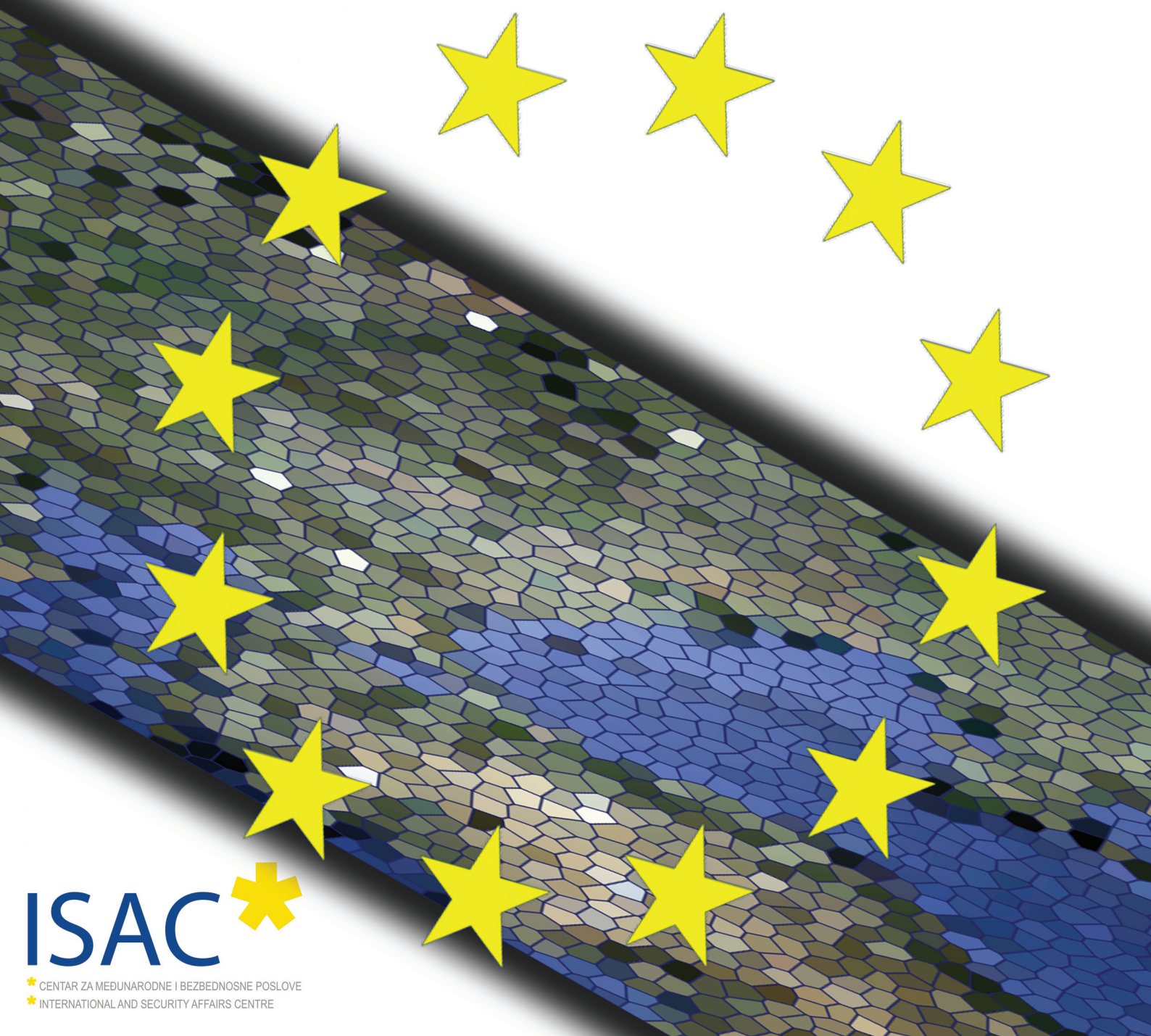


*POLICY PAPER*

# TURKEY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

## GOALS AND MEANS OF THE NEW FOREIGN POLICY



**ISAC** \*

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The International and Security Affairs Centre - ISAC Fund, organized in April 2011 the conference “New Turkish Foreign Policy in the Western Balkans”, which was attended by experts from Turkey, the Western Balkans and the countries of the European Union (EU). The goal of the conference was to present the views and opinions on the recently intensified Turkish foreign policy, in a critical and polemical way, and in a region where the mere mention of Turkey provokes intense emotions. The conference was held under the Chatham House Rule, which contributed to the openness of debate and the extent and quality of its content. The food for thought paper that was used as an introduction to the conference, was sent out to participants by ISAC the day before the conference, in order to set basic guidelines for speakers and thereby initiate a debate during the discussion.

