

INVOLVING TURKEY IN EU COMMON FOREIGN,  
SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates if there are some converging lines between Turkish foreign policy under the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP) and the European Union (EU) common foreign, security and defense policies. Starting from an overall presentation of how Turkish main insecurity perceptions have so far shaped its foreign policy, we proceed to scrutinize the ambivalent attitude towards the EU which emerged during the AKP period. Despite the concerns raised by Neo-Ottomanism, Islamism and by the “Eurasian shift”, Turkey has provided a remarkable contribution to several Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions. Moreover, Turkey shares some of the same aims envisioned by the EU, such as the stabilization of Western Balkans. Therefore, we argue that there is already a common ground for a strategical involvement of Ankara in the future EU missions, for instance within the recent framework of Permanent and Structured Cooperation (PeSCo). Some Western Balkans countries (like Bosnia and Kosovo) would reap benefits from Turkish contribution, thanks to its historical and religious legitimacy.

**Keywords:** Turkey, EU, security, defense, NATO, Balkans.

## INTRODUCTION

Turkey's relations with the European Union (EU) have suffered from ups and downs from the beginning. Despite the close ties established through the Ankara Agreement of 1963 (associate membership with the European Economic Community), the Helsinki European Council of 1999 (recognition of Turkey as a candidate country) and the start of the formal accession talks in 2005 (Huseyin, 2014), any significant step forward is bogging down. The lack of political will to boost the negotiation process creates a situation of stalemate and hinders the opening of the other chapters required by the EU enlargement policy. It is worth to highlight that 16 among 35 have been opened (and only one closed), whilst eight are still considered frozen, given that Turkey refused to implement the additional protocol on Cyprus (Phinnemore and Icener, 2016). Although not included amid the frozen chapters, the Chapter 31 (Foreign, Security and Defense Policy), whose strategical importance will be addressed by this paper, is currently paralyzed by Cyprus veto.

The support of Turkish public opinion for the EU membership is plummeting. Recent surveys of 2016 have portrayed a very gloomy picture, as they found out that 39% of the interviewed consider the membership as a "bad thing", whereas those who are in favor of the EU membership drop at 28%, compared to the higher percentages of the past (Senyuva, 2018). Conversely, according to the research published by Kadir Has University (2017), the 48.4% of the population supports joining the EU, which would tell a more optimistic version of the story. In other words, the loss of mutual confidence makes ineffective any further progress in the dialogue.

This data couples with the lukewarm and critical attitude from the EU side, due to the De-Europeanizing" (Aydin-Duzgit and Kaliber, 2016) path followed by Turkey in external affairs (regarded as a "Eurasian shift" (Talbot, 2018) or as an "international re-orientation") and to fall short of abiding by European standards in the domestic sphere. The crackdown against the opposition in the wake of the failed FETO (Fethullahci Teror Orgutu) coup of July 2016 (Yavuz, 2018) raised the concerns of the EU Parliament, which has recently voted for the suspension of EU membership bid. Though it is not binding, this pronouncement is a product of the anxieties of many European observers. It is likely to rekindle the hidden skepticism against Turkey expressed by some EU Member States.

Albeit the downturn in the relations between Turkey and the EU, the article suggests that there is still room to keep the two partners on the right track and to foster a functional cooperation in some sector. As a body of European and Turkish scholars underlined (Muftuler-Bac, 2017), the framework of an "external differentiation" might be a possible way to maximize the synergies existing in foreign, Defense and security affairs. Two caveats should be borne in mind:

- The formula of "differentiated integration" (Leuffen, Schimmelfennig, and Rittberger, 2012) is not supposed to sugar the pill of a "privileged partnership", which Ankara was offered in the past in substitution of the EU membership. Such a formula will never be accepted by Turkish policy-makers (Bagci, 2008).

- The paper is not conceived as an analysis of EU regional and global actorness, as an historical account of Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) or as an in-depth investigation of the projects in progress, such as the Permanent and Structured Cooperation (PeSCo). The latter will be scrutinized only with regard to the eventual involvement of Ankara. Our purpose is to understand Turkish foreign and security perspectives and whether there is a convergence between the external vision promoted by the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP) – considered as the player with most leverage in foreign policy-making - and the EU common foreign, security and Defense policies.

Two broad research questions explain the rationale behind this contribution:

- 1) Why is strategically central for both the partners to keep Turkey on board in the ongoing EU missions?
- 2) Which geopolitical scenario would allow to reap more benefits from Turkish contribution?

The article uses a deductive strategy and an interpretivist methodology. It describes different episodes of Turkish foreign policy rather than the analysis of one single case study proceeds as follows. In the first paragraph, we explore the main foreign security perceptions of Turkey. The background context is crucial to identify the pivotal areas, which usually raise the concerns of Turkish political and military elites. The second section delves into the core elements of AKP foreign posture over the last 15 years, with a specific focus on the different periods and shifts. Through the accurate periodization, we shed light on the ambivalent attitude toward the European Union under Erdogan leadership. The third paragraph addresses Turkish association and partnership with the EU common Defense projects and missions, firstly in the framework of the Western European Union and at a later stage, after the Treaty of Amsterdam, in the CSDP. It is worth to bring to the fore the advantages of Turkish involvement and the convergence between the two partners in the shared neighborhood. We contend that Turkish role should be emphasized in the missions carried out in Muslim-populated regions (such as Bosnia and Kosovo), as the deployment of Turkish troops might be positively evaluated by the locals. In the conclusions, the article provides some recommendations to make the case for a further functional cooperation between the EU and Turkey.

