Policy Brief

A Vision for the Centennial of Our Republic

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There are now less than fifteen years left before we celebrate the centennial of the Republic of Turkey. Taking into consideration the fact that we, the humans, managed to squeeze into the last century two or three world wars and worn out several ideologies, even raising the Earth's temperature whilst exhausting its natural resources, no doubt we will be living in a much different world than the present one, in fifteen years from now... Moreover, the pace of change has increased such that it is incomparable with that of the past and the possibility of unforeseen technological and societal change has dramatically improved. The way the latest financial crisis erupted is the manifestation of such a potential. Since no one yet can predict the eventual outcome of the crises that suddenly shook the financial markets and economies like an earthquake, an attempt to foresee the first quarter of the 21st century might seem like a futile effort.

Nevertheless; in order to secure the future, it is necessary to formulate a vision which will guide us in our endeavor to shape it. We need to look into the kinds of hardships we might face and ways to avoid them by examining the trends and variables that are likely to prevail. More importantly, we need to decide on the kind of country and environment we would want to be living in fifteen years from now. Such a design may be useful only if it is realistic, widely shared and owned up to. This article is a humble mental exercise in search of such a vision.

Main variables and options at the global level: The financial and economic crisis that has suddenly surrounded the world has provided a striking example to the extent and negative effects of globalization, bringing humanity to new crossroads. If states can overcome the crisis and agree on common methods, and to that extent, improve global governance to prevent new ones, globalization might proceed on a healthy course; if not, however, a new period of protectionism would be likely, spurring nationalism and regionalization. In short, the first two of these three tendencies –etatism, regionalization, globalization- carry the danger of conflict, while the last one evokes anarchism. The present coexistence of etatism, regionalization and globalization is one of the main reasons for the dissonance, and hence the uncertainties in the world. A fundamental change in this political setting cannot be expected within the next fifteen years.

Just like the way the European Union was born out of regional economic cooperation beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community, it is now high time to set new global standards and to take global measures together with appropriate institutional arrangements for a more stable and secure world. Global warming, the shrinkage in energy and water resources, unbalanced population growth and the effects their movements will have all make global solutions essential. While this is done, it would be a good idea to question the capitalist paradigms and search for a "healthy and balanced development" instead of "sustainable development" based on consumer habits that shorten the life of our planet. Since indigestible

imbalances and differences are the source of all conflicts global governance will be of any use to the extent that it makes them acceptable and manageable.

Leading powers should give up their self-centered approach to tame others by using soft or hard power, opting instead for an attitude that holds the values they defend such as human rights, equality and the rule of law not on a dual but a singular standard. In this regard, making the United Nations more democratic and effective, as well as sincerely adopting the Millennium Development Goals should be priorities on the international community's agenda for the next fifteen years. Still, while "world citizen" is being heard more often, a world where humanity's benefits take precedence over personal and national ones is no more than a dream, just like Plato's Utopia.

There is no evidence to make us think that "nation state" era is coming to an end. On the contrary, the rise of identity consciousness is giving momentum to the establishment of new states, and communities are fast to erect walls of "otherness" between each other. To bring humanity together around common human values and common global interests, either willingly or by force, is bound to remain as wishful thinking. Therefore, no matter how inevitable globalization might seem, the international environment does not fall in line with it.

The world is full of unresolved conflicts that have been going on for years. The Palestinian problem, the visible face of the war between the US and the armed Islamic movement based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, non-state actors, nuclear weapons and imbalance in military power, and the asymmetrical threats that emerge in response to them are combined with social and economic inequalities to provide a threat on a global scale. States that fail to adapt to globalization or with no competitive strength fall in difficulty to survive. Developed countries often make matters worse by their coercive and formative attitudes towards these states.

Principles such as the peaceful solutions of disagreements and the nonviolability of borders, while accepted easily in theory, are not practiced with the same ease. On the other hand, the imbalances and differences that cause the disagreements increase everyday; the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. The information age facilitates the manipulation of the behavior of people and societies. In the short term, there does not seem to be a solution to these problems. Looking at current trends and the weight of the global problems it is possible to assume that in 2023 our world will be in a much dangerous situation than it is today. It is obvious that such an environment will negatively impact globalization.

The worst case scenario imaginable in this context is the frontalization of regional and religious polarizations further fed by global imbalances and energy problems. Considered together with technological and military advances, the dangers inherent in such a radical frontalization are obvious. In the absence of an effective global system of governance and justice to offset the self-interest of people and nations, it is not surprising to see that in societies where good governance is lacking and feelings of oppression abound, religion, hatred and hostility are becoming easy replacements. For this reason the possibility of a clash of civilizations should be taken seriously, and co-habitation of civilizations should be given due consideration.

While global problems require global approaches, the impossibility of a single government in today's conditions makes an alternative multi-polar model based on the balance of power a more suitable and realistic option. It could be said that current demographic and economic trends support this model. In this case, the essential criterion is that the balance between the poles is reliable, meaningful and tangible and that the model is based on mutual dependence rather than enmity. Said balances should allow for carrying out competition and cooperation simultaneously.

