

The Western Condition:

Turkey, the US and the EU in the New Middle East



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Introduction

While in the Middle East, the ripple effects of the Arab uprisings continue to shake up the post-WWI status-quo, the West, and above all, the European Union, is still embroiled in the aftermath of its greatest financial crisis since the 1930s. This concurrent occurrence may be fortuitous but it has no doubt exacerbated one of the defining tensions of our age. The West is no longer able to dictate the terms of modernity beyond its borders - indeed, in its very close neighbourhood when it comes to the European Union. But for all the talk of a post-western world, the appropriation, transformation and subversion of standards and norms developed in and by the West remain ubiquitous. It is this tension between declining *and* inescapable West which we call the *Western condition*, acknowledging of course that there are several *Wests* relevant to our story. As such, the Western condition is both a condition *of* the West – in the case at hand, the differentiated modes of reactive engagement and disengagement of the US and the EU from the Middle East - and a characteristic of countries which remained conditioned *by* the West, be it through formal or informal *conditionality* invoked by the EU or the US, or more broadly through the constraints imposed by the rules of the game underpinning the western international order.

In this paper, we use the prism of Turkey to ask what is happening to the Western condition in the ‘new’ Middle East. Nowhere is the Western condition more entrenched, resented and actively engaged with than in Turkey which has spent the last century coping and negotiating with it. And nowhere, we believe, is the current tension so consequential, in part because Turkey stands at the intersection between worlds and between different geostrategic logics. In this context, that the relative economic and political stability earned over the last decade in Turkey might be proving to be increasingly precarious undoubtedly affects the changing Western condition in the region. To the extent that the ‘West’, broadly speaking, exacerbates, mitigates or ignores conflict between states and between peoples in the Middle East, Turkey is usually part of the equation. For the ambitious and increasingly self-assured foreign policy makers in Turkey’s Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government, the geopolitical vacuum generated by the uprisings has represented an opportunity to advance Foreign Minister Davutoğlu’s long standing vision of Turkey acting as an ‘order setting agent’ in its former Ottoman territories. What kind of order then is emerging? It has been widely observed that these events have intensified deep running regional and global rivalries and created a geopolitical tug of war for hegemony and survival that has been playing out violently above all

along one sensitive dimension: the Sunni-Shia fault line. It may well turn out to be the case that Turkey has the potential to tip the scales in western interest but under its own terms.

To demonstrate how this is happening, we explore Turkey's relationship with the West as it affects both democratic reform domestically and geo-strategic alliance-making externally – and as a result of both these dimensions the claims made around the theme of “Turkey as a model” for the region. Although there is no strict division of labor in this regard, it is true that Europe has traditionally privileged reform and the United States has traditionally privileged strategy in their respective relations with Turkey. We suggest that the two overlapping crises in its neighbourhood – e.g. financial and political - have both brought Turkey back into the fold of US grand strategy for the Middle East, and loosened the imperative of democratic reform as the Obama administration astutely recycles in a pro-Western key the AKP's own regional leadership agenda – a discourse crowning Turkey as the ‘victor of the Arab Spring’ and promoting it in the Middle East as a ‘moderate Islamist’ model of democracy, economic growth and political stability. But this strategy, we argue, is not devoid of significant risks, if not embedded in a broader democratic agenda. Only a return to and of a West committed to such an agenda will keep the country from a further slide into authoritarianism.

Are Turkey and the West, and more specifically Europe, ready for such a return? We believe that despite the apparent lack of interest on both sides in resuscitating Turkey's stalled accession process to the EU, there are new avenues for bilateral engagement that could both once again inspire a democratic reform agenda in Turkey, and provide the much needed outward looking political dynamism for the EU. It might be argued that Europe's internal woes and Turkey's entanglement in the Middle East's confrontations have become too profound to allow for such a rapprochement to take place. But this is also precisely what makes re-engagement desirable, even a necessity for both sides. Ultimately, in the absence of such re-engagement, there is little doubt that a Turkey facing ethnic conflict will significantly exacerbate instability in both Europe and in the Middle East. The European Union's reengagement with Turkey as well as with the uprisings in the Arab world is essential, even though the two regions will require different modes of engagement.

In this essay, we try to dis-entangle the threads of the Western condition in the case of Turkey and the new Middle East in three phases. We start with the current state of play in the region, analysing above all the shift taking place around the Sunni-Shia axis and what this means for the use and misuse of ‘Turkey as a model’. We move on to a historically informed lay-out of the three phases of AKP foreign policy, which also correspond to three fundamental logics of Turkey's “western condition”, namely “Europeanisation”, “Autonomisation” and “Americanisation”. Finally, we ask whether and how these three dimensions may be combined in the current climate, and suggest options for doing so.

I. On the Strategic Use of the ‘Turkish model’

The outbreak of popular uprisings across the Arab world since late 2010 has not only fundamentally reshaped the socio-political landscape of the Middle East, but has also opened a geopolitical vacuum, triggering in turn a complex regional power struggle to reshape the region. The collapse of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt as a result of these uprisings, and in Libya following external military intervention, the suppression of uprisings in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and the outbreak of civil war in Syria have created the most profound systemic crisis in the region since the downfall of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century and the subsequent colonial partitioning of the Middle East. In this volatile context, the suggestion that Turkey’s experience under a decade of AKP government could serve as some sort of inspiration or even a model for revolutionary Arab countries is not only an ideational factor but has become a geopolitical stake in the game between regional actors and the West. And the changing degree of enthusiasm expressed for the idea by the Arab publics becomes a factor in these volatile regional dynamics.

Turkey-as-a-Model: Variations on a theme

In very broad terms, the ‘Turkish model’, in its many different variations since the emergence of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s, stands for a workable arrangement between an Islamic identity and an ostensibly non-western cultural legacy on the one side and a pragmatic course of modernisation, intertwined with membership in Euro-Atlantic structures on the other. Overall, this arrangement has come to be viewed as more inclusive and successful than the political systems in the post-colonial Middle East. Its most recent reincarnation in AKP-governed Turkey is seen as an instance of relative socio-political stability and economic growth within a fairly democratic framework, managed by civilian politicians with a background in political Islam. Supporting references for this idea typically emphasise Turkey’s impressive economic growth over the past decade especially at a time of economic slump in the West, its government’s consecutive electoral victories, as well as its perceived image as an economic and cultural magnet in the region. Beyond this generic definition, however, the ‘model’ remains shrouded in conceptual ambiguity.

One way of framing what is meant by the ‘Turkish model’ is to analyse its constitutive elements as part of a ‘grand strategy’ of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, operating in two interrelated discursive domains and geographical scales.

- First, ‘model’ refers to Turkey as a referent for revolutionary Arab countries and their new emerging leadership, a relevant and attractive source of inspiration for domestic governance, publicly discussed in these countries (especially in Tunisia and Egypt, and to

a lesser extent, in Libya) and openly subscribed to by some factions and prominent individuals within their ascendant Islamist movements, including Mohammad Ghannouchi, the leader of Tunisia's an-Nahda movement, and the Egyptian President Mohammad Morsi, and his Muslim Brotherhood. These groups and individuals tend to view the AKP with a certain affinity because of a shared Sunni Islamist political heritage and express interest in its social and economic policies that combine references to Islamic ideas of social welfare with neo-liberal growth strategies. Using the referent explicitly can strengthen their hand in domestic power struggles. More ambiguously, Islamic parties as well as sections of publics in the region are groping for ways of accommodating ostensibly pluralistic constitutional frames and Islamic hegemony in the longer run and can look at the AKP as having accumulated a decade-long experience on this front. The attractiveness of the Turkish model revolves around competing notions of "secularism", a point we will come back to.

- Second, while a national 'model' can be a passive referent, interpreted and re-interpreted irrespective of the country's own action, external perceptions can be used as part of a regional strategy of 'model promotion'. This would correspond to the recycled idea of Turkey serving as a 'moderate Islamist' model in the Middle East; an idea that has once again become popular within the US foreign policy establishment, subscribed to by the US government and actively promoted by security-driven think tanks, lobby groups and pundits since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. Their immediate concern rests not so much in the model's domestic implications for the recipient countries or for Turkey, but rather in its strategic benefits for the US-led western security establishment in the wider region. These interests include ensuring that emerging political actors maintain friendly relations with the US and its regional allies, consider Iran, and not Israel, as the main security threat in the region, and subscribe to market liberalisation policies, keeping barriers for trade and investment with the West and the US-led regional alliance at a minimum.

It is at this intersection that the 'Turkish model' has come to be used and promoted by Turkey's foreign policymakers as part of a pro-active regional leadership strategy. In Davutoğlu's grand strategy, if there ever was one, these two dimensions –Middle Eastern 'admiration' and imitation on one hand Western promotion on the other – were expected to mutually reinforce each other and radically change Turkey's national identity as well as its place in the region and the world. What Davutoğlu has long envisioned, and the AKP has thought to assert through the charismatic persona of Prime Minister Erdoğan, was turning Turkey into the pivotal actor in its various neighbourhoods, while increasing its strategic worth and autonomy vis-à-vis its Western counterparts. In this vision, Turkey is best placed to act as an 'order setting agent' at the centre of a geography spanning from the Balkans to the Middle East, drawn together by strong trade

and diplomatic ties exactly because of a shared historical, cultural and religious heritage (with an emphasis on Sunni Islam) dating back to the Ottoman Empire.¹ The imperial legacy is thus turned on its head as ‘order setting’ becomes legitimised through a non-coercive appeal to be “like us” rather than “part of us”.

The Arab uprisings appeared to present Turkey’s decision makers with an ideal opportunity to realise Davutoğlu’s vision. Encouraged by the expressed desire within parts of the ascendant Islamist movements in these countries to emulate the AKP’s social and economic policies, as well as by the renewed interest in the West to promote Turkey as a regional model, the AKP government adopted an increasingly pro-active approach in dealing with the Arab uprisings. But as is often the case, not everything has gone according to plan.

The Backdrop: the new Sunni Axis and US-Turkey rapprochement

There are clearly practical tensions between these different dimensions of the ‘Turkish model’ and its usage by various actors. For one, Erdoğan’s rising popularity in Egypt and other Arab countries following his public denunciations of Israel before the Arab uprisings, coupled with Turkey’s close ties with Iran and Syria, had not only greatly strained his government’s relations with the US-backed regime of Hosni Mubarak, but with the US as well.² It was in large part this tension and the image of Erdoğan as the headstrong leader of a rising regional power that had created the ground for the adoption of the model idea by political activists and segments of society in the Arab world. And yet, arguably the most remarkable change ushered by the Arab uprisings has been the rapprochement between the US and Turkey, grounded in converging security interests regarding the geostrategic make-up of the new Middle East in the making. In this context, ‘the rhetoric of ‘Turkey as a model’ is now part of a pro-US rather than an anti-US discourse.

At the heart of this turn of events lies what has now become a prominent strategic divide in the region, that between Shia and Sunnis. It is in this light that we need to assess the full import of the AKP government’s abrupt termination of the strategic partnership it had meticulously built with Syria’s Bashar al-Assad and its active and leading role in supporting the Syrian opposition. This sharp turnaround on Syria has led to a deterioration of the AKP’s once flourishing ties with the principal supporters of the Assad regime, namely the so-called ‘Shia axis’ (led by the Islamic Republic of Iran and involving the government of Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq and Hizbullah in Lebanon) and to a lesser extent with Russia. In turn, this has created new spaces for strategic alignment between the AKP government and an emerging bloc of regional and global actors

¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

² See Reem Abou-el-Fadl, ‘Arab Perceptions of Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy: Cautious Engagement and the Question of Independence’, in Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu, Mehmet Karlı (eds) *Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey’s Foreign Policy Under the Justice and Development Party* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2012).

locked in a rivalry with Iran; a regional Sunni bloc made up of highly disparate, even antagonistic actors, including, in addition to Turkey, the conservative monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and popular Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, an-Nahda and Hamas.³ To this, we may add a range of ultra-conservative Salafist movements and violent jihadist networks. This picture is of course complicated by the fact that many of these countries harbour important Shia minorities (Lebanon, Saudi Arabia) and sometimes even majorities (Bahrain). In sum, and with the blessing of the West, the increasingly violent sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict has both been exacerbated by and led to the emergence of a new regional geostrategic landscape defined by what could be described as the oldest conflict within the Islamic tradition. And Turkey's role in such a shift has been crucial.⁴ To be sure, one could argue that the 'Sunni axis' was not a matter of principled choice for the AKP government, but a geopolitical reality that could no longer be ignored. Nor is the shift necessarily absolute and exclusive. But it is likely to be determinant for the foreseeable future nevertheless.

The paradox for Turkey lies with the fact that this pro-activeness signalled the end of a brief period of autonomous Turkish foreign policy making which had caused much displeasure in western foreign policy circles. If the AKP government's regional balancing act had been its signature as a rising middle power, this was clearly at odds with what we have called the Western condition in the region. Within the US foreign policy establishment, Turkey's 'return to the West' and renewed commitment to the NATO security framework has led to the revival of an old discourse that was previously endorsed by the George W. Bush administration and subsequently dropped as Turkey went on to strengthen ties with Syria and Iran and downgrade them with Israel. In Washington, Turkey has again been anointed as a beacon for the region.

The Landscape: The power of attraction in an age of revolution

The fate of 'Turkey as a model' is clearly not only a function of the country's alignment with Washington. Most importantly, the outbreak of the Arab uprisings has bolstered the already positive perception of Turkey, the Justice and Development Party and Prime Minister Erdoğan

³ The sudden departure of Hamas, originally an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, from the Shia axis (self-referred to as the 'Axis of Resistance' [against Israeli and US imperialism]) and participation in the Sunni bloc is the most striking example of the prevalence of the Sunni – Shia split. In the course of the Syrian conflict, top Hamas operatives left Syria, where they were based since 1999, for Egypt and Qatar, triggering accusations of treason by the Syrian and Iranian regimes. Khaled Meshaal, the political leader of Hamas, subsequently moved to Qatar, which has turned into a major benefactor of the Palestinian group, as evidenced by the Qatari emir's historic visit to the Gaza Strip in October 2012. Meshaal was also present at the AKP's September 2012 congress, and in a much applauded speech he praised Erdoğan as not only the leader of Turkey, but "also a leader of the Muslim world".

⁴ "Militant Sunnis from Iraq have been going to Syria to fight against President Bashar al-Assad for months. Now Iraqi Shiites are joining the battle in increasing numbers, but on the government's side, transplanting Iraq's explosive sectarian conflict to a civil war that is increasingly fuelled by religious rivalry." Yasir Ghazi and Tim Arango, 'Iraqi Sects Join Battle in Syria on Both Sides', *New York Times*, 27 October 2012.

on the part of various socio-political strata across a large number of Middle Eastern countries.⁵ Inter-state relations must be considered against this backdrop.

In the case of Egypt for instance, the AKP's attempts to champion the Palestinian cause prior to the Arab uprisings provoked sympathy in the ranks of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood much before the change of regime. The bilateral rapprochement following the revolution comes as no surprise, as the AKP supported both Morsi (as well as Tunisia's Rachid Ghannouchi) resulting in a visible strengthening of military, diplomatic and trade ties between the two countries, when Morsi became Egypt's president.⁶ In a speech delivered at the AKP congress in Ankara in September 2012, Morsi emboldened Turkey's leadership praising Turkey's democratic achievements as a "source of inspiration for the Middle East" whose involvement in the region was essential for "economic and social rehabilitation following the Arab Spring revolutions."⁷ Yet, the Egyptian – Turkish rapprochement did not lead to the formation of a new pro-Palestine bloc, as one could have expected given the traditional anti-Israeli rhetoric of the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, both Morsi's and Erdoğan's invectives during their address to the AKP congress were targeted at Syria's Bashar al-Assad and his key supporters in the region.⁸ This united Turkish – Egyptian stance on Syria could be explained in part by the intensity of the armed conflict in that country, in which both the AKP circles and the Muslim Brothers (like the Islamist movements in Tunisia and Libya) view the Syrian conflict in light of their own recent struggles against military-backed secular authoritarian regimes, i.e. the Mubarak regime in Egypt and the Kemalist establishment in Turkey.

At the same time, both the Brotherhood and the AKP also sympathise strongly with Syria's Sunni majority in its fight against the nominally secular dictatorship controlled by the Alawite minority and backed by Shia Iran.⁹ Egyptian Islamists vividly remember the Hama massacre of

⁵ This observation is based on two annual surveys in the region. First are the EU-funded Euromed Surveys, titled 'Experts and Key Actors of the Euro-Mediterranean Space', conducted by the European Institute of the Mediterranean. The 2011 survey has found that of a number of international actors, Turkey's response to the Arab uprisings has been perceived as the most positive, pro-active and supportive of the dynamics of the Arab Spring by respondents in the Middle East (Turkey was closely followed by the EU in this category). The second are the 'Perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East' surveys carried out by the liberal Turkish think tank TESEV. Their findings suggest that perceptions of Turkey have improved steadily between 2009 and 2012 in all countries of the Middle East, except in Syria and Iran, where they have been declining (sharply in Syria) since 2011. Their 2011 survey indicates Turkey as the country being most positively viewed, contributing most to conflict resolution and most likely to serve as a successful model in the region. See 'Euro-Mediterranean Policies and the Arab Spring', *Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors 2011*, European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, 2012; Mensur Akgün and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar (eds) *Ortadoğ'u'da Türkiye Algısı 2011* (TESEV Yayınları, January 2012).

⁶ Tim Arango, 'Turkey and Egypt Seek Alliance Amid Region's Upheaval', *New York Times*, 18 October 2012.

⁷ Gözde Nur Donat, 'We need Turkey in post-revolution Arab world, Morsi says at AK Party congress', *Today's Zaman*, 30 September 2012.

⁸ 'Erdoğan slams Russia, China, Iran over Syria in key party congress', *Today's Zaman*, 30 September 2012.

⁹ Alawites, also known as Nusayris (particularly in Turkey), are a religious group mainly based in Syria that are distantly related to the Twelver school of Shia Islam. (Twelverism is also the dominant faith in Iran and the largest sect in Iraq and Lebanon.) The Alawites should not be confused with Turkey's Alevis, the Turkish and Kurdish communities that practice a heterodox strand of Islam, combining elements of Sufi mysticism, Shi'a beliefs and Anatolian folk traditions. There is a relatively small minority of Alawites in Turkey, estimates varying between

1982, when tens of thousands of Syrian members of the Brotherhood were killed by the government of Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father. Thus their common realignment along a Sunni axis is clearly grounded in the kind of socio-religious identity which drives the new leadership of both countries.

And geostrategic calculations overlay sectarian tensions in complex patterns. For Turkey, for example, the Syrian conflict is intimately tied to the AKP's leadership ambitions in the region: it was in no small part the premature assumption that the Assad regime would meet the same speedy fate as the North African dictators, and be replaced by a Sunni Islamist-dominated government that would look to Turkey as a close ally and model, that led the AKP leaders to abandon their erstwhile friend Bashar al-Assad around mid-2011. The same goes for the decision to take on a proactive role in supporting the political and armed factions of the Syrian opposition, namely the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). But as the Syrian uprising morphed into protracted civil war, Turkey has found it difficult to avoid being dragged into the crisis, facing a bulging refugee influx, growing Salafist and jihadist influence within the Syrian opposition,¹⁰ and a delicate military stand-off with the Syrian army along the 800 km-long border between the two countries. In addition to these, and arguably most ominously, violent attacks since 2011 against government and civilian targets inside Turkey by the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) were energised by the prospect of political autonomy in Syria and reportedly supported by the Syrian and Iranian regimes. There is little doubt that this has exacerbated existing societal tensions *within* Turkey and put its internal stability in jeopardy.

The Arab uprisings have also presented the Sunni Gulf Arab monarchies, Saudi Arabia in particular, with a geopolitical calculus between hegemony and survival. The urban-based mass demonstrations of 2011 in Yemen and Bahrain, both home to Saudi-backed Sunni governments as well as substantial Shia populations, and the unrest among Saudi Arabia's own Shia minority in the oil-rich Eastern province have threatened both the Saudi regime's internal security and its peninsular hegemony vis-à-vis Iran.¹¹ But by framing these uprisings as driven purely by religious strife, the authoritarian Gulf monarchies have used the growing sectarian character of the

750,000 people to 1 million, mostly based in the Arabic speaking province of Hatay on the border with Syria, as well as in the Cilician plains, i.e. in the provinces of Adana and Mersin. Turkey's Alevi minority is much larger (estimated between 10 – 15 million) and spread across the country. Until recently, there has been only little contact between the two communities, even though this seems to be changing given the prominence of Alawites in the Syrian conflict.

¹⁰ The claim, made from the outset of the Syrian uprising by the Assad regime, that it was fighting a mainly jihadist opposition, has increasingly become a concern for the Turkish and the US governments, with the revelation that most of the arm shipments to the Syrian opposition, particularly coming from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were going into the hands of Salafi groups or jihadists, which could turn against the US and its 'moderate' allies in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict. David Sanger, 'Rebel Arms Flow Is Said To Benefit Jihadists in Syria', *New York Times*, 14 October 2012.

¹¹ The Shia unrest in Saudi Arabia has received little media coverage within the Sunni bloc or in the West, while it has been extensively covered in Iran and Russia. Although largely suppressed by the Saudi government, periodic episodes of violence continue to flare up in the region. See Amena Bakr, 'Saudi Arabia boosts security in Eastern region fearing riots', *Reuters*, 12 July 2012.

region's geopolitical divide as an excuse to suppress calls for socio-political justice and reform in their own countries. Citing Iranian meddling, Bahrain's Sunni rulers were able to enlist the help of the Saudi military and carry out a brutal crackdown of peaceful civilian demonstrations by members of the island's Shia majority who were calling for constitutional reform and equal rights, while the US and the EU looked away.¹² The increased sectarian character of the Syrian conflict has even allowed Saudi Arabia, one of the region's socially most repressive, least democratic and certainly least 'revolutionary' state-level actors, to present itself as the 'champion of the revolution' against the Syrian dictatorship and to mount further geopolitical pressure on Iran.¹³

Finally, though certainly not a part of the emerging Sunni alliance, Israel has seen itself drawn closer to this bloc, as it also sought to benefit from the shifting focus towards sectarian divisions and the prioritisation of the geopolitical rivalry with Iran. Initially, the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, and the rise of Islamist movements now in government in Israel's two former strategic partners, Turkey and Egypt, deeply unsettled the Israeli political establishment and increased its sense of isolation in what it views as a hostile region. But the Syrian conflict and the growing Sunni – Shia competition seemed to offer the Israeli government, if not a permanent break, at least a temporary respite from being at the spotlight of regional politics. Consuming the energy of the various Islamist movements and their supporters, the deepening of sectarian tensions and the geopolitical rivalry with Iran has effectively served as a distraction from the occupation of Palestine. At the same time, with the break-up of the 'axis of resistance' following Hamas' strategic move to the Sunni bloc, the Israeli government has seen its most formidable opponents in the region divided and weakened. In this light, renewed attempts by Israeli officials since 2011 to frame Iran's nuclear programme as the region's most imminent security threat clearly resonate with a broader constellation of regional interests.¹⁴

The Sunni alignment however is not without tension for Egypt either. If the Syrian conflict and the 'sectarianisation' of the geopolitical power struggle in the Middle East have aligned both Turkey's AKP government and Muslim Brotherhood-led Egypt with the Gulf monarchies, the latter are not natural allies. Egypt's new Islamist rulers, like Turkey's AKP, have toned down prior anti-Israeli rhetoric. Egypt promised to abide by the 1979 peace treaty with Israel – a US

¹² See 'Bahrain' in 'World Report 2012', *Human Rights Watch*, January 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012>; and 'Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry', *Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 23 November 2011, <http://www.bici.org.bh/>

¹³ The Gulf monarchies were already lobbying the US government to attack prior to the Arab uprisings. Diplomatic correspondence leaked by Wikileaks in 2010 from the period between 2006 and 2008 reveals the level of distrust between the Sunni Gulf regimes and the Islamic Republic, as well as the pressure mounted on Washington especially by Saudi Arabia to carry out a military operation against the Iranian regime, because of its nuclear programme. Ross Colvin, "Cut off head of snake" Saudis told U.S. on Iran', *Reuters*, 29 November 2010.

