



**THE NEW WAVE OF FOREIGN
POLICY ACTIVISM IN TURKEY**
DRIFTING AWAY FROM EUROPEANIZATION?

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the prospects for Turkey's EU membership do not look very bright. With key chapters for negotiation already suspended, the government is likely to resume a loose Europeanization agenda. The counterpart of this in the foreign-policy realm is an approach based on 'soft Euro-asianism'. An attempt is also being made to develop friendly relationships with all neighboring countries, coupled with a mediating role in regional conflicts, but without the EU providing the main axis for foreign policy. The present report investigates the continuities and ruptures in Turkish foreign policy during the post-2002 AKP era. It attempts to identify the underlying reasons for the decline in enthusiasm for EU membership following the golden age of Europeanization and reforms during the early years of the AKP government. The report also points to internal and external political developments which may help to reverse the current drift away from Europeanization.

I. Introduction

The prospects for Turkey's ambitions for full EU membership do not appear to be very bright at the present time. The "grand coalition for special partnership" appears to be firmly entrenched. With key chapters for negotiation already suspended, the government in power is likely to resume its pursuit of a loose Europeanization agenda of gradual reforms that fall considerably short of deep commitment to full membership. The counterpart of this in the foreign policy realm is an approach based on "soft Euro-asianism" where the emphasis on the use of soft power continues and an attempt is made to develop friendly relations with all the neighboring countries and with the EU no longer providing the main axis or reference point for foreign policy. The present report investigates the underlying reasons for the decline in enthusiasm for EU membership following the golden age of Europeanization and reforms during the early years of the AKP government focusing on both domestic and EU issues. The article also points to internal and external political developments which may help to reverse the current drift away from Europeanization, thus giving possible grounds for optimism concerning the future of Turkey-EU relations.

The study is organized along the following lines. Sections 2 and 3 highlight elements of the new wave of activism in Turkish foreign policy during the AKP era. An attempt is made to distinguish it from the previous wave of foreign policy activism during the early years of the post-Cold War period.¹ Attention is drawn to the fact that the ongoing process of Europeanization has had a deep impact on foreign policy attitudes. Section 3 underlines elements of both continuity and rupture in Turkish foreign policy. Whilst the emphasis on the use of soft power remains a dominant characteristic of the AKP period as a whole, there appears to have been a sharp decline in enthusiasm for EU membership during the second phase. Section 4 emphasizes the importance of the push for EU membership as a first-best solution for Turkey. The complex set of domestic and external influences which have progressively undermined enthusiasm for

¹ For general accounts of Turkish foreign policy which pay significant attention to both the Cold-War and post-Cold War contexts, see Yasemin Çelik, *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*, Westport Conn.: Praeger (1999), William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000*, London: Frank Cass (2000), Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War*, London: Hurst/Seattle: University of Washington Press (2003), and F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND (2003). On the transformation of Islamist politics in Turkey and multi-dimensional analyses of the Justice and Development Party (or AKP) phenomenon, see the collection of essays by Hakan Yavuz, ed., *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Islam, Democracy and the AK Parti*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press (2006), and Ümit Cizre, ed., *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, London: Routledge (2008).

Turkey's drive for EU membership are explored in depth in Section 5. The question of whether the retreat from Europeanization can be reversed is discussed in Section 6 by drawing attention to the possible short-term and longer-term influences which might play a positive role in this context. The concluding observations are presented in Section 7, which also speculates about future developments, especially in the light of the onset of the global financial crisis.

2. Foreign Policy during the AKP Era: The Impact of the Europeanization Process

The Helsinki Decision of the European Council in December 1999, which recognized Turkey as a candidate country for full EU membership, provided a powerful incentive for reform. Coupled with the impact of the deep economic crisis that Turkey experienced in February 2001, the EU process became particularly important in creating the mixture of conditions and incentives necessary for large-scale economic reforms. Turkey experienced a kind of virtuous cycle of a mutually reinforcing democratization process and economic reforms, with the golden age corresponding to the early years of the AKP government. In spite of the initial fears concerning the party's Islamist origins, the AKP proved to be a party of moderate standing and reformist orientation. During this period, the AKP government displayed a vigorous commitment to the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria in both the economic and political realms, with the result that, at its December 2004 Summit in Brussels, the European Council decided to open the negotiation process without delay. The Brussels decision of 2004 clearly underlined the pace of transformation and reform that Turkey had experienced during this period.

During this period, the process of achieving EU membership had a profound impact in three interrelated areas. The first key area was the economy: the Turkish economy experienced one of its most successful phases of growth. Fiscal and monetary discipline was established and inflation reduced to single digit levels for the first time for several decades. Important institutional reforms helped to create a relatively autonomous central bank and a more robust banking and financial system, which created stability conducive to long-term growth. Turkey started to attract considerable amounts of foreign direct investment. The EU process played a central role in providing both a focus for a program of reforms and the motivation needed for different groups in society to rally around the reform program which the IMF program alone could not accomplish. The fact that Turkey's boom in foreign direct investment effectively started in 2005, following the decision to initiate the formal negotiation process, is further testimony to the importance of the kind of powerful signals which rapid progress in meeting formal EU criteria helped to provide to key economic actors.²

² For the impact of the Europeanization process in the economic realm, see Kemal Dervis, Daniel Gross, Michael Emerson and Sinan Ülgen, *The European Transformation of Modern Turkey*, Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, (2004), and Ziya Öniş and Caner Bakır, "Turkey's Political Economy in the Age of Financial Globalization: The Significance of the EU Anchor", *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (July 2007), pp. 147-164.

The second important manifestation of the golden age was in the realm of democratization. Turkey made important strides in terms of progressing towards a consolidated or substantive democracy during this period. Critical reform packages were introduced representing important advances in terms of dramatically extending the boundaries of civil and human rights and the rule of law in Turkish politics. The abolition of the death penalty and the steps taken towards the recognition of Kurdish identity were striking elements of reform. The reform process represented initial steps in the direction of a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem by offering a set of cultural rights which involved the use of the Kurdish language for education and broadcasting. This represented a fundamental break with the dominant approach of the Turkish state elites, which tended to view the Kurdish problem primarily in economic and security terms. There is no doubt that the kind of democratization reforms that passed through the Parliament during this period would have been inconceivable in the absence of powerful incentives and pressures from the EU, given the strong resistance from the nationalist circles, which tended to view such reforms as an existential threat to the unity of the Turkish state.³

The third broad realm in which the formal Europeanization process appears to have made a profound impact is in foreign policy behavior. The emphasis in Turkish foreign policy during this period shifted quite dramatically towards the use of “soft power” resources. Whilst the EU process constituted a centerpiece of Turkish foreign policy, there was also an explicit attempt to develop a multi-dimensional foreign policy popularized by the slogan of zero problems with all neighboring countries. Significant progress made in terms of improving relations with countries such as Greece and Syria, with both of whom Turkey had problematic relations in the past. Similarly, significant efforts were made to develop relations with Russia and Turkey’s Black Sea neighbors. Turkey has undertaken important initiatives to improve its relations with the Arab Middle East and increase its presence in the Islamic world by active participation in the Islamic Conference Organization. Yet another striking feature involved the need for an internationally acceptable solution to the Cyprus dispute along the lines of the Annan Plan. This represented a dramatic departure from the established policy stance of the Turkish state. More recently, Turkey has played an important mediating role in conflicts between the United States and Iran, and between Israel and Syria. What is also remarkable during this period is the democratization of foreign policy itself. Foreign

³ For a detailed elaboration of the democratization reforms, see Ergun Özbudun, “Democratization Reforms in Turkey: 1993-2004”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2007), pp. 179-196, and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, “Turkey’s Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union”, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (April 2005), pp. 17-31.

policy is no longer monopolized by a limited number of state actors. New actors such as business associations and civil society groups have emerged as active participants in the foreign policy process. Furthermore, foreign policy issues have been opened up to public debate, and previously fixed positions on a number of issues, including Cyprus and relations with Armenia and the Kurds in northern Iraq, are being challenged in the process. Put together, these elements signify a very significant shift in the direction of a benign regional power, one that would not have been possible in the absence of an on-going deep Europeanization and democratization process.⁴

