

ANALYSIS

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# TURKEY'S "ZERO PROBLEMS" ERA IN THE BALKANS

MEHMET UŐUR EKİNCİ







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## ABSTRACT

While some observers, referring to recent developments in the Middle East, are questioning whether Turkey's "zero problems with neighbours" doctrine is still in effect, Turkey's relations with the Balkans are enjoying their golden age. Since the mid-2000s, bilateral relations with all governments in the region have been in good terms, social and economic relations have intensified and Turkey's public image has become increasingly positive.

This analysis offers a general assessment of Turkey's relations with the Balkans under the AK Party government. It examines the main concerns, principles, strategies and instruments of Turkey's Balkan policy, assesses the role of non-state actors in Turkey's growing role in the region and discusses the relevance of the debates on "neo-Ottomanism". Following an evaluation of Turkey's political position in the Balkans, it closes with policy recommendations to Turkey and Balkan countries for a more effective cooperation that would benefit all sides.

Few would disagree that Turkish foreign policy has become increasingly active and assertive in the last decade. Among the factors that played role in this were the new global and regional structures that emerged after the Cold War, the political and economic stability under the AK Party rule as well as the foreign policy vision and strategies stipulated by the incumbent Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Meanwhile, pointing out the downturn of the EU accession negotiations and the Turkish government's open confrontation with Assad regime in Syria and lately the military regime in Egypt, critics of Turkish foreign policy have claimed that Turkey's "zero problems" vision has failed altogether.<sup>1</sup> While this is a somewhat hasty conclusion even in the context of the Middle East, Turkey's relations with the Balkans have in fact been enjoying their golden age since the mid-2000s. During recent years inter-governmental relations have deepened, trade volume has multiplied, social ties have strengthened and Tur-

1. Two recent articles with this claim are Piotr Zalewski, "How Turkey Went From 'Zero Problems' to Zero Friends," *Foreign Policy*, 22 August 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/08/21/how\\_turkey\\_foreign\\_policy\\_went\\_from\\_zero\\_problems\\_to\\_zero\\_friends](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/08/21/how_turkey_foreign_policy_went_from_zero_problems_to_zero_friends); Laure Marchand, "La Turquie veut enrayer son déclin diplomatique," *Le Figaro*, 29 August 2013, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2013/08/29/01003-20130829ARTFIG00515-la-turquie-veut-enrayer-son-declin-diplomatique.php>

key's image in the eyes of the Balkan people has become more positive than ever.

Examining Turkey's relations with the Balkans is important for a number of reasons. First, the Balkans is among the few regions in which Turkey has traditionally been highly interested and engaged. In this regard, Turkey's relations with this region provide important information regarding its main foreign policy goals, principles and actors. Second, Turkey's Balkan policy is a case that shows the operability of the "zero problems" vision under suitable structural and conjunctural conditions. Third, since the image of the Balkans in Turkey is shaped considerably by historical, religious and cultural elements, it is a typical case to indicate the extent of identity-based motivations and decisions in Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party. Fourth, as the relations with the Balkans involves a multiplicity of non-state actors, its examination would demonstrate the dynamics of Turkey's "new diplomacy," in which civil society and the business sector are highly active while public institutions increasingly assume coordinative, rather than directive, functions.

In short, Turkey's relations with the Balkans exhibit not only Turkey's approach to a geography which it attributes great strategic, economic and socio-cultural importance and where a large variety of regional and extra-regional actors operate, but also the reflections of its on-going political, economic and social transformation on foreign affairs under a fairly stable regional environment. Examination of these relations, which harmoniously incorporates interests with values, state with non-state and ideals with realities, and is marked by dialogue and cooperation instead of tension and conflict, will demonstrate the prematurity and shallowness of the conclusions, which are based on the responses of Turkey to the highly polarised, hostile and insecure political environment in the Middle East, that Turkey's "zero problems" vision has completely lapsed.



# 1. TURKEY'S APPROACH TO THE BALKANS AFTER THE COLD WAR: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Following the centuries-long Ottoman rule, Balkan politics were increasingly influenced by the European Powers, primarily Russia and Austria-Hungary, from the nineteenth century onwards. During the interwar years, a pro-status-quo introversion with efforts of regional cooperation as well as simmering ethnic tensions prevailed in the region. During the Cold War, the Balkans became deeply affected by global politico-ideological trends and groupings.

Although indigenous social and political dynamics of the region came to the fore after the end of the Cold War, the Balkans are still very much under the influence of certain international powers. In order to stop the human tragedy and resolve the political instability created by the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars, first the United States and later the European Union became involved in regional politics. Especially the latter has been working to bring a lasting stability to The Western Balkans and integrate this region with international society through the incentive of EU membership. These efforts, which have been going on since the early 2000s, profoundly influenced the preferences of political actors and hence both domestic and international politics in the Western Balkans. In addition, the European Union strengthened its position as a main actor in the larger Balkan geography with the membership of Bulgaria, Romania and lately Croatia.

Turkey is an actor that has been endeavouring to (re-)establish itself in the Balkans after the Cold War. After the decades that divided the Balkans from Turkey with an iron curtain, the policymakers at Ankara realised the necessity of developing a new outlook for approaching the

region when the dissolution of the Communist bloc and the emergence of new states brought about swift and radical changes in the international and regional systems, creating both new opportunities and challenges for Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Given the atmosphere of transition and uncertainty, Turkey found it urgent to act pro-actively to forestall security threats, contribute to regional peace and stability and strengthen its social and economic bonds with the region. Despite declaring at first its respect to the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, Turkey recognised the newly independent states immediately when their international recognition appeared certain.<sup>3</sup> From the early 1990s onwards, the Turkish government signed a number of bilateral agreements with Balkan governments to promote cooperation and to foster trade and investments. Turkey also sought to accelerate the political stability and economic development of the Balkans through integrating the region with other nearby geographies. Accordingly the Turkish government invited Greece and Albania, two non-Black Sea countries, to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation.

Nevertheless, during the 1990s and the early 2000s, Turkey's engagement in the Balkans was primarily through its participation in international military missions and operations. After the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars, Turkey took its part in UN peacekeeping missions and later the NATO stabilisation force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1997, Turkish forces participated in the UN-backed Operation Alba to restore peace and order in Albania. During the Kosovo War in 1999, Turkey joined its NATO allies in the military operation against Yugoslavia and sent troops to the ensuing KFOR peacekeeping missions. Upon internal conflicts in Macedonia, Turkey also participated in

2. Sabri Sayarı, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 169-82.

3. İsmail Soysal, "Günümüzde Balkanlar ve Türkiye'nin Tutumu," in OBIV Commission, eds., *Balkanlar* (İstanbul: Eren, 1993), 228.

the NATO-led operations in this country in the years 2001-2003 and the EU-led Proxima police and gendarmerie forces until December 2005.

While adhering to its principle of not unilaterally involving in conflicts and disputes,<sup>4</sup> Turkey, as a regional actor, encouraged peace and stability through various channels. For instance, albeit reluctantly at first, Turkey played an important mediating role between the Muslims and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Bosnian War.<sup>5</sup> Turkey also became a founding member of a number of regional security and cooperation organisations, including South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), Peace Implementation Council (PIC) and South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG).

When Turkey-EU relations deteriorated in 1997, the Turkish government decided to follow “regional policies,” which meant further diversification of orientation and promotion of cooperation in its surrounding regions.<sup>6</sup> However, the quick recovery of the relations with Europe, domestic political disputes and the ensuing economic crises prevented Turkey to concentrate on developing novel approaches for the Balkans or elsewhere. As a result, no significant change in intensity, actors and instruments was observed in Turkey’s relations with the Balkans. Nevertheless, the increased political dialogue with Greece, the then only EU-member country in the Balkans, in the final years of the 1990s was an important

development that would make a positive effect on Turkey’s relations with the whole region.

## 2. TURKEY’S BALKAN POLICY UNDER THE AK PARTY ERA

While Turkey’s main concerns and principles with respect to the Balkans have remained generally the same since the end of the Cold War,<sup>7</sup> compared to the Balkan policy of the preceding governments, the AK Party period is marked primarily by a higher degree of vigour and self-confidence. Although, as mentioned before, Ankara was enthusiastic for a more active involvement, both politically and economically, in the affairs of the Balkans, the resources that Turkey could harness were limited. For domestic political quarrels as well as economic crises throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s prevented the country to fully actualise its political, economic and social potential in materialising its foreign political ambitions. The relative stability under the AK Party government, economic growth, as well as structural and democratic reforms have provided Turkey with better resources and higher confidence in foreign policy.

From their inception, the AK Party governments have adopted Ahmet Davutoğlu’s<sup>8</sup> ambitious framework for Turkish foreign policy involving an integrative and holistic utilisation of the country’s geostrategic, social, cultural and historical resources. Unsurprisingly, the Balkans is among the regions that Davutoğlu placed the greatest importance. In *Stratejik Derinlik*, he presents his prescriptions regarding Turkey’s Balkan policy mainly along three lines: first, he believes that in order to enlarge its influence over

4. Nevertheless, domestic pressures at times could induce the Turkish government to engage in independent actions, such as clandestinely sending arms to the Bosniaks during the Bosnian War: Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 7, vol. 12 (1998): 25.

5. Philip Robins, “Coping with Chaos: Turkey and the Bosnian Crisis,” in Richard Gillespie, ed., *Mediterranean Politics* (London: Pinter, 1994), 1: 125-6.

6. Kâmil Mehmet Büyükcöçak, “Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Yeni Bir Boyut: Balkanlar,” in Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, ed., *Türkiye-Yunanistan: Eski Sorunlar, Yeni Arayışlar* (Ankara: ASAM, 2002), 141-2.

7. Mustafa Türkes, “Türkiye’nin Balkan Politikasında Devamlılık ve Değişim,” *Avrasya Dosyası* 14, vol. 1 (2008): 253-80.

8. Davutoğlu has been a key figure shaping Turkish foreign policy since 2002, first as the Chief Advisor of the Prime Minister on foreign affairs and later as the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

the region and maintain it both during peacetime and in case of tension or conflict, Turkey should primarily strengthen its relations with the elements connected to Turkey "with history and by heart" (read the Muslims) and bring the Ottoman-Turkish cultural heritage to the fore. Second, he regards Turkey's geographical, social and economic resources that can connect the Balkans to other nearby basins as an invaluable asset. For him, acting as a pivotal state connecting the Balkans with the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Central Asia will not only contribute to peace and stability in these regions, but also increase Turkey's weight in the Balkans. Third, Davutoğlu finds it essential that Turkey forestalls the involvement of other external powers in the Balkans by actively engaging in intra-regional politics and have closer relations with all relevant actors there.<sup>9</sup>

While preceding governments had devised similar pro-active strategies for the region, they were unable to carry them out systematically and vigorously due to the reasons mentioned before. In addition, different from the general outlook of Turkey's post-Cold War Balkan policy, Davutoğlu's vision involves an important element, that is the more active and institutional use of common religion in approaching the Muslims in the region. Indeed, the existence of a sizable Muslim community with a shared Ottoman past has long been a strong, if not the strongest, factor shaping the interest of conservative members of the AK Party and its precursors in the Balkans.<sup>10</sup> Davutoğlu also complained in *Stratejik Derinlik* that the secularist sensitivities and fears have prevented Turkey from engaging in a stronger relationship with the

Muslims in the Balkans and hence from utilising a significant socio-cultural resource.<sup>11</sup> During the AK Party period, as will be discussed below, state institutions cooperated with the civil society cooperated in matters like religious education and the construction of mosques. The consolidation of Turkish Islamic influence over the region on the one hand caused Arab-led Wahhabism/Salafism, which grew popular during the 1990s, to decline<sup>12</sup> and on the other hand strengthened social and cultural bonds between the local Muslims and Turkey further.

Compared to the Balkan policy of the preceding governments, the AK Party period is marked primarily by a higher degree of vigour and self-confidence.

The role of civil actors in shaping Turkey's relations with the Balkans should also be remarked. Thanks to developments such as the increase in per capita income, the expansion of the business sector and the advancement of communication and transportation, Turkish civil society and business groups have increased their contacts and relationships with the outside world, including the Balkans. The government, in its part, has taken advantage of these new dynamics. While providing the exporters and investors with incentives, encouragements and new channels, it established agencies to support and facilitate the activities of the NGOs in the region. As a result, the acceleration of the activities of Turkish companies and civil society has consolidated Turkey's political and economic position and capacity in the Balkans.

9. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (İstanbul: Küre, 2001), 316-21.

10. Thanks both to its sensitivity to the plight of Muslims abroad and its close contacts with the Bosniaks in Europe, the National Outlook movement was among the first groups in Turkey that organised demonstrations during the Bosnian War and urged the Turkish government to act on behalf of the Muslims: Kerem Öktem, "Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks: Turkey's New Presence in the Balkans," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 1 (2012): 30.

11. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, 316.