¹⁴ The Israeli government noticeably stepped up threats of an 'imminent' military attack against Iran as the Syrian uprising unfolded, following an extended period of relative lull in verbal attacks between Iran and Israel. The suggestion that the Israeli political establishment sees the Iranian nuclear programme primarily as a regional distraction and that it is interested in sustaining tensions but not in actual conflict could be supported by the fact that that Israel gave no prior warning before its attacks against the Osirak reactor in Iraq in 1981 and suspected nuclear facilities in Syria in 2007.

red line¹⁵ – and has limited the flow of goods and arms through the underground tunnels to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. At the same time, on the domestic front, Egypt had to combat Saudi-funded Salafist groups that have been carrying out attacks against the Egyptian military in the Sinai Peninsula and defying Hamas to launch missiles into Israel from Gaza.¹⁶ Under considerable financial duress from a mismanaged economy that has suffered from chronic corruption and lost tourism revenues since the beginning of the uprisings, Egypt faces sustained international pressure from the IMF and the US while dealing with the political and security challenge posed by the Salafists. Under these circumstances, the leadership of the Brotherhood seems to have concluded, reluctantly or otherwise, that their best bet to remain in power was to maintain the *status quo ante* in Egypt's economic and regional orientation.¹⁷ In response, the US government has agreed to cut on Egypt's debt and promised investment and economic cooperation with its government.¹⁸ Mindful of the growing intra-Islamist rivalry between the Salafists and more centrist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and an-Nahda, the US strategy has been to favour the latter group, and through a combination of threats and promises, ensuring that they remain 'moderate', at least on the strategic policy areas of Israel, and economic policy.¹⁹ To be sure, the lack of progress towards an independent Palestinian state remains the core hindrance in this strategic calculation.

Considering this state of affairs by the beginning of 2013, we could argue that the conflict in Syria and the early transitional phase in Egypt have emphasised the overlaps between the two dimensions of the 'Turkish model' discourse and practice, that is its use as referent for domestic governance and its standing in the West as a flag bearer for 'moderate Islamism', thus bolstering Turkey's regional leadership ambitions. As members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (and other ascendant Islamist movements such as Tunisia's an-Nahda) praise Turkey's leaders and ostensibly strive to emulate its 'governance model', they also contribute to the AKP's regional

¹⁵ Matthew Lee, 'Clinton: US pleased so far by new Egypt president', *Associated Press*, 27 June 2012

¹⁶ In one such attack on 5 August 2012, Salafist militia in Sinai killed 16 Egyptian soldiers. 'Egypt and Gaza: A honeymoon that wasn't', *Economist*, 29 September 2012; Jon Donnison, 'Israel seeks to contain Gaza's Salafi-jihadist threat', *BBC News*, 15 October 2012; 'Hamas disinclined to face Salafists: Israeli official', *France 24*, 17 October 2012.

¹⁷ In this sense, the Brothers already appear to be emulating the Turkish experience during the early 2000s, when the newly elected AKP government, facing severe economic problems, pressure from the western security alliance and internal socio-political challenges to its authority, found itself working closely with Israel, the US and the IMF. There are, unsurprisingly, critical voices within or close to the Brotherhood for this dramatic turnabout. For one such criticism, see Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, 'Will Egypt's Islamists make the same mistakes as previous regimes?', *Abram Online*, 16 October 2012.

¹⁸ The promise of investment and economic cooperation was made during the visit of a large group of high profile US officials and businesspeople in Cairo in September 2012. An article on the *Financial Times*, reporting on the visit, commented gleefully that the new Egyptian government would adhere to the neo-liberal economic programme started under its predecessor: "Despite rhetorical calls for social justice and a few gestures such as raising civil service and soldiers' salaries, Egypt's Brotherhood is a steady advocate of free-market policies. Mr Morsi's government appears set to continue Mr Mubarak's economic agenda, albeit with a stated commitment to fight corruption." Borzou Daragahi, 'US delegation to Egypt vows more investment', *Financial Times*, 9 September 2012; Steven Lee Myers, 'To Back Democracy, U.S. Prepares to Cut \$1 Billion From Egypt's Debt', *New York Times*, 3 September 2012.

¹⁹ For more on the intra-Sunni rivalry, see Jonathan Brown, 'Salafis and Sufis in Egypt', *Carnegie Papers*, December 2011 and Khalil al-Anani, 'Dynamics of Inter-Islamist conflict', *Abram Weekly*, Issue no. 1099, 24 – 30 May 2012.

leadership agenda. At the same time, the Brothers hope to conform sufficiently to the politico-economic and security demands of the US and its regional allies to be categorised as ‘moderate Islamist’, like their Turkish counterparts. Are these synergies sustainable? A growing number of factors suggest otherwise, and these might become more prominent in the longer term.

The Plot: Contradictions and limits to the model discourse

First, there may be good reasons to question the long-term compatibility of Turkey’s regional leadership ambitions and the reception of this agenda in the Arab Middle East. To interpret Turkey’s regional popularity as an appetite for the emergence of a new hegemon in the region seems problematic, particularly if the potential hegemon in question is not only not Arabic-speaking, but also perceived as neo-Ottoman.²⁰ Despite the affinities between the AKP and various ascendant Islamist movements across the Arab world, Turkey remains an external actor in the Arab geography. And while in public Turkish officials emphasise a shared social, cultural and historical heritage and downplay any hegemonic agenda, references to the Ottoman Empire do not usually evoke the same lofty memories as in Turkey itself of harmonious co-existence among former Ottoman subjects in the Middle East and the Balkans. In the minds of AKP cadres, as well as of the mainstream Islamist constituency in the country, the bloody final decades of the empire, oppression, ethnic cleansing and genocide simply do not feature very highly. This is not so for those, particularly in the Balkans, but also in the Arab nation-states, for whom the Turkish domination remains a relatively recent and vivid collective memory.

Moreover, as Reem Abou El-Fadl argues, expressions of popular Arab approval for Turkey tend to imply “certain expectations and demands made of Arab leaders, rather than purely representing an analysis of Turkish behaviour.”²¹ In other words, especially before the uprisings Turkey has been seen as filling a vacuum in the absence of strong Arab leadership in the region.²² But the prospective emergence of such leadership would challenge Turkey’s regional popularity and ambitions. Egypt, with its well-substantiated claim to leadership of the Arab world, is once again the most likely contender for that title. To the extent that the country manages to move out of its fragile transitional phase and its popularly elected rulers manage to solidify their political base and start overseeing economic growth, they would be less likely to tolerate a relationship with Turkey on unequal terms, even though such a development seems unlikely in

²⁰ The observation that Turkey’s regional popularity has continued to rise following the outbreak of the Arab uprisings is based on two annual surveys in the region: ‘Euro-Mediterranean Policies and the Arab Spring’, *Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors 2011*, European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, 2012; Mensur Akgün and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar (eds) *Ortadoğu’da Türkiye Algısı 2011* (TESEV Yayınları, January 2012).

²¹ Reem Abou-el-Fadl, ‘Arab Perceptions of Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy: Cautious Engagement and the Question of Independence’, p. 247.

²² See Azmi Bishara, ‘Turkey’s Recent Stances are Party Choices, not those of the State’, *Islam Online Interview* (Arabic), 10 March 2009; Gamil Matar, ‘Turkey Returns to the Arabs’, *Al-Shorouk* (Arabic), 5 December 2009; Salama Ahmed Salama, ‘Admiration for Turkey: Why?’, *Al-Shorouk* (Arabic), 18 January 2010; Talal Salman, ‘Waiting for an Arab Erdoğan’, *As-Safir* (Arabic), 31 March 2010.

the near future.²³ In any case, if the Egyptian Islamists wish to emulate Turkey's achievements, it would not be farfetched to expect them to eventually develop their own regional leadership agenda grounded in the popularity of their own constitutional model.

Beyond the rhetoric, the extent to which the ascendant Islamists are willing to copy the 'Turkish model', or how much support there actually is for it within these movements remains ambiguous. When put in practice, many references to the AKP as brothers in arms have turned out as unfounded. A case in point is the consternation that Prime Minister Erdoğan caused among leading members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood during a landmark visit to Cairo, when he praised secularism as a state form that allows for Islam as well as other religions to flourish within a neutral setting.²⁴ It is important to note here that this is not the understanding of secularism which the Turkish government has been pursuing of late, but more probably more a message to the US, establishing Turkey firmly as the most "moderate" of Islamist governments in the region. Another is the example of Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, a prominent member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau, who was distanced from the movement when he put himself forward as a presidential candidate in 2012. Widely described within Egypt and outside as a 'moderate' or 'Turkish-style liberal Islamist', Aboul Fotouh's calls for political reform and pluralism drew criticism from more conservative members of the Brotherhood and was decisive in his resignation from the movement.²⁵ Indeed, the new Egyptian Constitution, adopted in the fall of 2012 by popular vote, provides a legal referent to Sharia law that would (still) be unthinkable in the Turkish constitutional setting. For all its leaders' increasingly vocal Sunni moralism, the AKP may simply be too concerned with regional hegemony shrouded in references to the Ottoman Empire and not sufficiently 'Islamic' for the rising Islamist movements in the revolutionary Arab countries.

Moreover, Turkey's regional leadership role may also come into conflict with its renewed commitment to the US-led western security establishment. As we already noted, one of the main contributors to Turkey's rising popularity in the Middle East had been the perception that, on the basis of the AKP's newfound economic dynamism and political confidence, it had stopped acting as a US client in the region, especially in relation to Israel. While the Syrian civil war serves as a distraction from the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, that conflict remains the most 'emotive' issue in the region, as well as the most likely to re-emerge as the principal driver of popular politics.²⁶ At that point, Turkey's government (or for that matter a potentially emerging Egypt)

²³ That the Brotherhood-led Egypt was already taking a pro-active role in mediating between Palestinian factions, and between Palestinians and Israel during the early transitional period may be seen as a budding sign of a desire to play this regional role.

²⁴ 'Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood criticizes Erdoğan's call for a secular state', *Al Arabiya*, 14 September 2011.

²⁵ Shadi Hamid, 'A Man for All Seasons', *Brookings Institute*, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/05/09-fotouh-hamid?rssid=islamist+movements>

²⁶ The above-mentioned TESEV survey from 2011 has found that Israel was still perceived as the biggest threat source in the region (47%), followed by the United States (24%) and Iran (11%). Remarkably, of the countries

will find it particularly difficult to simultaneously pursue its regional leadership ambitions, heed popular Turkish and Arab expectations and accommodate the strategic demands of the US-led security establishment. Without a meaningful breakthrough in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict and dramatic changes in popular perspectives towards the US and Israel in the Middle East, the long-standing dynamics of the region are unlikely to allow any country to emerge as its leader while being perceived as a US client. On the other hand, any claim to leadership independent from the US and Israeli strategic interests (hence, often in opposition to them) is almost certain to face systemic resistance and obstruction by these two players and the wider western security establishment, as evidenced by the intensive campaign of political and economic isolation and military confrontation against Iran since its 1979 revolution.

But the immediate and most pressing question for Turkey remains whether a transformative grand strategy operating on different geographical scales and discursive domains is viable. Can its decision makers sustain their current regional leadership agenda embedded in a strategic rapprochement with the US and its regional Sunni allies, while also continuing on a path towards democratisation, economic growth and socio-political reconciliation and stability? Or is its external strategy of regional hegemony bound to come in conflict with its internal democratic agenda? To answer these questions, we need to take a closer look at the Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP over the last decade...

II. An Ambivalent Decade: Three variations in the AKP's foreign policy

Foreign policy decisions can be fruitfully analysed in terms of the relationship between structures and agents. Human agency, i.e. the decision of key political actors or groups, may alter the course of events, or create path dependence, especially at certain critical junctures.²⁷ To what extent such choices are determined or constrained by structural factors – such as geography, demographics, economics, history and culture – is a matter of considerable debate. Undeniably, structures help shape personalities and influence perceptions that affect decisions. More fundamentally, they determine the range of decisions available to them in the first place. Turkish foreign policy under the AKP has been mainly driven by a small number of key figures, Erdoğan, Davutoğlu and to a lesser extent, President Abdullah Gül, who share similar views of Turkey's history, culture and role in the world but possess very different personalities and political styles

surveyed, the country with the highest number of respondents viewing Israel as the primary security threat was post-Gadhafi Libya (71%) and the lowest was Iran (31%).

²⁷ Path dependence and critical junctures are terms associated with comparative historical methodology. Path dependence embodies the argument that “crucial actor choices may establish certain directions of change and foreclose others in a way that shapes long-term trajectories of development.” Such choices will have particularly profound impact during critical junctures, which are “historical spaces, moments, arenas of change, which produce a struggle for new spatial reference points and in which a new segmentation of the polity becomes evident.” James Mahoney, *Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) pp. xi, 6.

and thus different ways of engaging with geopolitical constraints. Foreign policy under the AKP has gone through three distinctive phases which we refer to as Europeanisation, Autonomisation and Americanisation.

Europeanisation and the 'liberal moment' (2002 – 2007)

In its first term in power from 2002, the AKP took over and deepened a process of internal reform and regional reconciliation that had already started under its predecessors. The EU accession process had gained momentum following the decision to recognise Turkey as a candidate country at the 1999 Helsinki Summit.²⁸ By the late 1990s, many of Turkey's long standing disputes with its neighbours were either resolved or on the way to resolution: good neighbourly relations were restored with Bulgaria after that country abandoned its assimilation policy targeting the Turkish minority in 1990. Relations with Greece had improved considerably thanks to the efforts of foreign ministers Yorgos Papandreou and Ismail Cem. Support for reunification was on the rise among Turkish Cypriots and for EU membership on both sides of the island. Energy cooperation and growing trade relations had visibly improved relations with Russia, gradually leaving behind Cold War rivalries. In its Middle Eastern neighbourhood, the Adana Protocol of 1999 opened the way for security cooperation between Turkey and Syria, which had been on the brink of war only the previous year over Turkey's control of strategic water resources and Syria's support for the Kurdish separatist group PKK in its fight against the Turkish state. Following the capture of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999 (with the assistance of US and Israeli intelligence), the PKK had called for unilateral ceasefire, ushering in a period of calm in a debilitating civil war that had been raging for nearly two decades.

On the other hand, many of the socio-economic and institutional problems of the previous decade still loomed large in the early 2000s: fragile coalition governments, economic crises, spiralling inflation, widespread human rights abuses and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, corruption, state collusion in organised crime and weak democratic institutions kept in check by the Kemalist-controlled military-bureaucratic establishment. The depth of the social trauma caused by the Kurdish conflict was also slowly becoming more visible. Symbolised by the military's scorched earth campaigns, state-sanctioned extra judicial killings of Kurdish dissidents and the TV images of fallen soldiers in coffins wrapped with Turkish flags, that conflict had left behind thousands of destroyed villages, millions of displaced people and over 40,000 casualties – the overwhelming number of them Kurdish.

²⁸ Kalypto Nicolaidis, 'Europe's Tainted Mirror: Reflections on Turkey's Candidacy Status After Helsinki' in Dimitri Keridis (ed) *Turkish Foreign Policy*, Basseys, 2001.

It was very much the resultant yearning for political and economic stability following the ‘lost decade’ of the 1990s that had turned European integration into such an alluring prospect for a majority of Turkey’s citizens at the turn of the millennium.²⁹ In November 2002, representing a fresh and untainted choice among a host of old and failed parties, the youthful leaders of the AKP won the support of diverse socio-political constituencies who shared this common yearning. They promised to pursue EU integration vigorously and emphasised a pragmatic and service-based politics in contrast to the ideological anti-secularism and anti-westernism of their Islamist predecessors, the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), which had been outlawed by the Kemalist-controlled Constitutional Court following the military *coup d’état* of February 1997.

The AKP’s promise of reform, stability and growth attracted a coalition of socio-economic actors inside Turkey. Made up of a rising class of socially conservative entrepreneurs from Anatolia and the large cities of Western Turkey (by and large a product of the market liberalisation reforms of the 1980s and united through Islamic fraternities and trust networks such as the influential Gülen movement³⁰) a small but increasingly vocal liberal intelligentsia, as well as a significant proportion of the Kurdish electorate, this informal coalition viewed the country’s military-bureaucratic tutelage as the greatest obstacle to Turkey’s political and economic liberalisation, and the pursuit of EU membership as the key to overcoming it. The membership accession process provided Turkey with a liberal democratic model to emulate and a political and institutional roadmap to follow. At the same time, the prospect of admitting a predominantly Muslim country with a fast growing young population into the EU intensified existing debates about defining ‘Europe’ and determining the EU’s preferred size, demographic composition, institutional powers, socio-economic functions and wider geopolitical role.

Between 2001 and 2005, Turkey’s governments adopted far reaching democratising reforms with unprecedented political will and popular support in conjunction with the EU’s ‘harmonisation packages’. These included the abolition of the death penalty, the adoption of a new civil code, stricter measures against human right abuses and torture, legal amendments to safeguard the

²⁹ Popular support for EU membership in Turkey consistently scored above 50% in opinion polls during the early 2000s, peaking with 67% in 2004. ‘Eurobarometer 63: Public Opinion in the European Union’ European Commission, Spring 2005, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_exec_tr.pdf. On Turkish elite perception see inter alia, Nora Fisher Onar and Ahmet Evin, “Convergence and Resistance: the European Dilemma of Turkish Intellectuals,” in Justine Lacroix and Kalypso Nicolaidis (eds), *European Stories: Intellectual Debates on Europe in National Contexts*, OUP, 2011; Nora Fisher Onar and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, “Turkey in cosmopolis? Turkish elite perceptions of the European project,” in *Collective Identity and Democracy-The Impact of EU Enlargement*, Magdalena Góra and Zdzisław Mach (eds), ARENA Report No 4/10, RECON Report No 122010.

³⁰ For a review of the origins of and socio-political views espoused by this movement, which has come to wield significant influence over the economy and political institutions of Turkey over the past decade, see Ebaugh, Rose, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (New York, NY: Springer Verlag, 2009); Özdalga, Elisabeth, *Secularizing Trends in Fethullah Gulen's Movement: Impasse or Opportunity for Further Renewal?* (*Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 2003, 12:1, 61-73); Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito (eds), *Turkish Islam and the secular state: the Gülen movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003); for its role in Turkey’s foreign policy see also Öktem (2012).

freedom of expression and minority rights, as well as security sector reforms that started tilting the civil-military balance in politics in favour of the former for the first time in more than four decades.³¹ In 2002, the AKP government also lifted the draconian emergency laws that were in place in the Kurdish provinces since 1987 and had given rise to a culture of impunity for the various branches of the security services operating in these areas.³² Increased political stability and a programme of economic liberalisation in turn attracted record amounts of foreign investment at a period of surging global liquidity, boosting economic growth and allowing the AKP government to undertake projects to improve the country's ailing infrastructure and social services. In 2005, in response to Turkey's reform efforts, the EU formally initiated accession negotiations with Ankara. In 2007, the electorate expressed their satisfaction with the newfound political stability and continued economic growth by returning the AKP to office, with an increased share of the vote.

Accompanying the government's initiatives during this period was the remarkable atmosphere of societal openness, pluralism and introspection that these few years of political and economic reform had ushered in. For the first time, the most traumatic chapters of the country's modern history and its hitherto untouchable socio-political taboos – from the founding myths of the Kemalist nation-building process to the systematic annihilation of Anatolia's non-Muslim communities and their heritage; from the existence of the Turkish 'deep state'³³ to the causes and consequences of military coups, and the plight of every group suppressed by the state or marginalised in society, including the Kurds, Alevis, women, pious Muslims, religious minorities, atheists and LGBT communities – became the subject of open and candid public discussion, through books, newspaper articles, television debates, academic research and conferences.³⁴

³¹ For a review of these reforms, see Meltem Müftüler Bac, 'Turkey's Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union', *South European Society and Politics*, 10 (1), March 2005, p. 22. For a detailed overview of Turkey's security sector reforms and challenges to democratisation see Ahmet İnsel and Ali Bayramoğlu (eds) *Almanac Turkey 2006 – 2008: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight* (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2010), and Ümit Cizre, *Prime Movers, Specific features and Challenges of Security Sector Reform: The Case of Turkey*, DCAF Policy Paper, No. 17, 2008; and Karabekir Akkoyunlu, 'Democratisation and Security Sector Reform in Turkey' in Heiner Hänggi and Carolina G. Hernandez (ed), *Security Sector Reform and Democratisation: A Comparative Perspective*, DCAF Yearly Books, Geneva, 2012.

³² These include the regular military, the police force, as well as the gendarmerie and its quasi-official intelligence and counter-terrorism unit, known as JITEM, whose members have been implicated in extrajudicial detainment, torture and killings of civilians in the region and whose existence was still officially denied in 2012. See 'The Intelligence Issue and JITEM' in Ahmet İnsel and Ali Bayramoğlu (eds) *Almanac Turkey 2006 – 2008*, p. 178.

³³ The 'deep state' refers to a secret and extra-legal network of security sector actors, judiciary, civilian politicians and organised crime groups united by a chauvinist view of the state and society, which continues to pose a major obstacle to the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law in Turkey today. The roots of this 'state within a state' date back to the final decade of the Ottoman Empire, when a semi-secret organisation, known as *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (the Special Organisation), was set up under the Committee of Union and Progress government. Founded on a vaguely defined pan-Turkist and pan-Islamist ideology, the organisation carried out political assassinations and played a key role in the Armenian genocide of 1915-16. See Taner Akcam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, (London: Constable, 2007).

³⁴ This atmosphere of relative openness and the sense of liberation from decades of self-imposed ignorance is captured in Kerem Öktem's *Angry Nation: Turkey since 1989*, (London: Zed Books, 2011)

During this brief 'liberal moment' that lasted until the mid-2000s, Turkey did not only attempt to fix its broken economy and restructure its political institutions, but also to heal its deep running social and historical fault lines. We should note that these attempts also triggered a wave of angry and at times violent nationalist reaction from within the state and society. For example, in 2005 a conference on Ottoman Armenians, the first to openly challenge official accounts of history, was postponed when a court ruled it could not be held at the grounds of a public university. When finally reorganised at a private university, its participants were pelted with eggs by protestors.³⁵ Much more alarming were the murders of a Roman Catholic priest and three Protestant missionaries in 2006 and well-known Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink in 2007, all of which have been subsequently linked to the Turkish 'deep state', though none of the resulting court cases have so far been able to name the real culprits.³⁶

At crucial moments, the first AKP government did not yield to such pressures or attempt to obstruct this process of societal introspection. Even if it did not so much lead the process, the ruling party often facilitated it by striking a reconciliatory rather than confrontational tone in domestic politics and carefully managing the frequently clashing expectations of its diverse socio-political constituents. Perhaps most importantly, during these years the party was also engaged in a relatively pluralistic process of self-critique, which allowed it to produce dynamic and relevant responses to the changing and at times conflicting demands of its various constituencies. This dynamism stood in stark contrast with the stagnant worldview and insipid politics of the AKP's Kemalist rivals, especially the main opposition Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), whose hierarchical leadership had still subscribed to a Cold War-era existential threat rhetoric and readily appealed to the institutional powers of the military and the Kemalist judiciary in the face of the complex socio-political challenges facing Turkey at the beginning of the 21st century.

This dynamic and reconciliatory approach also characterised the AKP's foreign policy, which was steered in these years by Abdullah Gül, a soft spoken and affable politician who as prime minister (2002 – 2003) and foreign minister (2003 – 2007) worked to strengthen Turkey's diplomatic ties with its western and regional counterparts. Like in its domestic politics, the EU and the accession process featured prominently in Turkey's foreign politics during this period. In 2004, for example, in a bold attempt to resolve the frozen conflict in Cyprus, which remains one of the key obstacles to Turkey's European integration, the AKP government supported the Annan Plan for the reunification of the island, despite stiff resistance from the still influential

³⁵ Titled 'Ottoman Era Armenians During the Collapse of the Empire: Intellectual Responsibility and Democratic Problems', the conference was first planned to take place at the Bosphorus University between May 25-27, but was delayed due to public and political pressures and the last minute judicial intervention. It was finally held at Bilgi University on 24 September 2005.

³⁶ There is overwhelming evidence to implicate an underground network of ultra-nationalist security sector actors and their civilian accomplices in organising and carrying out these murders. In 2011, one of these cases, the murder of Protestant missionaries in Malatya (also known as Zirve Publishing House massacre), was merged with a major investigation and court case, known as 'Ergenekon', into allegations of coup plotting against the AKP government.

Kemalist establishment. When put to referendum the plan was supported by a majority of Turkish Cypriots, but rejected by Greek Cypriots, which led to its failure and the subsequent admission of Cyprus into the EU as a divided nation. The EU's influence over Turkey's domestic and foreign politics peaked with the initiation of formal membership negotiations in 2005, from which point onwards it has gradually waned parallel to the slowing momentum of the accession process.