The AKP's multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy, based on the use of diplomacy and soft power, was also very much influenced by Ahmet Davutoğlu's "strategic depth" perspective.⁵ In Davutoğlu's vision, foreign policy is no longer perceived as a series of bilateral relations or foreign policy moves, but as a series of mutually reinforcing and interlocking processes. In this respect, Davutoğlu argues that, in order to formulate a long-term strategic perspective, one needs to take into account both "historical depth" which provides a sound assessment of the links between the past, present and the future, and "geographical depth", thus penetrating into the intricate dynamics of the relations between domestic, regional and global factors.⁶ The geo-cultural, geo-political and geo-economic factors that contribute to the strategic depth of a country could only be genuinely interpreted at the intersection of these historical and geographic paradigms. Moreover, using the analogy of a bow and an arrow, he argues that the further Turkey draws its bow in Asia, the more distant and precisely will its arrow extend into Europe. Hence, he states that, "If Turkey does not have a solid stance in Asia, it would have very limited chances with the EU."⁷

⁴ On the democratization of foreign policy and the emphasis on the use of "soft power" as a reflection of the overall democratization of Turkish politics under the impact of EU conditionality, see Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Spring 2005): 265-284, and Tarik Oğuzlu, "Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (March 2007): 81-97. On the impact of the EU in terms of transforming Turkey's security discourses, see Pinar Bilgin, "Turkey's Changing Security Discourses: The Challenge of Globalization", *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 44 (2005): 175-201.

⁵ Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu emerged as a key influence on the formulation of foreign policy during the AKP era as the Chief Advisor to the Foreign Minister (and currently the President), Abdullah Gül. See Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Standing), Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001 and "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı" (Turkey Should be a Pivotal/Central Country) *Radikal* (Turkish Daily) February 26, 2004. See also in this context Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (November 2006): 945-964.

⁶ See Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey* (2008), Vol. 10, No.1, p. 80. For a detailed discussion, development of his vision, see Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001.

⁷ See Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001, pp. 551-563.

The major premise of this argument is that Turkey is a “central country” strategically located in the core of the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Hence, Turkey has multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character or a single region, thus requiring it to extend its influence simultaneously to Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Caspian and the Mediterranean.⁸ As such, it also needs to go beyond a parochial approach to national security and to become a security and stability provider for its neighboring regions. Consequently, Turkey’s engagements from Central Asia to Africa, from the EU to the OIC, as well as its bid for UN Security Council Membership and its quest for becoming a key player in regional energy politics are all parts of this new foreign policy vision, which, while maintaining Turkey’s traditional Western orientation to some extent, also has a strong Eurasian and Middle Eastern component.⁹

In the context of this much more pro-active approach towards the Middle East and Eurasia, an attempt is being made to develop friendly relations with the Arab world. A major move in this regard is to participate and play a leadership role in the Organization of the Islamic Conference.¹⁰ The AKP’s Islamist roots in this context constitute an asset. The crucial March 1 decision not to allow US troops through Turkish territory during the March 2003 invasion of Iraq and Turkey’s drive for EU membership generated considerable interest in the Arab world. This is developing into a kind of rapprochement between Turkey and the Arab world, rather similar to the on-going rapprochement process with Greece. Indeed, the AKP government

⁸ Some commentators have also characterized this approach as a kind of “neo-Ottoman turn” in Turkish foreign policy, one aimed at trying to establish Turkish influence over the previously Ottoman territories in the Middle East and the Balkans. See Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism”, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, No. 2 (Spring 2008): 19-41. “Neo-Ottomanism” may not be a good term to describe Turkish foreign policy during the AKP era in the sense that it is not governed by hegemonic designs but by pragmatic considerations. There is also a clear understanding of the limits of Turkish power and influence in the surrounding regions.

⁹ See Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2008): 77-96.

¹⁰ On Turkey’s new activism in the Middle East during the AKP era, which marks significant point of departure from the previous wave of foreign policy activism during the 1990s, see Bülent Aras and Rabia Karakyapolat, “Turkey and the Middle East: The Frontiers of the New Geographic Imagination”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No.4 (December 2007): 471-488; Meliha Benli Altunişik, “The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 1/2 (Winter 2005): 45-63; Dietrich Jung, “Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10, No.1 (March 2005): 1-17; and Tarik Oğuzlu, “Middle Easternization of Turkish Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2008): 3-20. For comprehensive overviews of different dimensions of Turkish foreign policy during the AKP era, see Zeynep Dağı, ed., *AKP’li Yıllar: Doğu’dan Batıya Dış Politika (The AKP Years: Foreign Policy from East to West)*, Ankara: Orion Yayınevi (2006); and Kemal Kirişçi “Turkey’s Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times”, *Chaillot Paper*, No. 92.

displays considerable pro-active behavior in both spheres, although admittedly the rapprochement with Greece predates the AKP government.

There has also been a strong, but at the same time a more pragmatic drive to develop diplomatic and economic relations with Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union. Significant efforts are being made to revive the BSEC project.¹¹ Relations with Russia are buoyant, especially since Putin became president. The role of Turkey as an important energy corridor is being developed further, and a number of concrete steps are being taken in this direction, building on the achievements of the previous decade.¹² On the one hand, Turkey is considerably dependent on Russian natural gas for its domestic consumption, a fact that has led to cooperation and major joint energy projects such as Blue Stream. On the other hand, the push towards turning Turkey into a major energy hub as a transit country has increased competition with Russia over energy issues, as clearly revealed by Russian opposition to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project, which is strongly backed by the United States.

In a world of rapidly increasing energy demand, the global struggle over access to and control of energy resources has been intensifying. Consequently, “the energy ellipse,” encompassing both the Caspian region and the Persian Gulf and containing over two-thirds of global proven petroleum reserves and more than 40 percent of the world’s proven natural gas resources, is like a strategic “jackpot.” In shaping the intricate dynamics of Eurasian energy geopolitics, there are three major issues which are of critical importance for all key players: (i) the quantity of energy reserves available for extraction; (ii) ownership of these resources; and (iii) distribution routes, which determine the direct and environmental costs. In this respect, Russia, the US, the EU, and China are the main global actors, with significant interests and influence in these areas, while Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran are emerging as important regional actors in Eurasia. The challenging task of transporting land-locked Caspian energy to international markets further com-

¹¹ The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was established by eleven member states in 1992. It came into existence as a unique and promising model of multilateral political and economic initiative aimed at fostering interaction and harmony among the member states, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity encouraging friendly and good-neighboring relations in the Black Sea region. The BSEC Headquarters was established in Istanbul in March 1994. With the entry into force of its Charter on 1 May 1999, the BSEC acquired international legal identity and was transformed into a full-fledged regional economic organization called the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. With the accession of Serbia (then Serbia and Montenegro) in April 2004, the Organization’s membership increased to twelve states.

¹² In addition to the goal of successfully completing the BTC crude oil pipeline, the AKP government promoted the Shah-Deniz natural gas pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum), as well as the other Trans-Caspian Natural Gas Pipeline project (i.e. the Turkey-Greece-Italy Inter-connector Project), railroads and complementary infrastructure.

plicates the delicate dynamics between energy producers, energy transit countries and energy consumers, thus turning “pipeline politics” into an indispensable part of energy security. In this respect, Turkey has a constantly increasing significance as an energy transit country.

The East-West Energy Corridor, which has been initiated through intensive collaboration between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the United States, forms a critical part of these initiatives. The Energy Corridor aims primarily at transporting Caucasian and Central Asian crude oil and natural gas to international markets via safe alternative routes to Russia and Iran. The major components of this major energy outlet include the BTC crude oil pipeline and the Shah-Deniz natural gas pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum), as well as the other Trans-Caspian Natural Gas Pipeline projects (i.e. the Turkey-Greece-Italy Inter-connector Project), railroads and complementary infrastructure.