## **THE INSECURITY PERCEPTIONS OF A TURKEY IN ITS NEAR ABROAD**

### **The Cyprus Issue**

The geographical location of Turkey represents a double-edged sword, as it makes the country an obliged crossroad and a strategical hub among two continents and three seas. At the same time, the opportunities undisclosed by its favorable position might be overshadowed by the risks faced in the conflictual neighborhood. Thus, the extensive surveillance of borders, especially in the South-East, turns out to be a top priority in Ankara security agenda.

In this paragraph, I discuss the crucial drivers and the perceptions of insecurity which raise the concerns of Turkey in its geographical near-abroad, that is to say the South-Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Besides, it is worth adding to the list the role – both symbolical and economic - played by Central Asia Turkophone countries in the Pan-Turkic geopolitical imagination, whose leverage in foreign policy decision-making has grown up since the fall of the Soviet Union (Imai, 2018). Even though the historical reconstruction of Turkish insecurity mindset exceeds the rationale of this article, it is useful to briefly sketch why some regions have been often perceived as a source of continuous threats. Firstly, the paper considers appropriate to zoom on the Eastern Mediterranean area, which generates frictions with some EU Member States.

The utmost value of the Aegean Sea and of the island of Cyprus for Turkish national security and Defense cannot be ignored. The two issues have constantly undermined the relations with Greece, which in turn has acted as one of the main sponsors of Cyprus accession into the EU. The maritime disputes in the Aegean troubled waters date back to 1964 at least, when Turkey extended its territorial seas from three to six nautical miles (about 11 km), in reaction to the same decision of Greece in 1936. This situation of precarious balance has persisted so far, with Athens controlling 43.5% of the Aegean, whereas Ankara is left with 7% and the other 49% for the high seas (International Crisis Group, 2011). The eventual extension of Greek territorial waters until 12 miles would materialize an existential threat and a *casus belli* by Ankara, independently from the political party holding the majority of seats in Turkish Parliament. This extension would allow Greece to occupy the 71% of the Aegean, in front of a limited increase of 1.8% of Turkish share. Turkey's fear of the deprivation of its right to explore and exploit the high seas is still palpable in how the Turkish MFA illustrates the maritime controversy (Republic of Turkey, 2019). Other matters of dispute and of possible escalation stem from: the absence of a delimitation agreement on the Continental Shelf; the breadth of the Aegean air space; the securitization of small rocks and islands, which are strategical assets in the competition for the control and the militarization of the sea.

The Greek-supported coup of 1974 in Cyprus brought about a syndrome of encirclement among Turkish military and policy-makers and prompted the invasion of the North of the island. The establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in July-August 1974 was described as a “peace operation” to counter the threat of *Enosis* between Greece and Cyprus (Kaliber, 2005), which worsened the perception of Turkish insecurity from that moment on. The fracture with Cyprus hampered the process of negotiation with the European Union, despite the (failed) attempt by the AKP to reframe the security lexicon around the issue, during the first government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Bilgin, 2007). His willingness to downgrade the “vital security threat” into a mere “political problem” was a way to strengthen Turkish positions in the bargain with Brussels and to show a positive attitude towards the resolution of the conflict – in parallel with the endorsement of the Annan Plan by Northern Cyprus. Nonetheless, the efforts to prevent a zero-sum game failed due to Turkish opposition to the formal recognition of Cyprus and the opening of its traffic to the Nicosia, in compliance with the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement of 1963 (Martin, 2015). Turkey will not be willing to backtrack from these two pillars

of its security strategy, in addition to a third pillar which is out of discussion – i.e. cutting the number of troops deployed in the TRNC (Ustun, 2010). What the EU deems as an “occupation of Cyprus soil” is indeed a “matter of honour for Turkey, comparable to the Falkland Islands for Britain” (Bagci, 2008). The same rationale explains Turkey’s reluctance to accept that in the future, after an eventual re-unification of the island, the Turks living in the North might be addressed as a “minority” and thus discriminated vis-à-vis the Greek majority. Furthermore, the race for the control of the Aegean Sea risks rising the tension between Turkey on one side and Greece and Cyprus on the other, in terms of freedom of navigation and of exploiting the natural gas resources that recently raised the interest of some regional actors.

According to Ankara, Greece and Cyprus are yet to give up the “maximalist national positions” placidly endorsed by the other EU Member States. These statements have been recently stressed in the aftermath of the Sixth MED7 Summit (France, Italy, Spain, Malta, Portugal, Greece and Cyprus) over the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus issues. The outcomes of the meeting, according to the Turkish MFA, point at the Greek and Cypriot “abuse of their EU membership” and deem the final conclusions as “biased, unrealistic and contrary to the international law” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2019), as the Turkish Cypriots’ rights on the natural resources of the island were once again denied and excluded from the talks.

### **The other areas of friction with the EU**

The Aegean Sea aside, it is worthwhile to pinpoint the reasons why the strategical areas located on the Eastern side leave Turkey and its Western allies at loggerheads with each other. A short focus on three issues is needed to raise the awareness around Turkish security conundrums, which the EU policy makers should bear in mind whenever they sit at the negotiation table with Ankara.