The AKP government also worked to maintain Turkey's close strategic ties with Israel and the United States, on the basis of security cooperation within the framework of the Bush administration's "global war on terror". As part of this framework, soon after the 11 September 2001 attacks and the US-led occupation of Afghanistan, Turkey provided logistical and military support to Washington. Neo-conservative strategists and think tanks in turn began promoting Turkey as the 'moderate' antidote to Islamic fundamentalism; they were soon joined by a chorus of influential foreign policy pundits within the mainstream US media.³⁷ The idea was officially articulated as part of the "Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative", publicised by the US government as a project of democracy promotion and adopted at the G8 Sea Island summit in June 2004.³⁸ At a NATO conference in Istanbul shortly after that summit, President Bush praised Turkey for setting an example of "how to be a Muslim country which embraces democracy, rule of law and freedom" and recommended it as a model for the Middle East.³⁹ Interestingly, the idea of Turkey as a model initially came from the West.

The notion of Turkey serving as a Muslim model to the Middle East was vocally rejected by the staunchly secular military-bureaucratic establishment, which regarded Washington's neo-conservative support for the Islamist-rooted AKP as an imperialist ploy to weaken the Kemalist regime. For its part, mindful of its tenuous grip at the reigns of the state and the growing popular anger at the Bush administration following its 2003 occupation of Iraq, the AKP government repeatedly expressed its unease with the terms 'model' and 'moderate Islam'. But the basic argument struck a chord with the party's leading figures and overlapped with Davutoğlu's (then

³⁷ For example, upon a perfunctory placement of the country – and himself – at Samuel Huntington's civilisational fault line ("There is nothing like standing at this stunning intersection of Europe and Asia to think about the clash of civilizations – and how we might avoid it"), Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* described Turkey as a "free society [...] which has always embraced religious pluralism" and suggested that the "moderate branch of Turkish Islam" was the "real Islam". He then went on to argue: "if we want to help moderates win the war of ideas within the Muslim world, we must help strengthen Turkey as a model of democracy, modernism, moderation and Islam all working together." Thomas Friedman, 'War of Ideas, Part 2', *New York Times*, 11 January 2004.

³⁸ "From an idea of partnership to a growing reality, the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative represents genuine co-operation between the G8 and European nations and the governments, business and civil society of the region, in order to strengthen freedom, democracy and prosperity for all [...] Governments and people of the region have expressed their wish to see democracy and freedoms expanded." US Department of State Archive 2005 – 2009, <http://bmena.state.gov>

³⁹ *Hürriyet*, 28 June 2004. Quoted in Meliha B. Altunışık, 'The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East,' *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 27(1-2), Winter-Spring 2005, p. 46. Also see Hüseyin Bağcı and Şaban Kardaş, 'Post-September 11 Impact: The Strategic Importance of Turkey Revisited', in İdris Bal (ed), *Turkish Foreign Policy in Post Cold War Era* (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker, 2004), pp. 429-432.

advisor to Foreign Minister Gül) doctrine of ‘strategic depth’, to which we will come back. In a speech titled “Conservative Democracy and the Globalization of Freedom” at the American Enterprise Institute in January 2004, Erdoğan laid out this vision with the following words:

Turkey in its region and especially in the Middle East will be a guide in overcoming instability, a driving force for economic development, and a reliable partner in ensuring security [...] I do not claim, of course, that Turkey’s experience is a model that can be implemented identically in all other Muslim societies. However, the Turkish experience does have a substance which can serve as a source of inspiration for other Muslim societies, other Muslim peoples.⁴⁰

The American occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the Turkish parliament’s refusal to allow US troops the use of its territory as a launching base for the invasion set in motion events that in due course dampened the US foreign policy establishment’s enthusiasm for showcasing Turkey as a moderate Islamist model in the region.⁴¹ The occupation created tensions between the Turkish government and the US foreign policy establishment that were not fully resolved until the Arab uprisings in 2011, even as the two governments took steps to mend fences from late 2007 onwards.⁴² In June 2004, the PKK ended its five-year ceasefire, resuming cross-border attacks into Turkey from its bases in northern Iraq. As casualties mounted, the Turkish government and media started to blame the US and its cooperation with the Iraqi Kurds for the resurgent violence.⁴³ Anti-American sentiments were stoked in Turkish public opinion, represented in popular novels and blockbuster movies depicting Turkish patriots fighting American (and Israeli) imperialists, much to the ire of US, and later Israeli officials.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ M. Hakan Yavuz (ed), *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Party* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), Appendix 1, p. 337.

⁴¹ Ironically, the parliament’s decision, which reflected the overwhelming public opposition to the war in the country, was a remarkable victory for Turkish democracy in the face of intense pressure by the British and American governments, who had manipulated and ignored the will of their own publics to go to war. Unlike in the First Gulf War in 1991, the senior cadre of the Turkish military was in favour of supporting the US operation, thinking that it would give Turkey more control over post-Saddam Iraq. This view was also shared by Erdoğan, who was still banned from active politics at the time, while then Prime Minister Gül and Speaker of the Parliament Bülent Arınç were more reluctant. When put to vote in parliament on 1 March 2003, a (mostly Kurdish) dissident minority of AKP deputies sided with MPs from the opposition CHP against the proposal, denying the US a northern front on Iraq and effectively leaving Turkey outside the war. For a detailed account of this period by a veteran Ankara journalist, see Fikret Bila, *Sivil Darbe Girişimi ve Ankara’da Irak Savaşları* (Ankara: Ümit, 2003), pp. 144 – 244.

⁴² A Bush - Erdoğan meeting at the White House in October 2007 produced an agreement on increased security cooperation between the two governments and intelligence sharing over PKK activities in northern Iraq.

⁴³ As exacerbated by events such as the humiliating arrest of a group of Turkish intelligence officers in northern Iraq by US forces. See David Wastell, ‘Turkey furious as US seizes its troops in Iraq’, *Telegraph*, 6 July 2003.

⁴⁴ On a visit to Turkey in February 2005, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith expressed the Bush administration’s discontent with the popular anti-American rhetoric and called for the Turkish government to put an end to it. See Lerna K. Yanik, ‘Valley of the Wolves-Iraq: Anti-Geopolitics Alla Turca’, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 2(1), 2009, pp. 2 – 18. For the reaction to Feith’s visit inside the AKP circles, see Erhan Başyurt, ‘What a Calamitous Report’, *Today’s Zaman*, 26 February 2005. For a critical analysis of the popular expressions of anti-Americanism, see Lerna K. Yanik, ‘Valley of the Wolves-Iraq: Anti-Geopolitics Alla Turca’, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 2(1), 2009, pp. 2 – 18.

Finally, the US occupation of Iraq encouraged the AKP government to step up efforts to improve ties with the Assad regime and the Islamic Republic of Iran with whom Turkey's relations had been characterised by rivalry, tensions and distrust during the 1990s and Ankara's strong strategic partnership with the US and Israel.⁴⁵ The three countries were brought together by an increasingly shared threat perception emanating from the prospect of a prolonged civil war, the growing threat of Sunni extremism,⁴⁶ a disintegrating central state in Baghdad and the rise of an independent Kurdish entity in northern Iraq - a fear that Turkey particularly shared with Iran, which is also home to a sizeable and autonomy-seeking Kurdish minority. The extensive security cooperation agreement signed by the Erdoğan and Khatami governments in 2004 constituted an important milestone, which increased intelligence sharing and joint military operations against Kurdish militants along their countries' porous border.⁴⁷

Autonomisation and the pursuit of 'strategic depth' (2007 – 2011)

Turkey's 'liberal moment' came to a gradual halt from the mid-2000s onwards. While its EU accession process and its associated reforms stagnated, the resurgence of armed conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK pushed securitisation back to the top of the government's political agenda. Largely outside the Turkish government's control, these developments were nevertheless compounded by changing socio-political dynamics within Turkey.

As previously noted, the end of the PKK's ceasefire was in part a consequence of the shifting geopolitical dynamics following the US occupation of Iraq, namely the growing momentum for Kurdish autonomy and an enlarged manoeuvring space for Kurdish militants along the Turkish border in northern Iraq. The downturn in the EU – Turkish relations, meanwhile, was closely related to the post 9/11 rise of Islamophobia in many European countries.⁴⁸ Coupled with the

⁴⁵ For Turkey's relations with Iran during the 1980s and 90s, see Ünal Gündoğan, 'Islamist Iran and Turkey, 1979-1989: State Pragmatism and Ideological Influences', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 7(1), March 2003; and Robert Olson, *Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2004).

⁴⁶ Al-Qaeda affiliated or inspired jihadist groups posed a security threat to all three countries: to Iran and the Syrian regime, fuelled by sectarian divisions that resurfaced violently in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein, and to Turkey, because of its government's continued alliance the US, the UK and Israel. In November 2003, jihadist cells carried out four bomb attacks targeting HSBC offices, the British Consulate and two synagogues in Istanbul, leaving 67 people dead and more than 700 wounded. The attacks led to increased intelligence cooperation between the AKP government and the governments of both Israel and Syria. 'Shalom says attacks prove terror is at work everywhere', *Haaretz*, 16 November 2003; 'Syria expels Turkey bomb suspects', *BBC News*, 30 November 2003.

⁴⁷ For Turkey's Iran policy under the AKP government, see Karabekir Akkoyunlu, 'Turkey's Iranian Conundrum: A Delicate Balancing Act' in Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu, Mehmet Karlı (eds) *Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the Justice and Development Party* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2012).

⁴⁸ The revelation that many of the key operatives of the September 11 attacks were based in Hamburg (the so-called 'Hamburg Cell') and the murders of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and director Theo van Gogh were key events that caused a swelling of public anger against all Muslims in countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, France and Germany. Although none of the perpetrators of these attacks were Turks, the existence of a large Turkish

popular backlash within Europe against what many regarded as a union pushed too far and too deep by out-of-touch ‘Eurocrats’, public perceptions of Turkey’s accession prospects took on an explicitly alarmist and unaccommodating turn. They found representation at the highest level of European decision making with the election of ‘Turcosceptic’ politicians, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, as the chancellor and president of Germany and France. These developments exacerbated – and were in turn exacerbated by – a general sense of disillusionment within Turkey eventually leading to the AKP government’s turn towards a more confrontational style of politics first at home and then, increasingly, abroad.

The external causes leading to the loss of the EU ‘anchor’ and the re-securitisation of the Kurdish issue only partly explain this confrontational turn, which is also connected to the changing power relations within Turkey. Between 2007 and 2011, riding on strong economic growth seemingly unaffected by the economic crisis in the West and buoyed by successive election victories, the AKP government pursued its efforts to challenge the socio-political hegemony of the Kemalist guardians.⁴⁹ In 2007, then foreign minister Abdullah Gül became Turkey’s first president with a background in Islamist politics despite secularist mass rallies, a military ultimatum and attempts by the Constitutional Court and the CHP to obstruct the parliamentary election process.⁵⁰ Having barely escaped closure by the Constitutional Court for ‘anti-secular activities’ in 2008, the ruling party put its political weight behind two critical court cases known as ‘Ergenekon’ and ‘Balyoz’, launched in 2007 and 2010 respectively, into allegations of coup attempts by suspected members of the ‘deep state’ between 2003 and 2004. The Ergenekon and Balyoz investigations saw the arrest and lengthy detention of hundreds of high and mid-level military officers (including a former chief of staff of the armed forces, İlker Başbuğ) along with journalists, academics and civil society activists.⁵¹ Finally judicial reforms launched after the September 2010 constitutional referendum expanded the civilian courts’ ability to try military officers and granted the legislative greater power over the appointment of judges in civilian courts.

But as Turkey’s civilian leaders gradually found themselves in charge of the institutions once controlled by the Kemalist guardians, their democratising zeal diminished in almost equal measure and their rhetoric and policies started to resemble a socially conservative version of their patrimonial secular predecessors. In turn, this has led to a gradual split in the liberal-

community in Europe and Turkey’s candidacy for EU membership, put Turks (and Turkey) at the receiving end of this anger.

⁴⁹ After its 2007 victory, the AKP won a third term in 2011 securing 51% of the vote, while Turkey’s GDP grew by 9.2% and 8.5% in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Between 2007 and 2011, the GDP growth was within an impressive 5 – 8% bracket. ‘Turkish Economy’, Undersecretariat of Treasury, 14 May 2012, http://www.treasury.gov.tr/irj/go/km/docs/documents/Treasury%20Web/Reports/Sunumlar/Ekonomi_Sunumu_ENG_0_.pdf

⁵⁰ William M. Hale and Ergun Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 89 – 92.

⁵¹ Kerem Öktem, *Angry Nation: Turkey since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2011)

conservative coalition which the AKP had carefully nurtured during its earlier years in government. Even during those years, it was mainly the liberal civil society, with the active encouragement of a still influential EU, that pushed the limits and set the tone of public discussion in Turkey. The political leadership followed, albeit hesitantly and often from a safe distance. This was to be expected: the ruling party did not primarily represent the interests of Turkey's liberal intelligentsia. Its core and most populous electorate was (and remains) the conservative Sunni constituencies originally from the Anatolian heartland, with their appetite for economic growth and free enterprise, as well as a shared goal with the liberals in dismantling the system of military-bureaucratic guardianship, under which they suffered socio-political and economic discrimination.⁵²

That said, not unlike the Kemalists, the conservative Sunni political tradition also embodies entrenched nationalist and patriarchal dispositions shared by both mainstream strands of Turkish political Islam, i.e. the ideological anti-westernism of the National View (*Milli Görüş*) movement, led by late Necmettin Erbakan and last represented in parliament by the Welfare Party, and the pragmatic, business oriented, pro-US strand associated with the movement of the charismatic religious scholar Fethullah Gülen. Though not uniform and unchanging, these tendencies have time and again clashed with liberal and social democratic positions on such key issues as the limits of the state's legitimate authority, the role of women in society, or the acceptance of socio-political responsibility over the state's past crimes.⁵³ With the EU losing its sway over Turkey's political agenda and the gradual demise of the Kemalists during the second half of the 2000s, this socially conservative, patriarchal and nationalistic tendency became more visible in the AKP's domestic politics.⁵⁴

Signs of resurgent authoritarianism in politics included intensifying government pressure on the media, giving rise to a culture of self-censorship in the editorial boards of prominent media

⁵² Except during the post-1980 coup period in Turkey, when the US-backed military junta, in its effort to marginalise a wide spectrum of leftist movements, supported a socially conservative political agenda along with market liberalisation reforms. This took place as part of a wider strategy during the 1980s by the US-led security establishment to recruit Sunni Islamist movements as an ally against communists. Parallel initiatives include the US-Saudi-Pakistani alliance with the Afghan mujahedeen against Soviet occupation, and Israel's role in encouraging the growth of Hamas in an attempt to divide the Palestinian armed struggle and weaken secular Fatah. (See Andrew Higgins, 'How Israel Helped Spawn Hamas', *Wall Street Journal*, 24 January 2009). But with the demise of the Left and the rise of Islamist parties in the 1990s, the Kemalist guardians returned to framing political Islam as a fundamental threat to the regime, culminating in the military coup of February 1997.

⁵³ One example is the debate over the criminalisation of adultery, which the AKP flirted with during 2005 but backtracked when faced with a united opposition by the EU, the liberals and the Kemalists. In these early years, the ruling party would often point to the institutional and political constraints imposed by the EU and the military-bureaucratic establishment to justify to their conservative constituents why they did not push a more Islamic social agenda.

⁵⁴ Prime Minister Erdoğan's response in 2008 to a public apology campaign from Armenians for the crimes perpetrated in the past and still denied, organised by prominent liberal intellectuals, clearly demonstrates this polarisation: "They (the liberals) must have committed genocide that they feel the need to apologise. The Republic of Turkey has no such problem. If there is such a crime, its perpetrators are free to apologise. But neither I, nor my country, nor my nation have such a problem." (Markar Esayan, 'Ben de özür dilerim', *Taraf*, 18 December 2008).

conglomerates and independent newspapers,⁵⁵ a restrictive internet legislation designed to force users to subscribe to filters blocking websites deemed socially, morally or politically inappropriate by the government, and a controversial 2006 amendment to the Anti-Terrorism law that significantly broadened the definition of terrorism, expanded the authority and legal immunity of the police force and equipped special police units with military grade weapons.⁵⁶ In 2009, only a year after it had barely escaped a similar fate, the government did little to resist the Constitutional Court's decision to outlaw the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (Demokrat Toplum Partisi, DTP) and the subsequent trial of some of its deputies on the basis of the Anti-Terrorism legislation.

Despite these disconcerting developments, between 2007 and late 2010, civil society organisations and the liberal intelligentsia could still exert pressure on the AKP government, at times forcing it to revise its policies.⁵⁷ Although shrinking, there were remaining avenues of cooperation between liberals and social conservatives during this period, particularly with respect to the AKP's ongoing struggle to dismantle the Kemalist tutelary system. The liberal intelligentsia also supported the government's so-called Kurdish, Armenian and Alevi initiatives launched during 2009 – i.e. direct talks with the PKK leadership to negotiate a permanent peace settlement, the opening of borders and re-establishing of diplomatic ties with the Republic of Armenia, and the 'opening' towards Alevis meant to address the grievances of the country's largest religious minority and the state's long standing assimilationist policies against them.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ One widely reported case was the high profile legal conflict between the AKP government and the Doğan media conglomerate in 2009, in which tax authorities imposed a record fine on the media giant in a move that the Doğan Group argued was in response to its newspapers' critical portrayal of the AKP government. Although the AKP certainly appeared to be motivated by an opportunistic and revanchist instinct, we should note that painting Doğan as a champion of freedom of expression in Turkey is problematic given their extensive business interests beyond media and the fact that their newspapers have notoriously manipulated the political agenda in the past. The sides settled their dispute in 2010 in the course of which an editorial and staff re-arrangement took place in a number of Doğan-owned newspapers.

⁵⁶ Between 2006 and 2010, hundreds of Kurdish children aged between 12 and 15 were imprisoned as a result of this legislation. Most of them had participated in anti-government protests, shouting slogans and throwing stones at security officers. Biriz Berksoy, 'The Police Organisation' in *Almanac Turkey 2006 - 2008: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, pp. 193 – 195.

⁵⁷ Sustained pressure by rights groups, civil society organisations and rights groups forced the government to water down the internet legislation, which it finally passed into law in 2011. However, thousands of websites still remain banned in Turkey. The AKP also revised the Anti-Terrorism legislation in 2010 so that children and adults would not be treated in the same way by the law. These revisions came on the heels of a growing public outcry and a dogged civil society campaign.

⁵⁸ Relations with Armenia have been frozen since that country's 1993 conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave and further strained over Turkey's refusal to recognise the mass killing of Ottoman Armenians during WWI as genocide. Kurdish and Turkish Alevi communities have faced persecution, systematic suppression and marginalisation since Sunni orthodoxy became institutionalised within the Ottoman state in the 16th century. In the republican era, many Alevis supported secular leftist movements and even the CHP, despite having also been persecuted by the Kemalists when resisting the state's assimilationist policies (notably, the massacres of Kurdish Alevis of Dersim province in 1937 – 38). These policies have persisted under subsequent governments. Despite claims to secularism during the republican era, the state-funded Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has continued to exclusively uphold and promote the Hanefi school of Sunni Islam as the unofficial religion of the state and the ruling elite at the expense of other religions and sects. See 'Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders', *International Crisis Group*, Europe Report No.199, 14 April 2009; 'Turkey and the Kurds: Peace Time?',

There was some encouraging early progress.⁵⁹ But by 2011 the Kurdish and the Armenian initiatives had largely collapsed as a result of a series of political miscalculations, personality clashes, communication errors, as well as a fear of nationalist backlash on the part of the Turkish government and its Kurdish and Armenian counterparts.⁶⁰ The Alevi opening was also phased out quietly around the same time, with little to show in the way of institutional reform.⁶¹ Without a doubt, a breakthrough in any of these bold initiatives would have provided a major boost for efforts within Turkey to face the country's historic traumas and heal its deep running socio-political wounds. It would also have allowed its decision makers to tackle regional challenges exacerbated by the outbreak of the Arab uprisings with better grounded self-confidence. Instead, having acted largely against the will of the nationalist and conservative Sunni segments of the society, and seeing no tangible return on its investments, the AKP government eventually backtracked and went on to adopt a populist and confrontational rhetoric that appealed to the preferences of these two sizeable and partly overlapping constituents.

It is against such a backdrop of 'failed openings' that Turkish foreign policy flourished during this period, a period which we can safely characterise as Davutoğlu's apogee. While his influence within the foreign ministry continued to grow following the election of Abdullah Gül to the presidency, Davutoğlu's flagship doctrine of 'strategic depth' truly came to replace Ankara's traditional reactive approach when he became foreign minister in 2009. Borrowed from military doctrine to indicate the extent to which a country or territory's vulnerability can be reduced beyond the strict defence of its boundaries, the term has come to take on a broader politico-

Economist, 27 August 2009; Kıvanç Ulusoy, 'The "Democratic Opening" in Turkey: A Historical/Comparative Perspective', *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2010, pp. 125- 142.

⁵⁹ In 2009, the state broadcaster launched its first ever Kurdish-language TV channel, TRT 6. Representatives of the PKK and the Turkish state (led by the undersecretary of the National Intelligence Organisation, Hakan Fidan) held several secret meetings in the Norwegian capital Oslo and had tentatively agreed upon a draft settlement plan in the summer of 2010. Mutual state visits by Turkish and Armenian presidents in 2008 had already set the stage for the Armenian initiative. The two governments signed a protocol in Zurich in October 2009. In September 2010, as a symbolic sign of contested meanings, the Turkish government allowed an annual mass to be held at a controversially restored medieval Armenian church in Turkey's Van province.

⁶⁰ In the Kurdish initiative, the personality clash largely occurred among the senior cadres of the PKK. But both sides failed in managing the expectations of their respective constituencies, admittedly a very difficult task in a highly emotive and deeply entrenched conflict. In the Armenian case, the government, in particular Prime Minister Erdoğan, ultimately bowed down to pressure by nationalists at home and Azerbaijan abroad. The Azeri regime successfully exploited its kinship ties with Turkey, and Turkey's reliance on Azeri gas, to extract an unequivocal guarantee from Turkey that it would not normalise relations with Armenia until the frozen conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh was resolved. That guarantee, spelled out by the Turkish leader during a visit to Baku against the advice of Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, caused a stir within the AKP and effectively spelled the end of the Armenian initiative. See Nigar Göksel, 'Turkey and Armenia Post-Protocols: Back to Square One?', *TESEV Foreign Policy Programme*, November 2012.

⁶¹ The government set up an 'Alevi workshop' and invited prominent figures from the Alevi community to take part in a constructive dialogue with the state. Prime Minister Erdoğan became the first Turkish prime minister to visit an Alevi 'cemevi' (place of congregation and prayer) and the first ever Sunni leader to visit Imam Ali's shrine in Najaf, Iraq. His public apology for the Dersim massacres of 1937 – 38 was also of symbolic importance, even if there was a subtext of highlighting the CHP's responsibility in it. However, marred by mutual distrust and a lack of sincere intent, the workshop failed to produce any meaningful framework for institutional reform and the state's refusal to officially recognise Alevism as a minority religion persisted.

diplomatic understanding – i.e. “the ability of a state to reduce threats by a combination of strategies which includes improving relations with neighbors to try and bring the possibility of an armed conflict to zero and thereby creating space for economic development and projection”.⁶² As summarised by Pakistani General Durrani:

Strategic depth, within and without, is of course the need of every country. ‘Friendly neighbourhood’, ‘near abroad’, and buffers are some of the more familiar variants. Of course, this is not merely a spatial concept (Israel has it in the US), it is also economic, political (alliance building), and is best provided by unity within.⁶³

Every country it may be, but it is fair to say that contemporary Turkey has recently most spectacularly applied a full blown version of the doctrine to its foreign policy. For Davutoğlu, his country definitely benefits from a geographical and historical advantage on this count, but building on such potential was to involve balancing Turkey’s dependence on the West through the nurturing of multiple alternative alliances and in the process maintaining a Turkish-centric balance of power in its region.⁶⁴ This philosophy he summarised through the simple motto of ‘zero problems with neighbours.’

During the second half of the decade, ‘zero problems’ first meant expanding existing zones of influence and creating new ones by mediating conflicts (including those that involved Turkey) in such diverse disputes as between the Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia or between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the Middle East, the AKP government sought to broker agreements between Syria and Israel, Hamas and Fatah (to the ire of the Mubarak regime) as well as between the US and Iran over the latter’s nuclear programme. In addition, Turkey hoped to acquire ‘strategic indispensability’ in the neighbourhood through an aggressive export-driven trade policy especially with Syria, Iraq, Iran and Russia, which in turn facilitated cooperation on security and energy issues with these countries.⁶⁵

In sum, under Davutoğlu’s leadership, the Turkish foreign ministry entered into a period of unprecedented activism and became an institution where state policy was made rather than

⁶² Ejaz Haider, ‘Pakistan needs strategic depth’, *The Express Tribune*, 7 October 2011.