In this context, completion of the BTC pipeline project has been particularly significant. It is important to emphasize, however, that the inauguration of this project predates the AKP era. On 5 September 1997, President Heydar Aliyev, with strong backing from Turkey and the US, formed a working group for initiating this main pipeline. At the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November 1999, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan reached an agreement, with the endorsement of the US President Bill Clinton, for building a major exportation pipeline along the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) route. Consequently, BTC opened a new East-West energy corridor providing an alternative energy route to Russia and Iran for crude oil, thus also enhancing the geo-political significance of Turkey by turning it into a critical energy corridor.¹³

Emphasis on Turkey’s global role became much more pronounced during the AKP era. Turkey’s historical legacies and geo-political position provides her with considerable advantages and allows her to play a global role that is more far-reaching and extensive than a typical global power. Turkey’s role as a bridge between the Christian and the Islamic worlds and as a facilitator of inter-cultural dialogue is being emphasized at a time of rising tensions and Islamophobia at the societal level in the West in the post 9/11 global environment.

¹³ Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “Active Diplomatic Engagements and Energy Politics: The Caspian, Azerbaijan, and the Gulf Region,” *Russian and CIS Relations with the Gulf Region: Current Trends in Political and Economic Dynamics*, Marat Terterov ed., Dubai: Gulf Research Center Publications, 2008.

In this respect, the AKP government significantly supported and promoted the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. This project was initially proposed by the Spanish Prime Minister, Zapatero, during his speech at the UN general Assembly on 21 September 2004. Following his defeat of the conservative Aznar government on a foreign policy platform in the aftermath of the March 2004 Madrid bombings, Zapatero made this proposal as an alternative approach to combat international terrorism. Upon the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's recommendation to include a Muslim country in leading this initiative, the Turkish government accepted the Spanish invitation to co-sponsor the proposal. Hence, on 14 July 2005 the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative was formally launched under UN auspices. Kofi Annan stated the goal of this project as being to "respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community – both at the institutional and civil society levels – to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization which potentially threaten world peace."¹⁴ Since being invited to assume a leadership role, Turkey has become a more vocal advocate of the project than even Spain, promoting it at numerous international platforms such as the EU General Affairs Council Meeting on March 2006, the Arab League Summit on 28 March 2006, and the World Economic Forum on 20-21 May 2006.¹⁵ Despite its limited concrete achievements, the value attached to Turkey's Eastern heritage and Islamic identity, as well as its ties with the West, also appeal to its domestic audience.

The strong and persistent government support for this project also went hand in hand with the new discourse in Turkish foreign policy highlighting the "moral/normative aspect" beyond the confines of narrow "self-interest", this being indicative of a pronounced desire to assume a more global role and global responsibility. Within this framework, Turkey has tried to act in terms of what Davutoğlu called "rhythmic diplomacy," which means pushing for sustained pro-activism in the field of diplomacy, trying to achieve a more active role in international organizations and opening up to new areas where Turkish contacts have been limited in the past.¹⁶ Turkey has hosted the NATO and OIC Summits and has been actively promoting its case to become a UN Security Council member. As a result of Turkey's opening

¹⁴ "Annan Announces new initiative to Bridge Gap between Islamic, Western Worlds," UN News Center, July 14, 2005, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story>.

¹⁵ For more information on Turkey's role in the Alliance of Civilizations project, see Ali Balci and Nebi Miş, "Turkey's Role in the 'Alliance of Civilizations': A New Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy?" *Turkish Studies*, Volume: 9, No. 3 (September 2008): 387-406.

¹⁶ See Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2008): 82-83.

up to Africa, she now has observer status in the African Union. Such relations are not only activated at the state level, but civil society is also involved. For instance, in conformity with the new Africa policy, one of Turkey's business confederations, TUSKON (Confederation of Businessman and Industrialists of Turkey), has taken the initiative to organize an Africa summit, bringing large numbers of African ministers and businessmen to Turkey.

Last but not least, relations with the US experienced a dramatic downturn during the early part of the AKP government. Indeed, this represents a fundamental shift from the basic foreign policy orientation of the 1990s, in the context of which relations with the United States and Israel constituted the primary axis of Turkish foreign policy. Relations with the US were critical up to March 2001. The US (in association with the IMF) played a key role in Turkey's recovery from its economic crisis and also assumed a crucial role in Turkey's drive for EU membership. Moreover, US support for the BTC project was very decisive. However, there has been a certain lag in realigning Turkish-American relations to the changing dynamics and new challenges of the post-9/11 era, which have given way to new areas of converging and diverging interests.

In particular, the developments in Iraq served as a "critical litmus test" for US-Turkish bilateral relations.¹⁷ On the one hand, the American leadership viewed the war in Iraq as a crucial step towards restructuring a new regional and global order after 9/11. On the other hand, being a neighbor of Iraq and an integral part of this already very volatile region, Turkey perceived the war to be source of great risks, especially given the ambiguity of American plans concerning post-war conditions in Iraq. Relations deteriorated particularly after the 1 March 2003 parliamentary decision not permitting the deployment of US troops to Iraq through Turkish territory. Moreover, the rise of cross-border PKK terror originating from northern Iraq after the US invasion further increased tensions. The period between 1 March 2003 and 55 November 2007 marked the lowest point in relations between the two countries since the US arms embargo of 1975-1978, and the reservoirs of trust on both sides were greatly depleted. Nevertheless, there is also a wide range of converging interests, which highlight the continual significance of transatlantic relations, including achieving peace and stability in Iraq and the Middle East, energy security, enlargement of NATO, collaboration in peace-keeping operations in the Balkans and the fight against international terrorism. Hence, significant attempts have been made to reconstruct the relationship,

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 89.

and the Turkey-US-EU triangle seems to have paid dividends in terms of securing active US support in the struggle against the PKK in the final months of 2007, as well as putting relations once again on a more constructive path.

3. Turkey's Pivotal Role as a Benign Regional Power: Continuities and Ruptures in the AKP's Foreign Policy

There exist considerable elements of continuity in Turkish foreign policy in the immediate post-Cold War and the AKP eras, as well as within the AKP period itself. Hence, it would be un-historical to claim that there has been a complete rupture in Turkish foreign policy with the AKP government in power in the post-2002 era. Indeed, the Europeanization and Eurasian aspects of Turkish foreign policy co-existed during both periods. Indeed, what is striking is the swing of the pendulum in the direction of Eurasianism in periods of disappointment and of the weakening of relations with the European Union. This was certainly the case in the early 1990s, when Turkey's membership bid for the EU was rejected at a time when the EU appeared to be embracing post-communist Eastern Europe in a new wave of eastern enlargement. This also seems to be the case in the recent period, when the issue of Turkish membership has become a focal point of debate within the EU's internal constitutional stalemate. This is sending negative signals to Turkey, which in turn is dampening down its enthusiasm for implementing the changes necessary for a successful membership drive. Beyond the continuities, however, important differences can be identified.

Arguably the main axis of Turkish foreign policy during the 1990s was the Turkey-US-Israel triangle. In the AKP era, the EU has become the principal reference point for Turkish foreign policy. Secondly, in parallel with this new alignment, Turkey has also been taking on the role of a benign regional power, which is based on the use of "soft power" resources. Joseph Nye defines "soft power" as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" arising from a country's culture, political ideas and policies, whereas "hard power" is "the ability to coerce" based on a country's military and economic might.¹⁸ The multilateralist approach and the perceived legitimacy of the policies also enhance soft power.

For instance, the recent improvement in Turkey's relations with Syria is a very good manifestation of this change. Throughout the 1990s, for both Turkey and Syria, the perception of the other as an unreliable neighbor determined the context of Turkish-Syrian relations. Primary sources of contention between Turkey and Syria have been

¹⁸ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.119, no.2 (2004): 256.

Syria's logistical support for the PKK and its territorial claims over the province of Hatay in Turkey. In return, Syria has been very concerned about Turkey's ambitious hydraulic-based South East Anatolia (GAP) regional development project because of its adverse implications for its water problems and leading to a discourse highlighting conflict, which depicted the Tigris and Euphrates as "rivers of fire." Although Turkey's official foreign policy line has been to separate the water issue from terrorism, according to analysts, in this period, Syria played the "terror card" against Turkey's "water card".¹⁹ However, in the period following the capture of Öcalan in 1999, and particularly since Bashar al-Assad's ascent to power and the AKP government's initiatives, there has been a radical improvement in bilateral relations. Suddenly, despite the increasingly adverse impacts of climate change and increasing demand for water, the conflictual discourse concerning the water issue has receded to the background for the time being. Moreover, in comparison with the confrontational approach of the US towards Syria following 9/11, Turkish policy towards Syria is much more aligned with the EU's policy of engagement.