- Chief among all is the threat of Kurdish terrorism (and no more of Kurdish identity as a whole (Yavuz, 2003) in the securitized cross-border region with Syria, Iraq and Iran. In this respect, Ankara claims that the EU should endeavor further in order to eradicate the Partîya Karkerên Kurdîstan (PKK) ramifications in some Member States and to neutralize its terrorist threat. Turkey’s disagreement around the US support of Northern Syrian Kurdish units of the Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG) - treated as another ramification of the PKK - might damage the relations with the European States, which are believed to send boots on the ground to fill the American gap in the Kurdish majority areas (Bostan, 2019). The phantom of Kurdish secessionism can be considered as a product of the so-called “Sèvres syndrome” or “Sèvres-phobia”, inscribed in the military mindset. The persuasion that the external world (the West) and their internal agents (the Kurds, but it might be extended to the Islamist as well) plot to weaken and to tear apart the Turkish State is difficult to exorcise in the military and in some political circles (Terzi, 2010).

- The Middle East has always been prioritized in Turkish foreign agenda<sup>3</sup> and it is yet to placate the insecurity perceptions of Turkey for a variety of reasons - the management of water resources (Oktem, 2016), energy security (Tagliapietra, 2018), illegal migration flows (Yildiz, 2016) and the Israeli-Palestine conflict (Unal, 2017). Admittedly, the positions of Turkey and the EU chimed in on some recent dossiers (e.g. the management of refugees and asylum seekers). The latter should be managed as a key to bolster the partnership and to reduce several gaps emerged in the bilateral dynamics.
- Finally, the troubled and decade long relation with Armenia is yet to be appeased and might represent a liability in the negotiation with the EU. More than the posture of Erevan, the dialogue with Ankara is exacerbated by the contested political use of history by some Member States: namely, the recognition of the massacres of Armenians at the beginning of the XX century as a genocide. This is another matter of honor for Turkey, as long as it laments the double standards of western States, blind in front of the war crimes committed by the Armenians and of the terrorist attacks of ASALA organization in Europe. The suspension of diplomatic ties and the support of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Bagci, 2008) weaken the reconciliation with Erevan.

These dossiers (Cyprus and the Aegean Sea) will be a very puzzling task for Brussels policy-makers. The EU should come to the terms with Turkey's logic, explained by the calculus of a geopolitical actor who wants to maximize its national security, as well as to meet the symbolical and emotional needs of the population, which in turn would interpret the signing of the Additional Protocol as "selling all the island to Greece" (Bagci, 2008).

The existing cleavage between the EU and Turkey involves the conception of their security culture: rooted in the traditional security concerns of the sovereign State, in Ankara, while conversely more inspired to post-modern and post-military way of interpreting security, in Brussels and in some European capitals. Despite the recent electoral success of radical right-wing parties in some influential Member States, the "clash of security cultures" (Bilgin, 2010) between Turkey and the EU has not been settled yet, as they have a different representation of what counts as a security threat. The EU's emphasis on topics like civil society, migration, human rights and environmental awareness cannot gain momentum at the same pace in Turkey, still affected by material threats such as low intensity warfare in the South-east, terrorist attacks, disputes over territorial and maritime borders and by the domestic hegemony of the National Security Council in the security discourses (Kaliber, 2005). This explains why the West has always been constructed ambiguously as a source both of inspiration and of economic development and of insecurity, isolation and

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<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive account, see the classical volumes of Philip Robins: (1991). *Turkey and the Middle East*. Council of Foreign Relations Press. New York; (2003). *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*. University of Washington Press. Seattle. On the latest seek for regional leadership, see Altunisik, Meliha B., Lenore G., Martin (2011). *Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP*, pp.569-587, Bilgin, Pinar, Bilgic, Ali (2011). *Turkey's "New" Foreign Policy toward Eurasia*. Eurasian Geography and Economics. 52(2): 189-191, and Onis, Ziya (2014). *Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East*. Mediterranean Politics. 19(2): 203-219.

subalternity (Bilgin and Bilgic, 2012).

The guardianship of national security by the military was challenged and downsized by the AKP, during a head-to-head confrontation in which Erdogan's alleged reformism was partially endorsed by the EU. By contrast, the secular State bureaucrats and the voters of CHP were afraid that the former mayor of Istanbul – who had been affiliated to the Naksibend order (Yavuz, 2003) and to Erbakan's parties would have played the EU card to Islamize the country (Jung, 2008).

In the next paragraph, we will take into duly consideration the foreign policy-making of AKP, brought into further light as a breakthrough compared to the traditional Kemalist framework. Nonetheless, the fear of a “religious turn” in external affairs, similar to the domestic “Islamization” trend, was actually overestimated (Kaya, 2015). The step from a general analysis of Turkish constant foreign policy directions, which are often at odds with EU ones, to a particular discussion of AKP period is not a leapfrog jump. Reading together the two sections enables to interrogate whether Erdogan found a compromise with the EU around the most controversial issues and, therefore, which scenarios are to be considered as the most fruitful for the bilateral cooperation.

### **THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF AKP: EU-PHORIA AND ISLAMISM AS RAGMATIC FOREIGN POLICY TOOLS**

This section copes with the pivotal ideas and drivers at the core of AKP foreign policy and of its main artisan, the current President Erdogan. His preponderance in Turkish political system, lawfully enshrined by the constitutional referendum of 2017, is a matter of evidence (Gorener and Ucal, 2011). Besides the remarkable leadership of Erdogan, the only profile who managed to bear a sort of clout on Turkish external choices belongs to Ahmed Davutoglu, a notorious academic and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister. In spite of that, its ambitious conceptions of “Strategic Depth” and of “Zero-problems with the neighbors” crumbled apart, as we can notice in the Syrian quagmire.