12. Kerem Öktem, *New Islamic Actors after the Wahhabi Intermezzo: Turkey's Return to the Muslim Balkans*, (Oxford: European Studies Centre University of Oxford, 2010).

Apart from these domestic agency-based factors, some international (both structural and conjunctural) ones also contributed to the intensification of political, economic and social relations between Turkey and the Balkans in recent years. First and foremost is the involvement of the European Union in the Western Balkans and the membership incentive it offers. All countries in this region regard the accession to the EU as a strategic priority, and this common Europeanisation perspective has created a relatively peaceful atmosphere and steps for reconciliation and normalisation of relations. The stability in the region has enabled the Balkan governments to concentrate on domestic reform, economic liberalisation and institutional consolidation. All this created new opportunities for Turkey to further involve in the region and deepen its economic and commercial relations with the Balkan countries.

### The acceleration of the activities of Turkish companies and civil society has consolidated Turkey's political and economic position and capacity in the Balkans.

Second, recent developments in Europe and Turkey's EU accession process had their reflections on Turkey's Balkan policy. While Turkey's economic, social and cultural activities in the Balkans had already shown an upward trend during the early years of the AK Party, the real increase in their intensity and diversity in fact has taken place from the mid-2000s onwards. One of the most important reasons for this is Turkey's increased attempts to diversify its foreign policy and strengthen its relations with non-EU geographies as a result of the standstill in the accession negotiations after 2006. In addition, following the Eurozone Crisis in 2008, the Turkish govern-

ment, as well as business circles in Turkey, looked for new markets to minimise its negative effects.

Third, the improvement of relations with Greece has made a significant positive impact. As mentioned before, after the fall of the Communist bloc, Turkish governments wanted to adopt a pro-active policy in the Balkans. An impediment before this was Turkey's poor relations with Greece. Due to the longstanding bilateral problems and mutual suspicions, Turkey and Greece regarded the Balkans as a sphere of strategic competition against each other. In this zero-sum game, Turkey tried to reach the Turks and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania, while Greece attempted to balance Turkey out and pre-empt a Muslim encirclement by aligning with Serbia.<sup>13</sup> After years of tensions, which almost led to an armed confrontation in the 1996 Kardak/Imia Crisis, the two governments engaged in more dialogue and interaction during the final years of the 1990s, which, also thanks to the strong social support, rapidly improved Turkish-Greek relations. This, in turn, brought about a more cooperative atmosphere in the Balkans, enabling both countries to act more freely. The Kosovo Crisis of 1998 was also crucial in making the both parties realise that maintaining stability in the Balkans is in their common interest.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, both Greece and Turkey supported the steps of NATO and the European Union to preserve peace and integrate the region with international society. Loosening their security-centred Balkan policy, they began to approach the region on the basis of economic interdependence and soft power.

13. İlder Turan and Dilek Barlas, "Turkish-Greek Balance: A Key to Peace and Cooperation in the Balkans," *East European Quarterly* 32, vol. 4 (1999): 469-88; Othon Anastasakis, "Greece and Turkey in the Balkans: Cooperation or Rivalry?" *Turkish Studies* 5, vol. 1 (2004): 51-2; Davutoğlu, 301-2.

14. Büyükcöçak, 124, 145-6.

### 3. MAIN ASPECTS OF TURKEY'S BALKAN POLICY

#### 3.1. Concerns

Turkey's concerns regarding the Balkans can be roughly summed up under three headings. First, the Balkans is a matter of **geostrategic** concern for Turkey due to its geographical proximity and contiguity. Turkey regards the maintenance of security in the region and prevention of trans-border crimes such as human trafficking and smuggling vital for its own security. In addition, since the Balkans is the only land connection between Turkey and Western Europe, lack of stability and peace in the region will adversely affect Turkey's international trade.

The second type of concerns is **economic**. Since the early 1980s, Turkish governments have adopted an export-led growth strategy. Its proximity to Turkey, easy accessibility and the relatively underdeveloped situation of its financial and industrial sectors has made the Balkans a quite suitable market for Turkish entrepreneurs. Using its geographical and socio-cultural advantages Turkey aspires to find its place in the economic competition of various countries in the region. Turkey also regards its contribution to the economic progress and interdependence of the Balkans as a means to consolidate regional peace and stability as well as to gain political benefits. Furthermore, since the Balkans is situated between Turkey and Western Europe, economic and commercial cooperation will directly or indirectly contribute to Turkey's economic relations with the EU. Perhaps the most typical example to this is the pipeline projects that will transport gas to Western Europe through Turkey and the Balkans.

Thirdly, Turkey has also strong **socio-cultural** concerns regarding the Balkans. The cultural and historical bonds that remain from the Ottoman times constitute the primary source of interest for Turkish political and civil actors

in the region. A large portion of Muslims and ethnic Turks still inhabit the Balkans, while millions of descendants of immigrants who came from the Balkan territories lost by the Ottoman Empire reside in Turkey and maintain their connections with the homeland of their ancestors. In addition, thanks to the fact that a major part of this geography used to be an integral part of the Ottoman heartland for centuries and was geographically close and accessible to İstanbul, the political, economic and cultural centre of Ottoman-Turkish civilization, there are a large number of shared elements between Balkan and Turkish cultures.

None of these concerns are actually new in Turkey. They were the motivations that drove the Turkish policy makers in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War to develop a new, more active, foreign policy in the Balkans.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, with better political and economic resources and increased cooperation of the state with civil and business actors, the AK Party government could deal with these concerns more vigorously than previous governments.

#### 3.2. Principles

Turkey officially defends two main principles for Balkan politics.<sup>16</sup> The first one is **regional ownership**, which means that the problems of the region should be resolved by the participation and will of the indigenous actors. Turkey emphasises this not only to check the political influence of external powers over the region, but also to disentangle the Balkans from the disagreements and rivalries among these powers, which have augmented strifes, tensions and instability in

15. Büyükçolak, 138-40; Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, "Turkish-Bulgarian Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: The Exemplary Relationship in the Balkans," *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 32 (2001): 33.

16. Address by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Ministerial Meeting of the SEEC, 22 June 2010, İstanbul, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-republic-of-turkey-at-the-ministerial-meeting-of-seecp\\_istanbul.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-republic-of-turkey-at-the-ministerial-meeting-of-seecp_istanbul.en.mfa)



the region for at least two centuries. The second principle is **all-inclusiveness**, i.e. taking into account in regional settlements of the views all parties in the region. By defending this, Turkey hopes to revise the existing arrangements that had been introduced and promoted by external actors with a more balanced outlook and prevent new disgruntlements that can cause further tensions between states and communities.

### 3.3. Goals

In principle, Turkey sees it essential to ensure long-lasting peace and stability, continuous political dialogue and economic integration in the region, as well as to respect and preserve its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious character.<sup>17</sup> By playing an active role in the transformation of the region into a more peaceful and interdependent one, Turkey also wants to strengthen its political and economic position and improve its image in the region. Turkey's quest in the long run is becoming a leading political and economic actor with stronger social and cultural connections.

### 3.4. Strategies, instruments and actions

In the political sphere, the Turkish government has spent considerable effort for closer dialogue and better understanding with the Balkan governments. Official visits, at both high and low level, have been remarkably frequent especially since 2009. The agendas of these meetings went beyond the discussion of regional and global issues, as a large number of bilateral agreements for cooperation in commercial, economic, cultural, educational, industrial and technical matters have been concluded. Among these are free trade agreements with all Balkan countries and visa exemption agreements with all non-EU member states in the region.

17. Ronald H. Linden and Yasemin İrepoğlu, "Turkey and the Balkans: New Forms of Political Community," *Turkish Studies* 14, vol. 2 (2013): 230; Altin Raxhimi, "Davutoglu: 'I'm Not a Neo-Ottoman'," *Balkan Insight*, 26 April 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/davutoglu-i-m-not-a-neo-ottoman>

In recent years, Turkey has been increasingly active in offering mediation and dialogue for the resolution of inter-state and inter-communal disputes in the region. The most fruitful of these attempts has been the trilateral consultation process among Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. As the Dayton Peace Process and following initiatives by the USA and Europe did not yield any concrete result for a lasting understanding and peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey took the initiative to bring Serbian and Bosnian political leaders together when it held the chairmanship-in-office of the SEECP. This process was launched in 2009 with the first meeting of the foreign ministers of the three countries. In April 2010, the presidents of the three countries met in İstanbul for the first summit meeting of the trilateral mechanism. At this summit, the three parties signed a declaration underlining the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need for mutual dialogue and cooperation. Further meetings continued afterwards. During this process, Turkey found the middle ground between the two governments over the issue of the Srebrenica Massacre. While encouraging the Serbian government to apologise from the Bosnian Muslims for this catastrophic incident, Turkey also convinced the Bosnian government to accept the apology even though it did not employ the word "genocide."<sup>18</sup> This led to further steps for the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the Ankara summit in May 2013, the three states also agreed to establish a trilateral committee for the advancement of economic and commercial cooperation amongst each other.<sup>19</sup>

18. "New Beginnings in the Balkans?" *ISN ETH Zürich*, 21 May 2010, <http://isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=116496>

19. *Türkiye-Bosna-Hersek-Sırbistan Üçlü Zirve Toplantısı'nda kabul edilen Ankara Zirve Bildirisi*, 15 Mayıs 2013, Ankara, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-bosna-hersek-sirbistan-uclu-zirve-toplantisi\\_nda-kabul-edilen-ankara-zirve-bildirisi\\_-15-mayis-2013\\_-ankara.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-bosna-hersek-sirbistan-uclu-zirve-toplantisi_nda-kabul-edilen-ankara-zirve-bildirisi_-15-mayis-2013_-ankara.tr.mfa)

Simultaneously, Turkey also spearheaded a trilateral consultation mechanism including Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The initiative, which was launched by the foreign ministers of the three countries in early 2010, involved regular meetings and development of joint projects for strengthening relationships among the three founding elements in Bosnia and Herzegovina and accelerating the reform and reconstruction process in this country. Turkey and Croatia's joint support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership to NATO was also within the scope of this mechanism.<sup>20</sup> After these overtures, however, the mechanism has slowed down due to Croatia's membership to the EU.

In addition to these, Turkey also offered mediation between Serbia and Kosovo in late 2010,<sup>21</sup> but the issue was eventually taken up by the EU. Meanwhile, Turkey also worked for reconciling the parties in certain domestic issues in the Balkans, including the rift between Islamic institutions in the Sanjak region of Serbia<sup>22</sup> and the government crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>23</sup>.

While undertaking individual initiatives for mediation and reconciliation, Turkey has continued encouraging and actively participating in multinational institutions and missions operating in the Balkans.

For higher security, political stability and economic prosperity of the region, Turkey has keenly encouraged and supported deeper integration of the Balkans with the international

#### TURKEY'S PARTICIPATION IN MULTINATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND MISSIONS IN THE BALKANS

- **South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP):** Regional initiative for political dialogue and cooperation in various areas. Turkey is a member.
- **Regional Cooperation Council (RCC):** Formerly Stability Pact for Southeast Europe; operational arm of the SEECP involving outside partners (both states and international institutions). Turkey is currently in the board and one of the leading contributors to its budget.
- **Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC):** Formerly Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI); an institution for preventing and combating organised crime in the region. The incumbent director-general is a Turkish representative, Mr. Gürbüz Bahadır.
- **Kosovo Force (KFOR):** NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo operating since 1999. Currently Turkey's troops in KFOR amount to 365 out of 4985.
- **Peace Implementation Council (PIC):** The international body responsible for sponsoring and directing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Turkey is a member of the council as well as the representative of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in its Steering Board.
- **European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX):** EU judicial and police deployment in Kosovo for consolidating the rule of law. Turkey is among the five non-EU contributing states.
- **EUFOR ALTHEA:** 600-men EU military force in Bosnia and Herzegovina operating since 2004 for preserving peace and monitoring compliance with the Dayton Agreement. Turkey is among the five non-EU contributing states.
- **South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG):** 5000-men joint military force kept ready to participate in peace operations. Turkey is among the seven countries contributing to the force.
- **United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK):** Turkey has one officer apiece in the police and military components of the mission.

community. Expressing the desire to see the Balkans as "an integral part" of Europe rather than a periphery,<sup>24</sup> the Turkish government has offered Western Balkan states support and technical assistance in fulfilling EU criteria. Turkey has been lobbying for the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia to NATO. Turkey has also been working for the international recognition and integration of Kosovo since the latter declared its independence in February 2008. It especially conducted intensive lobbying in the Organisation of Islamic Co-

20. "Mostar Köprüsü'nün önünde barış mesajı," *Türkiye*, 29 April 2010, <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/Genel/a440750.aspx>

21. "Davutoğlu: Turqia e gatshme të ndërmjetësojë për dialog Kosovë - Serbi," *YLL Press*, 29 September 2010, <http://www.yllpress.com/16868/davutogllu-turqia-e-gatshme-te-ndermjetesoj-per-dialog-kosove-serbi.html>; "Turqia e gatshme të ndërmjetësojë në bisedime," *Telegrafi*, 3 November 2010, <http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/turqia-e-gatshme-te-ndermjetesoj-ne-bisedime-2-11095.html>

22. "Ankara settles dispute between religious institutions of Sandzak," *Today's Zaman*, 17 October 2011, <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-260153-ankara-settles-dispute-between-religious-institutions-of-sandzak.html>

23. "Ahmet Davutoğlu Bosna hersek gezisini tamamladı," *Yeniçağ*, 30 January 2011, <http://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/yg/ha bergoster.php?haber=45276>

24. Altın Raxhimi, "Davutoğlu: 'I'm Not a Neo-Ottoman,'" *Balkan Insight*, 26 April 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/davutoglu-i-m-not-a-neo-ottoman>

operation (OIC), inducing a number of Muslim countries to recognise Kosovo.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, however, in accordance with the “regional ownership” principle it defends, Turkey places primary importance on regional initiatives for cooperation and stability. It encourages further institutionalisation of the SEECP, the strengthening of its role and activities and the gradual takeover of the functions of international institutions and missions by regional and local actors. With this strategy, it aims to break the influence of outside powers over the Balkans and empower the regional actors, including itself, in resolving their own problems.