In another very significant example, in the fall of 2007, Turkey sought to use diplomatic channels before resorting to unilateral force in the recent crisis in northern Iraq concerning Turkey's cross-border operations against PKK terrorists. An emphasis on multilateralism constitutes a striking feature of the new era. This has been particularly evident in the AKP's attempts to deal with the Kurdish conflict. A number of important multilateral initiatives preceded the use of hard power to deal with the PKK, thus helping to generate considerable international support for its actions in the process. In order to increase the constructive involvement of regional countries in the future of Iraq, Turkey assumed a position of leadership in the "neighboring countries" initiative. For instance, Turkey signed a special agreement with the Arab countries during the meeting of Extended Neighboring Countries of Iraq, held in Istanbul on 2 November 2007.²⁰ This agreement included plans for coordinating and institutionalizing relations among Iraq's neighbors through the establishment of a Turkish-Arab forum. This process not only assisted in confirming the legitimacy of the new Iraqi government, it also helped to treat the future of Iraq as an international rather than a purely American issue, i.e. within the framework of United Nations, and with more active involvement from regional powers.

¹⁹ See Ali Çarkoğlu and Mine Eder, "Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-tigris River Basin", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (January 2001): 41-71.

²⁰ Additional information on the meeting of Extended Neighboring Countries of Iraq can be found at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-basin-toplantisinde-yaptiklari-konusma_-1-kasim-2007.tr.mfa

During the 1990s, Turkish foreign policy was much more identity-based and emotionally charged. In the new era, foreign policy has become more pragmatic. This kind of shift is particularly evident in Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan and the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. During the early 1990s, Turkey has attempted to play a leadership or big brother role for these republics, newly liberated from the Soviet rule. In the new era, relations with these countries continue to be friendly, yet based on more pragmatic grounds of mutual economic interests. This effectively avoids possible confrontation with Russia through an over-activist approach towards the rest of the post-Soviet space.

The new developments in the Caucasus, marked by Russia's attack on Georgia during the brief war of August 2008, when Georgia attempted to recapture its separatist pro-Moscow region of South Ossetia by force, will lead to an extremely complicated period in the region. Despite US and EU condemnation for going way beyond the disputed area and for deploying troops and bombing deep inside Georgia proper, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has defended Russia's actions by stating that "Russia has returned to the world stage as a responsible state which can defend its citizens."²¹ Moreover, Russia has recognized the two pro-Russian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. These actions reveal that a resurgent Russia will display an increasingly assertive foreign policy. As a consequence, in the new confrontation between the United States and Russia, Turkey will be faced once again with the challenging task of striking a delicate balance between its alliance with the United States and NATO and its relations with Russia, on which Turkey is heavily dependent for its energy needs. Recent reassertion of Russian power may also have the unintended consequence of revitalizing Turkey's Europeanization agenda.

In response to these new developments, Turkey has maintained its multidimensional and soft-power approach by championing the idea of forming a "Caucasus Solidarity and Cooperation Platform" in the wake of the Georgia-Russia war and has conducted numerous high-level diplomatic contacts to promote it. The most significant of these contacts has been Turkish President Abdullah Gul's brief landmark visit to Armenia on 6 September 2008 to attend the World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey in Yerevan. This visit effectively used "football diplomacy" as an opportunity to open channels of communication as a first step towards addressing the diplomatic

²¹ Oleg Shchedrov, "Georgia Crisis Defines a New Russian Defense Policy," *Washington Post*, September 1, 2008.

and political challenges in the two countries' bilateral relations, as well as promoting cooperation on broader regional issues.²²

The political leadership is also attempting to exploit the links between different dimensions of foreign policy. Turkey's mediating role in various conflict situations is becoming increasingly important in enhancing its status as a pivotal regional power. The AKP government particularly emphasizes this "mediator" or "facilitator" role within the context of the greater Middle East. For instance, the Solana-Larjani meeting to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue took place in Turkey. Opening a functional channel of dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Turkey invited the Pakistani president, Musharraf, and the Afghan president, Karzai, to meet in Turkey in May 2007. The Israeli and Palestinian presidents, Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas, met in Ankara before their critical Annapolis meeting in the US. Turkey has also facilitated and fostered diplomatic contacts and dialogue between Pakistan and Israel, and between Israel and Syria.

However, there are also limits to the effectiveness of this "soft power" facilitator role, which can even prove counter-productive, especially if it is enacted unilaterally without considering policy alignments with the European Union or the United States. This impact was clearly revealed during the visit of Hamas leader Khalid Mishal to Turkey. In the aftermath of Hamas's victory in the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006, at a time when no Western country or Middle Eastern state on friendly terms with the West was willing to have diplomatic contacts with Hamas, the AKP government provided the Hamas leader with a high-profile endorsement by receiving the Hamas leader himself, when even the Turkish Foreign Ministry declined to extend an invitation to Mishal.²³ This imprudently timed and conducted initiative has been counter-productive for three reasons. First, it had a detrimental effect on Turkey's relations with Israel and also diminished the critical support of the Jewish lobby for Turkey in the US. Secondly, since it was conducted unilaterally, the very legitimacy and effectiveness of this initiative was reduced. Finally, it promoted the view that Turkey was moving away from aligning its foreign policy with the EU. Having learned from this experience, Turkey is aligning its position more closely with the EU in its mediation efforts during proximity talks between Syria and Israel.

²² "Gül's Armenia visit is more than symbolic," *Turkish Daily News*, September 6, 2008; Elitsa Vucheva, "EU hails Turkey's 'historic' Armenia visit," *EU Observer*, September 5, 2008.

²³ Soner Çağatay, "Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East," February 16, 2006, <http://www.thewashingtoninstitute.org/template>.

In addition to the intensive diplomatic maneuvering, the economy also became stronger during the AKP era. The 1990s style of foreign policy activism had been hampered by the chronic instability of the Turkish economy and recurrent financial crises. Under the AKP, thanks to the party's strong commitment to monetary and fiscal discipline, inflation has been reduced to single-digit levels and significant growth has been generated, which is likely to be a more durable and sustainable process. Furthermore, the significant trade and investment linkages that characterize Turkey's foreign economic relations with all its neighboring countries, including northern Iraq, in a situation of high growth enable Turkey to deploy her soft-power resources much more effectively. The importance of these growing economic interactions and trade-investment linkages are particularly striking in Turkey's recent relations with Greece, Iraq and Syria. The growing maturity and internationalization of Turkish private capital is reflected in the country's foreign policy initiatives, which are no longer confined to the realm of state actors. The strength of the Turkish economy will be crucial for its ability to play a benign regional role based on soft power. In spite of recent improvements, however, in terms of overall economic performance and the growing strength of Turkish private capital, elements of vulnerability remain. The presence of a large current-account deficit and the heavy dependence of the growth process on large inflows of external capital and favorable global liquidity conditions suggest there might be problems ahead in terms of sustaining the high growth generated during the early part of the decade. Such dangers clearly highlight once again the importance of the EU anchor for the future performance of the Turkish economy, especially in a new environment in which global conditions for economic growth have become drastically less favorable.

Finally, the democratization of foreign policy has emerged as a key element under the AKP government. New actors are involved. Civil society associations, notably business associations, are increasingly playing an active role in foreign policy discussions and the implementation process. Foreign policy issues have been opened up to public debate. Indeed, previously fixed positions on a number of key issues have become the focal point of public debate, such as Cyprus, relations with Armenia, and relations with the Kurds in northern Iraq. Hence, we see a direct example in the Turkish context of how the overall democratization of domestic politics can contribute towards a softening of foreign policy. In the new era, Turkey's pro-active foreign policy, based on soft power, also becomes much more convincing viewed from the perspective of the international community. In the 1990s, Turkey often encountered criticism for alleged double standards, for example, when it tried to promote the rights of the Bosnians against the Serbs at a time when the rights of its own Kurdish minorities

were effectively being repressed in the domestic sphere. In the new era, with the enlargement of cultural and civil rights in the domestic sphere, Turkey's pro-active foreign-policy moves appear more convincing and to rest on firmer ground.²⁴

²⁴ It would be fair to say that Turkey is still in the process of moving in the direction of becoming a benign regional power, given that elements of the use of hard power still form part and parcel of Turkish foreign policy. Examples of the use of hard power include the maintenance of a military presence in Cyprus and military excursions into the Kurdish territory in northern Iraq as part of the struggle against the PKK.