Our first aim is to catch the conceptual nucleus of AKP foreign posture in the geographical scenarios more sensitive for the relation with the EU, and, in a second moment, to dwell on the involvement within the foreign, defense and security policies envisaged by Brussels. Before proceeding to the division of the AKP governments in four different phases, it is worth putting the accent on the uncomfortable heritage Erdogan had to deal with after the landslide 34.2% gained in the elections of 2002. The party, aware of its linkages with political Islam, attempted to prevent the risk of another military coup, as the Turkish National Security Council prioritized Islamism as “the number one security threat” after 28 February 1997 (Yavuz, 2003). Therefore, the new PM severed the ties with the past, embodied both by the secular Kemalist political class (perceived as a distant elite by the religious Turkish masses (Jung, 2008) and by the Islamist “counter-elite” (Gole, 1997) of its peers. The AKP departed from the previous domestic and foreign policy preferences, for instance with regard to the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria, highly criticized by the Kemalist deep State and of the toughest Islamist wing (Haas, 2012). Therefore, trying to

delineate a periodization of AKP-EU relation might be analytically helpful.

- A. The first phase (2002-2005) was one of “compromise” between Turkish Muslim and Eastern identities, on one side, and the adhesion to European civic and normative sphere of values, on the other (Ertugrul and Yilmaz, 2018). The dialogue with the EU was given a special priority: thus, this progressive attitude of Erdogan’s party received the endorsement of the EU and of part of literature (Kirisici, 2008), who looked at the reformist path with temperate optimism. The fresh start was signalled by the harmonization packages approved by Turkish Parliament, in order to set off the membership negotiation process in 2005. Nevertheless, the 2002 AKP electoral manifesto stated that Turkey had close cultural ties with other regions (Middle East, Central Asia, Balkans) (Ertugrul and Yilmaz, 2018), not only with NATO and the Western partners. The rapprochement with the EU was instrumental to ensure more leeway for the groups of Islamic intellectuals, schools, charities and organizations, which were marginalized by the assertive secularism of Kemalists. The ambivalent posture of Ankara was in tune with the rhetoric of Turkey as a bridge between two continents and two civilizations.
- B. After the launch of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in 2005, which was first proposed by the Spanish PM Zapatero and co-sponsored by the PM Erdogan, the peak of the appeasement momentum was reached. Nonetheless, the same narrative of the dialogue of civilizations was a softer way to address the otherness of two partners constantly at odds around several issues. Only 12 on 35 chapters of the negotiations were opened, and one was provisionally closed. This second phase (2005-2009) might be described as “liberal” since Ankara accomplished several diplomatic efforts in the broad Middle East region: mediation in long-standing conflictual situations (Israel-Palestine, Israel-Syria, Iran, Lebanon); promotion of the trade; support of the diffusion of norms and values (Imai, 2018) - inspired by a “civilizational” paradigm (Bilgin, 2004). Notwithstanding the commitment of Erdogan towards the European Union, the traditional eastward foreign policy driver was maintained, while the Ottoman heritage and the pan-Turkic ideology were revitalized<sup>4</sup>. In the meantime, the crackdown of 2007 against part of the military – which was dubbed as the “Eurasian clique” - in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases unearthed some limits of Turkish rule-of-law (Ozpek and Yasar, 2018).
- C. The lexicon of a civilizational geopolitics successively bloomed during the Ahmed Davutoglu six years as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009-2015), which might be read as a third phase of AKP foreign policy. According to the well-known theorist of IR, it was time for Turkey to abandon the overused image of the bridge (“a passive entity between two sides” (Arkan and Kinacioglu, 2016)) and to behave as a pivotal actor in multiple contexts. In particular, as a regional and global

<sup>4</sup> The first summit of Turkish speaking countries was organized in 1992, where the Central Asian Republic were still dwarfed by Russian influence. Later, the “Congress of Turkic States and Communities” held in Baku in 2007 represented a more pronounced step forward to tighten the ties with the former Turkophone Soviet Republics. See Bilgin, Pinar, Bilgic, Ali (2011). *Turkey’s “New” Foreign Policy toward Eurasia*. Eurasian Geography and Economics. 52(2). p. 188.

leader under the flagship of its unique historical and religious identity - “Muslimhood became the scope of Turkishness” (Saracoglu and Demirkol, 2015). Therefore, the Islamic Weltanschauung was bolstered in the domestic project of nation-building and prioritized over the once popular magnetic attraction towards the Western principles. The new foreign horizons, inspired by pan-Islamic wishful thinking, collided with the normative model inscribed in the European theoretical conception of the International. The shift ushered in by the Davutoglu era was expressed by the celebration the Muslim identity of Turkey and the external grandeur of Ottoman heritage. Notwithstanding the celebrity of his theories - such as the Strategic Depth and Zero-problems policy (Davutoglu, 2001) - the ambitious program was tamed by the pragmatism of Erdogan, the *deus ex machina* of Turkish foreign policy. Elected president on August 10, 2014, he stopped backing the positions of Davutoglu in the aftermath of Syrian unsuccessful campaigns and cut off with the idealistic approach championed by the Professor.

The mandate of Davutoglu was about to face the chaotic uprisings wrought havoc in the region (Acikalin and Bagci, 2015). If the Israeli attack on the Turkish Mavi Marmara flotilla (May 31, 2010) had already revamped his solidarity with the oppressed Palestinian people, the Arab Spring was interpreted as a sudden occasion for Turkey to lead the normalization of the Middle East. Accordingly, such a geopolitical goal could be accomplished thanks to the historical legacy of Ottoman Empire, seen as the last embodiment of civilization and of pacific coexistence of different religions and traditions (Baskan, 2018). Consequently, these events contributed to invigorate Davutoglu’s intellectual and religious beliefs.