⁶³ Lt-Gen (r) Asad Durrani, ‘Strategic depth — revisited’, *The Express Tribune*, 19 October 2011. In the military world, the term generally refers “a state’s ability to deal with an offensive through elastic, multi-layered defence, absorb the initial thrust, stress the enemy forces and inflict attrition on it through multiple counter-strikes that would lead to the offensive petering out and falling short of its objectives. At a basic level it is a rather simple calculation of distances between the frontlines and/or any forward battle sectors and a state’s strategic assets: industrial areas, key urban and population centres, communications lines, military production centres, in effect the state’s heartlands or, to put it another way, all the soft and hardware whose agglomeration makes a state viable. For politico-military planners this becomes a central precept. How vulnerable such assets are and what strategy must be adopted to ensure that a state can absorb a methodical offensive and still be able to respond to and defeat an adversary.” Haider, 2011.

⁶⁴ See Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2000).

⁶⁵ See ‘Strategic Plan 2010 – 2014’, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, http://www.enerji.gov.tr/yayinlar_raporlar_EN/ETKB_2010_2014_Stratejik_Planı_EN.pdf

merely received from the top brass and transmitted abroad.⁶⁶ In an astonishingly short time, this new approach led to Turkey's emergence as an ambitious and pro-active medium power bent on increasing its geopolitical autonomy as a proactive response to the growing multi-polarity of the post-Cold War order. And this new role seemed generally welcome as Turkey increasingly made itself strategically indispensable to a diverse group of actors, often with clashing interests.

In Iraq, the Turkish government not only enjoyed cordial relations with the central government in Baghdad, but also increasingly with the autonomous Kurdish administration (Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG) in the north, despite the continued PKK presence and Turkish military operations in the mountainous border region, and differences over the legal status of the multi-ethnic oil-rich city of Kirkuk. President Gül's 2009 visit to Baghdad was the first for a Turkish head of state in 33 years, and Prime Minister Erdoğan's trip to Arbil, the seat of the KRG, and the Shia holy city of Najaf in early 2011 were ground breaking.⁶⁷ The impact of trade and energy cooperation on bilateral relations has been nowhere more visible than in Turkey's ties with the KRG, which flourished as Turkish companies came to account for an overwhelming majority of the investment in the region and as the AKP government worked to attract KRG's abundant oil and gas resources.⁶⁸

But it was Syria that came to be seen as the 'success story' of Davutoğlu's 'zero problems' policy, before its dramatic unravelling. In just over a decade, Turkish – Syrian ties moved from the brink of war and constant tensions to an arrangement where visa and customs restrictions were lifted, trade relations strengthened, cordial state visits became increasingly frequent and joint military exercises could be carried out. In 2010, President Assad described the newfound friendship with Turkey as a "reality, not a defensive policy", and added:

The amount of mutual trade is in our interests and those of Turkish businessmen. Families' relations on the border were difficult in the past; now there is much movement. The 700 km long border used to be minefields, now we are working on joint projects on either side. This is in addition to our role in dialogue for the sake of Iraq and even Lebanon. This has helped calm many issues which used to be deteriorating.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ The typical image from this period is that of a large delegation of ministry bureaucrats and advisors accompanied by dozens, sometimes hundreds of businesspeople arriving in an African or Latin American city to inaugurate a new consulate, establish direct flights to Istanbul via Turkish Airlines and sign numerous trade and energy cooperation agreements.

⁶⁷ In Najaf, Erdoğan met with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the most prominent Shia *marja* in Iraq, where the two were said to discuss the growing sectarian divisions at the time playing out in Bahrain. 'Erdoğan given hero's welcome in streets of Arbil, Najaf', *Today's Zaman*, 30 March 2011.

⁶⁸ See Matthew J. Bryza, 'Turkey's Dramatic Shift Toward Iraqi Kurdistan: Politics Before Peace Pipelines' *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 10 February 2012.

⁶⁹ Bashar al-Assad, Interview, TRT7, www.syrianews.net (Arabic), quoted in Reem Abou-el-Fadl, 'Arab Perceptions of Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy: Cautious Engagement and the Question of Independence', p. 241.

The rapprochement with Syria also provided a boost to Turkey's strengthening ties with Iran, which also flourished on the basis of trade, energy and security cooperation.⁷⁰ Between 2002 and 2008, bilateral trade rose from \$1.3 billion to \$10 billion, and stood near \$20 billion in 2011, despite the imposition of UN sanctions on Iran in June 2010. Iran became resource-poor Turkey's second largest provider of natural gas after Russia, while Turkish companies – often connected through Islamic business networks - committed to investing in Iran's ailing energy infrastructure, only to be stopped by the expanding international sanctions regime. Turkey also viewed Iran's participation as crucial for the realisation of the Nabucco pipeline project, which envisioned carrying Caspian gas to Europe via Turkey, bypassing Russia.⁷¹ At the same time, security cooperation continued to increase based on the 2004 agreement. It was during this period that the AKP government's Iranian policy came to be increasingly portrayed within western foreign policy circles as a 'litmus test' of Turkey's commitment to the US-led western security alliance.⁷² In 2007, in a testimony before the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Soner Çağaptay, a director at the neo-conservative Washington Institute for Near East Policy, quipped:

It is ironic that every time the U.S. State Department says the right things on how we are together with Turks in fighting the PKK and we will deliver security, promising the right things, that same day the Iranians bomb PKK camps. So this is how you read the news in the Turkish press: front page, big headlines, 'Iranians Have Bombed PKK Camps' -12th page, one column, 'The U.S. Has Said They'll Support against the PKK.' In this regard Iranians walk the walk and they make it look as if the Americans are only talking the talk. And that's a huge problem.⁷³

Motivated by these developments, the AKP government turned a blind eye to the heavy handed crackdown on anti-government demonstrations in Iran following its disputed presidential election in 2009. It also adopted a conciliatory tone on the nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, emphasising the country's right to uranium enrichment for civilian purposes. In May 2010, shortly before the sanctions vote at the UN Security Council, Turkey and Brazil got Iran to agree to a uranium swap deal, based on the proposal set forth by the P5+1 (US, Britain, France, Russia, China + Germany) in Geneva the previous year. Hailed as a breakthrough by Turkish and Brazilian diplomats, the agreement caught western leaders off guard and was

⁷⁰ See Karabekir Akkoyunlu, 'Turkey's Iranian Conundrum: A Delicate Balancing Act', pp. 259 – 280.

⁷¹ In 2007, the Turkish and Iranian governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the construction of a natural gas pipeline between the two countries that would serve as an important supply point for the Nabucco pipeline project. Also as part of the Memorandum, the Turkish state-owned energy company TPAO was tasked with investing up to USD 3.5 billion to develop Iran's South Pars gas field. 'TPAO goes solo with \$3.5 bn Pars spend', *Upstream Online*, 3 October 2007, <http://www.upstreamonline.com/live/article141710.ece>

⁷² F. Stephen Larrabee, 'Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, 86 (4), 2007, pp. 103 – 114.

⁷³ Quoted in Daphne McCurdy, 'Turkish – Iranian Relations: When Opposites Attract', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2008, p. 96.

eventually ignored as a ‘delaying tactic’ on the part of the Iranian regime.⁷⁴ As a display of its newfound autonomy and self-confidence, Turkey, a non-permanent member of the Security Council at the time, voted against resolution 1929 imposing international sanctions on the Islamic Republic; the only country to do so besides Brazil. This was probably a lost opportunity on both sides to harness Turkey’s zero problems strategy for the benefit of deflating the world’s nagging problems, as the Iranian nuclear question certainly is.

We should note that during this period, Turkish foreign policy was also affected by and gradually came to reflect the changing tone of politics and power relations inside the country. At various points, the increasingly confrontational rhetoric of a visibly self-assured ruling party, its more palpable Islamic bias and the seemingly unrelenting ambition of Prime Minister Erdoğan to take all matters, domestic and foreign, into his own hands, challenged Davutoğlu’s more subtle and process-driven method. The remarkable fallout between the AKP and the Israeli government after 2009 in part reflected these dynamics. In January of that year, Erdoğan stormed out of the World Economic Forum in Davos after strongly rebuking Israel’s president, Shimon Peres, for the Israeli military’s brutal three-week operation on the Gaza Strip. At the time Erdoğan was personally involved in conducting indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel, and Turkish officials claim they were on the brink of a major breakthrough on the eve of the Israeli offensive, which took them by surprise and prompted the AKP government to suspend its mediation efforts.⁷⁵

The Turkish premier’s outburst, which turned him into an instant hero at home as well across many Middle Eastern countries, was not premeditated and heralded a new arrangement whereby time and again the foreign ministry would have to react and reshape policy on the basis of Erdoğan’s unpredictable actions, with varying outcomes. In the case of Israel, the ‘Davos moment’ boosted the AKP’s standing in Turkey, in the region and possibly further afield, reflecting the widespread frustration with the western and ‘moderate’ regional governments’ subdued response in the face of what was widely perceived as a devastating assault on an already besieged population. In Baku, Erdoğan personally conceded to Azeri demands to make normalisation of Turkey’s ties with Armenia conditional on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, thus effectively spelling the end of the AKP’s Armenian opening.

In this context, it is of little surprise that the Islamic bias in Turkish foreign policy, a dimension already present in Davutoğlu’s worldview albeit usually wrapped in relatively subtle references to culture and history, became more pronounced. In some cases, this could bolster Turkey’s ‘soft power’ and ability to operate in terrains where western actors lacked the necessary means, ties or

⁷⁴ Only two days before, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had dismissed the duo’s attempts as futile. David E. Sanger and Michael Slackman, ‘U.S. Is Skeptical on Iranian Deal for Nuclear Fuel’, *New York Times*, 17 May 2010.

⁷⁵ Carsten Wieland, ‘The Syria-Israel talks: old themes, new setting’, *OpenDemocracy*, 29 May 2008, Nicholas Kimbrell, ‘Turkey shelves mediation between Syria, Israel over Gaza’, *The Daily Star (Lebanon)*, 1 January 2009; and Mustafa Kibaroglu, ‘Will the smoke of Gaza cloud Turkish – Israeli relations?’, *Bitterlemons International*, 3(7), 22 January 2009.

intentions to be as effective, as demonstrated in the well-organised and high profile campaign to extend humanitarian assistance to draught and conflict-ridden Somalia in 2011.⁷⁶ At other times, however, Turkish credibility could be seriously affected. Such was the case when Prime Minister Erdoğan labelled the plight of China's Uighur Turks under Beijing's assimilationist policies as 'genocide', or supported Sudan's President Omar al-Bashar, on grounds that "Muslims cannot commit genocide". The critical point was not that such positions might offend the West and its modes of labelling and ascriptions, but that they brought under critical light Turkey's own limitations in dealing with its past crimes against the Armenians, Kurds and other minorities and its deteriorating human rights record.

Perceptions of a religious bias also limited the international appeal and the impact of the AKP's criticism of Israeli policies against Palestinians. Nevertheless, Turkey's ties with Israel further deteriorated in 2010. Anecdotal but tellingly, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon publicly humiliated Turkey's ambassador at a meeting in Jerusalem by deliberately seating him on a lower chair and making a note of this to TV crews covering the event.⁷⁷ In May 2010, a Turkey-based humanitarian aid flotilla sailing towards the blockaded Gaza Strip was raided by Israeli commandos in international waters, killing nine Turkish citizens (including one American national). In 2011, the two countries came close to another naval confrontation when Turkey sent warships to defy an oil drilling agreement between Israel and the Cypriot government around the divided island.⁷⁸ Coupled with the AKP's warming ties with countries like Iran, Syria and Sudan, this deterioration fuelled an alarmist discourse about Turkey's shifting axis from the West towards an Eastern/Islamic alliance and a blame game across the Atlantic about who was responsible for this shift: then US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates pointed the finger at the European Union for pushing away Turkey by slamming the door on its membership aspirations.⁷⁹ Jose Manuel Barroso, the head of the European Commission, retorted that US policies under George W. Bush were chiefly to blame.⁸⁰

Echoing Gates, the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who had previously praised the AKP's "moderate branch of Islam", dropped the word 'moderate' and argued that the country's "Islamist government" was focused "not on joining the European Union but the Arab League – no, scratch that, on joining the Hamas-Hezbollah-Iran resistance front against Israel." Turkey, he suggested, was no longer "mediating between the East and West", but rather had become a "spokesperson for the most regressive elements in the East."⁸¹ Harold Rhode, a fellow

⁷⁶ Pinar Akpınar, 'Turkish aid to Somalia: A new pulse in Africa', *Al Jazeera English* (online), 2 September 2011; 'World nations praise Turkey for Somalia aid', *Today's Zaman*, 24 February 2012; Richard Laughreuters, 'Somalia: Where western aid fails, Turkey succeeds', *The Vancouver Sun*, 2 June 2012.

⁷⁷ Barak Ravid, 'Peres: Humiliation of Turkey envoy does not reflect Israel's diplomacy', *Haaretz*, 13 January 2010; Aaron J. Klein, 'Israel and Turkey: Anatomy of a Dissing War', *Time*, 14 January 2010.

⁷⁸ Marc Champion, 'In Cyprus, Turkey Raises Stakes Over Oil Drilling', *Wall Street Journal*, 20 September 2011.

⁷⁹ Marc Champion, 'Gates Says EU Pushed Turkey Away', *Wall Street Journal*, 10 June 2010.

⁸⁰ 'EU, US engage in blame game over 'who lost Turkey'', *Today's Zaman*, 24 June 2010.

⁸¹ Thomas Friedman, 'Letter from Istanbul', *New York Times*, 15 June 2010.

at the Hudson Institute and advisor to Pentagon on Islamic affairs until 2010, asserted that the AKP's Islam was "more in tune with the fanatically anti-Western principles of Saudi Wahhabi Islam."⁸² A fierce critic of the Turkish government during this period, Soner Çagaptay claimed it was the "erosion of Turkey's liberalism under the AKP" that was "alienating Turkey from the West", and warned its government that if it "wavers in its commitment to transatlantic structures such as NATO, it cannot expect to be President Obama's favorite Muslim country."⁸³ Also of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, David Schenker took a step further and argued for ejecting Turkey from NATO altogether.⁸⁴

This rigidly black and white discourse, however, did not only ignore the growing multi-polarity of the emerging international order, in which not only Turkey but also western actors have been seeking to diversify their international engagements; it also exaggerated the actual extent of Turkey's newfound independence. Indeed, a closer look at the timing and the context of the AKP's ostensibly anti-western policies suggests that Turkish claims to independent decision making were often more rhetorical than real. For instance, many of the AKP's more 'controversial' overtures towards Syria and Iran and its rebuke of Israel occurred contemporaneously with the Obama administration's "outreach to the Muslim world", aimed at repairing the damage that the previous Bush administration had inflicted on America's image in the Middle East.⁸⁵ As part of this attempt, in 2010 the US government itself initiated limited re-engagement with the Assad regime, lifting travel restrictions in place since 2006 and restoring diplomatic relations to ambassadorial level, downgraded in 2005 after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Seen in this light, much less a sign of Turkey's drift away from the West, the AKP government's overtures to Syria appeared to complement Washington's efforts to lure the Assad regime towards the western security alliance and away from Iran.

Furthermore, Ankara was the destination of the newly elected President Obama's first overseas visit, where he called the ties between the two countries a "model partnership".⁸⁶ Turkey's leaders did seem to push the boundaries of this partnership with their refusal to back the US-led sanctions against Iran in 2010, but we could argue that they were encouraged by President Obama's message of "extending America's hand of friendship" to the Iranian regime as well as the generally positive public and private feedback they received from western officials regarding

⁸² Harold Rhode, 'Turkey: Between Atatürk's Secularism and Fundamentalist Islam', *Jerusalem Issue Briefs*, vol. 9, no. 24, 9 May 2010.

⁸³ Soner Çagaptay, 'Turkey's Turn from the West', *Washington Post*, 2 February 2009. Also see by the same author, 'Is Turkey Still a Western Ally?', *Wall Street Journal*, 23 January 2009.

⁸⁴ "Since the 1930s, the country has been a model of modernization and moderation in the Middle East", Schenker wrote. "But absent a remarkable turnaround, it would appear that the West is losing Turkey." David Schenker, 'A Nato without Turkey?' *Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2009.

⁸⁵ Michael D. Shear and Kevin Sullivan, 'In Turkey, Obama Reaches Out to Muslim World', *Washington Post*, 7 April 2009.

⁸⁶ Presented as an engagement in more equal terms, "model partnership" was interpreted as a conscious departure from the term "special relationship", which carried Cold War connotations. See Bulent Aliriza, 'President Obama's Trip to Turkey: Building a "Model Partnership"', Turkey Update, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 8 April 2009, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090408_turkey_update.pdf

their mediation efforts. Turkey's fallout with Israel, on the other hand, appears to have tested its ties with the US more severely, with the pro-Israel lobby putting pressure on Congress, and by extension the White House, to take punitive action against the AKP government. The pro-Israel lobby also engaged in a successful attempt to block arms sales to Turkey and, in a reversal of its earlier stance, supported a bill for the recognition of the Armenian genocide in the US Congress.⁸⁷

Yet even here, evidence suggests that mindful of its revived security cooperation with the Turkish government on a number of strategically important issues, the US government chose to withstand the mounting political pressure from the right and 'tolerate' the increasingly toxic verbal exchanges between Turkish and Israeli officials. These areas of cooperation included Iraq, where the Obama administration was planning a complete troop withdrawal; Afghanistan, where the US military has been facing a resurgent Taliban; and even Georgia, whose pro-US Saakashvili government's close ties with Turkey was seen as a buffer against complete Russian domination over the Caucasus. While this would suggest that Turkey possessed the 'strategic indispensability' that the AKP's foreign policy was in part aimed at, it is not clear whether this was a particular novelty in the US – Turkish ties. After all, even during the Cold War era, Turkey had enjoyed a degree of leverage over the US superpower thanks to its sensitive geopolitical location and 'strategic relationship' with Washington.

The Obama administration's 'toleration' of deteriorating Turkish – Israeli ties may have had to do with two further factors. First, despite the fact that tensions between the two countries were real – i.e. not merely a result of political manoeuvring but a reflection of deep-running popular sentiments, especially in Turkey, where support for the Palestinian cause is part and parcel of the Milli Görüş tradition that forms the ideological backbone of the AKP – the relationship never reached the point of complete breakdown and always looked salvageable. This is partly because, in contrast to the ideological strand of Turkish political Islam that Milli Görüş represented until recently, the pragmatic, business-oriented strand led by the Hizmet movement of Fethullah Gülen consistently advocated strong ties between Turkey and Israel.⁸⁸ The clash between ideology and pragmatism vis-à-vis Israel has been evident in the fact even as the Turkish government downgraded its diplomatic ties and suspended military cooperation with the Jewish state, bilateral trade between the two countries reached record highs in 2011.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ The Armenian genocide bill passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2010 but was subsequently dropped by the Congress. A similar resolution was also discussed at the Israeli parliament for the first time in 2010. Mark Arax, 'Suddenly, the Israel lobby discovers a genocide', *Salon*, 16 June 2010.

⁸⁸ Following the 'flotilla incident', Fethullah Gülen issued a rare statement criticising the Turkish government for not preventing the ships from setting sail towards Gaza and thus bearing responsibility for the unfolding crisis. See Joe Lauria, 'Reclusive Turkish Imam Criticizes Gaza Flotilla', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 2010.

⁸⁹ Muhlis Kaçar, 'Turkish-Israeli trade at record high, tourist numbers plunge', *Today's Zaman*, 3 April 2011; Burcu Gültekin-Punnsman, 'Turkey-Israel: toward a decoupling of economics from politics', *Hurriyet Daily News*, 7 September 2011.

Secondly, Turkey's growing popularity in the Middle East, which became a particularly valuable asset for the US in the course of the Arab uprisings and was in large part a result of its anti-Israel rhetoric, had already presented opportunities for the US-led security establishment before the uprisings. This came in the shape of a budding rivalry between Turkey and Iran. As the Turkish government sought to increase its presence in the Middle East, it got engaged in a subtle competition with the Iranian regime over championing the Palestinian cause and influencing actors and dynamics within the Shia constellation, i.e. in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, where Iran had vital strategic interests.⁹⁰ Consequently, as early as in 2008 a narrative emerged which portrayed Turkey as a 'soft alternative' to Iran's 'hard power' in the region, extending its influence through commercial, cultural and diplomatic channels rather than military-economic alliances based on ideological fault lines.⁹¹ In late 2010, in a vivid indicator of this competition, as well as a sign of the limits of Turkey's independence from the western security alliance, the AKP government agreed to participate in NATO's missile shield programme, pointed at Iran, and even conceded to host its radars on Turkish soil, close to the Iranian border.⁹² In other words, at the same time as cooperation drew the Turkish and Iranian governments closer together, as evidenced in the Turkish rejection of the UN sanctions vote, the underlying rivalry was pushing the AKP government deeper into the US fold. This, in other words, was autonomisation with a western anchor.

In sum, while the AKP government largely succeeded in reminding its regional and global counterparts of Turkey's 'strategic' importance thanks to its multi-directional and pro-active foreign policy under Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, the net achievements of its 'zero problems policy' and the extent of its autonomy proved much more modest than the AKP decision makers and western observers of Turkey assumed during this period. In 2011, Turkey stood as a country that had failed to heal its widening socio-political divides, annulled its Kurdish, Alevi and Armenian openings, backtracked on its democratic reforms, all but abandoned its bid for the EU membership, increased its control over Northern Cyprus, and started watching its much touted 'soft power' influence over Syria, Iraq and Iran wither away with the Syrian uprising. Some of these developments, such as the failure of the EU bid, were in large part products of external constraints and dynamics over which Turkey did not have much control. The problem, it seems, was that in their growing self-confidence, Turkish leaders thought (and still think) that they had.

⁹⁰ Karabekir Akkoyunlu, 'Turkey's Iranian Conundrum: A Delicate Balancing Act', pp. 273 – 275.

⁹¹ See Meliha B. Altunışık, 'The possibilities and limits of Turkey's soft power in the Middle East' *Insight Turkey*, 10(2), 2008, pp. 41 – 54; Bulent Aras, 'Turkey's Soft Power', *Guardian*, 14 April 2009; Mohammad Ayoob, 'The Middle-East's Turco-Persian Future' *Foreign Policy*, 11 January 2011.

⁹² The Turkish government only agreed to sign up to the programme upon convincing other members not to single out Iran as a specific target. This was hailed by the AKP government as a victory for its delicate balancing act, satisfying the West without alienating Iran and all the while maintaining an independent posture. In reality, Turkey's achievement was little more than a face saving measure towards Iran, having accepted to participate in a weapons system that targeted the Islamic Republic directly, regardless of whether this is explicitly stated or not.

Americanisation and overstretch (2011 - ...)

The period since 2011 has been one where Turkey's domestic and foreign politics became fully enmeshed, with socio-political dynamics beyond the country's borders directly influencing events inside, and the government's confrontational domestic rhetoric and illiberal policies fuelling its increasingly hubristic regional leadership agenda. This has also been the period when the AKP finally completed its domination of the Turkish state and politics. Wresting control of the judiciary from the Kemalist establishment with the constitutional referendum of September 2010 it won a resounding third consecutive general election victory in June 2011. At the same time, the ruling party has become effectively synonymous with its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Driven by a powerful ambition to introduce a presidential system in Turkey and to become its first president in 2014, Erdoğan handpicked the new AKP deputies out of loyalists, leaving out names deemed to be either too independent or too close to Abdullah Gül, his long-time comrade but potential rival in a future presidential race.