4. Turkey-EU Relations: From the Golden Age to the Current Stalemate

Turkey-EU relations historically move in cycles. At the end of each cycle, Turkey moves closer to and becomes more integrated with the EU. The long-term pattern is clearly in the direction of further integration. The slower the path and the greater the delays on the path to membership, however, the more Turkey is confronted with higher barriers to entry. The threshold for membership clearly rises over time, a fact which can be illustrated by some concrete examples. When Greece became a member in 1981, the country's democratic credentials constituted an important yardstick for membership. When Turkey pushed for EU candidacy in the late 1980s and the 1990s, the EU had become far more integrated, and the criterion for entry had become not only democracy *per se*, but the quality of democracy. In the current context, Turkish aspirations for membership are faced with additional hurdles. The number of EU members has dramatically increased over time, and ultimately all the current twenty-seven members have to endorse full membership. Furthermore, the EU appears to have reached the limits of a top-down, elite-driven project. Public opinion and citizen participation are likely to become increasingly important over time, which means that Turkey needs to cultivate not only elite support, but also support at the level of the individual citizens in Europe in order to be able to accomplish its long-term goal of EU membership.²⁵

Arguably the process of "Europeanization" in Turkey in a formal sense of the term, that is, interrelated economic and political reforms in line with EU conditionality, date back to the process leading up to the inception of the Customs Union by mid-1995. The Customs Union was important in terms of accelerating the process of trade liberalization in Turkey, which had started back in 1980 and was also instrumental in promoting an important set of regulatory reforms and democratization. Yet, in retrospect, it is fair to argue that Turkey-EU relations during much of the 1990s were faced with what Mehmet Uğur has aptly described as "the anchor-credibility dilemma".²⁶ In the absence of any signal for full membership, the EU was not powerful enough to generate a deep commitment to macroeconomic stabilization and reforms on the part of the Turkish political elites. Similarly, the failure of these elites

²⁵ See, in this context, Loukas Tsoukalis, *What Kind of Europe?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁶ Mehmet Uğur, *The European Union and Turkey: An Anchor/Credibility Dilemma*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

to deal with endemic political and economic instability in turn raised fundamental question marks from the EU's perspective concerning Turkey's commitment to the goal of Europeanization. The outcome was a vicious circle.

Given this background, the Helsinki Decision of the European Council in December 1999 was critical in the sense that, for the first time, Turkey was recognized as a candidate country for full membership. The decision provided a powerful incentive for reform. Coupled with the impact of the deep economic crisis that Turkey experienced in February 2001, the EU process became particularly important in creating the mix of conditions and incentives that were necessary for large-scale economic reforms. Especially in the post-crisis era, Turkey experienced a kind of virtuous cycle of mutually reinforcing democratization and economic reforms rather similar in nature to the kind of transformations that southern European members like Spain, Portugal and Greece had experienced during the 1980s, while eastern European states like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic had gone through during the latest wave of eastern enlargement in the course of the 1990s and the early 2000s. Although we have identified a series of important turning points in Turkey's recent formal Europeanization, such as 1995, 1999 and 2001, most analysts would agree that perhaps the golden age was the period extending from the summer of 2002 – marked by the passage of a dramatic reform package in Parliament during the period of the DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition government – to October 2005, marking the formal opening of accession negotiations.²⁷ The golden age, by and large, corresponded to the early years of the AKP government. In spite of the initial fears of many concerning the party's Islamist origins or credentials, the AKP proved to be a party of moderate standing and reformist orientation. Indeed, during this period the AKP government displayed a vigorous commitment to the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria in both the economic and political realms, with the result that, at its December 2004 Summit in Brussels, the European Council decided to open the negotiation process without delay. For a close observer of Turkey-EU relations, this is something that few people would have expected back in December 1999, when Turkey was announced as a candidate country but the prospect of membership still appeared quite distant. The Brussels decision of 2004 clearly underlined the pace of the transformation and reform that Turkey had experienced during this golden age.

²⁷ The coalition government which came into power following the April 1999 elections was composed of the left-nationalist the Democratic-Left Party (the DSP), the ultra-nationalist the Nationalist Action Party (the MHP) and the center-right Motherland Party (the ANAP). Given the ideological orientation of the parties that made up the coalition government, it was quite surprising and paradoxical that this particular government was responsible for some of the major EU-related reforms during the summer of 2002 prior to the AKP era.

This line of argument clearly suggests that there is a strong case for accelerating Turkey's push for EU membership and the associated reform process. Yet, in the current context, Turkey-EU relations have reached a point of stalemate. What we observe is the emergence of a kind of grand coalition for a special partnership which is strongly rooted in both Turkey and Europe, one which appears to be quite entrenched for the foreseeable future. There is no doubt that Turkey will continue to be an important regional power in the absence of EU membership. A failure to join the EU will not mean the collapse of Turkish economy or of Turkish democracy. A central premise of the present study, however, is that membership of the EU has very significant benefits for Turkey and represents the first-best solution; therefore, it is an objective that cannot be easily dismissed in favor of alternative scenarios based on notions of privileged partnership. EU membership is important for Turkey for three important and interrelated reasons. First, the Turkish economy will be in a much stronger position in the presence of a strong and long-term EU anchor. Indeed, it is important to emphasize that the principal benefits, such as access to redistributive funds and related EU programs, as well as the gains that are likely to accrue from participation in the internal market, typically materialize following a country's accession as a full member. It would be interesting to refer to the experience of eastern Europe, where Euro-skepticism grew during the transition period, but declined after full accession in 2004. Secondly, the process leading to full membership will have quite dramatic consequences for the quality of Turkey's democratic regime. Turkish democracy, in spite of important reforms in recent years, still falls short by a considerable margin from being a fully consolidated liberal democracy. Thirdly, Turkey's foreign policy strengths, based on soft power, will be significantly enhanced if it is able to act collectively with the EU as opposed to developing a series of bilateral relations with its neighboring countries.

5. The Emergence of a Grand Coalition for a Special Partnership: Explaining the Loss of Momentum in Turkey's Drive for Full EU Membership

To an outside observer, the loss of enthusiasm for the EU membership project in Turkey in a short space of time on the part of both the government and the public at large represents a considerable paradox and deserves an explanation. Indeed, there was no single turning point, but several interrelated turning points, and a number of factors were at work to bring about this dramatic change of mood on the part of both the AKP elite and the public at large.

The intense debate generated in the aftermath of the Brussels Summit in 2004 concerning Turkey's European credentials, particularly in core EU countries such as France and Germany, has helped to create a serious nationalistic backlash in Turkey and strengthened the hands of anti-EU, anti-reform groups within both the state and society at large. Turkish media representations of Europe as a monolithic bloc also contributed to this change of mood. The increasing questioning of the very basis of Turkish membership and Turkey's European credentials by influential political figures at the very core of Europe, such as Sarkozy in France and Merkel in Germany, at a time when the decision to open up accession negotiations had already been taken made a deep impact in terms of influencing this change of mood in Turkish domestic politics. Indeed, there was a striking drop in public support for EU membership from a peak of 74% in 2002 to around 50% by 2006 and 2007.²⁸ The fact that Europe was also going through an international constitutional stalemate was also reflected in the rejection of the proposed Constitutional Treaty in the French and Dutch referendums, which injected an additional dose of pessimism. Again, media representations or misrepresentations of the constitutional crisis in Turkey played a role in terms of contributing to growing Euro-skepticism by helping to project the EU as an unattractive, crisis-ridden project.