- D. The fourth phase (2015-present) coincides with the appointment of Mevlut Cavusoglu as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The failed coup attempted by the Gulenist wing of military forces represented a watershed in the recent domestic affairs. The centralization of power entailed in the new Presidential Republic, lawfully enshrined by the constitutional referendum of 2017, paved the way for the intensification of the dialectic friend/foe in Erdogan’s politics. In terms of external policies, the religious and ideological inspiration was partially loosened and substituted by the quest for the maximization of national security. Such a pragmatic aim could be accomplished both in multilateral efforts to settle some troublesome political issues (the Refugee Deal with the EU on March 18, 2016, or the ongoing “Astana peace process” on Syria with Iran and Russia) and in unilateral decisions to stabilize the troubled southeastern border. The preponderant role of Erdogan in the definition of Turkish foreign policy should not be underestimated, as it exemplifies the importance of individual-level variables for the literature on Foreign Policy Analysis (Gorener and Ucal, 2011).

To sum up, it is possible to notice that different modalities of imaging foreign affairs stand out during AKP period. Yet, some leitmotiv can be retraced since the conservative Islamic party won the elections in 2002. The appeasement with the EU veered the conduct of Erdogan and its affiliates in the first AKP government, in sight of the accession negotiations. However, this sympathy

derived from the opportunity to play the card of EU candidacy, rather than from true commitment to EU norms and values. In the aftermath of the Euro-crisis and then of the Arab Spring, the positions have gradually diverged and now they stalled on the verge of a breakpoint.

This aligns with the backbone of AKP foreign-policy vision, which lays down two entangled principles. The first one is the progressive centrality of Islamic identity as a framework of religious and cultural references, inspired by Erbakan's blending of religiosity and anti-Westernization (Dikici, 2008) and partially to the "Turco-Islamic synthesis" of the Eighties (Yavuz, 2003). During AKP era, the speeches of Davutoglu became the highest expression of the merge with the Islamic-oriented narrative, rooted in a norm-based, moral and humanitarian vocabulary (Arkan and Kinacioglu, 2016). The increasing critical stance toward Westernization, criticized as a form of annihilation of Turkish inner identity, coupled with the open support for the regional Muslim Brotherhood networks (Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia).

The second one is the narrative of the revival of Ottoman legacy and the so-called Neo-Ottomanism, a controversial concept which, though absent in Davutoglu academic production (Imai, 2018), was meant to present Turkey as the historical center of gravity for the regional peace and stability. The Ottoman heritage picked up by the AKP privileges a celebration of the Sultanate of Abdulhamid II (Ozkan, 2014), whereas the Tanzimat period and its mimicry toward the West are left on the edges, since "the whole process of modernization estranged the elites from the masses: while the former became Westernized, the latter remained Muslims" (Baskan, 2018). As for the aspirations of creating a Pan-Turkic geopolitical space, this is more likely to pan out through the promotion of trade and of the common linguistic heritage, rather than through real political achievements. Admittedly, the notion of "Pan-Turkism" should be read as a minor tenet in AKP ideological toolbox, for it was shaped as a sort of electoral devise to lure the nationalist right-wing voters.

The civilizational turn in AKP foreign-policy discourse ends up, nonetheless, in a partial failure. A more thorough glance unveils the shortcomings of the Islamic-centered visions and the hidden pragmatic and populist rationale behind the main foreign-policy drivers. Davutoglu's idea of pan-Islamism is an intellectual mirage, which owes so much to Western classical geopolitical thinking (Mackinder and the Germans' theorists of Lebensraum) and falls short of addressing the real problems of Islamic world (Ozkan, 2014). The rationale behind the failure lies in the ambiguous posture of Turkey, whose internal struggle between Western and Muslim slowed down the necessary actions to deploy enough hard and soft power and to impose the leadership in the former Ottoman space.

Turkey lacked the Islamist symbolical and financial capital to lead the Arab Spring uprisings in sectarian terms – as Saudi Arabia managed to craft (Cinar, 2018). The Islamic impulse was exploited indeed as a remarkable foreign-policy asset, in order to strengthen the ties with Iran, Palestine and Muslim Brotherhood (Haas, 2012). It was the product of a realpolitik calculus, which instrumentalized the palpable religious breath shared by Islamist actors in the region. Accordingly, the symbolical potential of religion was harnessed as a tool to reach some pragmatic purposes, such as the possibility of the EU membership

and the “popularization” and de-militarization of foreign-policy agenda. Nevertheless, this use of a religious lexicon was not enough to take the lead of the Arab spring, hegemonized by the Gulf States, which are far more legitimate and wealthier actors in the Arabic and Islamic theatre (Kamrava, 2012).

Pragmatism, declined through populist methods and centered on the Islamic norms, is the main axis of AKP foreign policies (Baskan, 2018; Ozpek and Yasar, 2018). In the next section, we will try to understand whether and in which situation this posture might chime in with the EU common foreign, defense and security policies.