The collusion of domestic and foreign politics and Erdoğan's vision of himself at the centre of the party, the party at the centre of Turkey, and Turkey at the centre of a vast Muslim domain corresponding to the former Ottoman territories and beyond were powerfully conveyed in the victory speech that the prime minister delivered on the eve of the 2011 election from the balcony of his party's imposing headquarters in Ankara. "Believe me," he said, addressing tens of thousands of passionate supporters,

"Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul, Beirut won as much as Izmir, Damascus won as much as Ankara, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem won as much as Diyarbakir."⁹³

The AKP had just run its most self-congratulatory and confrontational election campaign. Pandering to the supporters of the far-right opposition Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) in an attempt to keep it below the 10% election threshold that would give the ruling party the absolute majority required for unilateral constitution making powers, the AKP adopted an aggressively nationalistic rhetoric with sectarian undertones to attack both the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP), which had succeeded the outlawed DTP, and the secularist CHP, where the hardliner Kemalist old guard has been engaged in a power struggle against a younger leadership advocating a cautiously social democratic programme.⁹⁴

⁹³ Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu, 'Introduction', in *Another Empire*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ Over the years, especially since the collapse of its Kurdish, Alevi and Armenian 'openings', the AKP's rhetoric has frequently overlapped with that of the MHP, as the ruling party increasingly appealed to religious nationalist voters, who make up the MHP's core constituency. While there appears to have been some movement of support from the MHP to the AKP, this was not enough to push the MHP below the election threshold, as it ended up receiving 13%

At almost every campaign stop, Erdoğan made subtle yet stinging remarks to remind his audiences that the new leader of the CHP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, was an Alevi, thus contributing to the hegemonic discourse of prejudice and discrimination that the government's Alevi opening was meant to counter.⁹⁵ At the same time, in a bid to maintain the party's support among the conservative Sunni sections of the Kurdish population in the face of the government's increasingly militaristic policies, the AKP decision makers chose to exploit sectarian sensitivities among Kurds. They repeatedly claimed that the members and supporters of the pro-Kurdish movement, many of whom are leftists and/or secular nationalists, lacked proper Islamic beliefs and morals. This has continued beyond the election, with such examples as the newly appointed Interior Minister Idris Naim Şahin's astonishing statement that Kurdish militants and their sympathisers were those who "eat pork, practice Zoroastrianism, I don't know from what nation or brotherhood, they practice—I am sorry—homosexuality, and do all sorts of disgraceful stuff, immorality, and heinous acts."⁹⁶

In the absence of a tangible democratisation agenda, the AKP government's domestic focus since the 2011 election has been to project the might and the grandeur of the party-state and its intention to remain a permanent fixture on Turkey's socio-political landscape, embodied in the slogan "Great Nation, Great Power, Objective: 2023", adopted at the party's fourth general congress in September 2012. The AKP's agenda for the coming decade includes an ambitious economic growth plan, spectacular development projects and an openly articulated mission to mould society on the basis of the party's conservative Sunni view of social morality. In its 2011 manifesto, the party set as its goal to transform Turkey into one of the world's ten biggest economies by 2023, the hundredth anniversary of the republic's founding.⁹⁷ Other development projects supposed to represent the government's ambitions are plans to dig an artificial canal next to the Bosphorus Strait, build the world's largest mosque on Istanbul's highest hilltop, the construction of two nuclear power plants in an earthquake prone geography, hydroelectric dams that threaten to destroy sensitive ecosystems and submerge hundreds of villages and historical heritage sites, as well as countless property-led urban transformation and gentrification projects with dire socio-cultural and environmental implications.⁹⁸ Finally, by expressing his desire to "bring up a religious youth" and passing a controversial education bill that expands the number of religious schools and adds religious courses to curricula, among other reforms, Prime Minister

of the vote. The two parties went on to cooperate closely in the new parliament, with the MHP acting as the unofficial junior partner of the ruling party on a number of issues.

⁹⁵ Sedat Ergin, 'Erdoğan and the CHP leader's Alevi origin', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 18 April 2011.

⁹⁶ İçişleri Bakanı'ndan yeni terör tarifleri', *Radikal*, 26 December 2011.

⁹⁷ See 'Hedef 2023' in the AKP Official Website, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/hedefler>

⁹⁸ See Constanze Letsch, 'Turkish dam threatens town that dates back to the bronze age', *Guardian*, 20 May 2011; 'PM Erdoğan unveils long-awaited 'crazy project' as Kanal İstanbul', *Today's Zaman*, 27 April 2011; 'PM announces construction of giant mosque in Istanbul', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 31 May 2012; Daniel Dombey and Camilla Hall, 'Turkey in push to attract Arab investors', *Financial Times*, 30 September 2012; and Ozan Karaman, 'Urban Renewal in Istanbul: Reconfigured Spaces, Robotic Lives', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01163.x.

Erdoğan and his governing party have pressed on with their state-driven social engineering project. In essence, this looks very much like a religious-conservative version of their predecessors' attempts to impose a strictly secular and Turkish national identity on a heterogeneous society.⁹⁹ The result is a return to robust authoritarianism.¹⁰⁰

The Anti-Terrorism laws are used to silence critics beyond those that take to the streets. The draconian spirit of this legislation and the AKP's seemingly unstoppable slide to patriarchy, militarism and nationalism were notoriously captured by the hawkish Interior Minister Şahin in a speech that harked back at the 'lost decade' of the 1990s. In that speech, the interior minister asserted that terrorism was not an act only carried out by armed militants, but that poets, painters, singers, satirists or academics could also be terrorists.¹⁰¹ True to his word, Şahin's government held the dubious honour of running a country with the highest number of jailed journalists in the world in 2011. Hundreds of editors, academics, small publishers, student activists and local politicians, most of them of leftist political orientation and/or Kurdish descent, remain behind bars facing lengthy prison sentences.¹⁰² In a particularly sensitive case, between 2010 and 2012, some 3,000 people, including prominent Kurdish politicians, elected mayors, academics, publishers and human rights activists were arrested, pending trial for aiding and abetting the Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Ciwaken Kurdistan, KCK), the urban faction of the PKK.¹⁰³ The first hearing in the case was halted when the court rejected the defendants' plea to make their defence in Kurdish.¹⁰⁴ In September 2012, nearly 700 Kurdish prisoners went

⁹⁹ Doğu Ergil, "Religious youth", *Today's Zaman*, 12 February 2012 and Simon Cameron-Moore, 'Turkey passes school reform law critics view as Islamic', *Reuters*, 30 March 2012.

¹⁰⁰ In an atmosphere where the ruling party, often with the support of deputies from the far-right MHP, passes controversial bills through the parliament without engaging in meaningful dialogue with opposition parties or civil society organisations, anti-government demonstrations have become the norm. It has also become commonplace to see local communities protesting the hydroelectric dams that will inundate their villages and drain their rivers, or teachers unions opposing the government's education bill being pepper sprayed, beaten by baton-yielding officers and ill-treated under detention, only to face terrorism charges under the Anti-Terrorism legislation of 2006. Such scenes routinely take place in the Newroz (Kurdish new year) celebrations and other gatherings across Kurdish provinces. In a telling sign of the demise of the Kemalist regime, secularist Turks staging a protest celebration in the capital on the Republic Day on 29 October 2012 faced a similarly heavy handed police response and were labelled as "terrorists and hooligans" by the prime minister. See also: Tim Arango, 'In Turkey, a Break From the Past Plays Out in the Streets', *New York Times*, 29 October 2012; 'Başbakan'dan Son Dakika: "Terörist Holiganlar"', *Bianet*, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/141732-basbakandan-son-dakika-terorist-holiganlar>

¹⁰¹ Another equally alarming part of the speech reveals the interior minister's Mussoliniesque view of state and society. "The state", declared Şahin, "is order. The state is law. The state is hierarchy. The state is property. The state is honour. The state is freedom, education, and health. The state is life itself." 'İçişleri Bakan'ından yeni terör tarifleri', *Radikal*, 26 December 2011.

¹⁰² CPJ condemns journalist arrests in Turkey', *Committee to Protect Journalists Worldwide*, 22 December 2011, <http://cpj.org/2011/12/cpj-condemns-journalist-arrests-in-turkey.php>; 'A year in prison for no reason', *Reporters Without Borders*, 3 March 2012, http://en.rsf.org/turkey-a-year-in-prison-for-no-reason-03-03-2012_41991.html

¹⁰³ "KCK Arrests Deepen Freedom of Expression Concerns", *Bianet English*, 16 November 2011, <http://bianet.org/english/freedom-of-expression/134065-kck-arrests-deepen-freedom-of-expression-concerns>

¹⁰⁴ 'Kurdish defense crisis marks first hearing of KCK trial', *Today's Zaman*, 2 July 2012.

on hunger strike demanding Kurdish language rights in court and in education and an end to the solitary confinement of Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader.¹⁰⁵

The government's handling of a number of critical court cases during this period have dealt further blows to the hope of reconciliation and democratisation. In March 2012, the slow moving trial into the 1993 massacre of 33 mostly Alevi poets, writers and intellectuals who were killed when their hotel was set on fire by a mob led by prominent Islamists was dropped due to a time limit, with the handful of low-level suspects that had been arrested walking free. Legal inconsistencies, allegations of political interference and the sheer number of suspects held behind bars for years in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases against suspected coup plotters have led to suspicions that, far from eliminating the culture of impunity and the 'deep' elements within the Turkish state, which the AKP now controls, the ruling party saw these as a chance to marginalise its political opponents. A verdict delivered in the Balyoz case in September 2012 sentenced over 300 officers to up to 20 years in prison, heralding the definitive end of the era of military coups, albeit amidst serious concerns of political revanchism and judicial irregularities.¹⁰⁶ Another watershed moment came when the widely followed murder trial of Hrant Dink ended after five years of bureaucratic foot-dragging, covered-up evidence and missing witnesses, with a verdict that left the senior bureaucrats and members of the police force implicated in the case untouched and then, eventually promoted.¹⁰⁷

It is against this background that Turkey witnessed the Arab uprisings. At the height of the Egyptian revolution, Prime Minister Erdoğan claimed the moral high ground long before most world leaders by calling on Hosni Mubarak to heed the people's message and step down. In Libya, where the Turkish government had built extensive political and business relations with the Gaddafi regime, the AKP initially came out strongly against a NATO military intervention, with Erdoğan calling it "unthinkable" and President Gül saying it was "out of the question".¹⁰⁸ A week later, alarmed by French President Sarkozy's apparent eagerness to assume a leading role in a possible intervention and in an attempt not to be left on the side lines, the Turkish parliament had despatched five navy ships and a submarine to Libya and had also agreed to commit troops if necessary.¹⁰⁹

As noted earlier, a similar volte-face came in Syria, where after several months of sitting on the fence, the AKP government assumed a leading role in supporting the Syrian opposition. By early

¹⁰⁵ The strike ended on 18 November, following a personal appeal by Öcalan, just as observers noted a critical threshold had been reached. Daren Butler and Seyhmus Cakan, 'Kurd militants end hunger strike in Turkey, deal seen', *Reuters*, 18 November 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Kerem Öktem, 'Turkey, the end of Islamism with a human face', *Open Democracy*, 20 January 2012.

¹⁰⁷ 'Turkey fails to deliver justice for murdered Armenian journalist as trial ends', *Amnesty International*, 16 January 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/turkey-fails-deliver-justice-murdered-armenian-journalist-trial-ends-2012-01-16>

¹⁰⁸ 'Turkey opposed to NATO military intervention in Libya, says Erdoğan', *Abram Online*, 14 March 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Head, 'Libya: Turkey's troubles with Nato and no-fly zone', *BBC News*, 25 March 2011.

2012, the main anti-Assad bloc, the Syrian National Council (SNC) designated Istanbul as their headquarter, while the wide range of disparate armed groups loosely united under the Free Syrian Army (FSA) found a safe haven and logistical base along Turkey's porous border with Syria. It was at this moment that the Turkish – American relationship entered, in the words of Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, its “golden age”,¹¹⁰ prompting the US foreign policy establishment and mainstream media to once again showcase Turkey as a model of economic growth, political stability and democratic governance and the ‘moderate Islamist’ alternative to both Shia Iran and anti-western Sunni movements in the region. US President Obama described Prime Minister Erdoğan as “an outstanding partner and an outstanding friend on a wide range of issues.”¹¹¹ Soner Çagaptay, who spent years portraying Erdoğan's government as driven by an avowedly anti-western and radical religious ideology, now argued that the AKP had been promoting all along a “soft form of secularism that allows for more religious expression in government, politics and education”, which could serve as a better model for the Arab world than Atatürk's French-inspired “hard secularism”.¹¹² And while Thomas Friedman continued to write about the “Sultanization” of Turkey under Erdoğan, this did not prevent him from advising revolutionary Arab youths to learn from the AKP “about leadership and getting things done.”¹¹³

The basis of this rapprochement and the resultant turnaround in the mainstream American discourse was clearly strategic. A task force report by the US Council on Foreign Relations argued that although “on a range of issues, especially in the Middle East, the United States and Turkey have in recent years had different expectations of each other [...] These differences should not preclude the development of a partnership, particularly since Ankara has moved closer to Washington's position on Syria and Iran.” Claiming that “Turkey is more democratic, prosperous, and politically influential than ever before,” the report suggested that this partnership should “reflect not only common American-Turkish interests, but also Turkey's new stature as an economically and politically successful country with a new role to play in a changing Middle East”. It also recommended encouraging American support for Turkish – Israeli rapprochement.¹¹⁴ Similar calls have been made with increasing frequency from within Israel and the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. “The Arab Spring provides a strong incentive for Turkish-Israeli reconciliation”, wrote Michael Herzog, a former chief of staff to Israeli defence ministry, and Soner Çagaptay in a *New York Times* op-ed:

¹¹⁰ ‘Erdoğan at bay’, *Economist*, 25 February 2012.

¹¹¹ Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 25 March 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/25/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-Erdoğan-turkey-after-bilatera>

¹¹² Soner Çagaptay, ‘The Empires Strike Back’, *New York Times*, 15 January 2012.

¹¹³ Thomas Friedman, ‘Facebook Meets Brick-and-Mortar Politics’, *New York Times*, 9 June 2012.

¹¹⁴ Madeleine K. Albright, Stephen J. Hadley and Steven A. Cook, ‘US-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership’, Independent Task Force Report No. 69, *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 2012, <http://www.cfr.org/turkey/us-turkey-relations/p28139>.

Middle East unrest has challenged Turkey's "zero problems with our neighbors" policy, casting Turkey and Syria as adversaries. At the same time, the region's revolutionary tremors have shaken the cornerstones of Israel's national security, even raising doubts about the future of its peace agreement with Egypt as the possibility of a Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Cairo becomes more real. Moreover, both Israel and Turkey fear that a powerful Iran could fill the void in the region.¹¹⁵

The Arab uprisings did not merely challenge Turkey's 'zero problems' policy, as Herzog and Çağaptay suggest; they led to the dismantling of that policy altogether. Within the space of a few months, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu went from harbouring the lofty vision of having zero problems with neighbours to facing the cold reality of having almost zero neighbours without problems, especially in its southern, eastern and northern neighbourhoods. Turkey's fallout with Iraq's Maliki government has not only been related to Syria, although it has been exacerbated by it. Much to the displeasure of the Iraqi government, the AKP government provided safe haven to the country's fugitive vice president, Tariq al-Hashemi, who was sentenced to death in absentia and has been facing an Interpol arrest warrant. Hashemi was Iraq's most senior Sunni politician until falling out with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The Turkish government also drew the ire of Baghdad by starting to purchase oil directly from the KRG, bypassing the central government. In April 2012, claiming that Erdoğan was "still living the illusion of regional hegemony" and accusing him of stoking sectarian tensions in the region, the Iraqi premier declared Turkey a "hostile state".¹¹⁶ In November, the Iraqi government expelled Turkish state-owned energy company TPAO, which was involved in a major oil exploration project in southern Iraq.¹¹⁷

Turkey's relations with Iran also took a hit as the Syrian uprising brought to the surface the underlying rivalry between the two states. Personal efforts by Prime Minister Erdoğan and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad to manage their countries' growing differences have been complicated by the existence of competing and semi-autonomous institutions within the Iranian regime, often resulting in mixed messages coming out of the Islamic Republic about Turkey. In June 2011, for example, the Iranian foreign ministry denied a statement purportedly by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that Iran would retaliate against Turkey in case its government supported a NATO intervention in Syria.¹¹⁸ In August, the Iranian chief of the general staff, Hassan Firouzabadi warned that it would be "Turkey's turn" if it continued to support the US in Syria.¹¹⁹ This was followed by similar warnings by General Ali Hajizadeh, a senior commander in

¹¹⁵ Michael Herzog and Soner Çağaptay, 'How America Can Help Its Friends Make Nice', *New York Times*, 20 June 2012.

¹¹⁶ 'Iraqi PM Maliki says Turkey is becoming 'hostile state'', *Al Arabiya*, 20 April 2012.

¹¹⁷ 'Iraq asks Kuwait Energy to replace Turkey's TPAO on oilfield', *Reuters*, 7 November 2012.

¹¹⁸ 'Tahran'dan Şok Tehdit', *Sabah*, June 27, 2011

¹¹⁹ 'S. Arabia, Qatar, Turkey have Syrians' blood on their hands: Iranian general', *Tehran Times*, 9 August 2012.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, and Hossein Ibrahim, a member of the Iranian Majles (parliament), who stated that NATO radars located in Turkey would be Iran's first target in the event of an attack by Israel or the US. The Iranian foreign ministry subsequently downplayed the importance of these comments, claiming that they merely reflected the "personal views" of the individuals who made them and not the official policy of the Iranian government.¹²⁰ In any case, the emerging pattern of allegation and denial was highly reminiscent of the battle of words between the two countries throughout their tense relationship in the 1990s. Also reminiscent of this decade was the abrupt end to the security cooperation and emerging reports of renewed Syrian and Iranian support for PKK activities inside Turkey.¹²¹

The Syrian crisis and the AKP's renewed intimate ties with the United States have also put to test Turkey's previously strengthening ties with Russia, a long-time ally and provider of military hardware to the Assad regime. Although the origin of this tension can be traced to Turkey's acceptance of NATO radars in its territory, not far from the Russian border, the Syrian civil war has further cast the two countries on the opposite ends of the regional divide and, despite official statement to the contrary, triggered a period of mutual distrust that has revived memories of the Cold War.¹²²

In Syria, Turkey may have overplayed its hand. Having turned down offers of international assistance and monitoring when the first Syrian "guests" fleeing the conflict arrived on its soil, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu appealed to the UN Security Council to take action as the conflict wore on and the bulging number of people pouring over the border added to the economic and logistical burden on the AKP government.¹²³ The government has also increasingly found itself facing challenges from three different sources: first, from the Syrian army, which has repeatedly shelled Turkish towns along the border; second, from a rising number of Salafist fighters, over whom the government has little control or influence, moving in and out of Turkey in relative

¹²⁰ Daren Butler and Hossein Jaseb, 'Iran seeks to calm Turkey over missile threats', *Reuters*, 14 December 2012.

¹²¹ 'Iran Rejects US Claim about Tehran's Support for PKK against Turkey', *Fars News Agency*, 17 August 2012; Osman Yakut, 'Iranian spy ring exposed in Turkey, dealing blow to ties between neighbors', *Today's Zaman*, 29 August 2012;

¹²² The first incident to spark a public diplomatic row between the two countries took place in October 2012, when Turkish authorities forced a Syrian passenger plane en route from Moscow to Damascus to land in Ankara, claiming that it was carrying military ammunitions. Ian Black and Miriam Elder, 'Turkey accuses Russia of supplying Syria with munitions', *Guardian*, 11 October 2012. The tip off had allegedly come from Washington. See Craig Whitlock, 'U.S. steps up support of Turkey amid Syrian conflict', *Washington Post*, 20 October 2012. The following day, Russia announced that President Vladimir Putin had postponed a trip to Ankara scheduled for later that month, where he was due to discuss energy cooperation issues with the Turkish government. 'Russian president postpones scheduled visit to Turkey amid tensions', *Press TV*, 11 October 2012

¹²³ Turkey is one of three nations that have geographical reservations to the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 and uniquely accepts claims of European asylum seekers. Asylum seekers from the Middle East and Asia are considered "conditional refugees" or "guests". According to Cengiz Aktar, "devoid of legal guarantees, the term "guest" opens the door to all sorts of practices lacking in consistency and transparency." Cengiz Aktar, 'Syrian refugees and the state of asylum policy', *Sunday's Zaman*, 28 March 2012; 'Foreign Minister Davutoğlu urges the UN Security Council for ending the crisis in Syria', Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, 30 August 2012. 'Red Cross says Turkey needs help to cope with Syrian exodus', *Today's Zaman*, 12 November 2012.

freedom;¹²⁴ and third, from the growing Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey, which is directly linked to the *de facto* autonomy that Syrian Kurds have attained when the Assad regime practically yielded control over a number of Kurdish towns to the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD), a close affiliate of the PKK in exchange for non-hostility.¹²⁵

Indeed, hardliners within the PKK have been emboldened by the breakdown of Turkey's security cooperation with Iran and Syria, and the growing prospect of Kurdish autonomy in Syria, which complements Iraqi Kurds' recent political gains and creates a sense of imminent fulfilment of Kurdish nationalist aspirations. So in mid-2011, they decided to 'seize the moment' and force the Turkish government into all-out war that they believed would ultimately lead to independence (or at least full blown autonomy) for Turkey's Kurds. The fact that many 'moderate' members of the Kurdish political movement have been imprisoned by the Turkish government and most avenues for political dialogue shut has also helped these hardliners gain legitimacy in the eyes of a conflict weary Kurdish population. As a result, Turkey has witnessed a sharp escalation in violent attacks by the PKK against both government and civilian targets, in rural as well as urban areas. This has in turn pushed the AKP further towards militarism and nationalism, creating a vicious cycle of violence and mounting societal tensions between Turks and Kurds across the country.¹²⁶ Between the parliamentary election in June 2011 and September 2012, the conflict claimed over 700 lives, including soldiers, militants and civilians; the highest number since Öcalan's apprehension in 1999.¹²⁷

At the same time, the military standoff with Syria has placed the AKP government into another difficult quandary. In early October 2012, when a Syrian mortar attack killed five people in a Turkish border town, the Turkish military retaliated by firing on Syrian government targets. Prime Minister Erdoğan warned the Assad regime that Turkey would not back from war if provoked, while the Turkish parliament rushed to approve further military action in case of future attacks.¹²⁸ Yet for all the hard talk, war with Syria carries enormous risks for Turkey, such as fuelling already existing socio-political tensions inside the country and turning it into a major battleground in the intensifying regional tug of war. Engaging in a protracted war could deal a severe blow not only to the AKP's self-image as a beacon of stability and democratic governance in the region, but also to its political domination within Turkey.

¹²⁴ See 'Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition', *International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report No. 131, 12 October 2012.

¹²⁵ Daren Butler, 'Syrian Kurdish moves ring alarm bells in Turkey', *Reuters*, 24 July 2012; Gonul Tol, 'Syria's Kurdish challenge to Turkey', *Foreign Policy*, 29 August 2012.

¹²⁶ '3 wounded as tensions escalate in Bursa over hunger strike', *Today's Zaman*, 31 October 2012.

¹²⁷ See 'Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement', *International Crisis Group*, Europe Report No. 219, 11 September 2012.

¹²⁸ Tim Arango and Hwaida Saad, 'Turkey's Parliament Backs Military Measures on Syria', *New York Times*, 4 October 2012.

Turkish officials, to their credit, have appeared largely aware of these risks, resisting western pressures¹²⁹ and Gulf state provocations¹³⁰ to take the lead in intervening in Syria. Having failed to move the UN to action and obtaining only a limited mandate from NATO Turkish leaders also seem to think that in case of direct hostilities Turkey would be able to rely on precious few allies – western or Arab.¹³¹ On the other hand, by appearing unwilling or unable to back their loud words with concrete action, they risk looking weak in the face of a major regional challenge; not the preferred image for a government with regional leadership ambitions. And as the Syrian civil war drags on, Turkey’s claim to represent the forces of democratic change in the region also becomes undermined by the emerging evidence of gruesome atrocities being committed not only by the forces loyal to the Assad regime but also by the opposition, which now includes a growing number of jihadist fighters.¹³²

Faced with these dilemmas while events in Syria moved towards what President Gül called the “worst case scenario”, there were signs in the autumn of 2012 that the AKP government was once again revising its policy vis-à-vis its southern neighbour, toning down its anti-Assad rhetoric and seeking a negotiated solution out of the crisis by stepping up efforts to limit movements across the border. The AKP government had also thrown its support behind the mediation attempts of UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and sought to re-establish cooperation with Iran and Russia.¹³³ Meanwhile, in a sign of Turkey’s waning prominence in handling the crisis, the US government had set out to establish a new opposition council in Doha to replace the Istanbul-based SNC.¹³⁴ Once hailed as the ‘success story’ of its autonomous and multi-directional foreign policy, Syria then became the first serious test of the AKP government’s regional leadership ambitions. By early 2013, it appeared to have failed that test.