The participants at the conference were striving towards in-depth analysis, trying to avoid falling into the trap of sensationalistic incidents that essentially tell so little about the actual state of relations and prospects of their progress. However, participants were not able to, nor wished to avoid uncomfortable topics; such as the role of religion in Turkey’s foreign policy, especially religious bonds with the Western Balkan nations, which accepted the Hanafi School of Islam from the Ottoman Empire. The bitterness of some of the participants from Turkey was noticeable at the conference, because of the fact that religious bond between the Turks and Muslims in the Western Balkans is still viewed in the region as an important determinant of the Turkish foreign policy. Similarly, participants from the Western Balkans paid special attention to some speeches in which Turkish officials emphasized the positive experiences of coexistence among peoples of the Western Balkans in the Ottoman Empire, disregarding the negative ones, as well as the statements that “Sarajevo is Turkish”, etc. The perceptions of the Ottoman Empire are very different in modern Turkey and the Western Balkan countries, and are a long way off towards bridging such parallel and rarely interconnected perceptions.

## ABSTRACT

*Although it increasingly perceives itself as an important pillar in international relations, Turkey's policy in the Western Balkans is in line with the NATO priorities of stability in the Western Balkans. However, due to its hampered progress towards the EU, Turkey had gradually stepped out with independent initiatives in the region. It is trying to re-brand Ottoman heritage, assure the Muslim elite in the region that their interests remain the priority of Turkey and build new relations with non-Muslim elites in the region. Turkey is building these new relations based on the political and the economic support it offers. Mediation in regional problems, international initiatives and strategic investments are just some of them. Many countries in the region continue to accept the independent initiatives of Turkey, which is an opportunity for Turkey to put its influence in the region on the table in negotiations with the EU. However, Turkey has neither the capacity nor the image or international status for an independent policy in the region. It is the Western Balkan countries which have to formulate Turkey's role in the region and make the EU accelerate the integration of the region, so that the independent initiatives of countries such as Turkey would not take away attention and energy from the common goal of EU integration.*

## TURKEY AS A PILLAR IN THE “MULTI-POLAR” WORLD

The economic and social achievements of modern Turkey are indisputable. Modern Turkey was the 17th world economy in 2010, according to the World Bank. It is a dynamic country where, according to one of the participants of the conference, more than 75% of the population lives in urban areas. Urbanization has contributed to the change of the mentality and the weakening of the deeply rooted conservative and patriarchal way of thinking in the society, which was affecting self-understanding of Turkey and the Turks and their image in the neighbourhood. A strong economy and urbanization are also a part of the changing image of Turkey in the non-Muslim parts of the region. According to one of the participants, a large number of tourists who visit Turkey see the economic achievements and modernization, thus disconnecting modern Turkey from its Ottoman heritage. For non-Muslims, Turkey is a modern state, and for the Muslims, it is an example of a state with a modern orientation in which they can develop their religious identity without changing the identity of these societies. This view is certainly present in the Balkans.

Turkey is not afraid to confidently translate its economic, cultural and social power into concrete policy and a visible expression of this is the new Turkish foreign policy. By using a wide range of instruments, the new Turkish foreign policy strives towards increasing the power and influence of Turkey in the states and regions where Turkey has either economic or traditional cultural influence. For example, in Central Asia, Turkey is one of the most active partners to the countries in the region, and a very important investor and creditor. In the Caucasus, Turkey is one of the most important factors in the problem of Azerbaijani - Armenian conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, and an important factor in Georgia (Abkhazia). In the Middle East, it does not hesitate to challenge the West in such important matters as the development of Iran's nuclear program, relations with Israel, but also to openly support the policy of intervention in Libya. The famous speech of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, in which the reasons for redefining the relations of Turkey towards the Western Balkans were stated, was held in Sarajevo in October 2009. In the speech he promised that Turkey would seek to re-create and establish a golden age of the Balkans, and he underlined the goal of his new foreign policy: establishing order in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Ahmet Davutoglu, on the opening ceremony of the conference “Ottoman legacy and Balkan Muslim Communities today” in