At a first sight, many doubts arise around our suggestion, due to the alleged democratic reversal of Turkish political system (Sommer, 2016) and to its geopolitical pragmatism. Some motives of friction emerge in relation to the areas of common interest. As Davutoglu stated in one conference of 2011:

*It is not our intention and goal to become a peripheral region of the European Union when we enter the EU and Balkans. Our aim should be to create not the community of second-class and needy countries, which are not in the decision-making mechanisms but a new Balkan geography, which shapes the destiny of Europe. Our aim should be grounded in such a vision (Davutoglu, 2011 Quoted in Ertugrul and Yilmaz, 2018).*

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Ankara needs to preserve cooperative ties with the EU and to gain international respect through coalition-building, rather than showing off hard and soft power for unilateral purposes. For some instances, the Western Balkans are the best scenario to beef up the mutual trust and to launch a sound partnership, in order to repeat the past success of peacekeeping and civilian missions. Herein, we argue, there is an opportunity of convergence to seek. Despite the fear of an Islamization of foreign policy, some scholars argue that the religious legacy emphasized by AKP – especially in the shape of neo-Ottoman revival – makes the case for Turkish interventions in part of its “geographical and emotional hinterland” (Aydintasbas, 2019) populated by large segments of Muslims who might positively endorse its intervention.

## **TURKEY’S CONTRIBUTION IN THE EU CSDP: MILITARY AND CIVILIAN MISSIONS IN THE BALKANS**

### **From the WEU to the CSDP**

As mentioned above, the Turkish hesitant optimism for the establishment of deeper ties with the EU is gradually fading away, since 81.3% of the respondents believe that Ankara will never be granted a full membership status (Senyuva, 2018). Such a lack of trust derives from the perceived ambiguity of the EU intentions, as only a minority of the participants seems to believe in the integration of some controversial policies - liberalization of visa and freedom of mobility, structural funds and agriculture. Yet, the scenario gets even darker since the prospect of Turkish membership in some core Member States is out of question not only for radical right populist parties, whose Islamophobic rhetoric is gaining momentum after the migration crisis in the Mediterranean and the jihadi attacks in Europe (Kaya, 2018), but also for more moderate segments of

the electorate (Phinnemore and Icener, 2016).

Despite the stalemate in the negotiation and the peak of skepticism of the two public opinions, this section argues that the possibility to involve Turkey in some of the EU common foreign, security and defense policies is yet to be abandoned. The persistence of Cyprus' veto on Chapter 31 of the accession process did not hamper Turkey to provide a remarkable contribution to several missions in the Common Security and Defense Policy.

Taking Turkey on board in the framework of the PeSCo might bridge the gap in security mentality and bring additional value to the partnership. Some common goals are pursued in the shared neighborhood - fight against terrorism and radicalization, promote regional stability, foster economic trade and energy cooperation, enforce the peace in war-thorn theatres, provide humanitarian assistance to refugees, support the transnational civil society networks, ease regular migration and curb irregular movements. We express this opinion with the strong awareness that an empirical validation is yet to be provided on the ground, as the definition of the projects is still ongoing, and further time is needed to assess the possibilities suggested by the essay.

Before coming to the latest developments in the military field, it is worth describing how Turkish participation was guaranteed starting from the initial European efforts to build common security and defense mechanisms. The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 was undergirded by three pillars. The second one concerned the need for European States to coordinate foreign and security policies through intergovernmental methods, with the ratio of leaving less room for the supranational institutions of the Community and thus saving the prerogatives of the sovereign States.

Prior to the launch of the European Common and Security Policy (ECSP) in the Helsinki EU Council (December 10-11, 1999), the basic principles of the Western European Union (created in 1948) had already evoked the possibility for the European States to launch joint military operations and to deepen the political cooperation. Every option on the table had to be formulated under the umbrella of NATO, which was closely linked to the WEU in the framework of the European Security and Defense Initiative (ESDI). The anchorage to the Atlantic Alliance has never been challenged by the EU Member States, who recognize the impossibility to meet the military needs in autonomy and of the negative signs of political distrust that an independent ECSP would entail. The partnership with NATO is one of the crucial tenets which allowed to open the door for Turkish involvement in the WEU and later in the ECSP, for the US steadfast lobbying toward the inclusion of Ankara - regarded as a fundamental strategical and geopolitical asset (Cebeci, 2011).

Turkey enjoyed a relatively privileged status of associate membership in WEU, wielding more influence than any other non-NATO members do. According to 1992 Petersberg Declaration of the WEU Council of Ministers, Turkey was given the possibility to join the process of decision-making (but not to block a decision); to participate in their implementation ("unless a majority of the Member States, or half of the Member States including the Presidency, decide otherwise"); to be granted the same prerogatives of full members in WEU military operations, to which they commit forces. The package of rights was

granted in return of a financial contribution (WEU Council of Ministers (1992) quoted in Blockmans, Steven (2010). The position of relative advantage of Turkey was downsized as soon as the associate partners acceded to the EU and to the ESDP, while the associate members were denied the same rights; despite some of them (like Turkey) could put forward their NATO membership in the bargaining process. Besides, NATO reiterated the commitment to the ESDI framework and the recognition of the fledgling EU/CSDP initiatives, strategically complementary with the Atlantic Alliance's aims, as stated in three fundamental occasions:

- the signing of the Berlin Plus Agreement (1996) and its three pillars - non-use of CSDP among NATO allies; non-inclusion of non-NATO partners; NATO-first approach (Acikmese, Akgul and Triantaphyllou, 2012);
- the high-ranking summit of St. Malo between France and UK (1998), meant to agree on the deployment of EU common operations in line with the "3D prohibition" stated by the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: no Duplication of capabilities, no Discrimination of NATO allies, no Decoupling of transatlantic ties;
- the Washington Summit Communiqué of April 24, 1999.