To speed up the development of the region and establish good neighbourly relations, Turkey has continuously sent development aid to Balkan countries since the early 1990s. While the allocations of individual countries have shown large fluctuations, the aggregate amount sent to the Western Balkans has increased in recent years. In 2010-11, Turkey was among the top ten donors that sent official development aid to Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

| OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT AID FROM TURKEY (MILLION \$) |      |      |      |      |      |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
|   | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
| Albania   | 4,3  | 4,4  | 8,6  | 7,8  | 3,6  |
| Bosnia and H.                                     | 15,9 | 15,9 | 32,8 | 25,9 | 17,9 |
| Croatia   | 0,9  | 0,5  | 0,1  | 0,4  | ...  |
| Kosovo  | ...  | ...  | 20,6 | 22,1 | 22,4 |
| Macedonia   | 9,2  | 9,9  | 6,0  | 28,3 | 6,8  |
| Montenegro  | 1,2  | 5,3  | 2,8  | 10,1 | 2,9  |
| Serbia  | 1,9  | 31,0 | 3,3  | 3,8  | 3,9  |

Source: OECD

25. “Türkiye, İKÖ ülkelerinin Kosova’yı tanıması için bastırıyor,” *Zaman Amerika*, 10 March 2008, [http://us.zaman.com.tr/us-tr/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=20481](http://us.zaman.com.tr/us-tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=20481); “Sejdiu: SHBA dhe Turqia shtyllat kryesore të përkrahjes ndërkombëtare për Kosovën,” *Bota Sot*, 27 February 2013, <http://www.botasot.info/kosova/213026/sejdiu-shba-dhe-turqia-shtyllat-kryesore-te-perkrahjesnderkombetare-per-kosoven/>

Energy pipeline projects, which will contribute to the interdependence and energy security of a large region in addition to its material benefits, have been another element in Turkey’s political and economic vision regarding the Balkans. The Turkish government has placed particular importance on the projects that would transport Caspian and Middle Eastern gas into Europe through Anatolia and the Balkans. Initially, for the delivery of Persian and Caspian gas to Europe, the Nabucco Project was developed and Turkey promoted it. Yet, as Europe’s interest in this project waned with the view that it is too costly and insufficient for energy security, Turkey decided with Azerbaijan to build a joint pipeline that would transport Caspian gas to the European border of Turkey. After the conclusion of its protocol in November 2011, the construction of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) will commence in the year 2014. With this project, Turkey hopes to play a key role in the energy security of both the Balkans and Europe by becoming an integral part of the Southern Gas Corridor. For the same reason Turkey encourages further infrastructure projects to be built in the Balkans. It also defends the view that turning the Balkans into an energy transportation corridor will make a long-lasting contribution to peace and stability in the region. As the Balkan countries deem these projects important for their energy security, Turkey’s interests in this regard coincide with theirs.

Increasing economic cooperation and interdependence with the region is among the key objectives of Turkey. Accordingly, the government has spent considerable effort for the coordination and facilitation of Turkish business activities in the Balkans. Turkey’s “regional cooperation and competition strategy” for the Balkans includes conducting continuous dialogue with Balkan states to facilitate trade and investments, promoting Turkish products and services, informing Turkish entrepreneurs of the opportunities in the region, encouraging cooperation among Turkish



and local enterprises and providing support to Turkish business associations and finance institutions operating in the Balkans. Since 2011, the Turkish Ministry of Economy regularly convenes a Balkan States Working Group with representatives from various public institutions, business chambers and NGOs to discuss the economic relations with the region and develop further strategies. All these efforts contributed to the increase in Turkish investments and exports in the Balkans (see below).

As a response to the growing role and power of social forces and the importance of perception management in international relations, the resort to public diplomacy and soft power instruments has been seriously taken up by the AK Party government.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, besides the policies in the political and economic sphere, it has carried out various social, cultural and educational projects in the Balkans by cooperating with civil society. A number of public institutions took part in this aspect of Turkey's Balkan policy.

- **Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA)**<sup>27</sup>: This public agency, responsible for providing aid and assistance to regions and communities abroad, was established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1992 as a response to the new world order after the Cold War. It was later attached to the Prime Ministry. In its early years, the agency was almost exclusively interested in Turkish-speaking communities, yet in recent years, in parallel to new openings in Turkish foreign policy, its audiences are far more diversified. As a result, while the Balkans was one of its priority regions, along with the Caucasus and Central Asia, in its early years, it has lately shifted its focus to less developed regions of the world,

especially to sub-Saharan Africa. That said, TİKA is still among the leading foreign policy agents of Turkey in the Balkans, almost functioning as a parallel diplomatic institution responsible for the socio-economic aspects of Turkey's policy. Among its tasks are carrying out developmental projects, particularly in the areas of education, health and agriculture, providing assistance to municipal projects, renovating Ottoman buildings and artefacts and coordinating the activities of local and Turkish NGOs operating in the region. Out of its 30 coordination offices in three continents, 6 are in the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia).

**TİKA is among the leading foreign policy agents of Turkey in the Balkans, almost functioning as a parallel diplomatic institution responsible for the socio-economic aspects of Turkey's policy."**

- **Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)**: Established in 2010 as another public institution attached to the Prime Ministry. In addition to providing assistance to Turkish citizens living abroad, its mission is to enhance Turkey's social, economic, cultural and educational relations with the broadly-conceived "kin and related communities." The foundation of this institution transpired from the need for a better planning and implementation of public diplomacy, which had been carried out by a plethora of ministries and bodies.<sup>28</sup> Among the key functions of this institution are sup-

26. İbrahim Kalın, "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in Turkey," *Perceptions* 16, no. 3 (2011): 5-23.

27. Its original name, Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency, was changed in 2011.

28. Kemal Yurtnaç, "Turkey's New Horizon: Turks Abroad and Related Communities," *SAM Papers*, no. 3 (2012): 4.

porting and coordinating NGO activities and providing scholarships for international students.<sup>29</sup> Students from Balkan countries can apply to a number of different scholarship schemes, including one accepting applications from the citizens of this region only.

- **Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet):** This institution, whose primary responsibility has been to provide religious services and education in accordance with the secular ideology of the Republic, has also been carrying out activities directed to the Turks living abroad. Since the early 1990s, it has become another channel of Turkey's foreign relations by engaging into contacts with other Muslim communities as well. As for the Balkans, visits from and to Turkey of religious officials have increased further during the AK Party period. Moreover, since 2007 the leaders of the official and/or officially recognised Muslim leaders of all Balkan countries have been convening annually. Cooperation in religious matters, the return of the properties of religious foundations (*vakıf*) and Islamophobia in the Balkans have been among the mostly discussed issues in these summits.<sup>30</sup> The Diyanet, thanks to the financial support provided by its affiliate foundation, has also provided scholarships for religious education to hundreds of students from the Balkans, opened colleges and preacher schools in Bulgaria and Romania and actively took part in the construction

and restoration of mosques throughout the Balkans.

- **Yunus Emre Institute (YEE):** Established in 2007, the Yunus Emre Institute is a public foundation responsible for promoting Turkish language and culture abroad. Sponsored by a constellation of sources including the government, the institute has so far opened 23 branches in various countries in Europe and Asia. The special importance YEE, hence the government, places on the Balkans is observable from the fact that 10 of these branches are operating in this region and two new branches will be opened shortly.<sup>31</sup> Within only a few years of operation in the region, this institute aroused significant interest in the Turkish language, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Turkish has become an elective language in secondary schools.<sup>32</sup>
- **Municipalities:** A number of municipalities of not only large cities but also smaller districts have been active in providing assistance and aid to the Balkans and organising social and cultural activities. Town-twinning between Balkan and Turkish municipalities, in which the latter undertake special projects for the former, is also quite widespread, amounting to more than 40 pairs.<sup>33</sup>

One of the aims of the Turkish government in these campaigns is obviously to improve the historical image of the Turks. For this aim, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu and other ministers have occasionally called for the revision of history textbooks

29. From 2012 onwards, all scholarships granted to foreigners by Turkish public bodies, including the Ministry of Education and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, has been undertaken by the YTB.

30. "Balkan Ülkeleri Diyanet İşleri Başkanları toplantısı," *Baltürk*, 30 March 2011, <http://balturk.org.tr/balkan-ulkeleri-diyamet-isleri-baskanlari-toplantisi/>; "6. Balkan Ülkeleri Diyanet İşleri Başkanları Toplantısı Sonuç Bildirgesi," *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Haber Bülteni* 271 (2013), 12-3. The return of properties to religious foundations has commenced in countries like Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and currently going on, albeit slowly. This process can lead to important socio-economic consequences since a sizable portion of lands and immovables in many parts of the Balkans originally belonged to *vakıfs*.

31. These branches are in Albania (Tirana, Shkodër), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Fojnica), Kosovo (Pristina, Peć, Prizren), Macedonia (Skopje) and Romania (Bucharest, Constanța). The two forthcoming branches will be in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mostar) and Montenegro (Podgorica).

32. "Türkçe seçmeli mecburi yabancı dil oldu," *Haber 7*, 27 December 2011, <http://www.haber7.com/dunya/haber/822993-turkce-secmeli-mecburi-yabanci-dil-oldu>

33. Emine Şeçeroviç, "Bosna'da Türk yatırımları," *Zaman*, 26 Ocak 2013, [http://www.zaman.com.tr/yorum\\_bosnada-turk-yatirimlari\\_2045514.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/yorum_bosnada-turk-yatirimlari_2045514.html)

in the Balkan countries, in which the Ottoman Empire are portrayed as ruthless conquerors and the major impediment on the region's development.<sup>34</sup> Despite the lingering of ingrained perceptions of the Ottoman past and the resistance among nationalist circles, the language of textbooks has been toned down in some countries such as Kosovo.<sup>35</sup>

## 4. THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FORCES LINKING TURKEY TO THE BALKANS

During the last couple of decades, Turkish civil and business actors have increasingly been involved in the Balkans. The penetration of a large number of foundations and associations, which have varying religious, ideological or nostalgic motivations, and rather rationally-acting businessmen, entrepreneurs and exporters have been the propelling force in establishing Turkey as a multi-faceted actor in the region. Their activities have not only strengthened social and economic ties between Turkish and Balkan people, but also contributed to Turkey's image and visibility.

### 4.1. Civil society and NGOs

Prior to the 1990s, external relations of Turkey were planned and conducted exclusively by the state, not only because civil society was too weak and disinterested in contributing to foreign policy, but also the state would not readily welcome such a contribution. However, this situation changed rapidly in the aftermath of the Cold War. Especially the Bosnian War increased the awareness of the Turkish society towards the

Balkans; conferences were organised under the leadership of NGOs along with some municipalities.<sup>36</sup> From the early years of the 1990s onwards, Turkish civil society groups and NGOs, based both in Turkey and in the Balkans, have gradually proliferated and got spread throughout the region. These groups and organisations, many of which are affiliated to religious brotherhoods, have carried out intensive charity activities, especially in the field of education. They have established universities<sup>37</sup> and dozens of primary and secondary schools, and provided scholarships to students at all levels. They have undertaken a wide array of social and cultural projects as well. While engaging in collaborative efforts with state institutions such as TİKA, YTB and YEE, these groups and organisations have usually conducted their activities individually and according to their own vision and agendas. An ambitious initiative has recently been launched by the İstanbul-based Union of NGOs of The Islamic World (UNIW) to sound out the needs of the civil society in the Balkans, observe the ongoing projects undertaken by Turkish actors and develop collaborative projects.<sup>38</sup>

Turkish civil society organisations in the Balkans are supported by the Turkish government through public agencies. The activities of Islamic NGOs from Turkey are also regarded positively by the USA and Europe as they represent a moderate understanding of Islam as opposed to more radical factions that have been penetrating into the Balkans.