The power centers of the multi-polar world are already considered to be the US/Canada, the EU, China, India and Brazil. It is impossible for the magnetic field of these poles to cover the whole world. Preventing competition over areas that are out of the polar zones but are attractive for these powers in terms of their resources or geo-strategic importance is the candidate for

being the toughest problem within this scenario.

In any case, the futures of Russia, Central Asia, and the Middle East will matter, while Turkey's position will carry a special significance by itself. Unless it consolidates its identity, the Islamic world will not be able to form a pole, but it will continue to compete/clash within itself and with the Western world to that end. It will not be a mistake to assume that the attitude of the power centers to this competition/clashing will be a determining factor for the security environment.

Turkey's Position: Politically, ideologically, culturally, and economically, Turkey is located on one of the world's most fragile fault lines. It has within itself certain vulnerabilities in the fields of development, income distribution and lack of constitutional consensus. In addition to being surrounded by sources of instability and conflict, the fact that it is increasingly becoming an energy hub is turning Turkey into a crucial geo-strategic center.

Turkey, while growing fast, trying to balance its dependence on others and employing a multi-dimensional foreign policy, has increased its regional influence and strategic sphere of interest. However, starting with energy, its technological, commercial and financial shortcomings have so far kept Turkey from feeling strong and secure.

Turkey is a country that shares rising global values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy. It is struggling to become a member of the EU on its way achieve its goal to catch up with the developed world. The EU membership is a strategic option that could balance the above-mentioned dependencies. However, hardships, setbacks and mistreatments encountered during this process lead the Turkish public to hesitate, while fueling anti-Western or anti-EU sentiments in return.

These occasional crises of trust between the EU and Turkey create an uncertainty about Turkey's position, while strengthening anti-Western, as well as conservative and nationalist tendencies. In this context, Turkey is obliged to assume that being on the edge of a deep fault line and as the only democratic and secular country with a predominantly Muslim population, it is one of the main targets of the radical elements in the Islamic world.

Under the circumstances, Turkey is in a position to influence the newly forming balances in the world more than ever before. In order to avoid the risks that come with being on the fault line, or ending up on the wrong side of it, we need to make the right choice for the kind of world we want to be living in by 2023. Looking for an answer to questions such as "what kind of a world" or "what kind of a Turkey would we like", it is first imperative to determine and agree on the indispensible values with which we would like to build up our society. Starting with humanistic values such as love, integrity, not resorting to violence, peace, responsibility and equality;

a Turkey that has also agreed on the cultural and constitutional values that shape our national identity must form the core of this vision.

Failing to achieve that, Turkey will inevitably be in a quandary at determining its interests and its place in the world. Turkey needs to make it the main goal of its fifteen year vision to get rid of its internal imbalances, with the understanding that values such as respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy can only be truly assumed if both the blessing and the burden of living in this country are shared equally.

This vision is in fact the founding vision of the Turkish Republic. The priority given by the modern republic to education, women's rights, transportation, modernity, independence, peace, and most importantly, to the establishment of the rule of law attests to this. The explanation to where we stand today, on the other hand, lies in the structural and institutional deficits in our democracy that were not sufficiently overcome by past administrations.

In order to overcome this deficit, Turkey should save itself from cultural erosion and find a way to raise informed and conscious generations with common national values in the guidance of reason and science. Beyond adopting his   principles that have formed the basis of our constitution, adherence to Ataturk's principles should be embraced in the form of values such as citizenship, integrity, work ethic,

The goal should be to be governed better than we have been governed so far and to achieve this in a healthy democratic system; this objective should be encouraged to be adopted as civic duty.

It is most natural for such a vision to reflect directly upon Turkey's international relations. Within this framework, there is a picture of Turkey as a country that is democratic, peaceful rather than aggressive, respectful of international law, faithful to its promises and fully committed to the UN's Millennium Goals. It would be natural for this country to become closer with those it sees as counterparts and moving away from those that are not. Certainly this proximity or distance should not be equated with friendship or enmity. Like all other states, Turkey needs to determine its foreign policy in accordance with its interests and she should rest her security on her own power, as well as on firm balances, with respect to its environment where uncertainty prevails, as NATO seems inclined to transform further into a co-operative security organization where cohesion and solidarity might get harder to achieve and the EU's depth and width have been called into question.

With this understanding, the Turkey of 2023 should take the shape of a country;

- That is solid and well governed,

- That has freed EU membership from being a foreign policy tool of the EU and made it primarily a choice of its own,

- That has established a "zero problem" neighborhood,

- That has consolidated her prestige and influence in Eurasia,

- That has balanced its dependences on others,

- That has a high production force and competitive strength,

- That contributes to international peace and stability,

- That grounds her defense and deterrence on its own inherent strength.

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