Some among these criteria were intended to rescue Turkey from the humiliation of an underrated role in the ESDP. The Feira European Council of June 2000 foresaw a mechanism of consultation with non-EU NATO partners, in a 15+6 format, which left less leeway for Turkey, if compared to the WEU (Blockmans, 2010). The US and the UK - the most influential sponsors of Turkey's EU membership - intervened to immunize Turkey's geographical proximity from eventual European autonomous operations. This compromise was sealed by the Ankara Agreement of 2002 and deemed as a necessary move to alleviate Turkish perceptions of insecurity (Acikmese, Akgul and Triantaphyllou, 2012). Therefore, it cobbled the way for the successful involvement of Turkish personnel in both military and civilian missions.

Despite the laments around the exclusion from the decision-making process, Turkey has contributed to the EU-led military mission (EUFOR-ALTHEA) and police-mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina; to the EULEX mission in Kosovo; to CONCORDIA (military) and EUPOL (civilian) Proxima in North Macedonia; to EUFOR RD Congo (military) and EUPOL (civilian) Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The help provided so far has been generous and appreciated, above all during the operation in EUFOR – BiH, where 274 have been deployed, ranking second among the major contributors (Tardy, 2014).

### **Turkey in the Western Balkans: an asset for the stabilization of the region**

Turkey embodies a very significant partner, for it boasts the capability to dispatch boots on the ground and to play an active role in crisis management operations. The material support aside, there are a great deal of advantages, which Turkey can count on to contribute to the stabilization of the Western Balkans.

- The first one can be identified in Turkish commitment to describe its foreign endeavors as typical of a regional, or even global, peacekeeper actor in the post-Cold War society. The self-perception as a contributor to the world peace encouraged Turkey to join different campaigns – observer missions, UN-led peacekeeping missions, civilian police missions and sub-contracted “robust” Peace Support Operations (Bagci and Kardas, 2004). This aligns with the more liberal fashion shaped for Turkish international presence by AKP in the first fruitful phases of Erdogan governments. As an example, the “Istanbul Declaration” of 2010 enabled Serbian recognition of Bosnia territorial integrity and mended the diplomatic ties between the two countries (Aydintasbas, 2019).
- The intense trade activity turns out to be the topical interest of Turkish elites - which should be interpreted in line with the pragmatic shift mentioned in the previous section. However, Turkey is still a marginal economic actor in the region and this matter of fact confirms that any fear-mongering around the neo-Ottoman penetration is misperceived.
- The growing diffusion of Turkish soft power in the Balkans creates an even more suitable background for the joint operations. One variable to interpret Turkish influence is the activism of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in the religious field. The Diyanet emerges as a foreign policy tool, not only to boost Turkish legitimation as a country who acts in the name of Islamic solidarity, but also to sponsor the agenda of AKP within the transnational Turkish diaspora (Ozturk et al.2018).
- Another factor to bring to the fore is the reticular presence of the Yunus Emre centres, conceived on the standards of the British Council and the Goethe Institute in order to entice young people into learning Turkish language - even if the lectures remain attended by a scarce number of students. The emphasis on the cultural sphere goes together with the humanitarian tasks carried out by Turkish Aid Agency offices (TIKA), whose 18% of the development aid is earmarked for the Western Balkans. Turkey bears a sound reputation in the field, since it occupies the first place in the Global Humanitarian Assistance report, as the most generous country donor in the world (Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2018). Hence, TIKA uses most of its budget to renovate Ottoman-era buildings and mosques (Aydintasbas, 2019).
- The symbolical value of religion and of the Ottoman/Hanafi version of Islam still dominant in the region (Oktem, 2012) might be harnessed in the context of peace-keeping and peace-building operation. The nexus between religion and peace-keeping/transitional justice and operations is a cutting-edge topic for scholarship (Soeters et al. 2004; Bosman et al. 2008), for it provides challenging hermeneutical keys to approach the reconstruction of social environments. Though the promotion of interreligious dialogue belongs to a different field from the military one, it would be worth to further explore whether there is a potential advantage in the deployment of troops sharing the same religious background of the population. Admittedly, up to now, one of

the few comprehensive quantitative analyses, covering all the Turkish peacekeeping missions, downplay the hypothesis that the presence of Muslims has had “discernible effects on the decision to participate in a UN PKO” (Yalcinkaya, et al., 2018).

Turkish presence in the Western Balkans might produce constructive outcomes, especially in relation to the cultural and religious similarity which can facilitate the interaction with the Muslim population, for instance in Bosnia and Kosovo (Bageci and Kardas, 2004). Another point of convergence can be traced with regard to the Western Balkans integration into the European framework, which Turkey considers as a gateway, more than a Trojan horse, for its trading policies and economic interests.

Although a quite positive reputation in the region, Turkish economic, cultural and religious clout should not be exaggerated. Neo-Ottoman nostalgia works better as a domestic slogan than as a practical tool to lure the locals, who mostly depict the Ottoman age as a dark memory of the past – except for Bosnian Muslims (Aydintasbas, 2019). Admittedly, Turkey’s new role as a transnational Muslim power has been welcomed by some, if not by all, governments, such as Albania, Bosnia and North Macedonia (Oktem, 2012). This is in line with the main premise of the paper, which calls for Turkish involvement in Western Balkans within the framework of the EU missions, while never endorsing the claims of Neo-Ottoman propaganda, and especially in the Bosnian theatre.