Turkey also defines itself by underlining the similarities and differences with the West. It modernizes as it gets closer to the West, but it is also defining itself, according to one of the participants at the conference, by emphasizing the differences with the West. While the modernization is its capital in relations with the West, these differences are the capital in the Turkish neighbourhood and other Muslim countries. This duality of Turkey does not necessarily mean division, but rather the pursuit of Turkey to become an independent factor in international relations, which will not necessarily be categorized as part of one of the existing patterns.

Turkish elites understood that the policy of positioning Turkey as a regional power requires a change in Turkish self-perception. As one of the participants at the conference noticed, there is a large cultural approach of Turkey in the relations with non-Western countries, that is seen in the creation of the dichotomy “us” and the others, meaning, the West. For example, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, during his stay in Syria, talked about the remains of the Crusaders’ fortresses. In China, he is talking about Turkey and China as the centres of civilizations that were destroyed and cut off by the Western countries’ colonization. This leads the Turkish political leaders to, through their democratic political model, remain sufficiently close to the West, while on the other hand, they create a new cultural identity which brings Turkey closer to the countries that are almost constantly in the conflict with the West, exactly because of unsolvable differences between their own cultural identity and the one in the West. This situation puts Turkey in a position of a desirable mediator, essentially a “bridge” or an “example of a democratic Muslim country”. In that way, Turkey gains enormous political influence, in the neighbourhood and beyond, which makes it an indispensable actor in international relations of the area. According to Turkish diplomats, Turkish policy is such that it offers solutions where everybody wins, which is essentially different from the solutions offered by the West, where there is always a losing side. By creating the new face of Turkey, which is at the same time Western and Turkish, and which has its roots in the historical and spiritual bond between Turkey and the people in its neighbourhood, Turkey shows a face of an ambitious state, one that uses the rhetoric of the past. It uses Ottoman times as a mean of acquiring and increasing its economic and political power, but not as a goal in itself; it is a policy directed to the aspiration of Turkey to become a “pillar” in international relations.

The EU has made it clear to Turkey that the desire for the status of the international force is incompatible with the application for the EU membership. However, even though they understand the importance of European integrations for modernization, the Turkish elites have become aware of the limitations of the European perspective of Turkey. The dispute over the status of Northern Cyprus, the “enlargement exhaustion” and the opposition of large member states, above all France and Germany, to Turkey’s membership, have, for now, blocked Turkey’s way into this exclusive club. Instead of membership, there was talk of offering a “privileged partnership”, which Turkey did not accept.

Because of the unclear prospects of the EU membership, Turkey elects the reforms that it will implement. Although willing to continue the reforms with the help of the EU, it now approaches them selectively. Those reforms which change the identity and vital interests of Turkey, for example, enhancing the freedom of speech are no longer a priority. This was clearly demonstrated by the recent restrictions of Internet access in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Also, as one of the participants at the conference said, Turkey has a hard time opening up public procurement so that the companies from the EU could compete, if it does not become an EU member. At the same time, there is an obvious decline in support for the EU accession in the masses, and among the elites in Turkey. Turkish elites from the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and also a huge part of the Turkish electorate, believe that the EU is going too far in its demands and wants to change the identity of Turkey and Turks.

The delayed path towards the EU that was the engine of Turkey’s modernization and development, caused Turkey to reconsider its position and role in its own surrounding. Ever since the end of the Cold War, Turkey has not felt the security challenges that would necessarily force it to “free

Sarajevo (Friday, 16th October 2009) [http://www.docstoc.com/docs/71671852/Davutoglu\\_transcript\\_dzs](http://www.docstoc.com/docs/71671852/Davutoglu_transcript_dzs)

2 Hurriyet Daily News, Turkish Internet filtering plan ‘unconstitutional,’ experts say, Wednesday, May 4, 2011, <http://web.hurriyetdaily-news.com/n.php?n=internet-filter-2011-05-04>

ride” with the West. Its growing confidence was evident in 2003 when it refused that the U.S. base “Incirlik” to be used in the attack on Iraq. Turkey has constantly worked to improve relations with Russia, which are currently at the highest level in the last few centuries. Turkey abolishes visa for the neighbours, it invests in their economies, mediates in the regional problems and offers good services in the internal problems in Syria and other Muslim countries. Although it has its own interests in the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia and Iran, as well as in relations with Russia, which balance the priorities of Turkey with the priorities of NATO, Turkey remains one of the most influential members of NATO and its foreign policy remains closely linked to NATO priorities.

