



# **TRANSITION, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE WIDER-BLACK SEA REGION**

## **Transition in Turkey: A Critical Assessment and Current Challenges**

**January 2013**

## 1. POLITICAL ASPECTS

Following the footsteps of Kemal Atatürk, post-WWII Turkish political leaders kept the Western-oriented and secular orientation of the country. The Kemalist leadership was based on six main untouchable principles: “republicanism,” “nationalism,” “populism,” “secularism,” “reformism” and “statism.”

In the 1980s, then prime minister Turgut Özal replaced the Kemalist leadership by introducing a new political identity, an alliance pattern of government, an economic-driven foreign policy, and an ethnic policy. Özal abolished statism and populism, two of the “six arrows” of Kemalism, and changed the content and meaning of secularism, nationalism, reformism and republicanism. Özal’s ideology was a synthesis of technological Westernization, and cultural Turkism and Islamism. One part of his ideology was the Ottoman and Islamic culture. A second part was economic and political liberalism. [3]

Since 2002, in contrast to the unstable coalition governments of the 1990s, Turkey has been dominated by a single political force, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by a charismatic leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In this period, Turkey has undergone a powerful economic boom driven by an energetic industrial base geared towards exports, and by a large domestic market with increasing levels of purchasing power. However, most of the progress and reforms took place during the first three years of the AKP’s tenure. In the two latter terms, Mr Erdoğan and the AKP have become increasingly authoritarian. While the early 2000s provided hope for the

consolidation of liberal democracy in Turkey, recent years have seen a reversal of that trend. [5]

The EU could provide in principle the necessary framework within which Turkey can complete its modern transformation. Turkey, in turn, can offer the European Union a number of advantages as a market, a robust strategic player, and a mediator between Europe and its own neighborhood. [8] However, Turkey today is less permeable to European pressure, and less interested in membership, than it has been in recent decades. Domestically, the Turkish government has shown growing authoritarian tendencies; in terms of foreign policy, Ankara has drifted increasingly towards associating itself with Islamic causes rather than European values. [5]

## 2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

One of the biggest economic challenges for Turkey is to make its recent macroeconomic stabilization sustainable. Turkey should be classified as a typical transition country which is moving away from a highly distorted boom-and-bust economy to a stable market economy. It seems fair to say that Turkey today is rather open to international trade and foreign investment and offers the potential for rapid and sustainable growth. [7]

The private sector has expanded rapidly, though the state remained heavily involved in the economy. The banking sector has weathered the financial turmoil relatively well with little government intervention. An

improving regulatory environment and open-market policies that support global trade and investment sustained the country's overall competitiveness. However, over the most recent years Turkey's transition toward greater economic freedom has slowed notably, being weighed down by lingering institutional shortcomings. Chronic fiscal deficits are highlighting the need to enhance public finance management and restructure public-sector programs. [6]

Turkey is characterized by demographic dynamism. Its labor force will continue to experience growth rates of more than 1 percent per annum for at least one more generation. In terms of investment in, and output of education, Turkey's performance is certainly much worse than the EU average.

Turkey is an example of a so-called dual economy. Sectoral and regional data reveal that the Turkish economy is divided into a tiny, but exceptionally well-performing progressive sector outside agriculture (mainly industry and some services) in some Western regions which is highly productive, and a large and poor rural sector covering approximately half of the labor force.

Enhancing the quality of Turkish institutions will be crucial for exploiting Turkey's growth potential. The transfer of the *acquis communautaire* to the new EU member states is built upon the idea that full gains from EU membership can only be reaped if the quality of government institutions in the member states is broadly the same. Improving the quality of governance will also lead to a growth dividend as

confirmed by a large strand of empirical literature on domestic institutions as a determinant of growth. [7]

Despite enviable economic performances and a rising geopolitical profile, the benefits that Turkey would draw from continuing integration with the EU are not exhausted. In particular, the developments of the past five years have shown that the attraction force of EU membership, as well as the disciplining framework of the Copenhagen criteria are essential for the deepening and further institutionalization of Turkish democracy.[8]

### 3. INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

The Kurdish question is arguably the most serious internal problem in Turkey and certainly one of the main obstacles to its aspirations to full integration with European institutions.

Many foreign experts define the problem simply as a matter of oppression and denial of rights by a majority group (the Turks) of an ethnic minority (the Kurds). However, in addition to the ethnic aspect, the Kurdish problem contains often neglected social, economic, political, ideological, and international dimensions that have carried different weights at different times. The international ramifications of the Kurdish question make it an issue of utmost importance in the regional politics of the Middle East. A deeper understanding of the matter must take into account the tribal character of Kurdish society, the dynamics of the PKK rebellion's rise and fall, and the larger context of Turkey's ongoing democratization.