34. Lavdim Hamidi, "Pristina 'Told to Revise History Books'," *Balkan Insight*, 1 December 2010, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/pristina-told-to-revise-history-books>

35. Jeton Musliu, "Kosovo Textbooks Soften Line on Ottoman Rule," *Balkan Insight*, 22 January 2013, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-textbooks-soften-line-on-ottoman>

36. Ali Bulaç, "Balkan Konferansı," *Zaman*, 27 October 1994, [http://www.zaman.com.tr/ali-bulac/balkan-konferansi\\_303972.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/ali-bulac/balkan-konferansi_303972.html)

37. These universities are International University of Sarajevo, International Balkan University (Skopje), Epoka University (Tirana), Bedër University (Tirana), International Burch University (Sarajevo) and University of South-East Europe Lumina (Bucharest). Those except the first two are run by foundations affiliated with the Gülen (Hizmet) Movement.

38. The website of the initiative is <http://balkanisbirligi.org/>

**TURKEY'S FOREIGN TRADE WITH BALKAN COUNTRIES (MILLION €)**

| Country                | 2002           |                | 2012           |                | Ex. %<br>Change | Im. %<br>Change |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                        | Exports        | Imports        | Exports        | Imports        |                 |                 |
| Albania                | 84,1           | 4,3            | 198,6          | 77,4           | 236             | 1818            |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 45,6           | 6,8            | 195,8          | 86,5           | 430             | 1274            |
| Bulgaria               | 400,7          | 538,1          | 1.311,5        | 2.147,5        | 327             | 399             |
| Croatia                | 45,5           | 10,1           | 155,7          | 162,8          | 342             | 1618            |
| Greece                 | 621,6          | 333,9          | 1.091,4        | 2.749,8        | 176             | 823             |
| Kosovo                 | ...            | ...            | 198,3          | 7,1            | ...             | ...             |
| Macedonia              | 106,8          | 15,9           | 213,7          | 79,7           | 200             | 501             |
| Montenegro             | ...            | ...            | 22,7           | 13,9           | ...             | ...             |
| Romania                | 598,3          | 703,9          | 1.939,8        | 2.519,9        | 324             | 358             |
| Serbia                 | ...            | ...            | 296,0          | 160,5          | ...             | ...             |
| Yugoslavia             | 128,9          | 11,4           | ...            | ...            | ...             | ...             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>2.031,4</b> | <b>1.624,4</b> | <b>5.623,5</b> | <b>8.005,1</b> | <b>277</b>      | <b>493</b>      |

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute

**4.2. Businessmen and firms**

After the fall of the Communist regimes, Turkish businessmen became interested in the region as the Balkan states swiftly took the course of liberalisation by opening up their markets to foreign capital and privatising, though gradually, state-owned enterprises. Yet, due to the slow pace of liberalisation in the Balkans and the lack of resources and experience of Turkish firms to compete in the international arena, Turkish investments and reciprocal trade remained limited, both geographically and in size, during the 1990s. In 2002, 87,4% of Turkey's trade with the region was with Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece only. Turkey's exports to these three countries amounted to 80% of all its exports to the Balkans, while its imports from these countries were as high as 97%. In the following years, however, thanks to the faster pace of liberalisation in the Balkans in accordance with EU accession requirements, as well as the economic growth and entrepreneurial dynamism in Turkey, Turkish business activities in the region intensified rapidly and trade and investments became more varied in sectorial and geographical terms. In 2012, Turkey's trade vol-

ume with the entire Balkans region was 373% higher than ten years before.

The growth of Turkey's trade with the Western Balkans has particularly been remarkable, owing much to the conclusion of bilateral free trade agreements and the encouragements offered by the recipient governments. Between 2002 and 2012, the trade volume between Turkey and the Western Balkans (including Croatia) increased more than fourfold. Meanwhile, it should also be remarked that the increase in Turkey's imports from this region largely outpaced its exports (1212% as opposed to 312%). Due to this unbalanced growth of trade, Turkey's share in these countries' imports has still not risen very high, perhaps with the exception of Kosovo, where Turkey has secured 8% of this country's total imports despite the absence of a free trade agreement.<sup>39</sup>

**TURKEY'S & SHARE IN THE EXTERNAL TRADE OF THE NON-EU BALKAN COUNTRIES (2012)**

|                        | Imports | Exports |
|------------------------|---------|---------|
| Albania                | 5,5     | 4,7     |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 3,4     | 2,5     |
| Croatia                | 1,3     | 1,2     |
| Kosovo                 | 8,0     | 4,1     |
| Macedonia              | 4,8     | 2,1     |
| Montenegro             | 2,3     | 3,9     |
| Serbia                 | 2,1     | 1,7     |

Sources: European Commission, Kosovo Statistics Agency

Until 2004, Turkey's yearly foreign direct investment (FDI) outflow to the Balkans used to be almost exclusively to Bulgaria and Romania. From that year onwards, Turkish investments began to flow in the rest of the Balkans, thanks to the accelerating liberalisation in these countries as well as bilateral agreements with Turkey. While the non-EU member states of the region have been inviting foreign investment to encourage liberal economy and competition, which are among the pri-

39. The free trade agreement between Turkey and Kosovo was concluded on 27 September 2013.

mary criteria for EU membership, Turkish firms are seeking to take advantage of the gaps in their market and industry as well as the absence of free flow of capital and labour between these countries and Europe. There are currently more than 1,000 Turkish firms working in the Balkans as a whole with a total investment stock of 4,9 billion \$.<sup>40</sup> As of 2011, Turkey was the fifth country having the largest share in FDI stocks in Albania,<sup>41</sup> while as of March 2013 Turkey was the third country with the largest investments in Kosovo after Slovenia and Germany.<sup>42</sup> The share of Turkish stocks in the remaining Balkan countries is relatively lower.

Turkish investments in the Balkans are in various sectors including strategic ones like telecommunication, energy, transportation and finance. Some airport facilities, including the international airports of Skopje and Pristina, have been built and/or run by Turkish companies.<sup>43</sup> Turkish Airlines bought 49 per cent of the BH Airlines of Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet this partnership was terminated after a few years.<sup>44</sup> Albania's public telecommunication company ALBtelecom was acquired by a Turkish consortium in 2007. Turkish banks, which have been operating in Balkan countries since the early 1990s, have become much more active during the last

few years.<sup>45</sup> Some Turkish firms and consortiums have undertaken large construction and housing projects. A larger number of Turkish enterprises operate in the manufacturing and services sectors. The bulk of factories owned by Turkish companies are in Romania.

Despite the increase in Turkish investments in total, big fluctuations are observed in Turkey's FDI outflow when examined on country basis. While in some years significant investments were made in Balkan countries, in other years their amount was negligible compared to the investments from other countries.<sup>46</sup> This is largely because it has so far been the acquisitions of large-scale projects, banks, and privatised state enterprises by big holdings and consortiums that have constituted the bulk of Turkish investments. A more balanced enlargement of Turkish investments requires sectorial diversification and the participation of a larger number of investors, both of small and large size.

Nevertheless, while many observers and politicians in the Balkans have expressed that Turkey is still not fulfilling its economic and industrial potential in the region and expect further invest-

40. Interview with an official at the Turkish Ministry of Economy, August 2013.

41. Turkey's FDI stock constituted 282 million € of the 3,036 million € total. Source: Bank of Albania.

42. Turkey's FDI stock constituted 182,6 million € of the 2,582 million € total. Source: Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo.

43. Lavdim Hamidi, "Turkey's Balkan Shopping Spree," *Balkan Insight*, 7 December 2010, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/turkey-s-balkan-shopping-spree>; Dusan Stojanovic, "Turkey uses economic clout to gain Balkan foothold," *Today's Zaman*, 16 March 2011, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-238307-turkey-uses-economic-clout-to-gain-balkan-foothold.html>

44. THY, Bosna Hersek Hava Yolları ile ortaklığını bitirdi," *Bloomberg HT*, 16 June 2012, <http://www.bloomberght.com/haberler/haber/1164055-thy-bosna-hersek-hava-yollari-ile-ortakligini-bitirdi>

45. Among state-owned banks, Halkbank has a subsidiary in Macedonia since 1993 and has recently opened a branch in Serbia, while Ziraat Bankası has been running in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1997. A number of Turkish private banks and finance groups have also been operating in Balkan countries, such as Garanti Bankası and Fiba Holding (Credit Europe) in Romania, Çalık Group (BKT) in Albania, Türk Ekonomi Bankası in Kosovo and Süzer Group (Banka Brod) in Croatia.

46. As an exception, investment inflows from Turkey have recently been fairly stable in Kosovo. According to the data provided by the Kosovo Statistics Agency, in the last few years, including the first quarter of 2013, Turkey has been one of the leading suppliers of FDI in this country. Moreover, in May 2013, a consortium of two Turkish holdings took over Kosovo's electricity distribution company: "Kosova'nın elektriği Çalık ve Limak'tan," *Sabah*, 14 May 2013, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2013/05/14/kosovanin-elektrigi-calik-ve-limaktan>



**YEARLY FDI INFLOW FROM TURKEY (MILLION \$)**

|                        | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Albania                | 3    | 0    | 3    | 5    | 5    |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 10   | 21   | 61   | 22   | 7    |
| Bulgaria               | 8    | 13   | 1    | 18   | 7    |
| Croatia                | 0    | 15   | 3    | 47   | 103  |
| Greece                 | 39   | 0    | 2    | 0    | 21   |
| Kosovo                 | 17   | 11   | 4    | 26   | 53   |
| Macedonia              | 1    | 0    | 8    | 71   | 12   |
| Montenegro             | 6    | 0    | 4    | 0    | 0    |
| Romania                | 24   | 20   | 20   | 27   | 32   |
| Serbia                 | 22   | 3    | 3    | 0    | 7    |
| TOTAL                  | 130  | 83   | 109  | 216  | 247  |
| Non-EU TOTAL           | 59   | 50   | 86   | 171  | 187  |

Sources: Central Bank of Turkey, Kosovo Statistics Agency. The figures for Kosovo are converted from Euro to US Dollar according to the yearly averages provided by IRS.

**% SHARE OF FDI INFLOW FROM TURKEY**

|                        | 2008 | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  |
|------------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Albania                | 0,31 | 0,00  | 0,29  | 0,48  | 0,52  |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 0,98 | 14,07 | 18,83 | 5,79  | 1,11  |
| Bulgaria               | 0,08 | 0,38  | 0,07  | 0,98  | 0,37  |
| Croatia                | 0,00 | 0,45  | 0,69  | 3,13  | 8,24  |
| Greece                 | 0,87 | 0,00  | 0,61  | 0,00  | 0,71  |
| Kosovo                 | 6,51 | 5,12  | 1,39  | 8,81  | 28,65 |
| Macedonia              | 0,17 | 0,00  | 3,77  | 15,16 | 8,91  |
| Montenegro             | 0,62 | 0,00  | 0,53  | 0,00  | 0,00  |
| Romania                | 0,17 | 0,41  | 6,80  | 1,07  | 1,43  |
| Serbia                 | 0,63 | 0,13  | 0,17  | 0,00  | 1,08  |

Sources: Annual totals for FDI inflows are gleaned from UNCTAD and Kosovo Statistics Agency.

**ATTITUDE TOWARDS TURKEY (%)**

|                        | 2008     |         | 2011     |         |
|------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
|                        | Friendly | Hostile | Friendly | Hostile |
| Albania                | 80,0     | 0,5     | 69,2     | 0,8     |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 41,0     | 20,8    | 51,6     | 8,6     |
| Croatia                | 23,4     | 9,1     | 33,5     | 3,4     |
| Kosovo                 | 79,3     | 3,3     | 92,7     | 1,0     |
| Macedonia              | 77,9     | 1,5     | 70,3     | 1,0     |
| Montenegro             | 22,2     | 9,2     | 30,4     | 9,6     |
| Serbia                 | 12,9     | 22,8    | 17,4     | 19,0    |

Source: Gallup Balkan Monitor

ments and trade,<sup>47</sup> the progress in Turkey's economic activity and presence in the Balkans in the last decade should not be discounted. After all, Turkey's economic presence in most of the Balkans is relatively new compared to other leading investors and trading partners of the region and the speed of foreign investment and trade depends on a number of different factors including rational calculations of firms and the political, economic and social environment as well as the extant regulations in the recipient countries. Barring an unexpected economic or financial crisis in Turkey, it can be estimated that Turkish capital will continue to flow in the region's economy. That said, the impressive trend that the commercial and business activities of Turkish companies have shown in recent years does not necessarily herald a steady increase in the share of Turkish investments in the Balkans. As European economies recover from the current crisis, Turkish companies will have to engage in a fiercer competition with their European counterparts. Meanwhile, investors from other countries, such as Russia, China, UAE and Azerbaijan, have also shown their interest in the Balkans market.