Rejecting the Kemalist thesis about the Turkey being threatened by neighbours, the currently dominant AKP tends to see possibilities in neighbours - not threats. This was formulated in the second out of five principles of foreign policy of Turkey, “zero problems with neighbours”.<sup>3</sup> It is an open policy which sees neighbours as a field of possibilities and not the source of threat and which observes Ottoman heritage as the capital in many parts of its neighbourhood. Turkey is not afraid to translate that capital into tangible influence, which can become a currency in its relations with other major pillars in international relations

## ***NEW TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE BALKANS: ZERO PROBLEMS FOR NATO***

The Balkans is the neighbourhood region for Turkey. According to the document Relations with the Balkan which was issued by the Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey is “developing relations to the highest level with the Balkan countries, with which Turkey has historic, cultural and humanitarian ties; enhancing the existing atmosphere of regional peace and stability; keeping the transportation connection of Turkey with Western and Central Europe open”.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, Turkey perceives the Balkans as a whole, regardless if the individual states are EU member states or not. Its approach towards these states is bilateral in essence, which bares little consideration EU integrations priorities, giving a notable geopolitical tone to the Turkish approach to the region.

Turkish voters are very sensitive towards foreign policy issues.<sup>5</sup> There are around 10 million Turkish citizens of Western Balkans descent, from where their ancestors came during several migration waves in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>6</sup> As Minister Davutoglu stated, there are more people of Bosnian and Albanian decent in Turkey than in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo and Albania. They represent a significant force that influences the attitudes and policies of Turkey towards the region, which was manifested during the BiH and Kosovo crises.<sup>7</sup>

For the same reason, every Turkish success in the Balkans mirrors in political dividends on the internal political scene of Turkey.<sup>8</sup> The proactive policy in the Balkans of the current Government helps it stir emotions of the voters, and to increase support for their policies. Usually statements

3 *The unity of the Security and Democracy, zero problems with neighbors, proactive and peace diplomacy, multidimensional foreign policy and rhythmic international and multilateral diplomacy*, Address by His Excellency Foreign Minister of Republic of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu, Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy, SETA Foundation’s Washington D.C. Branch, December 8, 2009, [http://setadc.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=202:unofficial-transcript-of-foreignminister-ahmed-davutoglus-speech&catid=58:text&Itemid=113](http://setadc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=202:unofficial-transcript-of-foreignminister-ahmed-davutoglus-speech&catid=58:text&Itemid=113), see also, Žarko Petrović, Turkey’s New Approach to the Western Balkans, Food for Thought Paper developed for the Round-table Conference, ‘The New Turkish Foreign Policy in the Western Balkans’, Belgrade, 8 April 2011 [http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Turkey's\\_new\\_approach\\_to\\_the\\_Western\\_Balkans.pdf](http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Turkey's_new_approach_to_the_Western_Balkans.pdf)

4 Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Relations with the Balkan Region*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/Relations-With-The-Balkan-Region.en.mfa>

5 According to the opinion polls by the Turkish Institute for Political Studies (TEPAV), around 51% of voters expressed interest for foreign policy, while 65% supports the current direction of foreign policy set by professor Davutoglu

6 Gangloff S., *The Impact Of The Ottoman Legacy On Turkish Policy In The Balkans*, 1991-1999, Ceri, 2005, Str.10, Accessed 26 June, 2011, Internet address <http://www.Ceri-Sciencespo.Com/Archive/Nov05/Artsg.Pdf>.

7 The pressure Bosniak and Albanian Diaspora on Turkish authorities during the last 20 years could be compared with similar attitudes of Chechen and Abkhazian Diaspora and their pressures for the recognition of the independent Abkhazia and for the firmer Turkish reaction towards the Russian army engagement in the Northern Caucasus. However, official Ankara ignored these pressures, demonstrating that it is capable to resist the public pressure if it is conflict with what the authorities see as the “reasonable” policy.