According to some experts, solutions based on Kurdish autonomy or federalism are obsolete since a majority of Kurds live in western parts of Turkey or are otherwise integrated into Turkish society, hence making from autonomy and federalism impractical alternatives. Moreover, despite the bitterness of the armed conflict, tensions on the grassroots level between Turks and Kurds remain low. Any solution that would institutionalize ethnic distinctiveness would therefore risk fueling ethnic antagonism. [10]

In order for any identity strategy to be effectively unifying, socio-economic policies that actually create compatible interests for ethnic Turks and Kurds would have to accompany it. [11]

On the more complex question of how to treat the Kurds living in Turkey, the AKP government has promised much and done less than it could have. This issue now seems to be the biggest restraint on Turkey's political life, undermining the political and administrative reforms, constraining the country's foreign policy choices, and requiring huge military expenditures to combat the decades-old insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). [2]

#### **4. CORRUPTION**

Turkey is confronted by significant corruption related challenges, with both petty and grand forms of corruption permeating through many sectors of society. These include the public sector, the private sector, political parties and the military. The government has taken steps to address corruption

challenges in the country. Major international anticorruption conventions have been signed and ratified, an anti-corruption action plan has been adopted in 2010 and the government has implemented a comprehensive series of reforms aimed at reducing red tape and related opportunities for corruption, and improving the country's business environment. In spite of these measures, progress in the fight against corruption remains limited and concerns have been raised in a number of areas. There is no central body in charge of developing and evaluating anti-corruption policies, there is inadequate coordination of the various institutions involved in the fight against corruption, and there is no independent body in charge of monitoring the implementation of anti-corruption measures. Despite greater civil awareness and participation, the 2010 strategic action plan on reducing corruption was designed with no consultation of non-governmental actors and civil society only has limited oversight over the implementation of national anti-corruption policies. [13]

A full-scale anticorruption strategy should include not only policing-type regulations and improved institutional structures, but also systemic reforms to deal with patron-client networking, informality and tax evasion. Since trust in public institutions is very low, it is rather difficult to speak of a healthy public sphere. There is a clear need, therefore, for a comprehensive reform of governance structures, in the form of increased accountability and transparency.

Turkey was advised to 'fully commit at all levels to the fight against corruption, including by strengthening all institutions involved, as well as coordination between them' (European Council 2006). The European Commission's *2010 Report on Turkey* makes a rather poignant remark, claiming that 'effective implementation of the strategy is necessary to reduce corruption which remains prevalent in many areas'. According to the *2010 Corruption Perceptions Index* prepared by Transparency International (2010), the world-acknowledged authority on this issue, Turkey ranks 56th with a score of 4.4 (an index from 0 to 10, 10 corresponding to 'no corruption at all' and 0 to 'full corruption' in the public sector) - and has oscillated around that rank in the past few years. [12]

## 5. ENERGY SECURITY

Turkey relies heavily on foreign sources of oil and imports nearly 90 percent of oil, with domestic supplies accounting for the remaining 10 percent.

Turkey is playing an increasingly important role in the transit of oil and gas supplies from Russia, the Caspian region, and the Middle East routed westward to Europe. Turkey has been a major transit point for seaborne traded oil and is becoming more important for pipeline-traded oil and natural gas. Growing volumes of Russian and Caspian oil are being sent by tanker via the Bosphorus Straits to Western markets while a terminal on Turkey's Mediterranean coast at Ceyhan allows the country to export oil from northern Iraq and Azerbaijan. The Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline is Turkey's largest oil pipeline (by capacity), and serves

as a transport pipeline of Iraqi oil. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline (BTC) is Turkey's longest pipeline, running approximately 1,100 miles and capable of carrying 1.2 million bbl/d of oil.