In short, civil society and business actors have been playing an important role in consolidating Turkey's position in the Balkans. While their entrance in the region was mostly independent from the state, the government has endeavoured to facilitate and support their activities through inter-governmental agreements, encouragements and financial aid. The increased cooperation among public

47. Interviews with spokespeople of PD (Albania); PDK, LDK and VV (Kosovo); SDP, PCG and FORCA (Montenegro), September 2013. See also, Emine Şeçeroviç, "Bosna'da Türk yatırımları," *Zaman*, 26 Ocak 2013, [http://www.zaman.com.tr/yorum\\_bosnada-turk-yatirimlari\\_2045514.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/yorum_bosnada-turk-yatirimlari_2045514.html); Fatjona Mejдини, "Turqia, aleati me 9% investime në Shqipëri, por me rritje progresive të tyre," *Shqip*, 8 August 2013, <http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/2013/08/08/turqia-aleati-me-9-investime-ne-shqiperi-por-me-rritje-progresive-te-tyre/>; "Makedonya 650 milyonluk bir pazar," *Aktif Haber*, 18 April 2013, <http://www.aktifhaber.com/makedonya-650-milyonluk-bir-pazar-770800h.htm>; "Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic Conferred With Turkish President Abdullah Gul," *InSerbia*, 15 May 2013, <http://ins Serbia.info/news/2013/05/serbian-president-tomislav-nikolic-conferred-with-turkish-president-abdullah-gul/>

institutions, NGOs and business actors have in turn led to the development and implementation of larger and more numerous projects, as well as a swift but notable penetration of Turkish entrepreneurs in the Balkans. All this has strengthened social, cultural and economic ties between Turkey and the Balkans. As a result, Turkey's image in the region improved;<sup>48</sup> public interest in and familiarity with Turkish culture has grown significantly<sup>49</sup> and an increasingly higher number of tourists have visited Turkey in recent years.

#### FOREIGN NATIONALS VISITING TURKEY

|                        | 1997           | 2002             | 2007             | 2012             |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Albania                | 31.508         | 29.221           | 57.601           | 59.565           |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | ...            | 32.490           | 50.437           | 61.851           |
| Bulgaria               | 219.353        | 834.073          | 1.239.667        | 1.492.073        |
| Croatia                | ...            | 14.826           | 29.470           | 47.144           |
| Greece                 | 170.445        | 280.033          | 447.950          | 669.823          |
| Kosovo                 | ...            | ...              | ...              | 70.156           |
| Macedonia              | ...            | 120.989          | 93.705           | 137.579          |
| Montenegro             | ...            | ...              | ...              | 16.559           |
| Yug. / Serbia & Mont.  | 150.725        | 188.127          | 137.100          | ...              |
| Romania                | 338.966        | 180.203          | 390.505          | 385.055          |
| Serbia                 | ...            | ...              | ...              | 157.568          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>910.997</b> | <b>1.679.962</b> | <b>2.446.435</b> | <b>3.097.373</b> |

Source: Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism

48. Many politicians and observers underline the growth of economic relations and the success of Turkish businesses as a key factor in the improvement of Turkey's image in the Balkans: Interviews with spokespeople of NOVA, PCG and FORCA (Montenegro); PDK, LDK and VV (Kosovo); SDSM and TDP (Macedonia); Rifat Efendi Fejzić (the Chief Mufti of Montenegro) and Darko Šuković (journalist, Radio Antena M, Montenegro), September 2013.

49. Menekşe Tokyay, "Balkan countries discover Turkey through the arts," *SETimes*, 31 July 2013, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2013/07/31/feature-04](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2013/07/31/feature-04). This also owes much to Turkish soap operas, which are widely watched throughout the region: Interviews with Gerti Bogdani (politician, PD, Albania), Vasilije Lalošević (politician, SNS, Montenegro), Vesna Šofranac (editor in chief, Pobjeda, Montenegro) and Muhamed Zeqiri (editor in chief, Alsat-M TV, Macedonia), September 2013. Çiğdem Buğdaycı, "The soft power of Turkish television," *SETimes*, 23 July 2011, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/07/23/feature-02](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/07/23/feature-02); Ivana Jovanovic and Menekşe Tokyay, "TV series fosters Balkan, Turkey relations," *SETimes*, 21 December 2012, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/12/21/feature-04](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/12/21/feature-04); Nedim Emin, "Balkanlarda Türk dizilerine ilgi nasıl okunmalı?" *Yeni Türkiye*, 8 May 2013, <http://www.yeniturkiye.org/balkanlarda-turk-dizilerine-ilgi-nasil-okunmalı/yeni-bolge/1519>

## 5. NEO-OTTOMANISM? THE INTERPLAY OF RATIONALITY AND ROMANTICISM IN TURKEY'S BALKAN POLICY

In parallel to Davutoğlu's recommendations in *Stratejik Derinlik*, under the AK Party rule Turkey has increasingly emphasised common history while dealing with the Balkans in general, and regarded the common religion as an asset to strengthen its ties with the Muslims in the region. Many projects directly undertaken or supported by the state, such as the renovation of Ottoman buildings, the cataloguing of Turkish manuscripts in libraries and the public courses on traditional Islamic art and painting, were efforts to bring the Ottoman-Turkish culture and civilisation to the surface after decades of neglect and oblivion and, as Kerem Öktem rightly observes, to assert the role of Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, "as protector of the Muslim communities of the Balkans."<sup>50</sup> Beyond using the Ottoman image as merely a cultural connection with Turkey, Turkish politicians have also made references to the Ottoman Empire in the context of contemporary political problems. For instance, in the speech he delivered in Sarajevo in October 2009, Davutoğlu declared that under Ottoman rule the peoples of the Balkans had lived peacefully for centuries and the time had come to restore the "political values, economic interdependence, cooperation and cultural harmony" of the Ottoman Balkans.<sup>51</sup>

Such policies and statements led to debates in the region on "neo-Ottomanism." The existence of an Ottoman image that has constantly been

50. Öktem, "Global Diyanet," 39.

51. Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Šta Turska hoće na Balkanu?" *NSPM*, 27 October 2009, <http://www.nspm.rs/prenosimo/obnovicemo-otomanski-balkan.html>. See also Öktem, "Global Diyanet," 35.

defamed since the construction of nation-states<sup>52</sup> has automatically rendered neo-Ottomanism a negative phenomenon in the eyes of many people. Having no clear definition, neo-Ottomanism is often associated, openly or impliedly, with irredentism and expansionism. Its Islamic dimension, as opposed to secularism, is also often highlighted.<sup>53</sup> While those who have unfavourable views of the Ottoman past accused Turkey of pursuing imperialism, more moderate critics of Turkish foreign policy regarded Davutoğlu's Balkans vision as purely driven by nostalgia and questioned its pertinence to the present-day realities of the region and its people.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the Oriental-Occidental dichotomy ingrained in minds has raised the concern among some circles that further development of relations with Turkey could threaten their European vision.

Neo-Ottomanism as a Turkish foreign policy vision is in fact not a new debate. It was broached and debated by Turkish columnists in the early 1990s, when President Turgut Özal advocated a more active involvement of Turkey in its nearby geographies by frequently referring to the common Ottoman past and surviving Ottoman legacies there. While some observers, who were critical of the traditional cautiousness of the Republican foreign policy, hailed Özal as a "twentieth-century Ottoman," others advised a more carefully framed and balanced approach

towards the formerly Ottoman lands.<sup>55</sup> These debates, which were shelved after Özal, have revived during the AK Party government. What is different from the Özal period is that neo-Ottomanism has become an important topic of interest and discussion abroad, especially in the countries surrounding Turkey, thanks to the growth of Turkey's political and economic influence.

To understand the historically-motivated aspects of Turkey's Balkan policy it is important to know first that the image of the Balkans in Turkey today is very much shaped by historical thinking. That is, in the minds of many Turkish people, there exists almost an automatic association between the Balkans and the Ottoman past. This is due to the fact that the Balkans was conquered by the Ottomans in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, well before İstanbul and a large part of Anatolia, and remained for centuries as a part of the Ottoman heartland, strongly connected to the capital in social, economic and cultural terms. Moreover, the descendants of those who immigrated to Anatolia after the end of the Ottoman rule in the region still maintain their social and cultural ties with the region. Thus, a strongly nostalgic view of the Balkans exists in Turkey without necessarily an irredentist aspiration. The sizable Muslim population inhabiting the Balkans are commonly referred to as "the grandchildren of the conquerors" (*evlâd-ı fâtihân*), while the remnants of Ottoman buildings and artefacts are regarded as objects of cultural heritage that need to be protected and cherished by Turkey.

One should also look at the "demand side" of the resurfacing of shared history and religion and the concomitant expectations from Turkey. Indeed, some Turkish and/or Muslim commu-

52. Gjergj Erebara, "Albanians Question 'Negative' View of Ottomans," *Balkan Insight*, 3 December 2010, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanians-question-negative-view-of-ottomans>

53. All these elements are found in the conceptualisation of Darko Tanasković, a Serbian professor, ex-diplomat and the author of a book on neo-Ottomanism: Darko Tanasković, *Neosmanizam: Povratak Turske na Balkan* (Belgrade: Službeni Glasnik, 2011). For Tanasković, the notion of neo-Ottomanism, which he defines as "an imperial nostalgia combined with extreme pragmatism," has been embedded in the Balkan policy of all Turkish political actors regardless of their ideology.

54. For instance, see Arbën Xhaferi "Sfida Osmane," *Shekulli*, 30 October 2009; Muhamet Brajšhori, "Kosovo counting on strong support from Turkey," *SETimes*, 30 April 2012, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/articles/2012/04/30/reportage-01](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/articles/2012/04/30/reportage-01)

55. Ali Fuat Borovali, "Post-Modernity, Multiculturalism and Ex-Imperial Hinterland: Habsburg and Ottoman Legacies Revisited," *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs* 2, no. 4 (1997-8), <http://sam.gov.tr/tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/ALI-FUAT-BOROVALI.pdf>; Sedat Laçiner, "Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism," *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law* 2 (2009): 153-205; Büyükoçak, 147.



nities have been asking Turkey to provide them with aid, assistance, and above all, protection. In the late 1980s, more than 350.000 Bulgarian Muslims, most of which were ethnic Turks, took refuge in Turkey due to the persecutions of the Socialist government. During the Bosnian War, many Bosniaks looked for Turkey's help, putting forward that they were the Muslim remnants of the Ottoman Empire and it was the Turks that had converted them into Islam. Many Muslims in the Balkans, including those that neither are ethnically Turkish nor speak Turkish language, still prefer to identify themselves as Turks.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Davutoğlu's emphasis on religious and historical connections cannot be viewed as merely a one-sided assertion. In fact, the role of such shared elements in the recent development of socio-economic relations between Turkey and the region is acknowledged by some regional actors.<sup>57</sup>

Even some non-Muslim actors have acknowledged Turkey's special position thanks to the shared history and culture. For instance, in response to the question of why Serbia was following the advice of Turkey but not another government in its relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vuk Jeremić, the then Serbian Foreign Minister, once stated that the Turks knew the region better than anyone as they had remained there for five centuries.<sup>58</sup>

Critics both inside and outside Turkey have generally tended to use the phrase neo-Ottomanism in two senses: the first is a fear-mongering

## Davutoğlu's emphasis on shared history, culture and religion has strong rational and liberal aspects.

one that Turkey has set about a neo-colonial project, and the second a derogatory one, referring to an over-ambitious nostalgic dream and insinuating the (in)famous Wikileaks remark that Turkey has "Rolls Royce ambitions but Rover resources." In response, Ahmet Davutoğlu has repeatedly and firmly rejected the attributions of an expansionist and neo-colonialist agenda to his Balkan policy.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, Davutoğlu underlines that due to historical, social and cultural factors Turkey's special interest in the region is normal. For him, Turkey cannot approach the issues of Bosnia in the same way as, say, a Scandinavian country would do because there were more Bosniaks living in Turkey than in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, he states that his vision for the Balkans, as well as for other former Ottoman lands, has "a civilisational, rather than a foreign policy" perspective, and what Turkey wants to achieve in these regions is an integration in the contemporary sense, similar to the European Union.<sup>61</sup> Thus, while referencing to the common Ottoman past, he does not put forward a retrospective project, i.e. the restora-

56. For a few examples of this, see Hajrudin Somun, "Is Turkey Bosnia's mother?" *Today's Zaman*, 11 November 2008, [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?load=detay&clink=158350](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&clink=158350)

57. For instance, Enver Hoxhai, the Foreign Minister of Kosovo, counts the common past, religion and geographical proximity among the factors that made Turkey one of the largest investors in this country: Chase Winter, "Erdogan pushes for common future with Balkan states," *SETimes*, 28 September 2011, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/09/28/feature-02](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/09/28/feature-02)