8 Tesev, *Foreign Policy Perceptions In Turkey*, May 2011, Accessed 26. June 2011, Internet Address [http://www.Tesev.Org.Tr/Ud\\_Objts/Pdf/Dpt/Ab/Foreign\\_Policy\\_Perception\\_2010](http://www.Tesev.Org.Tr/Ud_Objts/Pdf/Dpt/Ab/Foreign_Policy_Perception_2010).

of the Turkish representatives in the Balkans are emotionally charged but at the same time, these statements are occasionally directed more towards the domestic public in Turkey than towards the Muslim elites in the region. Minister Davutoglu himself underlined that whenever there is a crisis in the Balkans “they (Bosniaks, Albanians and Turks in Bulgaria) look towards Istanbul”, and that in such a way Turkey pays the price for its Ottoman heritage.<sup>9</sup> For example, during his speech in Sarajevo, Davutoglu stated that Turkey is a safe sanctuary for all of the Balkans’ Muslims in the form of: “Anatolia is yours, Bosnian brothers and sisters, and be sure that Sarajevo is ours”.<sup>10</sup>

Turkey’s economic breakthrough in the Balkans began in the early 1990s, increasing with the Turkey’s strong economic growth at the beginning of the 21st century. In the beginning, due to the rivalry with Greece, at the time the only EU member state in the Balkans, Turkey’s engagement in the Balkans was primarily focused on security and bilateral economic relations, but also the importance of the region as a transport corridor to Western Europe. Turkish security engagement in the Western Balkans started during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, with the outbreak of the war in BiH. While Turkey was one of the biggest proponents of NATO’s intervention in this country, its engagement in Bosnia remained limited to the NATO framework. After the war, Turkey became a member of the Peace Implementation Council (Turkey represents the Organization of the Islamic Conference in this body), an institution designed to overlook the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Furthermore, ever since Macedonia proclaimed its independence, Turkey remained one of its main international supporters, particularly when it comes to Macedonia’s name dispute with Greece. Turkey was also among the first states to recognize the independence of Kosovo, and continued its support to help the Kosovo elite reinforce independence. On the other hand, Turkey has also improved its relations with predominantly Christian states in the region, Greece above all. Decades long enmity and tensions were silenced down and relations were boosted with successful economic cooperation.

In addition, Turkey has put a lot of effort in redefining its relations with Serbia. Turkish diplomacy helped Spain, which held the EU presidency in that moment, to find a suitable “status neutral” formula for the Kosovo representation at the meeting of the Western Balkans Ministers of Foreign affairs on 2 June 2010 in Sarajevo. Largely as a result of the rapprochement between Turkey and Serbia, relations between Sarajevo and Belgrade have somewhat thawed. Following Ankara’s involvement, the ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina could return to Belgrade after a long delay. About a month before, the Serbian parliament adopted a declaration condemning the genocide in Srebrenica and in the first half of 2010 the new multilateral initiative between Serbia, BiH and Turkey was launched, resulting in the signing of the Istanbul Declaration on April 26 2010. Although some of the BiH politicians were suspicious towards it (especially from the Republic of Srpska), interpreting it as merely an independent act of the BiH Presidency Chairman. Despite the critics, this initiative continued and resulted in another trilateral meeting in April 2011, in Karađorđevo, Serbia, where BiH was represented by all three Presidency members. Turkey has recently offered its mediation services to two opposing factions of the Islamic Community in Serbia, by proposing a solution for the settlement of the division.