Some of the key decisions of the EU concerning Turkish accession also exercised a profound impact in terms of undermining enthusiasm at the elite level and the public at large. The first of these was the clause on the possibility of permanent safeguards on full labor mobility following Turkey's accession to the EU as a full

²⁸ Euro-barometer results indicate public support for EU membership of slightly over 50% for July 2007. The results are available at http://ec.europa.eu/public-opinion/index_en.htm.

member.²⁹ This immediately generated criticism even among the most vocal supporters of Turkey's EU membership as a clear case of unfair treatment.³⁰ While a temporary safeguard on labor mobility like the seven-year transition period imposed by some EU member states on the new eastern European members was quite understandable, the imposition of a permanent safeguard effectively meant that Turkey would be relegated to second-division status, a special partner even if it were to become a full member.

On top of the labor mobility issue, the failure of the EU to fulfill its promises to the Turkish Cypriots in return for their co-operative attitude towards the resolution of the Cyprus conflict along the lines of the UN plan for re-unification of the island generated yet another major blow. The EU's failure to deal with the Cyprus conflict on an equitable basis was increasingly interpreted as yet another case of unfair treatment, even among key members of the pro-EU, pro-reform coalition in Turkey. The fact that the negotiations were partially suspended due to the Cyprus dispute and specifically Turkey's failure to open its ports to vessels from the Republic of Cyprus proved to be the ultimate blow in this context. The EU's unbalanced approach to the Cyprus dispute appeared to confirm the widely held perceptions among the Turkish elites and the general public that Cyprus was being used to create yet another obstacle on the path to Turkey's full membership, the important point being that the Cyprus issue in itself was not critical but was being used as an instrument of exclusion.

The negative external environment originating on the EU front was amplified by a process which involved a steady deterioration of relations with the United States, which has traditionally been a key element in Turkey's relations with the EU.³¹ The growing instability in Iraq and the human costs of the Iraq War were interpreted as a direct consequence of American unilateralism and aggression, contributing to a major increase in anti-American and anti-Western sentiments, given the fact that culturally there is no strong demarcation between "Europe" and the United States as distinct entities in the Turkish context. The mutually reinforcing tendency is to view the EU and the US as part of the same, mutually interlocking "West" or Western civilization that Turkey aspires to be a part of.

²⁹ For a good discussion of the negotiating framework and its limitations from a Turkish point of view, see Kemal Kirişçi, "The December 2004 European Council Decision on Turkey: Is it an Historic Turning Point?", *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 2004).

³⁰ See E. Fuat Keyman and Senem Aydın, "The Principle of Fairness in Turkey-EU Relations", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 3 (Fall, 2004): 83-85.

³¹ See Öniş and Yılmaz (2005) for further elaboration.

Whilst negative and ambiguous external signals were of critical importance in swinging the pendulum away from the drive for Europeanization, there were also important domestic factors at work. A key element in this context was the weakening commitment of the AKP leadership to the goal of full EU membership. We should take into account here the Islamist roots of the AKP. There is no doubt that the party has been significantly transformed as it has progressively moved to the very “center” of Turkish politics, which became even more evident in the context of the 2007 general elections, in which the liberal representation within the AKP increased markedly. Yet, one should not forget that one of the core issues on the party’s political agenda is the issue of “religious freedoms”. Arguably the party leadership realized, through encounters with some of the key decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, that the scope for action for a religion-based party within the EU is clearly circumscribed.³² This might also have been instrumental in re-shaping the attitudes of the party leadership to the question of EU membership. Evidence of this loss of enthusiasm is evident from the fact that the AKP government has not actively pushed for some of the key reforms emphasized by the EU. Certain steps have been undertaken to modify the notorious Article 301 of the penal code, and new legislation has been introduced to protect the rights of the non-Muslim minorities. However, these measures have been implemented in a rather defensive and lukewarm manner. Given its broad mandate, the government could have taken more radical steps, such as abolishing Article 301 of the penal code altogether.³³ The opening of the Halki Seminary could also have represented a major move in terms of recognizing the rights of Christian minorities.³⁴

The elections of July 2007 represented a major opportunity for the AKP to revitalize the Europeanization and reform agendas. The party emerged from the election with an even larger coalition of support, and this broad-based public support could have been utilized to re-activate a large-scale reform agenda. Yet, with an exaggerated sense of its own power and a diminished sense of the importance of the EU anchor, the party leadership clearly missed an opportunity during the fall of 2007. The proposal involving a new constitution was an important reform initiative very much in line

³² In the case of Leyla Şahin versus Turkey of June 2004, the European Court of Human Rights decided in favor of Turkey. The banning of headscarves at the University of Istanbul did not violate Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

³³ *Article 301* is a controversial *article* of the Turkish *penal code* making it illegal to insult Turkey, Turkish ethnicity, or the Turkish government.

³⁴ The Halki seminary was, until its closure by the Turkish authorities in 1971, the main school of theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church’s Patriarchate of Constantinople. The European Union has raised the issue of the reopening of the school as part of its negotiations over Turkish accession to the EU.

with the spirit of EU conditionality. Instead of pushing for a new constitution in a vigorous manner and trying to forge the kind of social consensus that was needed to make such a radical project workable, the party's focus increasingly shifted towards the promotion of fundamental religious freedoms such as allowing female students to wear headscarves in the universities. Arguably, the crucial mistake here was to present these issues in an isolated fashion in the form of a constitutional amendment and not as part of a broader reform package. This, in turn, helped to create a very serious backlash and even alienated liberal opinion, which had hitherto been quite supportive of the AKP's reformist and moderate credentials. Ironically, the optimistic mood of the immediate post-election era was replaced by a serious re-polarization of Turkish society, culminating in the court case against the AKP in the early part of 2008 on the grounds that it had violated the very basis of the secular constitutional order. The consequences of these developments for Turkey-EU relations have been rather negative. From a European perspective, this set of events appeared to raise fundamental questions about Turkey's democratic credentials and have clearly empowered those elements in European society which were committed to the exclusion of Turkey on the grounds of culture and identity in any case, while leaving the pro-Turkey elements in a highly defensive position. The eventual verdict of the Constitutional Court in the summer of 2008 did not involve the closure of the AKP, although the party was given a serious warning and faced financial penalties. This decision, at least, helped to reverse the high degree of uncertainty which the court case had generated, thus injecting an air of stability into economic and political life and creating the possibility of a new opening in Turkey-EU relations.

There is no doubt that the EU membership process has enjoyed considerable support among different groups in both Turkey and Europe. Otherwise, the process would not have reached the stage of accession negotiations. In Europe, while public support for Turkish membership has been weak, there has nevertheless been strong support among certain sections of the elite depending on their visions of the future of the EU integration process. Those elements which have been particularly favorable to Turkish membership are those that see the future of the EU move in a more inter-governmental direction and at the same time envisage a strong role for the EU as a security actor. Furthermore, the same elements tend to place a very high premium on the transatlantic alliance and the role of the United States. Hence, not surprisingly Britain, the new member states and the Scandinavian countries (with the notable exception of Denmark) have emerged as important supporters of Turkish aspirations for membership in recent years. Similarly, Turkish membership appears to enjoy across-the-board political support in all major Mediterranean countries, with the

notable exception of France. Divisions also exist across the political spectrum in individual countries. Unlike France, for example, German elites and public opinion are divided on the issue of Turkish membership. Social Democrats, with their more flexible and culturally open visions of Europe, tend to be more receptive to Turkish membership. It was after all Germany under the leadership of Schröder which provided the strongest support for Turkish membership in the process leading up to the crucial Helsinki decision of the EU Council in December 1999.³⁵

The critical point, therefore, is that the EU is not a monolithic entity and that there is sizeable actual and potential support at the elite level for Turkish membership, which, in turn, can be cultivated by the Turkish political elites. The problem in the current context, however, is that this pro-Turkey coalition has become rather subdued and defensive. Similarly, the various elements which have been supporters of EU membership in Turkey appeared to have lost much of their enthusiasm and commitment. In contrast, the opponents of Turkey's EU membership have become much stronger and more vocal, and have effectively formed a grand coalition in favor of Turkey's exclusion from the EU. On the surface, Turkey-skeptics in Europe and the Euro-skeptics in Turkey tend to be quite different. Turkey-skeptics in Europe, strongly embodied in the personalities of leaders like Sarkozy and Merkel, claim that Turkey is not a natural insider in a culturally bounded vision of Europe and the associated process of deep integration. Euro-skeptics in Turkey, on the other hand, feel that European integration and its associated conditionalities will tend to undermine the unity and secular nature of the Turkish state.³⁶ Looking beneath the surface, however, one can identify common elements. In both cases, the politics of fear, and more specifically the fear of fragmentation, appears to be a central element. In the European context, these fears are based on the expectation that Turkish accession will help to fragment Europe and jeopardize its further deepening and governability. The

³⁵ For a detailed treatment of the components of the pro-Turkey coalition within the EU, see Ziya Öniş, "Turkey's Encounters with the New Europe: Multiple Transformations, Inherent Dilemmas and the Challenges Ahead", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 8. No. 3 (December, 2006): 279-298.