¹²⁹ Comparing Syria to Bosnia, and arguing for a Turkish-led intervention, Soner Çağaptay wrote, “The cost of intervention in Syria may be high now, but the price will only increase for all nations if civilian massacres continue unabated. [...]ç In Bosnia, the international community intervened before it was too late. If Syria radicalizes, becoming a jihadist safe haven, it could become a Sisyphean task to normalize it. Afghanistan is a case in point.” Soner Çağaptay, ‘The Right Way for Turkey to Intervene in Syria’, *New York Times*, 11 October 2012.

¹³⁰ In particular the Saudi regime and media have been consistently pushing Turkey to act in Syria, at times by throwing out fabricated stories and outrageous allegations aimed at provoking the Turkish government. In one such story surrounding the downing of a Turkish military jet by Syrian forces in June 2012, killing two soldiers, the state-funded *Al Arabiya* news network cited “leaked Syrian documents” to claim that Syrian soldiers had seized the Turkish pilots while still alive and interrogated them, before killing them upon Russian orders and returning the corpses back inside the fallen jet lying at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. The report was immediately dismissed by Turkey, Russia and the United States. ‘Turkey, US, Russia dismiss Al Arabiya claims on downed Turkish jet’, *Today’s Zaman*, 2 October 2012.

¹³¹ Ian Traynor, ‘Syrian shelling of Turkish village condemned by Nato and Pentagon’, *Guardian*, 4 October 2012.

¹³² Across the region, positive views of the role Turkey has played on the Arab Spring have decreased from 56% to 42% between 2011 and 2012 according to the 2012 TESEV survey on Middle Eastern perceptions of Turkey. Mensur Akgün, Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar and Bülent Kılınçarslan (eds), *Ortadoğ’da Türkiye Algısı 2012* (TESEV Yayınları, November 2012).

¹³³ ‘Russia supports Erdoğan’s call for regional talks on Syria’, *Today’s Zaman*, 5 November, 2012.

¹³⁴ Semih Idiz, ‘Turkey being sidelined on Syria’, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 6 November 2012. ‘US initiative for Syrian opposition seen as insincere, set to fail’, *Today’s Zaman*, 5 November 2012.

III. Faces of the West: Can Europeanisation, Americanisation and Autonomisation be reconciled?

What then can we infer from contemporary politics in the Middle East regarding what we called at the outset of this paper ‘the Western condition’? In particular, what shapes perceptions and drives “western” decision makers on both sides of the Atlantic in their dealings with Turkey? While we cannot presume to generalise against such a fluid backdrop, something can be said already about change and continuity. For one, that it is still the case, and perhaps more than ever, that different geopolitical priorities, historical vantage points and experiences of socio-economic and cultural interaction with this country mean that the story of Turkey’s ties to the West is interpreted differently in Washington, Brussels or individual European capitals. Second, that with the exception of the few years between the late 1990s and mid-2000s, when Turkey’s EU membership ambitions dominated its political agenda, the United States has been at the centre of Turkey’s engagement with the West, defining its main conceptual framework and dominant narrative. And third, that while Turkey’s attempt to define an autonomous foreign policy free of western entanglements might seem to have failed, it might yet take on a new shape in the post-Arab spring configuration. In short, the challenge for Turkish policy today as we see it is now to reconcile the three variations which have characterised its foreign policy over the last decade, namely Europeanisation, Americanisation and the search for autonomy.

The United States and the logic of strategy

However contentious within the American body politic, sustaining US global influence continues to define American foreign policy, and has been the underlying theme of all its bilateral relations, including with Turkey since the beginning of the Cold War.¹³⁵ During that period, and rather unsurprisingly, prevailing narratives of freedom, democracy and liberty often gave way to geostrategic considerations in the conduct of policy. Turkey was no exception. Indeed, it could be argued that its status of “America’s closest ally” in the region along with Israel all but reinforced the authoritarian and patriarchal tendencies of the Turkish state in the last half century. During the Cold War, the terms of Ankara’s engagement with the US and Europe, as well as the dominant narrative of Turkey’s identity as a ‘western’ country, was determined by its membership in the US-led western security alliance and its key geostrategic role as a frontier state along the East/West divide. This narrative depicted a Manichean struggle between good (the democratic West) and evil (the totalitarian East).

¹³⁵ See Joshua W. Walker ‘The Forming of the US-Turkish Special Relationship’, in Nur Bilge Criss, Selçuk Esenbel, Tony Greenwood and Louis Mazzari, *American Turkish Encounters: Politics and Culture, 1830 – 1989* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011); and F. Stephen Larrabee, *Troubled Partnership: U.S. – Turkish Relations in an Era of Global Geopolitical Change* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010).

Beyond the security rhetoric, belonging in the West during the Cold War simply meant participating in the US-led security framework and the capitalist free market system. Issues of democratic governance, civil liberties and human rights tended to become a concern for the US foreign policy establishment only when these had a bearing on the perceived security and politico-economic interests of the alliance's key actors. In the frontier regions of the East/West divide, where existing socio-political tensions were exacerbated by superpower rivalry, authoritarian governments reframed the Manichean narrative to justify their suppression of popular demands for political accountability and socio-economic justice. Thus, as long as the military-controlled state apparatus in Turkey defended the western alliance's security interests, it could be excused for routinely intervening in the electoral process, limiting civil liberties and abusing the human rights of its citizens.

Cold War dynamics also built on the existing foundations of the Turkish 'deep state'. As part of a US-led initiative to set up covert 'stay behind' paramilitary organisations aimed at resisting a potential communist take-over of NATO member states, a secret counter-guerrilla force was established within the Turkish military in coordination with the American and British intelligence services.¹³⁶ Nurtured by an ultra-nationalist ideology, and immune from legal constraints and civilian oversight, these units quickly turned into assassination squads, targeting suspected leftists, communists and, especially during the 1990s, Kurdish politicians, intellectuals and human rights activists. It was also during the Cold War era that the Turkish military, the self-appointed guardian of the Turkish republic, staged three of its four *coups d'état* with a claim to 'restore democracy' with the tacit approval (or, as in the case of the 1980 coup, direct backing) of the United States.¹³⁷

While the end of the Cold War brought this arrangement into flux, it did not alter its fundamental characteristics or dissolve its key institutions. During the 1990s, US – Turkish ties continued to be driven by strategic concerns. Turkey's active cooperation in various US-led military operations, starting with the Gulf War and followed by Somalia, former Yugoslavia, and after the 11 September 2001 attacks, Afghanistan, underscored the persistent security emphasis of this 'special partnership.' And Turkey's strategic cooperation with the US was compounded by a tightening of its military ties with Israel. In return, the US government generously supported the Turkish state in its 'dirty war' against Kurdish insurgents, by increasing security assistance and subsidised arms sales to Ankara. Between 1992 and 1999, it delivered more than \$6 billion

¹³⁶ Daniel Ganser, *NATO's Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and terrorism in Western Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Serdar Kaya, 'The Rise and Decline of the Turkish "Deep State": The Ergenekon Case', *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2009, pp. 99 – 113.

¹³⁷ CIA's complicity in the heavy-handed right wing military coup in September 1980 has been acknowledged, among others, by the agency's then-Ankara chief Paul Henze. See Mehmet Ali Birand, *The Generals' Coup in Turkey: An Inside Story of 12 September 1980* (New York: Elsevier, 1987). Also: Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's century of regime change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York, NY: Times Books, 2006).

worth of arms to Turkey. In 1997 alone, arms deliveries exceeded the total from the entire period between 1950 and 1983.¹³⁸ Finally, and despite calls for respect for human rights and democracy in Turkey, the Clinton administration turned a blind eye to the military's last successful intervention in Turkish politics: the so-called 'post-modern' coup that toppled the Welfare Party-led coalition government in February 1997.¹³⁹

Why do we find such contradictory pulls in US attitude to Turkey? Precisely, we believe, because intermittently but throughout this period, the 'special relationship' with Turkey was not only useful to the US for geostrategic reasons, but for its use by American (and often by Atlanticist British) foreign policy strategists as a model for the wider region. In short, both the promotion of Turkey as a 'moderate Islamist' model under the George W. Bush administration during the early years of the AKP government and the most recent iteration of this narrative in the context of the 'Arab Spring' were not without precedent. Previous instances of 'model' narratives during and after the Cold War tended to involve centre right governments in Turkey implementing broad-based market liberalisation reforms at home while contending with difficult – and often costly – US security demands abroad.

The first instance of a 'model narrative' that we could identify dates back to the 1950s under Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and Democrat Party government as Turkey embarked on a US-funded capitalist development programme, committed troops to the Korean War effort, joined NATO and signed a pro-western security pact (CENTO) with Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and the United Kingdom. Turkey then represented a Muslim country showing the way to modernisation and secularism, even though at that time, political Islam was still very much in its birth pangs. The second instance took place at the end of the Cold War, at a time when Turkey was on the path to political 'normalisation', having suppressed more or less the entire spectrum of left wing movements and completed a decade of neo-liberal reform under Prime Minister (later president) Turgut Özal in the repressive political atmosphere of the post-1980 military coup. In 1990, in a bid to display his country's commitment to the western security alliance, President Özal pushed the parliament to support the US in the wake of the First Gulf War. The Turkish parliament, controlled by Özal's Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP), authorised the use of Turkey's airspace and military bases by the US forces, halted oil purchases from Iraq and imposed economic sanctions on its Middle Eastern neighbour. In return, in their effort to devise a successor to the Cold War policy of containment, American foreign policy strategists went on to

¹³⁸ See Tamar Gabelnick, William D. Hartung, and Jennifer Washburn, *Arming Repression: U.S. Arms Sales to Turkey During the Clinton Administration*, a joint report of the Federation of American Scientists and the World Policy Institute, October 1999; Kevin McKiernan, 'Human Rights vs US Arms Sales To Turkey', *Boston Globe*, 13 January 2001.

¹³⁹ Mark Lacey, 'On Visit, Clinton Nudges Turkey on Rights', *New York Times*, 16 November 1999.

promote Turkey as the ideal country to fill in the post-Cold War geopolitical/ideological vacuum in the Middle East, the Caucasus as well as in Central Asia.¹⁴⁰

Like his 1950s' predecessor, Özal had anticipated that his politically risky decision to back a US military campaign would allow Turkey, a medium power, to expand its geopolitical influence in its southern and eastern neighbourhoods at the dawn of a new era.¹⁴¹ Yet unlike Menderes, who received NATO security guarantees and financial assistance through the Marshall Fund in exchange for sending troops to fight in Korea, Özal's calculation partly backfired.¹⁴² Turkey did not only incur significant economic damage from the loss of a major trading partner; it also faced a heavy refugee burden and a revitalised Kurdish insurgency on its porous southeastern border, as well as the prospect of an autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq. It was partly the bitter legacy of the First Gulf War that led to the Turkish parliament's refusal to allow US troops the use of Turkish territory as a launching base for the invasion of Iraq ahead of the Second Gulf War in 2003. Soon after that refusal, the neo-conservative strategists in the George W. Bush administration stopped presenting Turkey as a shining example of moderate Islamist democracy for the Middle East.

With the exception of the early 2000s, when Turkey's foreign and domestic politics were primarily oriented towards the European Union, these episodes of strategic convergence also triggered a process of Americanisation in Turkey's domestic politics. Dimitar Bechev reminds us that there was a time when people in Turkey called their country 'küçük Amerika' ('the little America'). "During the Cold War years," Bechev notes, "Turkey's centre-right leaders - from Adnan Menderes in the 1950s to Turgut Özal in the 1980s - extolled the virtues of the American dream to a receptive public; the Nato alliance was the alpha and omega of Ankara's security doctrine; Turkey's elite sent its offspring to colleges across the United States; and Turkish audiences lapped up the latest pop-culture imports such as the TV soap *Dallas*."¹⁴³ It seems then that the 'Turkish model' and the 'American dream' were joined at the hip.

Indeed one of the enduring images from the 1950s Democrat Party era is the construction of Turkey's first motorways (at the expense of its rail network) and import of Ford trucks, courtesy

¹⁴⁰ Tony Lake, President Clinton's first national security advisor, explained this new doctrine as "a strategy of enlargement of the world's free community of market economies." 'Confronting Backlash States', *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1994). Anthony Blinkman, special assistant to President Clinton and senior director for European affairs at the US National Security Council, described Turkey as a country that "sits at the crossroads - or, if you prefer, atop the fault lines - of the world. Because of its size [...] its history [...] its size [...] and strength, and most important, because of what it is - a nation of mainly Islamic faith that is secular, democratic, and modernising - Turkey must be a leader and can be a role model for a large swath of the world.' Address to the Washington Institute's Third Annual Turgut Özal Memorial Lecture on Turkey and US - Turkey relations. Quoted in Meliha B. Altunisik, 'The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East', p. 45.

¹⁴¹ See 'Gulf War and Aftermath' in F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003), p. 165.

¹⁴² Haldun Çancı and Şevket Serkan Şen, 'The Gulf War and Turkey: Regional Changes and Their Domestic Effects (1991 - 2003)', *International Journal on World Peace*, 28 (1), March 2011, pp. 41 - 65.

¹⁴³ Dimitar Bechev, 'The Americanisation of Turkey,' *Open Democracy*, 18 March 2012.

of Marshall Plan assistance. It was not only the American soap operas or Turgut Özal's frequent visits to the United States that characterised the Americanisation of Turkey during the 1980s and the early 1990s. The US-educated engineer-turned-politician strove to govern Turkey as a powerful president in the American mould, often intervening in the parliamentary process and challenging the authority of the powerful military guardians.¹⁴⁴ Özal was also inspired by the American system of federalism and, in a bid to resolve the growing Kurdish conflict, envisioned replacing Turkey's overly centralised state structure with a decentralised system of autonomous states ('eyalet'); a dangerous idea that most likely led to his death at the hands of the 'deep state' whose idea of Turkey as a model did not extend that far.¹⁴⁵

Today, as Turkey's western focus once again moves from Europe to the United States, its domestic politics too shows signs of Americanisation, or better what we would call *biased* Americanisation, for this concerns but one bit of the colourful American mosaic. As Bechev argues, "the accommodation of religious conservatism that underpins the AKP's democratic *imaginairé*" more closely resembles the relationship between religion and politics in the United States, while lacking US constitutional safeguards and checks and balances, than the secular sensitivities of core Europe's post-Christian polities.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, with its spiritual leader residing in rural Pennsylvania since 1999, the influential Gülen movement has had sustained exposure to the American culture wars and appears to have served as an intellectual bridge between the Christian right and Turkish Islamists. Indeed, Turkey under the AKP seems increasingly inspired by the evangelical wing of the Republican Party - from the ruling party's drive to uphold conservative family values, to the limitations it has gradually placed on teaching Darwinian evolution at schools, to Prime Minister Erdoğan's populist campaign against abortion and in favour of the death penalty.¹⁴⁷

These are of course but fragments of the complex changes taking place in Turkey. We cannot assume that top-down pronouncements necessarily reflect societal trends. Indeed, domestic trends which may appear like "Americanisation", seem all at once to be by-products of moments

¹⁴⁴ Faced with the resistance of Necip Torumtay, the military chief of staff, to Turkey's involvement in the First Gulf War, Özal did not budge and ultimately succeeded in having the military head replaced with a more compliant general, General Doğan Güreş.

¹⁴⁵ We should note that both Menderes and Özal met untimely deaths. Prime Minister Menderes was hanged by a military tribunal along with two of his senior Democrat Party associates following the military coup of 1960. President Özal died of a suspicious heart attack in 1993, at a critical moment when he was preparing to negotiate a peace settlement with the Kurdish separatist group PKK. His death coincided with the suspected assassinations by the 'deep state' of a number of key politicians, journalists and military officers, who were critical of the security sector's controversial role in the conflict. Under Özal's successor, Süleyman Demirel, state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses escalated dramatically. In June 2012, a report by the State Audit Board ruled the circumstances of Özal's death suspicious and that his death may have been caused by poisoning. In September, a state prosecutor ordered Özal's grave to be exhumed for investigation. 'Late President Özal's body to be exhumed', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 18 September 2012.

¹⁴⁶ Bechev, 'The Americanisation of Turkey'

¹⁴⁷ 'PM turns strike debate into death sentence row', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 5 November 2012; 'Citing Breivik, Turkish PM says death penalty sometimes justified', *Today's Zaman*, 9 November 2012.

of strategic convergence with the US, and products of political struggles for hegemony in an increasingly polarised country. And within a top-down logic, convergence with the US tends to occur without a socio-political blueprint adopted by broader sways of the bureaucratic and representative elites (as with Turkey's EU accession process). Instead, it is largely shaped by the sympathies and preferences of powerful individuals like Özal, Erdoğan, or arguably Gülen.¹⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, these trends do not necessarily reflect or serve the strategic interests of the US foreign policy establishment – what would the US gain from the banning of abortion in Turkey? – which in its majority tends to shy away from the socially-conservative take of the evangelist right. The United States, in other words, lacks the mechanisms and the institutions to monitor and influence the contents and the extent of Turkey's domestic 'Americanisation'. Crucially, it also lacks the intention.

Domestic developments in Turkey seem to push the United States to take an active policy stance only when they have an observable impact on its strategic interests in the wider region. As such, the mainstream US discourses on Turkey do not necessarily reflect the apparent trajectory of that country's democratisation or the state of its civil liberties. This has certainly been the case throughout the 2000s. A quick review of the assertions made by prominent strategists and pundits like Soner Çagaptay or Thomas Friedman quoted earlier may be revealing. For Friedman, the AKP in the early 2000s represented the "moderate branch of Islam" in a "free society [...] which has always embraced religious pluralism", just like the United States. Then, at the height of Turkey's multi-directional foreign policy, he portrayed the ruling party as a regressive Islamic force serving the interests of the 'East', only to go back to the 'moderate Islamist' narrative following the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. Similarly, for Çagaptay, Erdoğan's radical Islamism became 'soft secularism' when Turkey strategically aligned itself with the US on Syria. Needless to say, as we discussed above, this is not what one would infer purely from Turkish domestic trajectory.

The argument that Turkey had shifted its axis from the West to the East was already under way in the United States in the mid-2000s. The question of "who lost Turkey?" was being hotly debated within the US foreign policy establishment as early as 2004. Upon his return from a trip to Turkey with US officials in February 2005, Robert Pollock of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote an article titled "The Sick Man of Europe – Again", in which he accused the Turkish prime minister of being a "prize hypocrite", grieved the loss of Atatürk's legacy and the old days of steadfast Americanism within the Turkish establishment, pointed at "the subtle yet insidious Islamism" of the AKP as the reason behind "the collapse in relations", and warned that Turkey was on the way to becoming a "second-rate country: small-minded, paranoid, marginal [...] friendless in America and unwelcome in Europe."¹⁴⁹ It did not matter to pundits like Pollock, Friedman or

¹⁴⁸ The only exception is the 1950s when Americanisation occurred partly within the framework of the US Marshall Plan.

¹⁴⁹ Robert L. Pollock, 'The Sick Man of Europe – Again', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 February 2005.

Çağaptay, all of whom play a prominent role in shaping the mainstream foreign policy narrative in the US, that 2005 was the peak of Turkey's democratic reform drive and that the EU accession process still very much dominated the country's domestic agenda during this period.

In the late 2000s, the dominant US discourse on Turkey attempted to explain Turkey's disconcerting slide towards illiberalism as a function of its closer ties with Syria and Iran and fallout with Israel. Few people in the US foreign policy establishment publicly entertained the thought that Turkey was merely pursuing its own version of the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP), which seeks "to reinforce [the EU's] relations with neighbouring countries to the east and south in order to promote prosperity, stability and security at its borders."¹⁵⁰ The alarmist rhetoric of Turkey's 'Islamisation', which undermined simultaneous efforts by the Bush administration to mend fences with Turkey and constrained the Obama administration prior to the Arab uprisings, also ignored the fact that it was in large part thanks to Turkey's relatively stable and conflict-free relationship with its southern and eastern neighbours that the AKP government was able to take the political risk to initiate its Kurdish and Armenian openings.

At the peak of the 'axis shift' discourse, in an essay in the leading neo-conservative magazine *Commentary*, Michel Gurfinkiel argued with remarkable honesty the Turkey that was deemed lost to the West and lamented by many foreign policy strategists in the US. "Until very recently", Gurfinkiel wrote,

Turkey was everything an American would want a place in the Middle East or East Asia to be: a member of NATO; a quasi-democracy, enlivened by occasional military coups aimed not at disposing of but rather at reinforcing democratic rule; a country with a booming (if chaotic) economy and a vibrant civil society; and, last but not least, a country both Muslim and modern, enjoying a secular constitution and confident enough to maintain a friendly relationship with Israel.¹⁵¹

In contrast to the neo-conservatives in the Bush administration, foreign policy strategists within the Obama administration appeared to have a better grasp of the irreversible socio-political changes taking place in Turkey over the past decade. Less nostalgic about Turkey's Cold War-era loyalty to the US, they have attempted to devise a new strategy to accommodate these changes while maintaining Turkey inside the geopolitical orbit of the United States. This strategy envisioned a more comprehensive relationship between the two countries and deeper cooperation in implementing their respective agendas of engagement over confrontation. By the end of his first year in office, President Obama along with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, had

¹⁵⁰ 'European Neighbourhood Policy – Overview', European Union External Action Service, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm

¹⁵¹ Michel Gurfinkiel, 'Is Turkey Lost?', *Commentary*, 1 March 2007.

revisited the discourse of Turkey as a model by speaking of a ‘model partnership’ between two predominantly Christian and Muslim countries respectively, thus turning Turkey into a representative of rather than a model for the broader Muslim world. But, as discussed earlier, the Arab uprisings led the Obama administration back to the tried neo-conservative expedient of presenting Turkey as a ‘moderate Islamist’ model to the Middle East. In a context where both Turkey and the countries that are supposed to emulate it are grounds for such contested and fluid politics, such model talk risks more than ever being disconnected from the reality of democratic politics on the ground. As a result, depicting Turkey as a beacon of stability and democracy in this troubled region has been a two-edged sword for the US: on one hand, lending much needed symbolic support to its most dependable ally on the ground; but on the other hand effectively adding to the growing hubris of Turkey’s ambitious leaders, thus unwittingly contributing to the rise of its confrontational political rhetoric at home and abroad.

This is not the place to evaluate President Obama’s contention – and that of others before him including President Bush – that opposing interests and values in the realm of foreign policy constitutes a false choice and that indeed it is not in a country’s long term interest to do so. Perhaps the issue is one of justification rather than guidelines for action per se. Some would argue that there is nothing wrong with states acting on moral compunction without having strong interests at stake but there is no point in disguising the latter as interest-based.¹⁵² Arguably, US policy towards Turkey continues to be driven by regional security interests instead of a strong compulsion to support Turkey’s democracy, civil liberties and human rights. This is certainly not to suggest there is a fundamental conflict between the two – there need not be – but rather that the latter is still very much conditional on the former. Turkey’s domestic slide to authoritarianism is more likely to feature prominently on the US agenda and factor into policy if Turkey is seen to be distancing itself from Israel and mending fences with Iran. Still, US geostrategic interests can occasionally align with Turkey’s democratisation project so as to influence that project positively beyond rhetorical support. Consistent US backing for Turkey’s EU membership bid is a case in point, even if based primarily on a geostrategic calculus that included expanding NATO’s influence over the EU’s foreign and security policy, as the French have long suspected.¹⁵³ But this point reminds us once again of the ultimately limited US capacity to affect Turkey’s (and for that matter, Europe’s) domestic game.

