

ETUDES HELLENIQUES

HELLENIC STUDIES

LA TURQUIE EN MUTATION TURKEY IS CHANGING

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Turkey is Changing

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This special issue of *Études helléniques/ Hellenic Studies* focuses on Turkey, a country that is of great interest for more than one reason. In fact, Turkey is a country that occupies a pivotal geostrategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic position being in close proximity with major and boiling subsystems, as the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East. Firmly rooted in the Western camp, because of the Kemalist tradition, Turkey is also a country characterized by cleavages having heavy consequences for the equilibrium prevailing in its interior, which also influence its foreign policy.

So if one accepts the idea that a country's domestic and foreign policy are closely linked, then we can hypothesize that the arrival to power of the ruling AKP, an Islamist party, has not only modified the data of the Turkish domestic politics but also the direction of its foreign policy. Indeed, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, already in 2003, seems to have realized a major change in the basic directions of its foreign policy to the point that, according to some, it seems that Ankara is determined to jeopardize its alliance with the United States and Europe, and turn to the Arab-Muslim world where it could cash its geo-cultural capital, i.e. to come closer to the countries of the region with which it shares, in addition to religion, a common historical and cultural ottoman past.

Will therefore Turkey turn its back on the West? The answer is rather negative: the Turkish government is much stronger today than in 2002 when it won the parliamentary elections because of its success both in domestic and foreign policy: The tug of war of the government with the Turkish generals seems to be won by the AKP and Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is no longer a country torn by domestic acute problems, with the exception of the kurdish question. Furthermore one must take into consideration Turkey's success in the Middle East and the fact that it became a member of the G20. But this does not mean that Turkey could therefore break its political, strategic and economic ties with the West. So what does such a change mean in Turkish foreign policy? Rather it is a policy that seeks to synthesize the benefits available to Turkey and to enforce its interests and its role. The success of such an effort would have the double merit to further strengthen the position of

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the AKP in the Turkish political scene and force its Western allies to give it the position it considers its own, namely the position of a great country and not that of a vital ally, but one of a “second rank”. But to get to this point of confidence in its abilities, Turkish policy has severely fluctuated since 1991.

Since the collapse of the bipolar international system and up to date the international system is in constant change, a fact which is reflected perfectly in the Middle East: from the euphoria of the first decade of the post-Cold War era we moved to the fear sown by the terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001 and thereafter to the impasse to which led the Middle East policy of Washington at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

These changes are marked by the proliferation of regional conflicts and divisions in the Middle East and North Africa. Therefore, the instability and fluidity caused by the general change in the character of the international system—turn bipolar, unipolar and apolar at present according to some—added antagonisms, conflicts and new challenges, as this is the case of Islamic terrorism or the game of pipelines for transporting oil and natural gas to the world markets.

In this tumultuous context Turkey occupies a special position. According to a classical geostrategic representation, Turkey is in some way to the epicenter of these severe issues due to its pivotal geopolitical position, mentioned above. So, if Ankara still feels concerned by the issues and the evolution of conflicts taking place on its borders, its interest for the Middle East has grown since 2003 and for several reasons.

Firstly because in November 2002 the Kemalist Turkey was shaken by a political earthquake: an Islamic party, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wins a landslide election victory and rises to power. Some months later, in March 2003, the new Islamic government of Turkey is facing a serious dilemma: to satisfy U.S. demands for the use of Turkish territory to launch an invasion against a neighboring country with a Muslim population, namely against Iraq, or reject this request, which would satisfy the electorate of the AKP but also cause dangerous friction between the Islamic government and the army, guarantor of the Kemalist orthodoxy? Moreover, U.S. policy in the Middle East regarding key issues such as the Palestinian, Iran, Iraq, of which the Kurdish component is not the least, or the attitude of the administrations of George W. Bush against Islam, are against Turkish interests, at least as those put forward by the AKP.

In this context, Turkey is in a situation marked by significant contradictions. On the one hand Turkey is a strategic ally of the United States as it is—with

Israel-the only stable ally of Washington in this vast oil-rich region that extends from the Caucasus to the Gulf which is characterized by a chronic instability. In this context, it is obvious that Turkey is a vital U.S regional ally since the control of this region is of critical importance to U.S. interests. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Turkey needs the political, economic and diplomatic support provided to it by the United States. Moreover, the sensitivities and constraints arising from domestic politics to the ruling Islamic AKP bump against U.S. policy especially under the administration of President George W. Bush, who started a total war against Islamic terrorism, erroneously identifying Islam with terrorism. Moreover, the Middle East policy of Washington is often, at least according to Ankara, against the vital interests of Turkey, as in the case of northern Iraq, where U.S. policy has given rise to the Kurdish question, which has alarmed Turkey.