58. Servet Yanatma, "Boşnaklar ile Sırları ancak Türkler barıştırılabilir," *Aksiyon*, 15 February 2010, <http://www.aksyon.com.tr/aksyon/haber-26106-196-bosnaklar-ile-sirplari-ancak-turkler-baristirilirdi.html>

59. Sami Kohen, "Yeni Osmanlılık mı?" *Milliyet*, 25 November 2009, <http://dunya.milliyet.com.tr/yeni-osmanlilik-mi/sami-kohen/dunya/dunyayazardetay/25.11.2009/1166125/default.htm>; Delphine Strauss, "Turkey's Ottoman mission," *Financial Times*, 23 November 2009, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/af859474-d868-11de-b63a-00144feabdc0.html>

60. Bilal Çetin, "Davutoğlu: Bosna'daki gelişmelere kayıtsız kalamayız," *Vatan*, 17 October 2009, [http://haber.gazetevatan.com/Davutoglu\\_Bosnadaki\\_gelistmelere\\_kayitsiz\\_kalamayiz/265283/4/yazarlar](http://haber.gazetevatan.com/Davutoglu_Bosnadaki_gelistmelere_kayitsiz_kalamayiz/265283/4/yazarlar)

61. "Davutoğlu Bosna'da Konuştu: 'Yeni Osmanlı' Değiliz," *Haber Boşnak*, 30 August 2011, <http://www.haberbosnak.com/genel/30/08/2011/davutoglu-bosnada-konustu-yeni-osmanli-degiliz/>; "Davutoğlu: Saraybosna'yı Şam'a Bağlayacağız," *Haber Boşnak*, 3 March 2013, <http://www.haberbosnak.com/genel/03/03/2013/davutoglu-saraybosnaya-sama-baglayacagiz/>

tion of Turkish hegemony, but a prospective one inspired and motivated by shared historical and cultural values.

Some Islamic and conservative circles in Turkey do believe that under Ottoman rule the Balkans lived in peace for centuries and see the Ottoman past as a model to bring perpetual peace and tranquillity to the region after longstanding conflict and tension. They also regard engagement with the Balkans as a responsibility for the Muslim Turks. Nevertheless, Turkey's emphasis on common history and values is not pure nostalgia or romanticism. There is also a strong rationalist element in this. Even before the AK Party came to power, Ahmet Davutoğlu had opined that Turkey should utilise, wherever applicable, its historical and religious ties to "take advantage of the post-Cold War and post-September 11 opportunities."<sup>62</sup> Considering the fostering of Islamic identity particularly among the Bosniaks and Albanians as a strategy that would facilitate and accelerate Turkey's presence in the region, he complained that Turkey had never resorted to this because the Republican political culture perceived the manifestation of Islamic identities as an existential threat to the state.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, for him, the "strong historical, social, cultural and human ties" with the entire Balkan geography offers a common ground for regional cooperation.<sup>64</sup> All taken together, Davutoğlu's emphasis on shared history, culture and religion has strong rational and liberal aspects; for upholding these bonds can on the one hand bring the Balkan countries closer to Turkey and hence strengthen Turkey's position vis-à-vis other external powers in the Balkans, while, on the other hand, fostering regional peace and stability. Meanwhile,

62. Abdülhamit Bilici, "Mecburi istikamet Osmanlı mirası," *Aksiyon*, 9 February 2002, <http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/aksiyon/haber-6592-26-mecburi-istikamet-osmanli-mirasi.html>

63. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, 316.

64. Altin Raxhimi, "Davutoglu: 'I'm Not a Neo-Ottoman'," *Balkan Insight*, 26 April 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/davutoglu-i-m-not-a-neo-ottoman>

the Turkish government has not only carried out its relations with the Balkan states on a bilateral and multilateral basis, but also, according to its "regional ownership" principle, endeavoured to empower regional actors and institutionalise regional initiatives of cooperation at the expense of the outside powers affecting Balkan politics. In this respect, it would be quite difficult to regard the regional leadership that Turkey aspires to have in the Balkans as complete hegemony or domination.

The strong relationships between Turkey and Bosnian Muslims makes it no surprise that Serbian authors, such as Darko Tanasković and Srđa Trifković, are among the leading commentators on neo-Ottomanism. Indeed, Bosnia and Herzegovina has unique bonds with Turkey thanks to its sizable Muslim population and the existence of a large number of Turkish citizens of Bosnian origin. The news coverages during the Bosnian War, particularly regarding the Srebrenica Massacre, increased the awareness of the Turkish people in the affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, many conservative Muslims in Turkey, including Prime Minister Erdoğan, deeply esteem Alija Izetbegović, the late leader of the Bosniaks, as a model Muslim statesman. Due to all this, Turkey has shown special interest in the affairs of Bosnian Muslims and considered their protection as a duty.<sup>65</sup> As a recent example, since 2012, Turkey has supplied 100 million Euros of loan to encourage the return of Bosniak *emigrés* to the country, particularly to Republika Srpska, before nationwide census is carried out.<sup>66</sup> While some Bosnian Muslims

65. This is primarily due to the fact that unlike the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, the Bosniaks lack an ethnically kin state: Davutoğlu, 305. Many Bosniaks thus see Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, as their natural protector. Prime Minister Erdoğan has even stated that Izetbegović commended Bosnia and Herzegovina to Turkey in his deathbed: "Bosna'yı bize emanet etti," *Yeni Şafak*, 13 July 2011, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/politika-haber/bosnaya-bize-emanet-etti-18.07.2011-329756>

66. "Bakan Davutoğlu'na Kebapçı Önünde Sendikacı Tepkisi (3)," *Bugün*, 2 March 2013, <http://www.bugun.com.tr/son-dakika/bakan-davutoglu-na-kebabci-onunde-sendikaci-haberi/561074>

have expressed their happiness for having such a friend and protector<sup>67</sup> many Serbian nationalists consider Turkey's backing of the Bosniaks as an act of "troublemaking" and "dangerous" for the balances in the Balkans.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the Turkish government has also shown in various occasions that it is not intended to prop up one ethnic or religious community against another. The most obvious examples to these are its initiatives for trilateral mechanisms to resolve the political and administrative deadlock in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During these initiatives, even some Bosniaks became upset with Turkey's impartial attitude, as happened when Turkey did not press the Serbian parliament for describing the Srebrenica massacre as an act of genocide.

If Turkey is not proclaiming and pursuing an overtly neo-Ottomanist policy in the region, then who is voicing and promoting this claim and why? First, there are some Turkish NGOs that are strongly motivated by religion and an idealised historical image of the Ottoman Empire. They approach the region with a combination of religious/ideological (i.e., to help the Muslims, who remained away from Islam for decades, to remember and live their religion and to re-construct in some places an Islamic identity), humanitarian (i.e., to provide protection to the Muslims, who suffered from various problems and tragedies, and to help them develop and prosper) and nostalgic (i.e., to revive the Ottoman spirit of Islamic expansion) considerations. On the demand side,

the activities of such groups are welcome by the Muslim circles sharing similar views of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, as well as by those that pronounce neo-Ottomanism for political or economic gains. Nevertheless, these activities do not create the same positive reaction among all segments of Muslims in the Balkans due to the prevalence of secularism, nationalism and the surviving negative image of the Ottoman Empire. For instance, in Albania, the official organisation of the Muslim community approaches nostalgic discourses and views promoted by Islamic NGOs with scepticism and caution as it regards them as potentially disruptive for social harmony.<sup>69</sup>

Second, those who are uneasy with the strengthening of Turkey's position in the Balkans also play to the nationalist and religious sentiments of the masses by attributing to Turkey a utopian and/or expansionist neo-Ottomanist agenda and sometimes linking this to the rise of radical Islam. Among these, one can find Balkan politicians and commentators as well as international observers.<sup>70</sup> As regards the opposition in Turkey, while it has from time to time accused the government of pursuing a romantic neo-Ottomanist dream in foreign policy, these accusations have largely been with reference to the Middle East since Turkey's Balkan policy has so far not brought about a major entanglement.

67. See, for example, the remarks of Sulejman Tihić, the leader of the Democratic Action Party (SDA): "Turkey is with us in all important matters," *Anadolu Ajansı*, 13 June 2012, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/57818--d>. Mustafa Efendi Cerić, currently the President of the World Bosniak Congress, also once declared "Turkey is our mother; it has been so and it will remain so:" Hajrudin Somun, "Is Turkey Bosnia's mother?" *Today's Zaman*, 11 November 2008, [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=158350](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=158350)

68. Srdja Trifkovic, "Turkey Resurgent," *Chronicles Magazine*, 10 August 2012, <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/2012/08/10/turkey-resurgent/>; Vesna Peric Zimonjic, "Balkans Bristles Under Turkey's Gaze," *IPS*, 24 July 2012, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/07/balkans-bristle-under-turkeys-gaze/>

69. Interview with a high-level official at the Muslim Community of Albania, September 2013.

70. Oliver Antić, advisor to the President of Serbia, believes that the Serbian government and Foreign Ministry should study Tanasković's book very well, as neo-Ottomanism and Jihadism are two sides of the same coin: "Neosmanizam iz ugla Darka Tanaskovića," *RTS*, 24 April 2013, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Dru%C5%A1tvo/1312260/Neosmanizam+iz+ugla+Darka+Tanaskovi%C4%87a+.html> Also cf. Phil Cain, "The Limits of Turkey's Balkans Diplomacy," *World Politics Review*, 10 November 2010, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/6992/the-limits-of-turkeys-balkans-diplomacy>

## 6. EVALUATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### 6.1. How did Turkey approach to the Balkans and what made the “zero problems” vision work?

The approach of Turkish state and non-state actors to the Balkans in recent years has been shaped to a large degree by an amalgam of economic and identity-based motivations, even if for each actor one may be more dominant than the other. The AK Party government has been careful to take a balanced approach, emphasising historical and religious ties with the region without forsaking the country’s economic interests. In this respect, it is possible to claim that religious and cultural identity is a major, but not the completely determining factor in Turkey’s Balkan policy at present. Without excluding any regional actor according to religious or ethnic identity, Turkey has pursued cooperation with all of them on various grounds. Maintaining this balanced approach in the political arena, it has taken the role of mediator and counsellor instead of taking side in regional disagreements. It has also endeavoured to contribute to the preservation of peace and order, the fulfilment of structural reforms and the development of the entire region. Thanks to all these efforts, Turkey has been able to advance its relations with a wide spectrum of actors, improve its image and strengthen its political, economic and cultural position in the Balkans.

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Generally speaking, the principles in Turkey’s Balkan policy have been in line with its approach to other surrounding regions. Politically, Turkey has prioritised the maintenance of peace and stability, the intensification of regional cooperation and the resolution of disputes through dialogue. Economically, it pursued the objective of increasing its exports and investments and resorted to encouragements and bilateral agreements to foster trade. The Turkish government also has extensively used public diplomacy and soft power instruments to promote cooperation and the sense of togetherness with Turkish and Muslim people and to improve its image and prestige. For all these reasons, the government has also endeavoured facilitating and encouraging the activities of civil society and business actors.

“Zero problems with neighbours” does not necessarily mean the absolute absence of problems and tensions with neighbouring countries and societies, as this would be unimaginable. From time to time, small-scale disputes and differences of opinion between Turkish and Balkan politicians, state authorities and social groups have occurred. To give a few recent examples, in 2009, Greek government voiced the right to carry out hydrocarbon exploration in the parts of the Aegean Sea that Turkey regards as international waters.<sup>71</sup> During the same year, Bulgarian Min-

71. Kostis Chatzidakis, the Greek Minister of Development, indicated that Greece would launch oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities in the Aegean Sea despite all the objections raised by Turkey: “Yunanistan, Ege Denizi’nde petrol ve gaz arařtırmaları bařlatacak,” *Milliyet*, 2 August 2009, <http://dunya.milliyet.com.tr/yunanistan--ege-denizi-nde-petrol-ve-gaz-arastirmalari-baslatacak/dunya/dunyadetay/02.08.2009/1124056/default.htm>. The then Prime Minister Karamanlis also stated that the red-lines they had set regarding the status of the Aegean were not negotiable: “Karamanlis: AB Kriterlerine tam uyum, tam üyelik,” *Milliyet*, 24 September 2009, <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/karamanlis--ab-kriterlerine-tam-uyum--tam-uyelik/siyaset/siyasetdetay/24.09.2009/1142557/default.htm>. These declarations did not bring any material change and hydrocarbon searching of Turkish and Greek companies in the Aegean has continued in undisputed areas only. Yet, if the grave economic situation of Greece continues for long, the Greek government may become more assertive about exploiting the resources in the disputed areas in the future.

ister for Diaspora Bojidar Dimitrov launched a campaign for demanding compensation from Turkey, as a prerequisite for its accession to the EU, to the descendants of those who were forced to emigrate from Eastern Thrace in the aftermath of the Balkan War, which Turkey rejected.<sup>72</sup> Turkey's calls and attempts for the revision of history textbooks created strong reactions among Albanian nationalists,<sup>73</sup> while some Serbs, particularly the political leadership of the Republika Srpska, have criticised the Turkish government for ignoring the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>74</sup> The disagreement between Turkish and Bosnian official Muslim authorities regarding the election of Mufti in the Sanjak region still continues. Nor has anti-Turkish sentiments and Turcophobia ended completely in the Balkans, as seen in the declarations and manifestations of the ATAKA Party in Bulgaria.