¹⁵² For a recent controversy on the topic see Anne Marie Slaughter, ‘Interests vs. Values? Misunderstanding Obama’s Libya Strategy’, *New York Review of Books*, March 2011

¹⁵³ Ian Black, Michael White and Giles Tremlett, ‘Angry Chirac puts Bush in his place’, *Guardian*, 29 June 2004;

The European Union and the politics of proximity

Turkey's democratisation, civil liberties and human rights are more of a domestic concern for Europeans than for Americans, for obvious reasons. Socially entrenched historical references, geographic proximity and a greater degree of cultural and demographic exchange mean that a profoundly introspective element – a mutual quest for self-definition – lies at the heart of Turkey's multifaceted engagement with Europe and shapes its public debates and dominant narratives. In contrast with the vantage point of the American strategist, who looks at Turkey from the physical and psychological distance and geopolitical elevation of Washington, observed from anywhere in Europe, Turkey appears much closer, much larger and much more relevant to the continent's internal debates.¹⁵⁴

Turkey stirs popular emotions in Europe that can impact voter preferences.¹⁵⁵ Indeed the same thing can be said for the entire southern and eastern neighbourhood of Europe, which marks the difference between American and European perceptions and policies towards the Middle East. As Judt wrote in 2006,

For the US, the Middle East is a faraway land, a convenient place to export America's troubles so that they won't have to be addressed in the "homeland". But the Middle East is Europe's "near abroad", as well as a major trading partner. From Tangiers to Tabriz, Europe is surrounded by the "Middle East". A growing number of Europeans come from this Middle East. When the EU begins accession talks with Turkey, it will be anticipating its own insertion into the Middle East. America's strategy of global confrontation with Islam is not an option for Europe. It is a catastrophe.¹⁵⁶

In other words, while in the US the production of mainstream narratives embracing or rejecting 'Turkey as a model' fall under the remit of the foreign policy establishment and tend to follow strategic expediency, in Europe this endeavour becomes a more complex domestic and arguably 'organic' process that is not solely – or even chiefly – driven by the EU bureaucrats in Brussels.¹⁵⁷ The same, of course, also applies to Turkey, where contending perceptions of

¹⁵⁴ With the partial exception of London, which is, in the words of Tony Judt, "perched uncomfortably on the edge of continental Europe and with half an eye cast permanently on Washington." On Turkey, and for that matter on the rest of the Middle East, the United Kingdom fits the 'Euroatlantic' bill.

¹⁵⁵ Demonstrated for example by the French and Dutch 'no' vote in the 2004 referenda on establishing a European constitution. See Paul Taggart, 'Questions of Europe: The Domestic Politics of the 2005 French and Dutch Referendums and Their Challenge for the Study of European Integration', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44, 2006, pp. 7–25; and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, 'Turkey's Accession to the European Union: The Impact of the EU's Internal Dynamics', *International Studies Perspectives*, 9(2), 2008, pp. 201 – 219.

¹⁵⁶ Tony Judt, 'The Good Society: Europe vs. America' in *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 401.

¹⁵⁷ It is probably not too farfetched to speculate that had the 'Eurocrats' actually possessed the ability to shape the public debate on Turkey to the extent that the foreign policy strategists do in the US, Turkish entry into the EU

Europe reflect the on-going quest for self-identification within this country. This dynamic presents us with a contradiction: Turkey's engagement with Europe contains the potential to become a profoundly transformative relationship for both sides thanks to this shared domestic popular element, but that complex element does not always push the two sides towards more cooperation, openness and liberal democratic reform. In fact, it usually does not.

For a long time, the popular image of Turkey in Europe oscillated between on one hand a fear, awe and wonder inspiring entity and on the other hand a more familiar if uninspiring entity that is 'almost but not quite' European, lingering awkwardly at the continent's geopolitical, socio-economic and intellectual periphery.¹⁵⁸ The former category includes essentialising images of invading Ottoman armies, pushing deep into the Christian heartland with their military and moral prowess, conquering Constantinople and laying siege to Vienna; the lavish palaces, mysterious courts and exotic harems recounted and fantasied by travelling storytellers; and more recently, the image of an assertive, dynamic, yet unmistakably more Islamic country, whose charismatic leader dares to publicly dress down Israel, which at once excites and unsettles many European onlookers. In the second category, we come across images of the ailing Ottoman Empire – the sick man of Europe – waiting to be dismembered by the French, British and Russians; French and German inspired military officers, attempting to construct a strictly European nation-state; immigrant guest workers arriving en masse to participate in post-WWII reconstruction and "Wirtschaftswunder" or, to this day, a large and relatively poor country desperately seeking inclusion in the European Union.

In Turkey, too, contending perceptions of Europe have long reflected the continuous quest for self-identification. While for many Ottoman Muslims, especially during the formative centuries of the empire, Europe beyond its borders constituted the 'house of war' (*dar al-harb*), the land of unbelievers waiting to be incorporated into the 'house of Islam' (*dar al-Islam*), for many others – Muslims and non-Muslims – it gradually became the prime inspiration for reform and fashion. This second category included the Ottoman palace, much of the urban middle and upper middle classes, and eventually most of the senior officers in the military, who founded the Turkish republic in 1923. In the interwar period, the Kemalist leaders of the young republic looked to European states and institutions to create a strictly secular and 'western' state and society, also

would have been a far more realistic prospect, as it is the rising grassroots opposition to European expansion and not so much the political will of the EU elites that has stalled this process.

¹⁵⁸ In fact, the term 'Turkey' was first used in Europe in reference to the Ottoman Empire. Prior to the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the term meant little or nothing to the inhabitants of the geographic area that the republic comprises today. A corresponding term did not exist in most languages spoken within the Ottoman borders, including in Ottoman Turkish. For centuries, the Ottoman Empire was known to its subjects as 'Devlet-i Âliye-yi Osmâniyye', or the domains of the House of Osman. It meant little to the Ottomans that this multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire ruled by a dynasty that almost exclusively married Christian/European women, and had been engaged in the internal politics and alliance making of the continent at least since the 15th century, could be seen as a purely Turkish, Muslim or non-European entity.

because they realised that this was the only way to escape colonisation and domination.¹⁵⁹ The logic of this ‘westernisation’ was a direct result of the hegemonic West, represented at that time by the European powers. For Turkey’s authoritarian modernisers, who subscribed wholesale to the dichotomous worldview associated with the European Enlightenment, the West symbolised modernity and civilisation, while the East stood for religion and tradition, also bywords for backwardness and ignorance.¹⁶⁰ Turkey’s western condition is an old affair.

During the Cold War, Turkey found itself under the same ‘western’ security umbrella with those European countries that its founders had sought to emulate. Yet despite the geostrategic convergence, deepening economic ties, and the heightened level of cultural and societal exchange, its European engagement during this period was also marked by visible mutual distrust. Across Europe, a subtle but persistent antipathy towards Turkey, which was viewed widely (and not entirely inaccurately) as a corrupt, repressive and patriarchal state and society, was coupled by a popular (and often openly racist) dislike of the ‘uncivilised’ Turks now populating European cities, a trope that was ironically also shared by many elite cadres of the Kemalist establishment. Meanwhile, the mainstream Turkish discourse featured both a sense of jealousy and admiration for Europe’s cultural appeals and material prosperity and a feeling of anger and suspicion towards European policies and attitudes vis-à-vis Turkey.

Historically-rooted socio-political tensions largely determined the cycles of Turkey’s engagement with Europe throughout and as well as right after the Cold War, such as its troubled relationship with Bulgaria and Greece over each other’s treatment of their religious minorities (and over Cyprus with Greece),¹⁶¹ or strained ties with France for the latter’s suspected support for the Armenian terrorist organisation ASALA.¹⁶² With the arrival of thousands of Kurdish political refugees in the 1980s across northern Europe, the Turkish state’s repressive policies and the plight of Turkey’s Kurds came under the spotlight in Europe and found critical audiences across the continent. Consequently, as Turkey’s US-equipped security forces engaged in a brutal campaign of suppression against the Kurds during the 1990s, Turkish officials repeatedly accused the governments of France, Belgium, Netherlands and Sweden of providing financial

¹⁵⁹ As is well known, the Kemalist idea of secularism corresponded to French *laïcité*, which stood more for state control (and often suppression) of public expressions of religiosity than the separation of church and state, as in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The young republic translated its penal code from that of Fascist Italy and its civil code from the Swiss. Ironically, the country that was designed to be a purely ‘European’ nation-state had become recently purged of many of its non-Muslim communities and consisted of an overwhelming majority of Muslims. Throughout the republican period, policies against non-Muslims further reduced their numbers.

¹⁶⁰ This dichotomy was regularly emphasised by Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkish republic. In a 1923 interview, he stated that “Turks have followed only one destination over the centuries. We have always walked from the East towards the West. [...] Our whole effort is to establish a modern, and therefore, western government in Turkey. What nation desires to enter civilisation but does not turn towards the West?” Nimet Arsan (ed) *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, Vol. 3 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989), p. 91.

¹⁶¹ Othon Anastasakis, Kerem Öktem, Kalypso Nicolaidis (eds), *In the long shadow of Europe: Greeks and Turks in the era of Post-Nationalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁶² William Echikson, ‘Armenian bombing at Orly ends pact between Socialists and terrorists’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 July 1983.

and logistical assistance to the PKK. All the while, and despite these tensions, Turkey's politicians consistently pushed for further political and economic integration with Europe, achieving modest success.¹⁶³

Only during that brief window between the late 1990s and mid-2000s the Turkish – European engagement towards the goal of EU membership gained an overwhelmingly positive momentum, during which both sides favoured bilateral cooperation and integration over confrontation. It was in many ways a fortunate convergence at a particular juncture of their histories, in which Turkey looked to its West for reform, growth and stability, and the EU looked towards the East for new markets and populations to absorb in order to expand and strengthen its union.¹⁶⁴ The result, as discussed above, was a period of unprecedented democratic reform, economic growth and socio-political introspection in Turkey and a chance to settle the perennial 'otherisation' of Turkey by Europe, and of Europe by Turkey, by permanently tying the two entities together.

Although brief, this period has nonetheless demonstrated not only that the Turkish – European engagement is an emotionally charged relationship with the pursuit of self-identification at its core, but also that given the right conditions, it can also be a profoundly transformative relationship that encourages democratic reform, economic and political stability and societal dialogue. This is precisely the kind of engagement that would encourage the reconciliatory and pluralistic political rhetoric that Turkey needs as it slides disconcertingly towards illiberalism and internal conflict in the midst of its involvement in a destabilising conflict in the Middle East.

Renewing EU – Turkish engagements

The dynamic and transformative relationship between Turkey and the EU during the early 2000s helped bring Turkey out of the cycle of political repression, social conflict and economic crisis of the 1990s. Reviving that relationship could theoretically help prevent it from re-entering such cycle in the years to come. Yet given the fact that most of the socio-economic and geopolitical conditions that had made this brief but momentous engagement possible are no longer in place, the task at hand appears to be a particular difficult one. Not only do the factors that brought Turkey's European drive to a halt in the mid-2000s – the growing popular backlash against EU expansionism, rising xenophobia and anti-Islamism in Europe, combined with a sense of frustration in Turkey and the belief that it is better off without the EU – remain firmly in place;

¹⁶³ Turkey has been an associate member of the then European Community since 1964 and first applied for full membership in the EC in 1987. The most significant achievement in terms of Turkey's integration into the European Community before the turn of the millennium was the signing of a partial customs union in December 1995.

¹⁶⁴ On the various schools of thoughts prevailing in the EU at the time see Nathalie Tocci, 'Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform?', *South European Society and Politics*, Vol 10, No.1, 2005; Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'Turkey is European... for Europe's sake', in *Turkey and the European Union: From Association to Accession?*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands, January 2004.

but they have been further highlighted by the deepening socio-economic crisis in Europe and Turkey's all-consuming regional leadership ambitions in the Middle East, together with its shifting western focus towards the United States.

Indeed, there is a sense that both the EU and Turkey are too preoccupied with the challenges and the troubles of their separate geopolitical spheres to meaningfully re-engage with each other. That is the sense one gets upon realising that during Prime Minister Erdoğan's two-hour address to the AKP congress in September 2012, during which he listed his government's decade of accomplishments in Turkey, railed against Syria and Israel and promoted Turkey as the new leader of the Middle East, there was not a single mention of the European Union, save for passing references to its economic crisis, which he confidently claimed had bypassed Turkey. Among a long list of VIP guests in attendance that included Egypt's Mohammad Morsi, Khaleed Meshaal of Hamas and the KRG's Massoud Barzani, the only European representative was the former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder. One also understands a lot about the Turkish government's priorities when Burhan Kuzu, a senior AKP lawmaker who heads the parliamentary commission drafting Turkey's new constitution, pretends throwing the latest European Union Progress Report on Turkey, which criticises the ruling party on a range of issues, into the rubbish bin on live television. The symbolism becomes unmistakable given the fact that these yearly reports were eagerly awaited, profusely debated and seriously considered by Turkey's government, civil society and public only a few years ago.¹⁶⁵

Yet there seems to be little disquiet within Europe over Turkey's diminishing interest in the EU membership. On the contrary, one often comes across a sense of tangible relief at the prospect of an EU without Turkey. Reacting to a visit by the Turkish prime minister to Berlin, in which he stated that the EU had until 2023 to grant Turkey full membership, the conservative German daily *Die Welt* argued that "for a Europe in severe crisis, the question of Turkish accession is of minor importance, particularly after recognising the painful error of integrating other marginal countries. [...] The EU is a community of values, not an educational institution." An editorial in the left-leaning *Berliner Zeitung* called Erdoğan's performance "an absurd appearance! Europe currently has other things to do than think about new member states."¹⁶⁶ In the words of Alain Lamassoure, a passionate supporter of the EU but an opponent of Turkish membership in it, "the debate over the borders of the Union is finally over. The Turkish problem of the 2000s no longer exists. Neither the Turks nor the Europeans want to be associated with each other."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Sedat Ergin, 'Is it only the EU report that was thrown into the waste basket?', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 October 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Kristen Allen, 'Turkish Accession Is 'of Minor Importance' to EU', *Spiegel*, 1 November 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Alain Lamassoure, 'Prix Nobel de la paix : "Un formidable message d'espoir pour le monde"', *Journal de Dimanche*, 12 October 2012.

Thankfully, there are still prominent players on both sides that continue to resist these exclusionary views and advocate for Turkish accession to the EU.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Turks and Europeans simply cannot cease to be associated with each other. They are not only entangled by the institutional commitments made over the years to Turkey's European integration dating back to the 1950s, regardless of the fact that this process has been stationary during the past recent past, but also bound by their geographic proximity, existing demographic bonds and extensive economic connections. The politics of proximity is not only geographic but historical, cultural, institutional, demographical and economic. Efforts to draw mental or physical boundaries between the two, such as maintaining a strict visa regime to restrict the movement of Turkish citizens in Europe or constructing a fence on the Greek – Turkish border to curb illegal immigration from third countries, will not change the fact that Turkey, a fast developing country of more than 70 million mostly Muslim people, has long been a European actor and that it has a growing – not diminishing – relevance to the EU's internal debates, even without being a member state. Given their interconnectedness, just as Turkey cannot avoid being affected by Europe's social and economic crises, it is also no longer possible for Europe to remain immune to the destabilising effects of a Turkey that is not only on a faster growth trajectory than to the 1990s, but also risks being engulfed in socio-political conflicts at home and abroad. In short, Lamassoure's Turkish 'problem' has gained in urgency and cannot simply be relegated to the periphery.

The fundamental fact is this: far from being mired in the problems of their separate geopolitical spheres, Turkey and the EU are cohabitants and major actors in a common neighbourhood stretching from the Maghreb to the Mashreq and up to the Black Sea. The EU and Turkey can become competitors in this common neighbourhood, but they both have a lot to lose from the continued instability, increasing securitisation and growing focus on 'hard power' dynamics in their shared backyard. Consequently, while Judt is correct to assert that the "American strategy of confrontation" is not an option for Europe vis-à-vis Turkey or the rest of the Middle East, nor is pretending that these places no longer matter to the EU (indeed, the Obama administration is itself revisiting the tenets of this strategies). By the same token, deepening its ties with the Middle East can complement Turkey's European engagement, but it cannot replace it. A renewed EU – Turkish cooperation, in other words, is not a matter of choice for the two sides; it is a matter of necessity.

So where do we go from here? Despite the gloomy state of affairs between the EU and Turkey and both sides' apparent pre-occupation with their own set of problems, we believe there are still viable avenues for re-engagement. Pursuing these avenues may not only help the two sides

¹⁶⁸ See for instance the regular reports of the Independent Commission on Turkey; Emma Bonito, Howard Dean and Ana Palacio, 'The West's choice', *Hurriyet Daily News*, 22 December 2011; 16 EU foreign ministers, 'The EU and Turkey: Stronger together', *Euobserver*, 28 June 2012, <http://euobserver.com/opinion/116780>; See also "Project Europe 2030: Reflection Group report," European Council, March 2010.

salvage their troubled relationship, but crucially, it can also contribute to their efforts in dealing with their respective socio-economic and regional problems. This can take place on three interconnected levels: on a **bilateral level** between the EU and the Turkish government, on the **national level** between specific EU member states and Turkey, and on a joint **regional level** where Turkey and the EU increase cooperation in their shared neighbourhoods.

Relations between the EU and Turkey are multifaceted and not reducible to accession negotiations. On the internal/external security front, collaboration is ongoing on border management, counter-terrorism and cross-border judicial issues. But absent a broader membership perspective, these areas of cooperation remain simply instances of asymmetric 'rule export' on the part of the EU. Some analysts have argued that the EU and Turkey along with Russia must come together in a dialogue to build a new European security architecture.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, any long term geostrategic consideration of the Euromediterranean region ought to take both Turkey and Russia in the equation. Others have argued that there may be a new and more workable case for a privileged partnership for Turkey in light of the ongoing discussions in the UK for a looser association with the EU.¹⁷⁰ That, however, might be a misleading comparison given the vastly different conditions involved in opting out of long standing full membership and being partially admitted in the first place. In other words, a possible Turkish partial entry option is not functionally equivalent to a potential UK's partial exit option, even if it may sometimes be astute to compare the two countries. Turkey might indeed be able and encouraged to opt-out of some of the EU's domains of competence or policies as other countries have do, and perhaps in new innovative way, but it needs to become a full and bona fide member first.

We believe that Turkey's currently stalled membership accession process remains the chief institutional framework through which EU – Turkish relations are defined. Thus, when that process comes to a halt it also affects the entire relationship between the EU and Turkey. In order to be granted full membership status, Turkey's government needs to successfully negotiate with the European Council 35 chapters of the EU's *acquis communautaire*. At the time of writing, 13 chapters had been opened and only one (on science and research) was provisionally closed. The EU Council decision dating from December 2006 prohibited negotiations on eight chapters on the grounds that Turkey has not fulfilled its obligations towards the Republic of Cyprus based on the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement. At the same time, under former President Sarkozy, France had declared it would not allow negotiations to start on the five chapters that are directly related with membership.

¹⁶⁹ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, with Dimitar Bechev, Jana Kobzova & Andrew Wilson, *European security: The spectre of a multipolar Europe*, London: ECFR, 2010

¹⁷⁰ Sinan Ülgen, 'Avoiding a Divorce: A Virtual EU Membership for Turkey', *Carnegie Papers*, December 2012; 'Half in, half out: Can Turkey and the UK learn from each other's EU policies?', Roundtable with Sinan Ülgen and George Eustice MP, *Centre For European Reform*, London, 16 January 2013.

The election of Socialist Francois Hollande to the French presidency in 2012 has led to a relative thaw in French-Turkish relations: while the new French leader also expressed reservations about the prospect of Turkish membership, he did not categorically oppose it as his predecessor.¹⁷¹ The issue of Cyprus, on the other hand, remains a veritable obstacle to normalising EU – Turkish relations. The acceptance of the island into the EU despite the Greek Cypriot rejection of the Annan Plan in 2004 and the continued isolation of Turkish Cypriot community in the north has led to a gradual loss of interest and momentum for seeking a negotiated solution in Turkey, while the Turkish Cypriot community has lost what little political autonomy it had vis-à-vis Ankara. This has been compounded by the perception that Greek Cypriots, enjoying the benefits of EU membership and in possession of veto powers over Turkey’s accession bid, have little interest in changing the status quo.¹⁷²

There is also some expressed desire in both the EU and Turkey to revive the accession process despite the Cyprus quandary. Launched by the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle and the Turkish Minister for European Affairs and Chief European Union Negotiator Egemen Bağış in May 2012, weeks before Cyprus took over the rotating presidency of the EU, the so-called “Positive Agenda” is a creative and practical way to move the relationship forward in compartments by focusing on issues where the two sides see room for cooperation, namely the alignment with the EU legislation, political reforms and fundamental rights, mobility and migration, trade, energy, counter-terrorism and dialogue on foreign policy.¹⁷³ It signals a welcome change from the previously endorsed approach whereby individual differences were able to stall the accession process in its entirety.¹⁷⁴ A subsequent statement by 16 EU foreign ministers, expressing unity “in seeing [Turkey’s] accession process as a vital framework for cooperation and a powerful stimulus for reform” regardless of the outstanding differences of opinion amongst EU member states “on how to realise Turkey’s European perspective”, demonstrates that support for the Positive Agenda is not merely confined to the EU bureaucrats in Brussels.¹⁷⁵

However, for it to go beyond expressions of goodwill, the initiative requires the continuous interest and the active support of civil society in Europe and Turkey. Civil society organisations can play an instrumental role in sustaining pressure on European and Turkish officials to stick to the commitments outlined in the Positive Agenda, and in informing their respective publics on a range of issues where mainstream views can be susceptible to populist misrepresentation. It is up

¹⁷¹ Sylvia Zappi, ‘La position de Hollande sur la Turquie : entre ouverture et fermeté’, *Le Monde*, 12 April 2012; ‘Hollande Spring’ in Turkish-EU relations’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 22 June 2012.

¹⁷² Nathalie Tocci, ‘The Baffling Short-sightedness in the EU-Turkey-Cyprus Triangle’, *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, October 2010; Vincent Morelli, ‘Cyprus: Reunification Proving Elusive’, *Congressional Research Service*, 5 January 2011.

¹⁷³ ‘Positive EU-Turkey agenda launched in Ankara’, EU Press Release, 17 May 2012, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-359_en.htm#PR_metaPressRelease_bottom.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Turkey will bypass Cyprus with EU ‘positive agenda’ talks’, *Famagusta Gazette*, 18 May 2012.

¹⁷⁵ 16 EU foreign ministers, ‘The EU and Turkey: Stronger together’

to Turkish civil society, for example, to make the case to the public-at-large that EU engagement does not only provide a framework for economic reform, for which little interest remains in Turkey given the state of European economies, but also much needed impetus for political reform at a time when fundamental freedoms and civil liberties are under increasing governmental pressure. Such efforts will also have to contend with the popular image of a crisis-ridden Europe failing to live up to its own democratic standards, as technocratic governments from Spain to Greece are made to follow externally designed blueprints for scaling down public services at the expense of the majority of their populations.

Another issue where increased cooperation is both vital and possible, but also prone to popular resistance from within Europe is the issue of mobility and migration. The stringent visa restrictions facing Turkish citizens wishing to travel to the 26-nation Schengen zone has long been a cause for intense and widespread frustration within Turkey. At a time when Turkish citizens possess greater financial means than ever to travel abroad for leisure or business, and while the number of non-Schengen countries they can visit without obtaining a visa is continually growing, the doors of Europe remain shut to many. Visa applications processes to many EU countries from Turkey are bureaucratically complicated, slow moving and expensive, resulting in a loss of valuable business potential for Europe and perceptions of discrimination and double standards among Turkish citizens.¹⁷⁶ In this respect, the agreement reached between the two sides in June 2012 to take steps towards “a visa-free regime between the EU and Turkey as a gradual and long-term goal” in exchange for increased commitment by the Turkish government to stem the flow of third-country migrants from Turkey into Europe is a significant development. As part of a readmission agreement that is expected to be ratified by both sides in 2013, illegal migrants who reach Europe via Turkey will be repatriated to their home countries following temporary stays in Turkey. Turkey will establish camps in anticipation of temporarily accommodating as many as 100,000 returning migrants, whose financial burden will be shared with the EU.¹⁷⁷

The logistical complication and the humanitarian controversy of the repatriation process notwithstanding, the deal risks being still-born due to the insistence of Germany, Netherlands and Austria to see its continued implementation by Turkey before agreeing to any visa relaxation; an open-ended commitment that the Turkish government understandably objects to. Such apprehension reflects the socially entrenched stereotypes in these countries about Turkey, which still depict it as an agrarian society where impoverished masses look for an opportunity to migrate to Europe. In fact, very few of the immigrants who land in Europe via Turkey are

¹⁷⁶ “Turkey is the only EU candidate country without a visa-free travel regime with the EU. Even Moldova and Ukraine, which have yet to receive any promise of membership, participate in an EU visa liberalisation process. Other eastern neighbours are expected to follow suit. There are even discussions about visa-free travel for Russians.” Gerald Knaus and Alexandra Stiglmeier, ‘Being fair to Turkey is in the EU's interest’, *Euobserver*, 12 March 2012.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Turkey, EU formally start process for visa liberalization’, *Today's Zaman*, 21 June 2012.

