, 'Turkey, Russia, and the Caucasus: Common and Diverging Interests', *Chatham House Briefing Paper*, November 2009, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/15211_bp1109turkey.pdf.

by many as contributing to the birth of a new, distinctive European identity.⁵⁶ Despite the potentially symbolic dimension of Turkey's choice, countries like the UK, which were in favor of Turkey's EU membership, maintained the same orientation. France and Germany, for their part, remained opposed as to indicate that from their perspective Turkey's actions had no bearing on the determination of Europe's identity and future.

In the end, in fact, the future of Turkey-EU relations is really about what the EU will decide it wants to be, a decision which Germany and France will be key to determine. French officials stress that their 'no to Turkey' is not really about Turkey itself but it is a more general 'no to enlargement'.⁵⁷ The French people, since before the referendum which sank the European constitutional treaty, have been struggling to figure out what the EU may become without endangering France's place and role in it. Indeed, the key issue – bothering the French but also others – is the future political configuration of the EU. The question is whether this inevitable soul-searching will be mainly introspective and inward-looking or whether it will take into account the dynamic elements which have characterized the European identity since World War II.

Fears of including Turkey in the EU have certainly to do with the fact that for the first time it deals with a society which is predominantly Muslim.⁵⁸ Even if the dominant paradigm of the 2000s - the 'war on terror' – has been partly abandoned and accompanying fears of a 'clash of civilizations' are now fading, enlargement to a Muslim country with a large and growing population is a hard sell for any EU leader. Very few politicians bother addressing these fears by explaining to their electorates the reality of a country in which the rediscovery of the religious identity is part of a process which seems to be making democracy stronger, not weaker.

On a different level, resistance to Turkey has a great deal to do with the impact of this development on the delicate and complex internal balances of the EU. It is no secret that with a population of over eighty million, Turkey would be entitled to greater representation than France in EU institutions, and perhaps also of Germany. Even leaving aside the impact on formal procedures, the loss of relative influence for current EU members, especially large and mid-sized ones, could be substantial. Indeed, nothing of the kind has happened yet in the history of European integration, except for enlargement to the UK, which – not surprisingly – France resolutely opposed for many years.

In sum, a reflection is needed within the EU because it is only healthy that while the accession process unfolds, current EU countries assess again the impact of Turkey in the EU in light of the many developments of the past ten years. In fact, enlargement to

⁵⁶ On the concept of a 'European public' come together during the demonstrations against the war in Iraq, see, Michael Heffernan, 'The End of Atlanticism. Habermas, Derrida, and the Meaning of Europe in the Twenty First Century', *Geopolitics* 10:3, 2005, 570-575.

⁵⁷ See, Beyza Çağatay Tekin, 'The Construction of Turkey's Possible EU Membership in French Political Discourse', *Discourse and Society* 19:6, November 2008, 727-763.

⁵⁸ Sabine Strasser, 'Europe's Other', *European Societies*, 10:2, June 2008, 177-195

Turkey is not about 're-unifying' Europe – at least not anymore.⁵⁹ For better or worse, Turkey's membership has become for the EU an issue regarding its future rather than its past. The EU would certainly become a larger and more diverse entity as a result. The new 'stature' that the EU could acquire would have to be balanced out, however, with the loss of status and power of current members.

Some European leaders, in truth, have already concluded that this is not a problem, considering the 'costs' of saying 'no' to Turkey ultimately much higher than so-called 'absorption costs'. They point not just at Turkey's role as a 'stabilizer' in the EU's neighborhood, but its position as key 'energy hub' for Europe. Stressing these elements, the president of the Italian Republic has recently argued in favor of Turkey's membership, presenting it as something not just acceptable but necessary for the EU to become a '*Europe puissance*' after enlargements to the East have created fatigue internally without apparently enhancing the EU's external projection.⁶⁰

With an emerging consensus that in its present configuration and with its current instruments, including those made available by the recently ratified Lisbon Treaty, the EU will hardly occupy the position in world politics it aspires to gain, it seems sensible to assess whether enlargement to Turkey could lead to a better approximation between means and aims. Of course, the EU can keep trying to establish itself on the international stage with its current members, but in a sense it would be as if in the 1950s, France and Germany had decided that they could still matter in a newly bipolar world if they had gone it alone.

A further element worth keeping in mind is that by fully committing to bringing Turkey in, the EU would also critically contribute to another achievement: the EU 'anchor' would continue providing the assurance that Turkey will not succumb to non-democratic tendencies, which in fact have not been completely eradicated yet, and which could become dominant again if left unchecked. The latter is a risk that the current ruling elite is worryingly underestimating but whose existence EU officials fully acknowledge. In other words, the EU could keep acting as a 'disciplining factor' for Turkey and as a catalyst for reform, preventing instability from returning to the country and, therefore, to the EU's neighborhood too. Intervening only at a later stage when perhaps the situation had degenerated already, would entail the risk of not looking credible or effective anymore. In truth, the credibility dimension has been culpably neglected in the whole discussion about the future of Turkey-EU relations. The plain fact is that a unilateral withdrawal of the membership perspective would gravely undermine the credibility of the EU in the eyes of the Turkish people also as it regards other fields of cooperation, while heavily affecting the reputation of the EU as a membership-granting institution in the eyes of other candidates and potential candidate countries.

⁵⁹ Christian Sellar, Caedmon Staddon, Craig Young, 'Twenty Years after the Wall: Geographical Imaginaries of 'Europe' during European Union Enlargement', *Journal of Cultural Geography* 26:3, 2009, 253-258.

⁶⁰ Giorgio Napolitano, 'Eredità del passato e sfide del futuro: Turchia e Europa nei nuovi equilibri del mondo globale', Ankara, 18 November 2009, <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=1726>

The alternative of keeping only the prospect for membership open without really pursuing it, unlike it is often assumed, would not leave things as they are. The Middle East would keep changing, perhaps heading towards even greater instability. Turkey would change too, and not necessarily for the better. A combination of detachment and inaction could lead to a situation where the EU would find itself less powerful and with more instability around its borders.

Concluding Remarks

Turkey is not 'drifting'; it is in search of a new place and a new identity in the mutated context of the post-Cold War era. This complex process of transformation does not undermine Turkey's Western orientation, but it tests it again, calling upon Turkish political actors to re-affirm their commitment to cooperation and integration. It is time that the debate on Turkey's drift be replaced by a more serious and fruitful one on the reasons why Turkey is still important for the EU and for the West and what Europe and the West mean for, and can offer to, contemporary Turkey. To possibly a larger extent than in the past, this debate should see the active participation of the Turkish people and elite. Turkey's recent achievements bring with them new influence as well new responsibilities and Turkey's greater say in world affairs should translate into a more constructive and equal dialogue with its partners. Whatever the framework and scope, moreover, this debate should be oriented towards the future. Specters of the past and short-term calculations should be traded off with the gains that a re-founded relationship can bring if based on a realistic assessment of shared interests and a common vision of Europe's identity and role in the 21st century.

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