In this dislocated upset context, carrying serious risks but also opportunities, Turkey first sought to redefine its role regionally and internationally setting the three following goals:

- To strengthen its position in the Western camp of which Ankara wants to be a full member, yet threatened by the dissolution of the Soviet Union;
- To confront the dangers arising from the regional conflict and fluid situation prevailing in its neighboring subsystems;
- To protect its national interests considered in danger, as in the case of the autonomy of the Kurds in northern neighboring Iraq or in the Cyprus issue.

To accomplish these vital goals Ankara followed a very active foreign policy seeking to assert its geostrategic, geopolitical, geoeconomic and geo-cultural weight. In this context, Ankara has first turned to the new states with a Muslim population which emerged from the collapse of the Soviet world. Turkey has sought to present its political model, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, as an appropriate model for these new states in search of identity and development. It also sought to be present by political and diplomatic means, to the regional formation, assuming responsibilities, as in the Balkans within the framework of NATO, forming alliances as was the case with Albania, and taking regional initiatives like the creation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation of the countries bordering the Black Sea.

Accordingly, Turkey has tried to establish itself as a major regional power whose interests should be taken into consideration. Initially this goal was condemned to bankruptcy, partly because of the struggle between the army, guarantor of the Kemalist orthodoxy, and political forces - mainly Turkish-Islamic - and partly because of the economic weakness of the country, who

came to the brink of bankruptcy in the early 2000s.

But this picture is beginning to change since November 2002 when the ruling Justice and Development Party won the parliamentary elections with an overwhelming majority. Therefore, Ankara, under the influence of Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, seems to have changed the orientation of its foreign policy, highlighting its geopolitical, geostrategic, geoeconomic and geo-cultural weight. This means that Turkey is closer to the Arab-Muslim world that surrounds it, in the name of a religious and cultural community, and on behalf of a common past.

In this context, the contributions included in this special issue of *Études helléniques / Hellenic Studies* focus, on the one hand, on Turkey's efforts to fulfill its European itinerary, marked, however, by significant dilemmas, and partly to its policy towards the Middle East and North Africa, a conflictual region by excellence. The interest is even greater as Turkey has carried out since late May 2010 a big breakdown compared to the past, regarding its relations with Israel. It is certain that such a rupture influences the strategic balance in the region and tends to reshape the balance of regional and local forces.

In a world in transition, Turkey, itself in transition, is seeking a new role, which is the subject of the contribution of Christodoulos Yallourides and Afendoulis Langides (*Turkish External Orientation and Political Culture*) that examine the orientation of the foreign policy of Turkey and its political culture. In their contribution Yallourides and Langides trace the guidelines of Turkey's foreign policy since the early years of Kemalism up to this day and they show the cleavages that characterize it and the challenges it has to surmount.

Thereafter, is considered the goal of Ankara of becoming a full member of the European Union. Thus, Mersilia Anastasiadou (*Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Dilemma and Objections*) analyzes the contradictions that govern the European policy of Turkey, the most important of which is its attitude towards the Cyprus issue. The contribution of Mersilia Anastasiadou focuses on the question of Turkish accession to the European Union as a full member, which is one of its major foreign policy goals, persistently pursued with continued emphasis since the '60s but not unconditionally. Initially, the EU target of Ankara could be designed as part of the overall direction of the Turkish policy, which dictated a necessity for Turkey's participation in the major international organizations of the West, including the European Union. Subsequently this objective also corresponded to the needs of the country's political and economic development while during the 90s the European Union

seemed like an island of stability in a rapidly changing world. But to accomplish this objective Turkey should carry out dramatic changes in all spheres of public life to match the *acquis communautaire*. In this context, Turkey has made radical changes in many areas, especially regarding the role of the military in political life and has dramatically improved its economic performance. That said, Turkey is still quite far from full EU membership, firstly because of its rapid population growth, and secondly because of the large deficit that it has regarding its policy in the field of individual and political rights, minority rights etc. Moreover, in the field of foreign policy, Ankara is in a very weak position by refusing to recognize the Republic of Cyprus, already a member of the European Union, and pursuing a policy that is far from the policy of good neighborhood towards Greece.

For its part Çiğdem Üstün (*Analysis of Turkey's Relations with the EU and the U.S. in the light of the Arab Revolts 2011*) analyzes the European route of Turkey and the relations between Ankara and Washington in the light of the Arab revolts, from which have emerged Islamic forces which claim to follow the Turkish political model. Çiğdem Üstün therefore deals with relations between Turkey and the two western poles, the United States and the European Union, which are at the same time strategic allies for Ankara. Since the founding of the modern Turkish state, Ankara under the influence of Kemalism has pursued a pro-Western policy abandoning its immediate Middle Eastern milieu. That said, Ankara had to face the regional turmoil and act politically and diplomatically. Therefore, Turkey has sought to harmonize its policies with those of its Western partners and to reconcile itself sometimes with conflicting interests. Çiğdem Üstün's analysis also includes the policy of Turkey towards the Arab revolts that have profoundly changed the political and strategic data in the Middle East and North Africa which have in turn endangered the economic and political Turkish interests.