³⁶ See Hakan Yilmaz, "Turkish Populism and the Anti-EU Rhetoric", paper presented to the Conference on "Perceptions and Misperceptions in the EU and Turkey: Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Accession", organized by the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) and the Turkey Institute, Leiden, Holland (June 2008). The nationalist mind-set in Turkey has been heavily influenced by the "*Sevres Syndrome*," a sense of being encircled by enemies attempting the destruction of the Turkish state. See Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey and the Mediterranean," in Stelios Stavridis, Theodore Couloumbis, and Thanos Veremis (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of the European Union's Mediterranean States and Applicant Countries in the 1990s*, London: MacMillan Press, 1999: 280-281. This kind of thinking clearly characterizes the mind-set of key elements of the powerful Euro-skeptic bloc in Turkey, which would include the two major opposition parties in the current era, the Republican People's Party (the CHP) and the Nationalist Action Party (the MHP), as well the major components of the Turkish state bureaucracy and military.

negative outcomes are expected to manifest themselves both in the cultural realm – by undermining the cultural homogeneity of Europe – as well as in the economic realm, with mass migration from Turkey resulting in a loss of jobs on a grand scale on the part of established European citizens. The second common element is that a basic source of support for both elements, which we can term the grand coalition for a special partnership, is the losers in the globalization process.

Crucial developments in the internal politics of Europe over the past few years have undoubtedly had a deep negative impact on prospects for Turkish membership. One of the striking developments in Europe in recent years has been the development of right-wing populism based on the fears of immigration and the loss of jobs fuelled by the rise of Islamophobia.³⁷ The events of 9/11 have left a deep imprint on the European landscape and have clearly helped to fuel anti-Muslim sentiments among the general public. The clear swing of the pendulum towards right of center, Christian Democratic parties in recent years has also generated an unattractive environment for Turkish membership and helped push supporters of Turkish membership, both at home and abroad, into a heavily defensive position. What is important to recognize, however, is that the “Turkey question” is a reflection of deeper uncertainties and fears in European societies and the problems they are facing in adapting themselves to the pressures of globalization.

³⁷ For a good analysis with special reference to the Dutch context, see Rene Cuperus, “Europe’s Revolt of Populism and the Turkish Question”, paper presented to the Conference on “Perceptions and Misperceptions in the EU and Turkey: Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Accession”, organized by the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) and the Turkey Institute, Leiden, Holland (June 2008).

6. The Future Course of the Europeanization Process: Grounds for Optimism

The prospects for Turkey's ambitions for full EU membership do not appear to be very bright in the current situation. The "grand coalition for special partnership" appears to be firmly entrenched. Perhaps what appears to be most worrisome, on top of the dramatic decline in public support for EU membership in Turkey, is the loss of enthusiasm on the part of the liberal, pro-European elites for the EU membership process. With key chapters for negotiation already suspended, what is likely to happen is that the government in power is likely to pursue a loose Europeanization agenda of gradual reforms falling considerably short of a deep commitment for full membership. Needless to say, this is perfectly consistent with the vision of a privileged partnership. There is no doubt that for Turkey the EU membership process has lost much of its early momentum. Yet, there are important developments which makes one more optimistic about the future. First, the fact that the Constitutional Court case against the governing party did not end in a decision to ban the party constitutes, from a short-term perspective, a favorable development. The outcome of the court case against the AKP could have had very serious destabilizing consequences in terms of its impact on domestic politics, the economy and the future trajectory of Turkey-EU relations. In European circles, the decision to close the party could have been interpreted as a major breakdown of the democratic order in Turkey with the natural consequence of suspending the negotiation process altogether, which it would then have been very difficult to revitalize. Secondly, the change of government in southern Cyprus and the resumption of formal negotiations for the reunification of the island have helped to create a new climate of hope in the direction of reaching an equitable settlement to the Cyprus dispute. Although it is too early to predict the final outcome, there is at least the possibility that it could be positive, which would then help to eliminate a major hurdle on the path of Turkey's progress towards EU accession. Thirdly, the election of Barrack Obama as the new president of the United States may also help to inject a new lease of life into Turkey-US relations. The United States has always been a critical actor in Turkish foreign policy calculations and has played a critical role in Turkey's quest for EU membership. The new US administration, with its emphasis on multilateralism and engagement with key global and regional actors, is likely to generate a much more favorable environment in terms of strengthening both the Trans-Atlantic Alliance and bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States. These developments, in turn, are likely to create a more congenial environment for an internationally acceptable solution to the Cyprus problem and

contribute to a possible revival in Turkey's push for EU membership. More recently, the appointment of a new chief negotiator with the EU and the opening of a new Kurdish television channel under the auspices of the state broadcasting agency (the TRT) – representing an important step in the direction of recognizing the language and cultural rights of the Kurdish minority – in January 2009 may be interpreted as possible signs of a renewed impetus on the part of the AKP government to revitalize its drive to Europeanization.

The European integration process and Turkey-EU relations are both long-term historical processes. In spite of serious ups and downs and periodic crises along the way, the long-term trend has clearly been in the direction of a deepening of the integration process itself, as well as the deepening of Turkey's integration with the EU. Long-term historical processes are difficult to reverse. Reversal becomes particularly difficult once the critical decision is taken to initiate negotiations on the part of the EU with a candidate country. Indeed, there is no country which has reached the point of negotiations and then failed to qualify as a full member. Having set the target of full membership as a long-term goal, and having invested so much in one another, ending up with anything less than full integration will represent a sense of failure and a certain loss of credibility on both sides. Hence, a sense of historical perspective tends to inject an air of optimism regarding the future course of the integration process, as well as the possibility of Turkish accession to the EU as a full member.

The current constitutional crisis in the EU may ironically create an opportunity space for Turkey. Clearly what is at stake in the constitutional debate is the future direction of the European project. If the outcome of the constitutional crisis is the development of the EU more in the direction of what Jan Zielonka calls a loosely structured “medieval empire”, which is broadly consistent with the British vision rather than the kind of deep integration project favored by the French, this will naturally embody very significant implications for the future place of Turkey in the European context.³⁸ If the future path of the EU involves a British-style process of integration producing a relatively loose, intergovernmental Europe with relatively flexible boundaries and allowing significant scope for national autonomy, the prospects for Turkish accession will be considerably improved. In contrast, if the dominant style of integration is based on the French project of deep integration – the idea of Europe as a “place” with

³⁸ Zielonka, Jan, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

fixed boundaries as opposed to a flexible “space” – the natural inclination will be to include Turkey as an “important outsider” in a special partnership-style arrangement rather than as a “natural insider”. Our interpretation of the current constitutional impasse in Europe having reached a peak with the negative vote in Irish referendum of June 2008 is that the dominant tendency in the foreseeable future is likely to be the first scenario of flexible integration, which clearly constitutes a development in Turkey’s favor.