As Davutoğlu indicates, the "zero problems" principle is rather the endeavour to "eliminate the barriers preventing Turkey's reintegration with its neighbours" and to maximise cooperation with them.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, large-scale disputes and conflicts of interest are avoided, or set aside if already present, and mutual understanding and

cooperation are sought in alternative areas. If Turkey's relations with the Balkans are assessed in these terms, it can be easily claimed that Turkey has successfully implemented the "zero problems" doctrine in this region so far. No serious rift between Turkey and a Balkan government has taken place in recent years and even the long-standing disputes with Greece (e.g., continental shelf, exclusive economic zone, airspace and Cyprus), which had kept the bilateral relations fairly tense for decades, have been out of the agenda. As substantiated with statistics above, economic relations and socio-cultural interactions between Turkey and the Balkans have grown significantly and Turkey's image in the Balkans has improved.

Even though the AK Party government has adopted similar principles, utilised and mobilised almost identical instruments and followed similar courses of action, the "zero problems" principle has worked far more smoothly in the Balkans compared to other surrounding regions, particularly the Middle East. This is because agency has only partial role in foreign policy and the materialisation of visions and strategies also depend on favourable international and regional conditions. In the Middle East, internal dynamics as well as structural and conjunctural factors such as the unforeseen Arab revolutions, the prolonged civil war in Syria, the coup d'état in Egypt and the alignments among regional and global powers led to unexpected situations for Turkey. As regards the Balkans, Turkey has so far taken advantage of the coinciding interests and objectives of the Balkan states as well as the contribution of international organisations to regional stability.

Being surrounded by the European Union, the non-EU-member countries in the Balkans do not have an alternative foreign political alignment to integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions, particularly with the European Union. This common objective has not only played a key role in maintaining peace and stability in the Balkans but also fostered cooperation among regional

72. "Davutoğlu'ndan Bulgaristan'a tazminat yanıtı," *CNN Türk*, 5 January 2010, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/01/05/davutoglundan.bulgaristana.tazminat.yaniti/558063.0/index.html>

73. In Kosovo, some intellectuals have denounced this as an act of interference, insult and "cultural aggression". See "Kadare: Turqia po bën agresion kulturor," *Koha*, 28 March 2013, <http://www.koha.net/?page=1,5,140435>; "Turqia interesohet për trajtimin e Perandorisë Osmane në Kosovë," *Koha*, 11 March 2013, <http://www.koha.net/?page=1,13,138186>. Despite their different ideological positions, political parties in Kosovo generally concur in the view that while prejudiced and biased statements should be removed from history textbooks, politicians should leave this to historians: Interviews with spokespeople of AAK, LDK, VV and KDTP, September 2013.

74. Vedrana Durakovic, "Dodik ramps up rhetoric against Turkey's role," *SETimes*, 8 July 2011, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/07/08/feature-03](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/07/08/feature-03); Hajrudin Somun, "Sarajevo as seen by Erdoğan and Milorad Dodik," *Today's Zaman*, 7 October 2012, [http://www.todayzaman.com/news-294484-sarajevo-as-seen-by-erdogan-and-milorad-dodik-by-hajrudin-somun\\*.html](http://www.todayzaman.com/news-294484-sarajevo-as-seen-by-erdogan-and-milorad-dodik-by-hajrudin-somun*.html)

75. Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Zero problems in a new era," *Foreign Policy*, 21 March 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/21/zero\\_problems\\_in\\_a\\_new\\_era\\_turkey](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/21/zero_problems_in_a_new_era_turkey)



actors. While the revolutions in Arab countries opened the Pandora's Box for new political rivalries as well as ethnic, religious and sectarian conflicts, in the entire Western Balkans mainstream political actors have been united in the European vision. As a result, the political, ethnic and religious tensions in the latter have been far less intense than in the 1990s while dialogue and cooperation among regional actors has increased notably. The conclusion of the protocol of normalisation between Belgrade and Pristina on 19 April 2013 was a striking instance of the EU's impact on regional dialogue and understanding in the region. The goal of accession to the EU has affected not only inter-state relations but also the domestic politics of the Western Balkan countries as the governments have been respecting the principle of good and equitable governance more carefully than before and political and economic programmes of rival political factions have converged to a great extent. All these developments have contributed to peace and stability in the Balkans. Turkey, in its turn, on the one hand supported and encouraged these integration processes and on the other hand benefited from the state of tranquillity in advancing its economic and cultural relations with the region.

The economic conjuncture in recent years has also been in the advantage of Turkey. While Turkey was able to maintain its fiscal discipline and economic progress under the AK Party rule, the financial crisis and concomitant economic difficulties in the Euro zone, especially Greece, which is another aspirant regional power, have opened new opportunities for Turkish investors while increasing the demand in the Balkans for closer economic cooperation with Turkey.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, the absence of an antagonistic or rival power in the Balkans has facilitated Turkey's

balanced and cooperative approach to the region. As mentioned before, this would have been far more difficult without the improvement of relations with Greece. Especially the deepening of political and economic relations with Serbia owes much to the decline in the Greek-Serbian front against Turkey. The strong commitment of both the Turkish and Greek governments to maintain friendly relations, notwithstanding the unresolved status of the disputed issues mentioned above, has thus contributed to peace and stability not only in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean but also in the Balkans.

As no large-scale crisis occurred in the Balkans during the last decade, Turkey was able to avoid sharp divisions and confrontations. Turkey has not had to openly side with a regional actor against another. Even if in a regional dispute its position leaned towards one of the parties, Turkey acted carefully not to alienate the other party and rather encouraged both sides towards dialogue. For instance, while immediately recognising Kosovo's declaration of independence, Turkey sought an understanding between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo instead of urging the former to recognise it. Yet again, instead of strictly supporting one party, Turkey endeavoured to bring Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian governments together to resolve the problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, Turkey has remained on good terms with all governments in the region.

Nevertheless, while stability has generally prevailed in the Balkans since the end of the 1990s, it would still be too early to claim that the possibility of crisis and conflict has disappeared completely. On the contrary, according to the Gallup poll conducted in seven Western Balkan countries in 2012, around one quarter of the participants expect an armed conflict in the region within five years.<sup>77</sup> In case of such an

76. For a discussion on the central role of international political and economic circumstances in the growth of Turkey's presence in the Balkans, see Dimitar Bechev, "Turkey in the Balkans: Taking a Broader View," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 1 (2012): 135-7.

77. *Gallup Balkan Monitor* (2012), <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/>

armed conflict or a large-scale political or social crisis, Turkey may prefer to take a side, due to strategic and/or ethical reasons as happened in the Middle East.<sup>78</sup> Relaxing the "zero problems" outlook in the Balkans can in turn lead to a sharp decline in Turkey's relations with some actors in the region and rekindle anti-Turkish sentiments and propaganda.

## 6.2. Political weight: Has Turkey become a major political actor in the region?

While the economic interactions, socio-cultural connections and mutual perceptions between Turkey and the Balkans have improved significantly over the last few years and the Turkish government has also undertaken some political initiatives, it would still be somewhat early to claim that Turkey has become a major actor that can shape regional politics alone. This is observable in the mixed results that its "regional ownership" strategy has produced. While Turkey's mediation between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina has contributed to a visible, yet slow, progress in the political and economic relations of these countries, its mediation between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina has fallen short to bear any real fruit because of the accession of this country to the European Union. Nor did Turkey's offer for mediation between Serbia and Kosovo materialise, as the parties accepted that of the European Union. Turkey's efforts to promote the political role and influence of the SEECP, which is composed only of Balkan governments, in regional politics has yet to yield any significant result.

The voting in the United Nations General Assembly for the observer status of Palestine on 29 November 2012 has also shown that Turkey's leverage over the Balkan governments is not

still too strong. Despite Turkey's intensive lobbying and declaration that an abstention would mean "no," all Balkan states except Greece and Serbia abstained. Especially the abstention of Albania, a predominantly Muslim country, was a big frustration for particularly Prime Minister Erdoğan.<sup>79</sup> This meant that the influence of the United States, the leader of the nay votes, over the Balkans outweighed that of Turkey.

Turkey has so far taken advantage of the coinciding interests and objectives of the Balkan states as well as the contribution of international organisations to regional stability.

Although Balkan governments have been keen to cooperate with Turkey in various issues, Turkey's emerging role in the region is also met by scepticism among both nationalists and pro-EU circles. For the former are still under the prejudices of their historical convictions, while the latter are concerned that too much involvement of Turkey in the region could complicate their country's integration with Europe. These reactions also curb the extent of Turkey's political influence and leverage.

At present, with its conditionality carrot the European Union is the actor that exerts the strongest influence over the Western Balkans, and it appears unlikely to be challenged by another actor in a near future. Given that the EU accession process of the Western Balkan coun-

78. Actually for Davutoğlu taking a clear "national position" is a better response to crises than remaining neutral, as it is the only way "to shape history": From his speech at LSE, London, 7 March 2013.

79. Interview with a Turkish diplomat, September 2013. See also, Stephen Schwartz, "Albania's Abstention on Palestine U.N. Vote and the Islamist Response," *The Weekly Standard*, 14 December 2012, [http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/albania-s-abstention-palestine-un-vote-and-islamist-response\\_666462.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/albania-s-abstention-palestine-un-vote-and-islamist-response_666462.html); "Shqipëria rrezikon marrëdhëniet me Turqinë," *Shekulli*, 2 December 2012, <http://www.shekulli.com.al/web/p.php?id=10017&kat=87>

tries continues and its own membership prospect in the Union remains in limbo, Turkey's political weight over the Western Balkans is bound to remain limited. Under these circumstances, Turkey, while (re-)establishing itself in the Balkans in rather economic and cultural terms, tries to use its membership to NATO and other international and regional institutions as a source of political power and leverage.

The use of a soft-power-skewed smart power has so far proven to be a prudent and fruitful strategy for Turkey in the Balkans; for its relations with the region as well as its image there have remarkably improved. Meanwhile, however, Turkey's strengthening economic, social and cultural ties with the Balkans does not seem to convert into a substantial political influence in the short term. Becoming a major actor that could shape the political preferences and decisions of regional actors should rather be a long-term objective for Turkey.

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Relaxing the “zero problems” outlook in the Balkans can in turn lead to a sharp decline in Turkey's relations with some actors in the region and rekindle anti-Turkish sentiments and propaganda.

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### 6.3. What will the EU integration of the Western Balkans bring for Turkey?

All of the six states in the Western Balkans have applied for full membership to the European Union. As of today, three of them, i.e., Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, have been granted candidate status, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have signed Stabilisation and Association Agreements (only Albania's SAA has entered into force) and Kosovo is expected to sign SAA shortly. Nevertheless, the accession of these countries

to the EU is not expected in the short term due to their shortages in meeting the accession criteria and their international disputes.

Although Turkey received candidacy much earlier than all of these six states, this does not necessarily mean that it will become a full member to the EU before them. On the contrary, as seen in the accession of Central and Southeast European countries, negotiation and alignment can take much shorter with smaller states than with Turkey. Despite the possibility that the Western Balkans can integrate in the EU earlier than Turkey, the latter still supports the accession process of the former, as it brings a number of advantages. First, this process has with no doubt brought more stability in the region, which means to Turkey lower security threats and higher opportunities for cooperation, trade and investment. Second, the integration of the Western Balkans into EU will also bring Turkey closer to Europe by reducing the peripheral status of this geography and increasing cultural diversity in the Union. Moreover, even if these countries, which have strong historical, social and cultural connections with Turkey, become full member before Turkey, they can pressure other members from inside for Turkey's membership.

On the other hand, the integration of the Western Balkans to the EU before Turkey is expected to have certain disadvantages for the latter as well. Currently Turkey has bilateral free trade and other agreements with these countries, which have led mutual economic and social transactions to boom in recent years. The accession of these countries to the European Union will provide them with more alternatives and thanks to the free flow of capital and labour their business and trade relations with EU countries will develop at the expense of Turkey. In the political arena, the influence of the European Union over these states is also expected to become stronger, especially in security and foreign policy.