Stability of the Balkans is the crucial interest of Turkey, and its political engagement went hand-in-hand with the military one. Turkish police and military units got the important role in the post-conflict missions of peace keeping and peace implementation in BiH, Kosovo and Macedonia. In fact, Turkey is still one the biggest contributors to these missions. With the rise of its political and economic influence, Turkey also reinforced the bilateral dimension of the military and security engagement, cooperating with the armies and ministries of defence of the Western Balkans states. Furthermore, Turkey has improved, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the cooperation with the Western Balkans states in the field of defence and security, by providing military equip-

9 Address By His Excellency Foreign Minister Of Republic Of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu - *Principles Of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Seta Foundation’s Washington D.C. Branch, 8.Decembar 2009, Accessed 20 June 2011, Internet Address [http://Setad.org/Index.Php?Option=Com\\_Content&View=Article&Id=202:Unofficial-Transcript-Of-Foreign-Minister-Ahmed-Davutoglus-Speech&Catid=58:Text&Itemid=11](http://Setad.org/Index.Php?Option=Com_Content&View=Article&Id=202:Unofficial-Transcript-Of-Foreign-Minister-Ahmed-Davutoglus-Speech&Catid=58:Text&Itemid=11)

ment and various courses and trainings.

The intensity of political relations gave rise to the military cooperation, and varies from country to country, from training programmes to helping with the modernization of military infrastructure (eg. Vlore in Albania, where Turkish troops are still situated, and helping with the reconstruction of the military airport in Kuchova). In addition, Turkey's military cooperation with both Serbia and Montenegro is improving. Turkey has invested 10 million USD in the reconstruction of the civil-military airport "Morava", Lađevci near the town of Kraljevo in Serbia, which was officially opened in October 2011. The cooperation of Turkey with Montenegro is primarily based on activities within the NATO Membership Action Plan and on cooperation of navies of the two respective countries. Currently, negotiations on the Security Cooperation Agreement are under way. However, NATO remains the cornerstone of the Turkey's military policy in the region. Therefore, this country still supports to a large extent all the (remaining) countries from the region in their NATO membership aspirations.

In the same period, Turkey tried to develop its economic presence in the Western Balkans states within the bilateral framework. The main competition for the Turkish companies comes from the EU, thus there are two options for the further developing of the Turkish influence. Firstly, Turkish companies could offer competitive prices or the cooperation could be enhanced through offering of cheap loans and the direct investments in the economies of the region. Results are rather diverse, but there were breakthroughs in BiH (banking sector), Macedonia (civil and cargo air transport and infrastructure) and in Kosovo (transport, telecommunications, banking and trade). Still, all of the Western Balkans governments are very interested in the aforementioned Turkish investments in the strategic sectors - above all in the telecommunications and transport infrastructure, but also in the banking and construction sectors, mining, trade and development of small and middle size companies. In the time of the global economic crisis, impoverished Western Balkans states desire fresh capital, particularly from countries that show rather constant and strong economic growth, such as Turkey. Both the governments from the region and Turkey itself encourage Turkish companies to enter the regional markets, especially when it comes to strategic projects. One of the best examples of this (unsuccessful) encouragement is the offer of the Government of Serbia to the Turkish Airlines to take over Serbian JAT Airways. Turkish companies also participate in the construction of the Durrës-Kukës-Prishtinë motorway, and they are seen as the main contractor on the Belgrade-South Adriatic highway.

Furthermore, Turkey helps with the reconstruction of Ottoman period monuments throughout the region. This help is usually run via the Turkish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (TIKA). TIKA is also engaged in construction of schools and universities in the parts of the region with predominant Muslim population. In Montenegro, for example, the major part of Turkish help was direct towards the northern parts of the country, mostly populated by Muslims. The same institution - TIKA has financed the construction of madrasah in Tuzi, the first Muslim religious school in Montenegro in the past 90 years. Together with its economic and political influence, Turkey and its institutions, as well as its civil society organizations, are increasingly present in the culture and education in the countries of the Western Balkans. Together with Turkish TV programmes, they send the picture of Turkey as a modern, open and secular country, culturally close to the countries of the region.

Turkey is also present in the education sector of Albania and BiH. In Albania, Turkish schools are considered to be among the best and at this moment there are around 3000 students attending them. In addition, Turkish universities are open for the citizens of Albania, and according to some estimates there are around 1500 students enrolled at these post-secondary education institutions. Around 100 students from Kosovo receive Turkish state scholarships for attending their universities. The International Burch University in Sarajevo was founded with the help of the Government of Turkey in 2008. In Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey is offering scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as various scholarships for studying the Turkish language. There is no visa regime towards the Western Balkan countries, which contributes to interpersonal contacts, thus helping to continue the transformation of the picture of contemporary Turkey and its