The contributions that follow focus on Turkey's Middle Eastern policy. First Gencer Özcan (*Turkish-Israeli Relations in Crisis: Living with the Gordian knot*) examines the deep and open crisis that characterizes relations between Turkey and Israel, relations essentially triangular, since the alliance between Ankara and Tel Aviv did not serve only the interests of both countries but also the strategic interests of Washington. Gencer Özcan, therefore, deals with relations between Turkey and Israel, special privileged relationship until 2009 but which has since gone from bad to worse. The Turkish-Israeli relations have indeed hit their nadir on May 31, 2010, when Israeli forces attacked the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara*, which was part of the international fleet aiming to break the embargo imposed by Israel on Gaza. The main idea developed

in this paper is that during the '90s Turkey's relations with Israel were seen as a matter pertaining exclusively to the field of Turkish foreign policy. However, over the next decade, and especially since 2009, the Turkish-Israeli relations are heavily influenced by developments in Turkey's own domestic politics and they have rather become an issue of Turkish domestic politics. In this context, and as Israel persists in not formally presenting its apologies to the Turkish government for the bloody attack against the ship *Mavi Marmara*, it is very unlikely that relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv will improve. The disruption caused to the strategic balance in the Middle Eastern Arab revolts, growing regional insecurity, particularly after the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq, are important factors that require both countries to reconsider their attitude and to resume their military collaboration. That said, as the question of relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv continue to be designed as an issue of Turkish domestic politics, such a reconciliation will not be found.

Gulden Ayman (*Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power: Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East*) analyzes the Iranian-Turkish relations and the contradictions arising both towards Turkey's relations with its Western allies, especially the United States, as compared to its relations with the Gulf states, which feel threatened by the regime in Tehran.

Ioannis Grigoriadis (*Matching Ambitions with Realities: Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East*) seeks to define the new Middle East policy of Turkey by analyzing the benefits available to it and the problems it has faced. Grigoriadis analyzes the new foreign policy of Turkey, as the result of a double shift. The first change concerns the political balance inside the country, marked by access to power of an Islamic party, the AKP, which means that Ankara's foreign policy is deeply influenced by the strategic approach of the pivotal position of the country formulated by the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu. Subsequently, the new Turkish foreign policy reflects the changes made to the report of regional forces. Grigoriadis observes that while it is true that Turkish foreign policy had already shown signs of a change in direction, yet it is only under the AKP government that the Middle East policy of Turkey has radically changed. Ankara has dramatically improved its relations with Iran and most Arab countries, while its relations with Israel have deteriorated dramatically. Such a change certainly reflects the new strategic framework currently prevailing in the Middle East and Turkey's ambition to play the role of a major regional power, especially since no other country in the region is in a position to claim such a hegemony. Indeed, Ankara's foreign policy, reinforced by a major economic development which made Turkey a member of the G-20, seeks to join the club of emerging middle powers. Having said this, such an

attitude could undermine the whole structure of Turkey's foreign policy and possibly alienate its strategic relations with the West.

Vivi Kefala, (*Turkey, the Middle East and the Arab revolts*) seeks to assess the Middle East policies of Turkey and the impact of Arab revolts on it. The basic idea of her contribution is that Turkey under the AKP, for domestic political reasons but also under the weight of regional and international changes, outlined a new all azimuths foreign policy while arguing geostrategic and geoeconomic position. Without abandoning its Western allies and its prospects for joining the European Union, Ankara turns to the Arab-Muslim world trying to get a hegemonic position or become the cultural center of this set according to the old Ottoman model. This is an ambitious project whose success would give Turkey a unique weight to every point of view. The success of such a project remains uncertain, despite the fact that early Arab revolts seemed feasible because of the Islamist forces that emerged, which were proclaiming themselves as representatives of the model of Turkey and the AKP. Furthermore, with the latest evolutions in this region it is unlikely that the new Middle East policy of Turkey could reconcile its own contradictions and overcome the mistrust of Arab countries towards it, which have their own priorities and that have no interest in helping Turkey to become a regional hub, even to their detriment. Consequently, it is not certain that the Middle East policy of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is to meet its ambitions while it is reinforced with a large political audience inside his country but also within the Arab world and by a strong economic progress.

I would like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the Aegean for wanting to contribute to this special issue and therefore participate in an informal but essential discussion, on the future of Turkey, in a changing country, in a changing world.