To ease increasing oil traffic through the Bosphorus Straits, a number of Bosphorus bypass options are under consideration in Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and Turkey itself. The Turkish government approved the construction plans for the proposed Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline that, according to some estimates would reduce the Bosphorus Straits oil tanker traffic by up to 50 percent. The Samsun-Ceyhan bypass would transport oil from Turkey's Black Sea port of Samsun to Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast. The project includes the construction of a 350-mile oil pipeline, a new terminal for receiving oil at Samsun and a terminal for exporting the oil and a storage plant at Ceyhan. [19]

Turkey produces a very small amount of natural gas, with the total production amounting to 25 billion cubic feet (Bcf) in 2009. Consumption has increased rapidly, hitting a peak of 1.3 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) in 2008 up from 442 Bcf in 1999. Most of Turkey's gas imports come from Russia, with Gazprom sending gas to north-west Turkey via the Balkans as well as to central Turkey via the Blue Stream pipeline that links Russia to Turkey across the Black Sea. Turkey also imports gas via pipeline from Iran and Azerbaijan, as well as liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies under contract with Algeria and Nigeria. With the 2007 launch of Azerbaijani gas exports to Europe through the Turkey-Greece gas pipeline interconnector, Turkey has begun to realize its goal of becoming an energy

bridge for gas supplies from the Caspian region to Europe. Turkey will play an even bigger role linking gas producers in the Caspian and Middle East to consumers in south-eastern and central Europe once the proposed Trans-Anatolia-(Nabucco West) gas pipeline will become operational. [19]

## **6. FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY**

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Turkey restructured its foreign policy from being “the tail end of Europe” into “the center of its own newly emerging world.” Prime minister, and later president, Turgut Özal, attempted to transform Turkey from being simply a base for the Western alliance into a regional power. Under Özal, Turkish foreign policy increasingly concentrated on regions such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East. Özalist Turkey attempted to be the political and economic center or the “regional hegemonic power” of these regions. It shifted its strategic priorities and began to focus on regional issues rather than “bandwagoning” in global power games. [3]

Following the collapse of communism and the emergence of regional instabilities in the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East, Turkey’s Western oriented credentials came under question. Given the relevance of a liberal democratic transformation for EU membership, Turkey accelerated the process of de-securitization of its foreign policy, and worked to increase its soft power identity.

The intense debate about Turkey’s economic interests and the frustration linked to the slowing accession process in recent years generated a serious nationalistic backlash in the country, and strengthened some anti-EU and anti-reform feelings. This stressed the co-existence of both European and Eurasian dimensions in Turkish foreign policy. This new trend indicated a breaking away from the old Kemalist notion of Turkey as a country surrounded by enemies and strategically located in the West. Instead, it emphasizes cooperation between Ankara and its neighbors in order to provide stability in the region. [15]

Ankara’s newly found appetite for engaging in all neighboring areas is a means for gaining recognition simultaneously as a European, Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea power. In fact, these multiple regional identities, as well as Turkey’s historical and cultural legacy, mandate Turkey to pursue a foreign policy that is multifaceted aiming to promote good neighborly relations with all, to replace disagreement with cooperation, to seek innovative mechanism and channels to resolve regional conflicts, to encourage positive regional change, and to build cross-cultural bridges of dialogues and understanding. [15]

In the views of many experts Turkey is emerging as a great power. It has not yet become one for a host of reasons, including limited institutions for managing regional affairs, a political base that is not yet prepared to view Turkey as a major power or support regional interventions, and a region that is not yet prepared to view Turkey as a beneficial, stabilizing

force. At present, Turkish strategy finds itself in a transitional stage. It is no longer locked into its Cold War posture as simply part of an alliance system, nor has it built the foundation of a mature regional policy. That being said, geopolitical factors such as instability to its south, the rise of an Iranian sphere of influence, the deepening of Russian influence in the Caucasus, and the likelihood that at some point the United States might change its Middle East policy again and try to draw Turkey into its coalition, all allude to the view that there is no particular light yet visible at the end of the transitional tunnel. [14]

According to current foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkish foreign policy draws on several strengths: holistic understanding of historical trends and a sense of active agency, its progress in establishing a stable and peaceful domestic order, and its reintegration with neighbors. According to the same sources, it is also applying the following principles: pursuit of a value-based foreign policy, self-confident action, devising policies autonomously, and having a vision-oriented approach to crisis management. [9]

Turkey's increasingly strong performance in recent years has led some to think that a resurgent Ankara could take on an ever-larger share of the responsibility for governance in the vast expanse of former-Ottoman lands it once ruled. This so-called "neo-Ottoman" dream, serving Turkey's rising regional ambitions while relieving Western countries at a time of economic weakness and shifting U.S. attention to the East, has been a re-occurring theme in Washington and other Western capitals. Turkey

may have the greatest future potential as a regional player, but it needs the United States and the EU now more than ever. Simultaneously, the reverse is also true for its transatlantic partners. [16]

Whenever Turkey and the West will cooperate, it will be because their interests happen to align rather than as a result of shared values. Where the values of the Turkish leadership do not align with those of the West, most prominently concerning Cyprus and Israel, Turkish behavior will continue to diverge from that of the West. [5]



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