## TURKEY, BALKANS AND THE EU

Sustainable stability in the Western Balkans is a goal which still needs to be reached. Yet, the danger of the armed conflict is the thing of the past. Now, Turkey is striving to persuade other players in the region that its contribution to stability is both useful and needed. Traditionally, the stability of the Balkans is being connected to the process of the accession to the EU. Since 2009, as a country without a realistic short-period EU perspective, Turkey, through mediation initiatives and strategic influences, began to promote its own version of sustainable stability development in the Balkans. According to the notable Polish analyst Adam Balcer, Turkey wants to create its own sphere of influence, which could be of use in the case of slowing of pace of the EU integrations.<sup>11</sup> Stable influence in the Western Balkans certainly represent a sort of political wildcard for Turkey, while at the same time, good relations with all of the Western Balkans countries are very useful for the final goal of Turkey - the EU membership.<sup>12</sup> The importance of these relations will be increased if these countries become EU member states before Turkey itself.

Although Turkish foreign policy in the region is closely tied to the NATO framework and in most cases is along the lines of EU initiatives, few independent Turkish moves still raised some questions in Brussels. Turkish diplomats claim that mediation in the Balkans, and finding of acceptable solutions, are the main qualities of their contribution to peace in the region. However, Turkish influence is still far from the scope of influence of both the EU as a whole and even some of the EU member states. The EU is still the most influential organization among the citizens and elites in the Western Balkans states, since it offers integration through adoption of *acquis communautaire*, i.e. transformation of the state and its system through the adoption of the EU norms and standards. That is much more than “strategic partnerships” of the Western Balkans states with Russia, China or Turkey, and even the USA through NATO. The possible alliance with Turkey and reliance to its “mediation capabilities”, although temporary tempting, would be dependant solely on the Ankara’s will. However, as one of the participants at the conference noted, in the case of indefinitely prolonged Turkish path towards the full EU membership, some version of alliance with Turkey might become a more appealing option.<sup>13</sup>

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11 Adam Balcer, *Turkey And The Western Balkans. A View From Poland*, Demos Evropa, ISAC Fund, 2011, <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Turkey-and-the-Western-Balkans-eng.pdf>

12 Doga Ulas Eralp, SETA Policy Brief No 46, Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Future Reflecting on the Past, August 2010, page 9. <http://www.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=44343&q=turkey-and-bosnia-herzegovina-a-future-reflecting-on-the-past>

13 In his analysis *Regression Of Three Albanian Societies*, Veton Suroi, Albanian politician, pointed towards the possible attractiveness of the neo-Ottoman alliance for Albanian communities in the South Eastern Europe. See „Regression Of Three Albanian Societies“, Südosteuropa Mitteilungen, Minhen, 04/2011, p. 17.

## CONCLUSIONS

The new Turkish approach in the Western Balkans is both intensive and comprehensive, and it is just one part of the overall visible diplomatic action towards all of its neighbours. Turkey approaches the region as a whole, starting different initiatives to improve both economic and political relations with all of the Western Balkans states, with an aim to increase its own influence. In addition, along with these pragmatic political economic initiatives, Turkey not only strives to become the cultural model for the Balkans, but also the official protector of the endangered groups, above all the Muslims with whom Turkey shares historical ties originating from the Ottoman period. Unlike in the past decades, Turkey recognises and accepts these ties, and tries even to deepen them as a part of the new, overall image of Turkey. This new face, created with the goal to attract both Muslim and non-Muslim elites of the Western Balkan states by offering a “buffet” cooperation with Turkey - there is something for everyone.

Politicians, like the current Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, are trying to “re-brand” the Ottoman heritage with a goal to capture both “hearts and souls” of the Western Balkans. However, this does not work with the non-Muslims, and it seems that the Turkish elites do not put enough effort to make the image of their state acceptable for these segments of the population as well. This Ottoman re-branding effort is destined to fail, since the identity of the majority of the Christian Western Balkan states was forged in the late romantic era (end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the Balkans), on the ideology of secession from the Ottoman empire. It is hard to believe that Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians and Montenegrins would disband their own myths because of the striking “truth” about the Ottoman heritage, as presented by Minister Davutoglu.