## **INVOLVING TURKEY IN PESCO AND STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP IN THE DEFENSE INDUSTRY**

Though time is not running out inexorably, the gap is getting harder to fill. Throughout the ten years 2003-2014, Turkish alignment with CSDP positions has strikingly decreased, as the periodical Reports of the Commission put in the spotlight. The apparent friction deteriorated the relations in 2011, when Turkey refused to align with EU restrictive measures on Iran, Syria and Libya (Jorgensen, 2016). As a NATO member, including Turkey in some decision-making processes can be an acceptable pay-off in return of burden sharing in the future EU security operations. If the questions of Turkish exclusion from the European Defense Agency and from the exchange of classified material appear to be both frozen by Cyprus double vetoes, the eventual participation of Ankara in some modules of the PESCO raises a couple of hopes (PESCO, 2019). Cyprus and Greece are likely to stand against Turkish participation, but the flexible nature of the future operations unlocks the door for a selective inclusion of non-EU NATO members (Aydin-Duzgit and Marrone, 2018). The cooperation might occur in the projects based on the development and the transfer of Defense technology, which would meet the requirements of Ankara in this field (Bageci and Kurc, 2017). Having said that, Turkey ought to soften some positions based on direct and muscular confrontation, to adjust the Eastward trajectory and take more decisive steps in healing the wounded relation with the EU. We repeat again, conscious of the empirical limits of this study, that further time is needed to validate the hypothesis mentioned above.

The call for a sounder involvement of Turkey in the EU security and defense

policies might be justified also by the existent strategic alliance with some European countries in the field of the defense industry. In this respect, the partnership between Turkey and Italy can be brought to the fore as a successful case study, based on mutual trust and on a decade long growth of trade and investments. It is worth addressing the huge progress made in the areas of aerospace, ammunitions, maritime and electronic warfare. The most brilliant outcome of defense industry cooperation is the T129 ATAK Helicopter, which “has been effectively used in operations by the Turkish Armed Forces since 2014 and has demonstrated its proven success in the battlefield”, as stated by Ismail Demir, President of Defense Industries (Demir, 2018). Moreover, significant accomplishments have been made in space-satellite technology (GOKTURK Project), Maritime Patrol Aircrafts (MELTEM-3 Project) and as far as the F-35 Project is concerned – notwithstanding the recent stalemate around the acquisition of Russian S-400 missiles.

Additionally, many efforts are dedicated to implement the 18 months “Concept Definition Study” signed by Aselsan-Roketesan with the EuroSam Consortium, as a stage of the Long-Range Air and Missile Defense Project launched on January 5, 2018. EuroSam - established in 1989 as a joint venture of MBDA Missile Systems and THALES - was selected as a pivotal partner in the definition of a future indigenous air and missile defense system, which would make the case for the Turkish presence in the EU differentiated integration schemes. Anyway, at the moment clear signs of full commitment with some Western partners are yet to be manifested from Ankara. This attitude might be interpreted as being at odds with Italian availability to technology transfer and co-design, both crucial for the development of further local expertise in the sector, urgently needed to achieve a more self-sufficient defense industry (Bagci and Kurc, 2017).

The convergence between Turkey and Italy in the foreign, security and defense field creates a win-win situation that should be kept in mind by all the actors involved, such as the private investors who reap hefty benefits from the ongoing projects. Strengthen the ties in the defense industry is a strategical choice which encompasses a broader bilateral commitment to foster scientific and technological innovation and to boost the Research and Development (RandD) activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

This short essay tries to decipher if there is the possibility to find common ground between Turkish foreign policy and the EU common foreign, security and defense projects, with the purpose to involve Ankara in some ongoing European military operations. We argued that, although the evocation of Neo-Ottomanism and the use of Islam as a foreign policy tool, these narratives are selected symbolically by AKP to achieve more prosaic goals, such as the acquisition of the EU membership or the internal competition with the Kemalists for the definition of foreign policy priorities. We also stressed that the political exploitation of Islam is usually expressed through populist methods, which widely shape the foreign policy worldview of the AKP.

We addressed how Turkey contributed successfully to the peacekeeping military

and civilian missions carried out in the Western Balkans and how it has aligned for years with most of the CSDP positions. We argue that, notwithstanding the decreasing endorsement of EU policies and the lingering vetoes on the opening of Chapter 31, the benefits of Turkish participation still outdo the eventual shortcomings. The EU States which have always championed a stronger Turkish participation should insist on the positive outcomes blossomed in the missions of the last decade and on how the cooperation would be again strategically central for both the partners (Research Question 1).

To sum up, we hold that there are some shared interests and goals in the conception of AKP and EU foreign policy, at least regarding the stabilization of Western Balkans, where Turkey might provide a consistent contribution (Research Question 2). This vision might be achieved, as we suggested, in the flexible institutional framework of PeSCo, whose multiple modules pave the way for closer ties with non-EU NATO third-countries in security operations and in the defense cooperation.

The article uses a deductive strategy and an interpretivist methodology. It describes different episodes of Turkish foreign policy rather than the analysis of one single case study. The conclusions provide theoretical suggestions that should be validated on the ground by further scholars' research. Albeit this methodological limit, we strongly emphasize the contribution given to the literature on Turkish foreign policy and on the EU foreign policies. More specifically, the originality should be appreciated as far as the authors have tried to insist on the shared and often overlooked affinities between the partners rather than stressing the broken ties.

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