Turkish citizens. Unlike in the 1960s, when thousands of Turkish ‘guest workers’ arrived in Europe to assist in post-war reconstruction, Turkish citizens no longer predominantly seek livelihood outside of Turkey. As such, there is an urgent need for the Turkish government and civil society organisations to work in collaboration with their European counterparts to challenge these stereotypes and educate sceptical publics about the large scale socio-economic change that has occurred in Turkey since the 1960s.¹⁷⁸

The Turkish – European engagement would also benefit from a revision and strengthening of relations between Turkey and individual member states. Greece is a particularly important case that stands out in this respect. The socio-economic crisis in that country has deeply challenged the legitimacy of its political establishment, leading in particular to the rise of a violently xenophobic neo-fascist movement, known as ‘Golden Dawn’, which has 18 seats in the Greek parliament and alleged links to the police force. While Golden Dawn is still a minor party in a relatively peripheral EU country, the fertile ground on which the extreme right has been rising across the continent represents a more existential challenge to the future of the liberal European project than the fate of its single currency. At the same time, the movement’s brazen anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish rhetoric threatens to provoke nationalist sentiments across the Aegean, putting the relative stability Greece and Turkey have enjoyed since the late 1990s into jeopardy.¹⁷⁹

Turkey thus has more than just economic interest in seeing its neighbour move out of the crisis.¹⁸⁰ Having survived its own socio-economic crises just over a decade ago, Turkey is also in a position to assist Greece in this endeavour and use the current situation as an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties. In 2011, Turkey surpassed Germany as Greece’s second largest trade partner.¹⁸¹ While economic and cultural relations between the two countries are more extensive than at any point in the two republics’ histories, they can still be improved. Further adjustments to the bilateral visa regime that would make it easier for Turkish citizens to visit Greece and a demonstration of increased commitment by the Turkish government to address the issue of illegal migration, in which Greece is the primary entry point into Europe, could draw the two countries further together.¹⁸² The Turkish government has also expressed solidarity with the Greek people and pledged to ease bureaucratic red tape to encourage the continued growth of trade and investment ties. Such meaningful gestures, however, risk being undermined by the

¹⁷⁸ See Seçil Paçacı Elitok and Thomas Straubhaar (eds) *Turkey, Migration and the EU: Potentials, Challenges and Opportunities* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2012).

¹⁷⁹ ‘Greek ‘Führer’ vows to ‘take back İzmir’ after Istanbul’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 15 June 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Şahin Alpay, ‘Time for Turkey and Greece to draw closer’, *Today’s Zaman*, 26 February 2012.

¹⁸¹ ‘Turkey becoming Greece’s No 2 trading partner: Official’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 15 October 2012.

¹⁸² This is demonstrated by the fact that the number of tourists from Turkey increased significantly during summer 2012 when the Greek government eased visa restrictions for Turkish citizens traveling to the Greek islands, despite the fact that overall tourist arrivals into Greece dwindled. In 2010, the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish special passport holders led to a 180 percent increase in the number of Turks visiting Greece. ‘Greek minister calls for cooperation with Turkey’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 2 July 2012; ‘Turk tourists flock to Greek islands’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 28 July 2012.

imperialistic undertones of the AKP's foreign policy rhetoric in the Balkans, where repeated references to the Ottoman Empire targeting the region's Muslim populations cause suspicion and alarm among non-Muslims, including in Greece. A more humble narrative that does not invoke historical differences is likely to go further in helping Turkey become a trusted partner of all actors in this region.

Finally, and relatedly, both Turkey and the EU can benefit from increased cooperation in their shared neighbourhoods, particularly in the Middle East in the midst of the Arab uprisings. Interestingly, while Turkey has recently come out on top in most surveys exploring Arab perceptions of regional actors, the EU, for all its economic woes, tends to be a close second.¹⁸³ In spite of the financial crisis, the EU continues to wield significant 'soft power' influence over a wide and diverse terrain, which will become increasingly relevant in the long term, as economic issues remain the top priority for a majority of the region's populations.¹⁸⁴ Whatever shifting alliance patterns in the short term, both the EU and Turkey strive to influence this diverse region *as a whole* primarily through the 'soft power' tools at their disposal, i.e. by, economic, cultural and civil society ties through public and private initiatives. On its end, the EU has repeatedly tried to adapt its Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (or Barcelona Process) started in 1995, to changing circumstances in the region. Relunched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) encompassing 43 countries from Europe and the Mediterranean Basin, the new setting provides a good intentioned project based framework (eg. water pollution etc). But it has certainly not lived up to the vision of all those who dream of a Mediterranean revival, often reverting to a bilateral logic as its multilateral dynamic was regularly broken by the unresolved conflicts in its midst (Arab-Israeli, Cyprus-Turkish and Western Sahara). This is true even for concrete, a-political goals like the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) by 2010.¹⁸⁵ To be sure, the Commission did thoroughly revisit the so called "European Neighbourhood Policy" (of which the UfM is the southern flank) to reflect the fast moving changes occurring in this region, proposing in the Spring of 2011 "a partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" and subsequently launching "a new response to a changing Neighbourhood", which pledged increased support to transitional countries in terms of financial assistance, enhanced mobility and access to the EU single market in exchange for mutual

¹⁸³ 'Euro-Mediterranean Policies and the Arab Spring', *Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors 2011*, European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, 2012

¹⁸⁴ 47% of the respondents to the 2012 TESEV survey indicated economic issues as "the most urgent issue facing the respondent's country". This was followed by security issues with 9%.

¹⁸⁵ The signing of a customs union agreement with Turkey in 1995 was an important stepping stone for both sides. The Agadir Agreement of 2004 (a free trade agreement between Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt) has contributed to the expansion of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area in coordination with the ENP under the shared goal of creating a single Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone by 2010. For the initiative's shortcomings and future prospects, see Nicolas Péridy and Nathalie Roux, 'Why are the Trade Gains from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership so Small?', *Journal of World Trade*, 46 (3), June 2012, pp. 571 – 595; Ege Aylin, 'Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area – Is It Time To Be Optimistic about the Future?', FOCUS on the Free Trade Area, Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània, June 2010.

accountability and shared commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.¹⁸⁶ It also made available an additional €1.2 billion on top of the €5.7 billion already committed to the ENP to be used in advancing its goals of democratic institution building and inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. But it has resorted to using mainly the instrument of “National Action Plans” to renegotiate its relations with individual countries in the region rather than the multilateral framework of the UfM.

Hence, the EU has been particularly active in revolutionary Tunisia, assisting in and monitoring the country’s first free elections in decades and providing extensive technical and institutional support in its constitution making process.¹⁸⁷ But its involvement and influence diminishes significantly as one moves from the Maghreb to the Mashreq, while it has no leverage in the Gulf region. For example, the EU’s presence in post-Mubarak Egypt has been negligible, vastly overshadowed by the role played by the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and even Qatar, both in terms of financial assistance and political influence. In the Syrian civil war, the EU has been a reactive rather pro-active player and has largely followed the lead of the United States. While it is true that it was Tunisia that provided the first spark of the Arab uprisings, it will most likely be in the countries of the Mashreq, especially in Egypt and Syria, where the dominant socio-political and geostrategic dynamics of the post-Arab Spring Middle East are going to be shaped. Therefore it is imperative for the EU to make itself a more relevant actor in these countries.

In contrast to the EU, and as discussed at the outset of this paper, the Turkish presence in the Mashreq has been much more prominent, but also more controversial – indeed a growing majority of Syrians viewed Turkish government’s policy vis-à-vis their countries negatively in 2012.¹⁸⁸ Turkey’s presence mixes elements of the former ‘zero problems with neighbours’ policy with the kind of positioning called for by its new Sunni realignments. Hence, Turkey too has endeavoured to create a free trade area encompassing the Middle East and North Africa. Notably, its total trade volume with the Middle East expanded from \$5.8 billion to \$48.4 billion between 1996 and 2011.¹⁸⁹ While this is still a modest amount compared to the trade potential between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours, Kemal Kirişçi rightly argues that “Turkey is nonetheless offering the Mediterranean countries an opportunity to develop a more diversified

¹⁸⁶ ‘A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean’, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Commission, Brussels, 8 March 2011.

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/documents/communication_conjointe_mars_2011_en.pdf. ‘A new response to a changing Neighbourhood’, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Commission, Brussels, 25 May 2011.

¹⁸⁷ See ‘Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities for Tunisia 2012 – 2014’, Council of Europe, DGProg/Inf(2012)3 rev, 23 March 2012, <https://wcd.coe.int>

¹⁸⁸ 65% of Syrians and 58% of Iraqis surveyed by TESEV during 2012 viewed the government of Turkey as unfriendly, up from 16% and 58% respectively from the previous year.

¹⁸⁹ Foreign Trade Statistics, Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=12.

trade that could contribute to their economic transformation.”¹⁹⁰ It also has a more liberal visa policy vis-à-vis the countries in the region than the European Union. Nevertheless, it is clear that, like the EU, it lacks a multilateral vision and momentum for the region, especially in a new geostrategic context. Shaping such a vision together would be an apt agenda at a time when no actor alone is capable of projecting alone the kind of legitimacy that underpins genuine influence.

Most publics in the Maghreb and Middle east do aspire to many of the standards upheld (albeit imperfectly) in the EU but not when presented as ‘defined there’ – such standards need to be endogenised and indigenised. Democracy it might be but what variants along the liberal-religious axis is up for grabs and will continue to be for years to come. The perception by Turkey’s receptive audience in the region that it itself has had to negotiate with European-defined modernity for the best part of the past century, and that today’s Turkey might be able to both forge its own path and strengthen its links with the EU at the same time, may be an inspiring process. The Turkish experience may serve as experiment without aspiring to model status. Or rather, the model here would be in the ways Turkey manages its concurrent relationships as partially defined but not pre-determined by its Western condition. It would not be each side’s political and economic recipes, even while some of them might inspire. Here is one lesson from the Obama administration that Europeans might do well to ponder.

A case in point: Erdoğan and his Kurdish gamble

With such a prospect in mind, we would like to come back to our initial argument, that is that if the Arab uprisings constitute a foreign policy challenge for Turkey and a moment of redefinition for the Western condition, it is to a great extent through the detour of domestic politics, and perhaps above all the issue of minority treatment in Turkey. In this story, Erdoğan’s motives will continue to play a major role. In his words:

“Mubarak, we are human beings. We are not immortal. We will die one day, and we will be questioned for the things that we left behind. The important thing is to leave behind sweet memories. We are for our people. When we die the imam will not pray for the prime minister or for the president, but he will pray for a human being. It is up to you to deserve good prayers or curses. You should listen to the demands of the people and be conscious of the people and their rightful demands.”

On 1 February 2011, as he urged Hosni Mubarak to heed the message of the tens of thousands of Egyptians demonstrating in Tahrir Square against his three-decade rule, Turkey’s Prime

¹⁹⁰ Kemal Kirişçi, ‘The Arab Spring and Regional Integration: Can the EU and Turkey Cooperate?’, Opinions on the Mediterranean, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 2012.

Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan must have been equally conscious of his own mortality and of the legacy that he would leave behind at the end of his time. He may have also felt, watching one Arab strongman fall after another, that he was destined for an even greater legacy than the one he had already secured in Turkey, the country which his government has profoundly and permanently changed in less than a decade. As the sun started to settle on the troubled era of secular dictatorships in the Middle East, he would be the one to inspire and lead Muslims from Myanmar to Morocco into a brighter dawn, steered by divine guidance and supported by the people. This mission must have seemed even more inevitable in the June of that year, when his party secured its third consecutive general election victory in Turkey, which he dedicated to Sarajevo, Beirut, Damascus and Jerusalem as well as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and Diyarbakir.

Time is a scarce commodity, especially for those who strive to change the world and see the fruit of their labour. For Turkey's ambitious prime minister, every bureaucratic hurdle, every act of resistance by a political opponent, every criticism by an old comrade and every day that a secular Arab dictator stubbornly refuses to relinquish his throne is another frustrating delay on the path to realising his vision before his time comes to an end. He therefore feels less reluctant to put the mighty state apparatus at his disposal into use to clear the path before him, to silence the critics, to crush his enemies and to speed on with building the powerful new Turkey and creating the ideal society that will sustain his legacy. He knows, however, that his task would become easier with a new constitution and a powerful presidency, which would be for him to take.

History is full of ambitious men who in their pursuit of grand visions unleash both exceptionally creative and highly destructive forces at the same time. In many ways, one finds it hard to resist comparing the powerful Turkish premier who will go down in history as the man who undid Turkey's Kemalist republic with the charismatic military officer who had established that republic in the first place. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's legacy will continue to be debated in the years to come. But one thing we can confidently assert is that the Kemalist project of using the state to forge a homogenous society in the westernised, secular and fiercely nationalistic image of its charismatic leader has failed. Unable to fully mould pious Muslims and Kurds into their version of secular Turks, the Kemalist state set out to suppress them, which ultimately led to its self-destruction. Having inherited many of the tactics of his patriarchal predecessor, it is likely that Erdoğan's ambition to create an obedient, religious and hierarchically organised society will also stumble upon similar obstacles.

History also writes of ambitious leaders who in their hubris overestimate the power they possess and underestimate the challenges they face, only to see their grand visions come apart at their feet. In this paper, we have argued that depicting Turkey as an island of stability between a 'crumbling' Europe and a 'smouldering' Middle East conceals the grim state of its democratic deficits and socio-political fragilities and effectively contributes to the excessive self-confidence of its decision makers. Indeed, the island imagery should serve as a sign of caution rather than

confidence: it was US President Jimmy Carter who in 1978 described, not Turkey, but Pahlavi Iran as “an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world” only months before revolutionary turmoil toppled its hubristic monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who called himself *Aryamehr*, or ‘the Light of the Aryans’, and believed he was divinely ordained to modernise Iran from above.¹⁹¹ We neither forecast as tumultuous a prospect for Turkey, nor a similarly ominous fate for its leader, who unlike the Iranian strongman continues to enjoy a substantial level of democratic legitimacy. That said, the suggestion that a country like Turkey, which has unresolved societal fault lines of its own and is deeply invested in the economic and political infrastructure of its various neighbourhoods, can remain immune to changes of such profound scale comes across as dangerously arrogant or, at best, extremely naïve.

Thus, we have argued for a more humble political rhetoric in Turkey that focuses on healing the country’s own social and historical wounds rather than exploiting those beyond its borders for the sake of its regional leadership ambitions. We have objected to the promotion of Turkey by the US foreign policy establishment as a ‘moderate Islamist’ model to the Middle East, as this discourse is more about what Turkey can do for the US in the region rather than what it could stand for in the different geographical scales of its presence. We believe that a Turkey that truly embodies the democratic institutions and the socio-political peace and stability that it claims to represent now would serve as an inspiration to its neighbours in all directions. Yet, what is the likelihood of such an inspirational turn, given the realities on the ground?

On January 1st 2013, the Turkish government announced that it had begun negotiations with the incarcerated former leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, with the aim to disarm its military wing and end three decades of internecine warfare in the Kurdish provinces and beyond. While these negotiations are driven by domestic politics and Erdoğan's wish to immortalise himself as the liberator of the Kurds, the US and Western context is at least as central. The talks have been made possible to a great extent by Turkey's orientation towards the "Sunni axis", which of course also includes the Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq, while it excludes Iraq *per se*. As we discussed, this entity and its leadership has now excellent and multifaceted relations with its northern neighbour, ranging from political cooperation against the PKK to increasing trade relations, to the point of dependency on Turkish exports, construction and service companies. The KRG has conceded that it would not be able to survive on its own in its landlocked position with, crucially, no outlets for its one export good, oil. Its leaders are also adamant that the KRG has no long-term perspective for an attachment to an Iraqi central state. The option of very close

¹⁹¹ Mohammad Reza Shah wrote: “When I remembered the various episodes when I had miraculously escaped from death, and noted the fact that during my reign my country had also miraculously been saved from ruin, I became aware that my mission to my country was not completed yet. I will frankly confess that I was convinced that God had ordained me to do certain things for the service of my nation, things that perhaps could not be done by anyone else. In whatever I have done, and in whatever I do in the future, I consider myself merely as an agent of the will of God, and I pray that He may guide me in the fulfilment of his will, and keep me from error.” Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The White Revolution of Iran*, translated by the Imperial Pahlavi Library (Tehran: Kayhan Press, 1967), p. 16.

cooperation and even federation with Turkey has been voiced reported in both Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish media outlets.

The conditions for a renewed Kurdish initiative by the AKP government could hence be seen as perfectly suitable. A resolution of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey would open the way for much deeper ties with the Kurdish entity and create a solid bloc of majority Sunni, pro-market governments in the US fold (to which, from the lofty heights of strategists in Washington and probably also Ankara, Syria might be added, once 'regime change' has been successful – if all turns out the way Ankara and Washington hope for). Such a deep cooperation and/or federation of sorts with the KRG would make Turkey indeed a more 'Middle Eastern player' that could then act on behalf of two of the 'peoples' of the Middle East, i.e. Turks and Kurds while helping it overcome its most debilitating division. American strategy and pro-American alignment would then, for once, not have been neutral (or ignorant) towards human rights and ethnic grievances, but provide the reference for a more inclusive society and a fairer deal. This in turn would give credence to the idea that (geostrategic) interests and values can sometimes go hand in hand.

This scenario is daring. It re-conceptualizes Turkey as an EU-type post-national entity, to which other states or people can converge through a non-coercive appeal to be 'like us'. The KRG and the Kurdish areas in Syria are the obvious candidates. Obviously, however, the reality on the ground is complex. It is full of pitfalls and internal power games.

Which are the most important challenges to this Turco-Kurdish scenario? First, the obvious incentives of elements from within the Turkish deep state, the PKK and third countries (Iran, Syria) to undermine any peace process in Turkey that would simultaneously help Turkey overcome one of its foundational problems, diminish the space for manipulation through third party governments and empower Turkey in its region. All these actors have a vital interest in the continuation of armed conflict. The execution of three female activists close to the PKK in Paris, only a few days after the beginning of talks in Turkey in January 2013 has almost certainly been committed by one of these actors. Such attacks and attempts at derailing the process will continue and test the determination of the Erdoğan government and its Kurdish counterparts.

Second, the dynamics of the negotiations between the government and the PKK are not yet devoid of the plague of 'pre-conditions' that usually hampers such reconciliation talks. Erdoğan has insisted that his prime concern is to disarm the PKK, while at the same time making legal reforms that would free most of the Kurdish politicians charged due to alleged KCK membership and widen Kurdish cultural rights and regional autonomy. This approach still owes a lot to the AKP's Kurdish approach until now, i.e. wide-ranging if piecemeal reforms for cultural rights and legal and political isolation of the Kurdish nationalist movement through a barrage of court cases against its members. This was another iteration of the long-standing securitisation policy against Kurdish demands, which has tended to classify legitimate demands

for cultural and political rights under a broad definition of 'terrorism' and prioritized military intervention over negotiation. If the government fails to exit from this logic of securitisation and insists on disarmament as prior condition, the talks with the PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement will falter.

Third, the schedule of talks is very tight. Erdoğan has been driven by a number of strong desires, and the resolution of the Kurdish conflict is only one of them. The imposition of a more proudly Islamic national compact which is more open to Kurdish identity is another. But the most important is certainly his candidacy for the Presidency in 2014, which forces him to deliver on the Kurdish initiative within this year. Under such immense time pressure, mistakes can be made.

Four, too fast a rapprochement between Turkey and the Kurdish entity at the cost of relations with Iraq might lead to discomfort on the US side, specifically regarding Turkey's hastily concluded oil agreements with the KRG. The US has invested too much in the Maliki government to give it up entirely to the Shia camp. To what extent US foreign policy actors will lend support to the idea of a Turkish-Kurdish regional coalition remains to be seen.

Finally, there is one more dimension, where we encounter the logic of strategy vs. democratic reform. If the Kurdish conflict is thus resolved by Erdoğan, it is very likely that he would be re-elected and eventually gain the votes to introduce his version of absolute Presidency. A Turkish - Kurdish settlement would be possible thanks to a stronger reference to common Muslim Sunni roots, but the quality of Turkey's democracy and minority rights would not necessarily benefit, as other minorities might well be excluded from this 'Muslim compact'. Some would even go as far as to say that a resolution of the Kurdish conflict by the AKP could open the way for a robustly authoritarian government in Ankara (with Erdoğan at its top), time and health permitting. This is also why a number of secular commentators now insinuate that they would rather not have him solve the Kurdish 'problem', as they see a Turkish-Kurdish, pious-Sunni Muslim coalition then taking over of what little they still possess today.

But this is only one possible scenario. What alternatives can we think of? One could argue that a resolution by the AKP of the Kurdish conflict would in part, albeit implicitly, be inspired by the inclusive and flexible domestic geometries of the US and Europe (including federalism, decentralisation, localism, multiculturalism and minority rights) even though the politics of tolerance and inclusiveness are still clearly wanting on both side of the Atlantic. Such a new configuration would open the way for an invigorated 'western' Turkey, at least as far as the West's perception of itself is concerned. Only that the referent here would not be the authoritarian, hegemonic and colonial Europe of the 1920s on which the Kemalist Republic was founded and rests still today, but the post-nationalist, potentially post-hegemonic West that is much less sure about itself, its history or its model, and that needs to position itself in an

increasingly multi-polar world. There can be no doubt that such a context of shifting global power cannot provide the certainties of the Cold War era, and still many in Turkey, Europe and the US would like to ignore this fact. But beyond those suffocating certainties lies the promise of a new global deal that is truly post-colonial and post-Eurocentric. The triangle between Turkey, the EU and the US might be one of its most intriguing laboratories.

Conclusion: Beyond the impossible triangle

The western condition is not about whether Turkey will choose or abandon 'the West', but rather about how the structure-agency dynamic plays out in its foreign policy or how the actors involved manage to use the structural relationship between Turkey and the West to reinvigorate the potentials for peace and prosperity in the region. This depends in turn on which face of the West Turkey will see and eventually enact: the dominating and patronizing or the supportive and empowering version? The security-focused zero-sum face or the reconciliatory face? Will it be able to regain credibility alongside the EU in emphasising democracy, rule of law, human rights, civil liberties and social justice?

The European Union was in a unique position in the early 2000s to help steer Turkey in this direction, and for all its socio-economic woes, we think it can still do so today. The United States could help, if geostrategic considerations converge with a democratisation agenda. Turkey's increasingly interwoven future with Europe is not only a structural and unavoidable fact regardless of the fate of its accession process into the EU. It is a choice that needs to be made and made again on all sides. In the political turbulence of the region, a democratic and stable Turkey and a democratic and stable European Union can work together to thwart the danger of a further polarisation of the Middle East along sectarian axes and to inspire the peoples of the Mediterranean and their own struggles for social justice and political accountability. And yet again, such a 'democratic alliance' would require the commitment of the United States and the Obama administration to steer away from a predominantly geostrategic logic in the Middle East shaped by the security needs of Israel towards a renewed strategy of engagement.

So we are left with the sense that a revived Turkey – EU partnership is necessary, not *as if* nothing had happened in the intervening period since the mid-2000s, but rather integrating the 'reality on the ground' created by the two other foreign policy logics observed in the following years, namely 'autonomisation' and 'Americanisation'. This is not an 'impossibility triangle'. The factors that led to these two impulses are still with us and they are to stay. Turkey will continue to pursue 'zero problems' in the longer run, especially in the socio-economic field. It would do well to tone down its self-promotion as a model, and there are signs that this message is being received at least in the Foreign Ministry if not by the Prime Minister. Instead Turkey could opt

for cooperation and conversation at a time when so many states in the region are engaged in fierce internal battles to redefine a political version of Islam as social forces awake and demand participation. At the same time, its proactive engagement as part of a US-led Sunni axis reflects a reality that needs to be contended with in the region, namely that this increasingly relevant sectarian divide runs not only among but also within most countries in the region, providing each with means of destabilising its neighbours and all with a shared need for external agents to maintain a kind of social non-intervention pact. This pact may have broken down in the case of Syria but as the conflict unfolds, Turkey is likely to recover a potential mediating role. On this basis, Turkey could legitimately aspire again to the kind of regional leadership role discussed throughout this paper, while remaining cognisant of the dangers of overplaying its hand.

If this is to happen, the EU needs to again live up to its emphasis on democratic institution building and sustainable economic growth, an agenda bound up with the internal management of the financial crisis. If it was able to make significant progress along these lines, Turkey would then have to follow through and develop a more reconciliatory foreign policy rhetoric that does not strike its recipients as hubristic or motivated by sectarian impulses. Well managed, including with the support of the US, regional security concerns could fall into the background, allowing Turkish foreign policy thinkers to better incorporate the EU in their understanding of long term strategic depth. In such a world, the impulses that inspired the consecutive shifts towards autonomisation and Americanisation would not be denied but incorporated in a new EU-Turkey partnership which in turn could constitute a beacon for the region as a whole.