In the current situation, the EU clearly suffers from enlargement fatigue, having absorbed ten new members in 2004 and two additional members in 2007. Furthermore, this was the most complex wave of enlargement to date, involving the incorporation of countries with deep legacies of communist regimes. Again, however, a sense of historical perspective suggests that the current enlargement fatigue may not necessarily be a permanent phenomenon. Within the course of the next five to ten years, the EU may again find itself in the midst of a new wave of enlargement involving expansion towards the Balkans and eastern Europe at the same time. There is already strong support for further enlargement of the EU towards the east among the new member states. The Poles, for example, have emerged as vocal supporters of the membership of Ukraine. In a world of Russian assertionism and the solid base of support which exists among the new member states for further eastern enlargement for both cultural and security reasons, it is highly probable that a new wave of enlargement will take place in the medium term. Once this process gathers momentum, it might be difficult to exclude Turkey from it.

A favorable external environment for enlargement is quite crucial for reviving Turkish membership aspirations in the medium term. A favorable external context *per se*, however, is insufficient and needs to be accompanied by a parallel process of the emergence of a strong political movement at home which is deeply committed to the reform process and to membership. Clearly, a crucial element in this context will be the position of the secular middle classes in Turkey. If these groups in Turkish society feel that full membership of the EU is a necessary anchor for preserving a liberal constitutional order and preventing their marginalization in an increasingly conservative Turkish society, they may create the impetus for the emergence of such a political movement, which, in turn, may capitalize on a possible wave of further enlargement to press successfully for Turkey’s inclusion in the EU as a full member.

What can be done in the short run to reactive Turkey’s drive for EU membership, given its critical importance from the point of view of economic success, democratic

deepening and the consolidation of a foreign policy based on the use of soft power? Certainly, an approach based on promoting mutual co-operation without a firm signal for membership is not likely to be very productive, but will tend to accelerate the already existing trend towards a special partnership arrangement. There is clearly a need to re-dramatize the process and provide it with a new momentum by highlighting the fact that the main benefits of membership generally follow once membership is actually achieved. Hence, the emphasis ought to be on accelerating the process, rather than opting for a slow-motion scenario with an uncertain future. The most practical option would be for civil society groups and EU institutions to put greater pressure on the current AKP government to revitalize the reform process. Pro-active steps by the Turkish government would play a critical role, and Turkey itself could demonstrate its renewed commitment by developing a concrete timetable for membership going so far as to set a new target date for membership on a unilateral basis. At the same time, however, the EU could strengthen the hand of the Turkish government by taking a more active interest in resolving the Cyprus dispute, which constitutes the most immediate and concrete obstacle on the path to Turkish membership. The current mood in Cyprus makes one more optimistic than ever before that the negotiation process may end with a successful settlement in the island. Through active engagement, key European states and EU institutions could play a critical role in helping to resolve the Cyprus dispute, which would inevitably inject a new wave of optimism concerning the future of Turkey-EU relations.

7. Concluding Remarks

The new wave of foreign policy activism during the AKP era started out with a strong emphasis on Europeanization. However, the AKP era itself displays elements of continuity and change in terms of foreign policy behavior. Our central thesis is that there is significant continuity in the proactive and multilateral approach to policy-making. Yet, one is able to detect a certain rupture after the early years of the AKP government. The discontinuity is marked by a shift in commitment from deep Europeanization to loose Europeanization and a simultaneous shift to soft Euro-asianism.

What we are increasingly observing in the current era is the emergence of an implicit, broad and mutually reinforcing coalition for a “special partnership”, which seems to be deeply rooted in both Europe and Turkey. This constitutes a significant danger from the point of Turkey’s prospects for full membership. The proponents of Turkish membership, both at home and abroad, appear to be increasingly less vocal and enthusiastic compared to their Turko-skeptic and Euro-skeptic counterparts. The retreat into soft Euro-asianism certainly does not signify the abandonment of the Europeanization project altogether. What it means, however, is that the EU will no longer be at the center of Turkey’s external relations or foreign policy efforts. This, in turn, is likely to have dramatic repercussions for the depth and intensity of the democratization process in Turkey, especially in key areas such as a complete reordering of military-civilian relations, an extension of minority rights and a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem, as well as counteracting the deeply embedded problem of gender inequality. There is no doubt that there exist key elements within the Turkish state and Turkish society that would be quite content with the loose Europeanization solution, given the perceived threats posed by a combination of deep Europeanization and deep democratization for national sovereignty and political stability. The fears of deep Europeanization are not simply confined to the defensive nationalist camp, however: there also exists considerable conservatism, even in the much more globally oriented AKP circles, when it comes to deep democratization, as is clearly evident from the resistance to the repeal of Article 301 of the penal code.

A final question to raise in this context is whether the drift towards loose Europeanization and soft Euro-asianism is likely to be reversed. The likelihood of a major reversal in the immediate term appears to be rather low. From a longer-term perspective, two possibly mutually reinforcing developments may produce a renewed impetus for the deep Europeanization agenda. The first element in such a scenario would involve a

new enlargement wave in Europe, covering both the Balkans and eastern Europe; Turkey, which has already reached the point of accession negotiations, will not be immune to such a process. The second element in such a scenario would involve the emergence of a strong counter-movement from the more liberal and Western-oriented segments of Turkish society, who will place Europeanization and reform firmly on its political agenda.

Turkey will continue to be an important regional power, even if its foreign policy stance is characterized by soft Euro-asianism. However, the first-best choice for Turkish foreign policy would be a commitment to deep Europeanization; in other words, making EU membership the pivotal element or central axis of its multi-dimensional foreign policy. The benefits of deep Europeanization have already manifested themselves in terms of (a) strong economic performance, (b) major steps towards democratic consolidation, and (c) a foreign policy based on soft power. These three elements are clearly interdependent and tend to create a kind of virtuous cycle, which would be very difficult to sustain under the second-best choice of loose Europeanization. Following the recent Constitutional Court decision, one may feel somewhat more optimistic about the future and hope that the AKP will be able to revitalize its commitment to deep Europeanization and reform that had been a hallmark of its policy in the early years of its tenure in government.

Turkey has a critical role to play in the enhancement of peace and stability in its volatile region as a pivotal power with substantial influence and capabilities. However, it can play a more constructive and effective role as a benign rather than a coercive power if it successfully fulfills four challenging tasks by (1) consolidating its democracy; (2) maintaining good neighborly relations; (3) achieving a balance in the troublesome EU-Turkey-US triangle and (4) operating within a predominantly European framework while pursuing a multilateral foreign policy with extensive Eurasian ties. On all fronts, Turkey has a challenging period ahead of it, during which it needs to overcome numerous domestic and international obstacles that will not only determine the future path of Turkish foreign policy, but will also have very significant regional implications.

The onset of the global economic crisis has helped to inject a further element of uncertainty into the already uncertain trajectory of Turkey-EU relations and the future direction of Turkish foreign policy in general. The Turkish economy experienced a severe down-turn in performance in the later part of 2008. There is growing pessimism concerning the performance of the economy, and recent figures indicating falling

growth, rising unemployment and declining inflows of foreign direct investment point towards a new era of relative stagnation, making a sharp contrast with the economic boom of the post-2001 period. It is conceivable that the sharp decline in economic performance will help to reactivate the EU anchor and create a major incentive in the direction of strengthening Turkey's relations with the European Union and the United States. The fact that Turkey is currently in the process of signing a new stand-by agreement clearly points in that direction. It is also likely that the weakening of economic performance will reduce the scope for the assertive and multi-dimensional foreign policy strategy with no firm trans-Atlantic or EU axis that was observed during the second phase of the AKP government, forcing Turkey to align its policies much more closely with the Western alliance in the process.³⁹ At the same time, however, a prolonged recession in the United States and Europe may also produce a counter-trend. Turkey may increasingly find itself in a position of trying to diversify its economic relationships in order to revive its falling rate of growth. This, in its turn, may strengthen the present tendency in Turkish foreign policy in direction of a strategy of loose Europeanization combined with soft Euro-asianism.

³⁹ A recent analysis by Ian Lesser points in this direction. Lesser suggests that neighboring countries, finding themselves in an environment of significant economic stress, will also be much less receptive to the kind of soft-power approach that has been advocated by Turkey in recent years. See Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey and the Global Economic Crisis", *German Marshall Fund of the United States Policy Brief on Turkey* (Fall 2008), available at <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/article.cfm?id=504>.

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