On the other hand, emotional rhetoric of the Turkish diplomats is causing controversy and doubts among the non-Muslim populations in the Western Balkans. They see the new Turkish engagement either as the return of the former occupier who has recovered from its defeat and demonstrates its imperial ambitions again, or as a protector of Balkan’s Muslims that it has created centuries ago through semi-violent Islamization. These standpoints are based on the negative premises about Turkey’s goals in the region, which are just being enhanced by the emotional rhetoric of the Turkish representatives. Although Turkey puts a lot of effort into dismantling these negative premises, the rhetoric of Muslim solidarity is in fact complementary with the attitudes of the Muslim elites in BiH. By avouching Muslim elites that Turkey is willing to protect the interests of Bosniaks and Albanians in the region, Turkey is pushing the non-Muslims to react.

The new wave of pragmatic economic relations initiated in 2009 remains mostly concentrated towards those states with which Turkey already has close culturally and religiously ties. The further development of these relations pose questions about the officially proclaimed will of Turkey to remain a neutral state in the Western Balkans. For now, economic influence of Turkey in the Balkans is much smaller than the influence of many single EU states, and in some countries is even weaker than the presence of Russia and the USA. Therefore, the ambitions and wishes of Turkey to become the factor of stability in the Balkans face serious constraints.

With its engagement Turkey tries to present itself as a state capable to cut some of the “Balkans’ Gordian knots” and to stay along the lines of the Western states’ Balkans approach, and in that manner to preserve its positions on both sides of the Atlantic. However, the awareness about Turkey’s limited European perspective caused the importance of the EU within its foreign policy priorities to become relative. With that, the stability of the Western Balkans became a goal which exists independently from the European version of stability through implementation of reform process. Therefore, if the EU continues to set restrictions to the EU perspective of Turkey, this country could be tempted to try and achieve stability without or even despite the EU and despite its internal limitations.

At the same time, Turkey is aware of all the dangers that bring the non-traditional versions of Islam, above all the neo-Salfism coming from the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf. This version of Islam undermines the positions of Turkey in the Balkans, considering that these populations accepted Hanafi school version of Islam during the Ottoman period.

By connecting the stability of Balkans to Turkey's economic and transport interests, and considering the internal political situation in this state, we can see a more complete picture of its interests in the region. If we add to this the complex equation of EU-Turkey relations, it becomes clear that Turkey cannot blindly support one side, since that would not bring the desired stability nor it will buy sympathies for Turkey in Brussels.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **For the countries of the Western Balkans:**

1. All countries of the region should continue to develop good relations with Turkey, as a state, not with Turkey as a great power or a pillar in international relations.
2. The stability of the Balkans, and especially of the Western Balkans, is unavoidably linked to the path of the region towards the EU. Turkey should fully coordinate its interests in stability of the Balkans with the efforts of the EU to achieve sustainable stability in the region. Turkey has neither the capacity, nor the image or any objective opportunity of trying to ensure stability “in parallel” with the EU.
3. Given that Turkey, as of recently, has no perspective which other Western Balkan countries do in the form of EU membership, the countries of the region should formulate the least common denominator of relations with Turkey, which would be based on pragmatic interests, the development of economic and political relations and cooperation within NATO.
4. The address for solving regional problems is Brussels, not Ankara. Having that in mind, the countries of the region should be seeking solutions, preferably alone, and then with the help of Brussels to the problems of Bosnia and Kosovo.
5. Emotional rhetoric is not welcome in the Balkans, hence it should not be used in everyday politics.
6. The countries of the region should cooperate with Turkey regarding the reconstruction of shamefully neglected monuments of the Ottoman period. The negative sentiments of the common heritage of the Balkans will not be erased if the Ottoman monuments get destroyed and the positive ones will disappear.

## **For the Republic of Serbia:**

1. The Republic of Serbia should resolve problems in Sandzak and in relations between the feuding Muslim fractions in the region on its own. The basis for this solution exists in the legislation of the Republic of Serbia and international norms regarding human and minority rights.
2. The Belgrade authorities should immediately respond positively to such complaints of Bosniaks from Sandzak that have the bases in the legal system of Serbia, for example, proportional representation of national minorities, so that they would not be left for Turkey's mediation.
3. Serbia should not accept any kind of attaching of bilateral economic or military-political project with the issues of regional relations. Relations in the region should develop on the bilateral and multilateral basis and in accordance with the priorities of European integrations of Serbia.