For the time being, since Turkey is also a candidate to the European Union, its role in the Balkans is generally considered as complementary rather than alternative to the EU. However, if Turkey's accession process comes to a deadlock and its membership prospect becomes significantly low, this will likely accelerate Turkey's efforts to enhance its independent role and position in the Balkans.<sup>80</sup> In response, it can be expected that the Western Balkan countries will want to keep this limited in order not to forsake their European vision, which is a strategic priority for them, while enjoying the economic benefits that Turkey's increased involvement will bring. Thus, given the common EU membership goal of these countries, Turkey's EU accession prospect can deeply affect its Western Balkans policy and relations with the region in forthcoming years.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1. For Turkey

**a. Turkey should take advantage of the momentum to establish a stronger political and economic position in the Western Balkans.** Despite the common EU membership vision of Turkey and the Western Balkan countries, it cannot be determined as of now when any of these countries will become full member. As discussed above, (1) the accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU before Turkey or (2) the decline in Turkey's membership prospect while the accession process for the other countries continues can hamper Turkey's political and economic influence in the region. Against such possibilities, Turkey should redouble its efforts to establish itself in the region and strengthen its relations. Establishing closer cooperation, more amicable relationship and stronger interdependence with these

states will be in Turkey's benefit whether they enter the EU before Turkey or not.

**b. Turkey should keep encouraging exports and investments in the Western Balkans.**

Notwithstanding the recent growth of Turkish economic and commercial activities in the region, Turkey is still far behind many EU countries despite the financial crisis in Europe. In 2012, while Turkey's exports in the Western Balkans (including Croatia) were around 5,6 million € and its imports 8 million €, those of the European Union amounted to 31,3 billion € and 16,2 billion €, respectively.<sup>81</sup> As for investments, Turkey is not among the top 5 in any country except Albania and Kosovo. Currently there is a high level of unemployment in the whole region and sectors such as tourism, estates, transportation and food production, in which Turkish companies are strong, are underdeveloped. These conditions create excellent opportunities for Turkish businessmen to invest and operate in the region. These opportunities can be missed if the gaps in the local economies are filled by other investors.

**c. While expanding its trade with the region, Turkey should also be watchful over its trade balance.**

The increase in trade volume means increasing interdependence between Turkey and the Balkan countries, which suits to the goals that Turkey has pronounced. In the meantime, however, the increase in Turkey's imports from the region has been far greater than that in its exports. As a result, while Turkey's trade with the Balkan countries gave 407 million € surplus in 2002, it gave about 2,4 billion € in 2012. Even though this is largely due to the increase in imports from the European Union, the trade with the rest of the Balkans

80. For a similar argument, see Žarko Petrović and Dušan Reljić, "Turkish Interests and Involvement in the Western Balkans: A Score-Card," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 3 (2011): 170.

81. European Commission, *Trade: Western Balkans*, accessed 1 September 2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/western-balkans/>

has also shown a trend in favour of imports. When the non-EU countries (as of 2012) are excluded, the proportion of imports to exports has risen from 12% to 42% between 2002 and 2012.

- d. **Turkey should strategically plan and orchestrate its economic and commercial activities:** In different parts of the Balkans there is strong demand for certain goods and for technical know-how in certain sectors.<sup>82</sup> Turkey, as a relatively new economic player in the region, should address specifically to prevailing local needs for an effective and accelerated advancement of economic cooperation and interdependence.
- e. **Turkey should offer the region unique and alternative contributions:** For deeper and stronger relations with the Balkan states, Turkey can offer counselling and technical assistance in specific areas that it has special expertise or experience in. If this is done, the need for cooperation with Turkey will continue even after the involvement of other actors in the region.
- f. **Turkey should develop customised policies and instruments for specific countries and regions:** Despite the common tendency among policymakers and institutions to handle the Balkans holistically, this region is actually made up of countries and regions with significantly different political, economic and social realities, sensitivities, necessities and priorities. To establish stronger, more stable and long-lasting relations with the Balkans, Turkey should support the gen-

eral political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of its foreign policy with customised and diversified policies and instruments at the operational level.

- g. **Turkey should engage in dialogue with sub-state groups and entities:** In a highly complex political and social system like the Balkans, establishing good inter-state relations is not sufficient to maintain peace and stability. Especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo, certain ethnic and religious groups aspire for self-determination or independence, and as they often act autonomously from their kin states, anticipating their actions is not always possible. Therefore, regardless of their size and the resources they possess, these groups have the potential to disrupt regional stability and even create serious tensions. To prevent such results, Turkey should engage in regular dialogue with these groups and entities, observe their grievances, offer mediation with their adversaries and develop projects to alleviate their economic and social conditions. Such activities will contribute not only to regional peace and stability, but also to Turkey's image, prestige and political standing in the region.
- h. **Turkey should not assert itself as a "big brother":** While aspiring to become a key regional actor, the Turkish government should maintain its care not to irritate and alienate certain communities and exacerbate Turco-scepticism. Conceivably, no government or community would readily want another actor to assert a high degree of influence on their preferences and decisions regarding their own environment. In addition, nationalism in the region is still too strong for the endorsement of a "big brother," while the historical struggle against the Ottoman rule is still a strong element shaping national identities. Notwithstanding the

82. Turkish Ministry of Economy, *Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Profile*, accessed 1 September 2013, <http://www.ibp.gov.tr/pg/section-pg-ulke.cfm?id=Bosna%20Hersek>; Peter Tase, "Shqipëria dhe Turqia; partnerë strategjikë në një botë të globalizuar," *Mapo*, 5 August 2013, <http://mapo.al/2013/08/05/shqiperia-dhe-turqia-partnere-strategjike-ne-nje-bote-te-globalizuar/>; "Stavreski očekuava golem broj turski investicij vo Makedonija," *Faktor*, 10 May 2013, [http://faktor.mk/archives/46897?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=stavreskiočekuava-golem-broj-turski-investicij-vo-makedonija](http://faktor.mk/archives/46897?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=stavreskiočekuava-golem-broj-turski-investicij-vo-makedonija)

recent improvement in Turkey's image, the deep-rooted prejudices of Turks have not yet disappeared.<sup>83</sup> For all these reasons, not only Christians, but also Muslims and ethnic Turks, which are by default considered as Turkey's natural allies, have at times reacted negatively to Turkey's attempts to unilaterally involve in regional or local politics.<sup>84</sup> For Turkey to advance its relations with all parties of the Balkans and wield stronger soft power throughout the region, Turkish actors should be careful in their discourses and deeds.

- i. Turkey should be careful with inter-communal balances:** At first glance, the EU accession process in the Western Balkans may appear to have simmered down the conflicts among communities; yet, in fact mutual suspicions and rivalries still exist beneath the surface. Since political and social relations proceed in a quite delicate balance, actors should show extra care to maintain social, economic and political stability. As for Turkey, while it is understandable, to a certain degree that it gives priority to the Muslims and ethnic Turks in its services and activities

in the Balkans, Turkey should avoid creating the impression that this is intended to bring them into a politically superior position over the Christians. In addition, the concentration of some NGO activities on particular ethnic, religious and sectarian audiences can create further rivalry and division among communities. For instance, emotional approaches from Turkey to Bosnia and Herzegovina have created mixed reactions among the Bosnian society, even some degree of perceived threat. It is therefore unsurprising to observe that almost half of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not regard Turkey as a friendly country according to the latest Gallup Balkan Monitor poll.

Turkey's EU accession prospect can deeply affect its Western Balkans policy and relations with the region in forthcoming years.

- j. Turkey should better support, coordinate and monitor the activities of civil society actors:** The positive contributions of civil society groups and organisations to socio-cultural bonds among societies cannot be overlooked. These actors usually lack financial and human resources to carry out well-planned and large-scale projects. To facilitate their activities, which will in turn reinforce Turkey's presence and prestige in the region, the government should continue to support and cooperate with them. On the other hand, it is also a fact that civil society groups and organisations act according to their own perspectives and agendas, which are not necessarily in line with the state's foreign policy. Bearing in mind that the Turk-

83. See Erhan Türbedar, "Turkey's New Activism in the Western Balkans: Ambitions and Obstacles," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 3 (2011), 149-53.

84. For instance, Mustafa Cerić has recently indicated that while he was more than pleased with the Turkey's becoming to a regional power, he would like the Turkish government to take the demands and preferences of regional actors more into account in its Balkan policy: Seyfullah İslami, "Mustafa Çeriç: 'Türkiye'nin Balkanlar Politikasının Belirlenmesine Katkı Sağlamak İstiyoruz,'" *Zaman Makedonya*, 6 February 2013, [http://mk.zaman.com.tr/mk-tr/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=6562](http://mk.zaman.com.tr/mk-tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=6562). In Bulgaria, the recent attempt of a group in the AK Party to reshape the political organisation of the Turkish minority by encouraging the establishment of a new party failed in the April 2013 elections, in which the vast majority of the ethnic Turks voted for the old Turkish-led party Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS): Şevket Tahir, "Bulgaristan seçimleri yeni krizler doğurdu," *Dünya Bülteni*, 17 May 2013, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=260159>; Abdullah Bozkurt, "Turkey and the 2013 Bulgarian elections," *Today's Zaman*, 24 May 2013, <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnists-316424-turkey-and-the-2013-bulgarian-elections.html>; Fatih Yapar, "Sarıncı sandığında kazanan HÖH kaybeden AK Parti," *Ege'de Son Söz*, 13 May 2013, <http://www.egedesonsoz.com/haber/Sarnic-sandiginda-kazanan-HOH-kaybeden-AK-Parti-/840927>

ish NGOs generally approach the Balkans on the basis of identity, their actions can create mixed results in this region having delicate socio-political balances. Some observers have also warned about illicit activities, such as money laundering, perpetrated by some civil society organisations in the region.<sup>85</sup> In order to prevent social and legal complications and a negative blow to the image of Turkey, the government needs to monitor and coordinate their activities and ensure that these activities suit to the real needs of the inhabitants, rather than being symbolic and cosmetic ones or serving short-term political and economic interests of particular groups.

## 7.2. For the Balkan states

- a. **Balkan states should support Turkey’s “regional ownership” principle:** Regional stability in the Balkans has long been hampered by the competition among outside actors in this geography. The de-stabilising effect of outside involvement can be eliminated only through the development of regional institutions and mechanisms possessing the power and instruments to manage regional affairs and settle intra-regional disputes.
- b. **Balkan states should support Turkey’s search for a regional identity:** Another obstacle before a lasting peace in the Balkans has been the suspicions, tensions and conflicts among ethnic and religious groups. The development of a common regional identity can bring these groups together and increase the level of solidarity and cooperation among them. Europeanisation, while providing material and ideational incentives for peaceful coexistence, is unlikely to transform local identities into a homogeneous European

identity. Turkey’s efforts to find common grounds for cultural values, as well as its principle of “regional ownership,” can contribute to the development of such an identity.

- c. **The Western Balkans should intensify economic and commercial relations with Turkey:** The Western Balkan states can take advantage of Turkey’s *prima facie* self-interested endeavour to expand economically in the region and to become a strong and competitive economic force in the short and medium term. Regarding Turkey’s EU membership vision and its need for the maintenance of regional peace and stability an asset, they should look for further cooperation with this country for their own economic development. They need not be concerned that stronger cooperation with Turkey could drive them away from Europe; for Turkey is also an EU candidate and both the Western Balkans and Turkey will eventually become fully integrated in the European Union under normal course of events.
- d. **Balkan states should resort to Turkey’s experiences:** The Balkans can benefit from Turkey’s experiences in the issue areas that they need further reform and improvement, such as security, organised crime, corruption and border safety.
- e. **Balkan states should seek to benefit from Turkey’s pivotal role for inter-regional cooperation:** Turkey has a pivotal position between the East and the West and is also a member in a wide range of international organisations. It has also strong and complex relationships with countries in the surrounding geographies. The Balkan states can benefit from Turkey’s unique geostrategic position and international influence for furthering their economic and political relations and integration with other regions, such as the Islamic world and Eurasia.

85. Mesut İdriz, “Balkans between two worlds: Turkey and Europe,” *Today’s Zaman*, 9 October 2011, [http://www.sundayszaman.com/sunday/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=259260](http://www.sundayszaman.com/sunday/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=259260)







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**W**hile some observers, referring to recent developments in the Middle East, are questioning whether Turkey's "zero problems with neighbours" doctrine is still in effect, Turkey's relations with the Balkans are enjoying their golden age. Since the mid-2000s, bilateral relations with all governments in the region have been in good terms, social and economic relations have intensified and Turkey's public image has become increasingly positive.

This analysis offers a general assessment of Turkey's relations with the Balkans under the AK Party government. It examines the main concerns, principles, strategies and instruments of Turkey's Balkan policy, assesses the role of non-state actors in Turkey's growing role in the region and discusses the relevance of the debates on "neo-Ottomanism". Following an evaluation of Turkey's political position in the Balkans, it closes with policy recommendations to Turkey and Balkan countries for a more effective cooperation that would benefit all sides.



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