POLICY BRIEF

GLOBAL POLITICAL TRENDS CENTER (GPoT)

THE TURKISH INTERNAL REFORM AND FOREIGN POLICY SHIFT: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CYPRUS TALKS*

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ABSTRACT Internal social change in Turkey, inaugurated by the liberalization of the economy in the 1980s and given a new impetus by Turkey's EU accession path during the AKP governments, has engineered a momentous reform process, which marks the beginning of a new post-Kemalist era in the country. Steady economic growth, along with democratization, brings new social forces to the forefront of the political arena and makes them stakeholders in the policymaking processes. As a result, one can observe a substantive shift in Turkey's foreign policy, from the "hard power" model of the Kemalist era governed by the siege syndrome, to the "soft power" approach of Ahmet Davutoğlu's doctrine of "nil problems with neighbors", governed by a feeling of confidence that liberates the country from past obsessions. This foreign policy shift removes the Cyprus problem from the sphere of the untouchable grand national issues as well as from its historical context, and leads to a rationalization that allows for a compromise win-win settlement. Within this framework, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan, having won a new mandate with a larger ever-popular support, has a free hand to take the initiative for a lasting settlement of the protracted Cyprus conflict. The practical recommendations made in this regard constitute substantive political actions, which, if materialized, would decisively contribute towards an early settlement.

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Introduction

The ascent of the AKP to power in November 2002 marked the beginning of a post-Kemalist era in Turkey. This process, the very first seeds of which were sown by Turgut Özal in the 1980s, was, to a large extent, a bottom-up process, involving a deep rooted demand for change by large segments of society throughout the country. Kemalism, having started as a progressive – though top-down and elitist – movement for change, was turned by the 1970s into an authoritarian conservative establishment, alien-ated from society at large, and incapable of keeping pace with the era of globalization.

It has been said that the EU accession process has been the locomotive for social and political reform in Turkey.[1] However, there has been a genuine internal social drive, which made the reform process possible, and which has gained a renewed dynamic during the last decade. This dynamic social drive, though a complex process relating to tradition and inner spiritual life as well, has to be seen mainly as the result of the liberalization of Turkish economy, which was inaugurated by Turgut Özal in the 1980s and later made big strides during the years of the AKP

governments.[2] The entrepreneurial middle class that has gradually emerged, along with growing in size and broadening its boundaries to include intellectuals, journalists, and civil society activists, now assumes a more powerful political leverage and creates social consensus for reform.

Internal Reform and Foreign Policy Shift towards "Soft Power"[3]

For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on two main aspects of the reform process being engineered in Turkey. First, the institutional demo-cratization process and, second, the foreign policy shift from the "hard power" approach dominant until the close of the 20th century, to the transparent "soft power" approach of Davutoğlu's doctrine of "nil problems with neighbors".

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[1] Hugh Pope: *Solving the EU-Turkey-Cyprus Triangle*, International Crisis Group, 9 June 2011.

[2] See: M. Hakan Yavuz: *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, OUP, 2003; Sia Anagnostopoulou: *Τουρκικός Εκσυγχρονισμός* (Turkish Modernization), Vivliorama, 2004; Yildiz Atasoy: *Turkey, Islamists and Democracy*, I.B.Tauris, 2005; Hans-Lukas Kieser (ed): *Turkey Beyond Nationalism*, I.B.Tauris, 2006; Ali Carkoglu & Ersin Kalaycioglu: *Turkish Democracy today*, I.B.Tauris, 2007.

[3] See: Joseph Nye: *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004.

Democratization and modernization of the state is a prerequisite for effective entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, it is a precondition for social mobility and the development of civil society networks. This brings the citizens to the forefront of social and political developments and turns them into active players in the policy-making processes. The rapid development of think tanks, social research, and information society, reflects exactly the upgraded role of the citizenry vis-à-vis the state in the formulation of policies.[4] Whereas, under the Kemalist regime, the people existed to serve the state, nowadays priorities are shifting towards the fundamental European demo-cratic axiom where the state exists to serve the people.

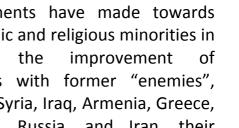While social mobi-lity and a minimum of social consensus are necessary requirements for economic development, export oriented growth – which is the case for Turkey – needs also peaceful relations with neighboring countries as well as peace and stability in the surrounding geographical and trade environment.

This last parameter adds new players to the foreign policy decision-making processes. Whereas, during the authoritarian state, foreign policy was exclusively determined behind closed doors by the National Security Council and the diplomatic bureaucracy, now the major role has shifted towards the political government and the social actors who try to promote their interests through foreign relations. This makes foreign policy-making a more transparent and more demo-cratic process and, at the same time, a more complex task, as it has to take into account and balance interests and sensitivities of a larger spectrum of players.

The openings that the AKP governments have made towards the ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey, the improvement of relations with former "enemies", such as Syria, Iraq, Armenia, Greece, Bulgaria, Russia, and Iran, their

> **[…] the improvement of relations with former "enemies", such as Syria, Iraq, Armenia, Greece, Bulgaria, Russia, and Iran, their forthcoming approach towards solution on Cyprus in 2004, and in general, the effort to make Turkey a factor of stability in the region, all these instances reflect a considerable degree of democratization in the drafting of Turkish foreign policy.**

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[4] Among other sources, see particularly: Maria Ververidou: *Τουρκία: Παράγοντες Διαμόρφωσης Πολιτικής* (Turkey: Actors in Policy-Making Processes), in Sotiris Dalis (ed): *Από τον Μπους στον Ομπάμα* (From Bush to Obama), Papazisis, 2010.

forthcoming approach towards solution on Cyprus in 2004, and in general, the effort to make Turkey a factor of stability in the region, all these instances reflect a considerable degree of democratization in the drafting of Turkish foreign policy.

A second change in Turkish foreign policy, more relevant to the scope of this paper, is connected with its orientation. Up until the close of the 20th century, Turkish foreign policy was dominated by the Sevres syndrome, a heritage of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, reinvigorated by the Cold War climate. Turkey was perceived as being at a state of siege by hostile neighbors, even by enemies from within (i.e. the ethnic and religious minorities and, later on, the Turkish Islamic movement). Even Greece, a NATO partner, had turned into an enemy owing to the Cyprus crisis, which has dominated Turkish-Greek relations since the 1950s. In what Zorlu had described as Turkey's preemptive defense against a Greek grip around its Mediterranean harbors, Turkey came out vehemently against the Enosis Movement in an over-reaction that led to the pogrom against the Greeks of Istanbul, and

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culminated in the military intervention in Cyprus in 1974. This "hard-power" approach was still the dominant trend when, in 1996, Şükrü Elektağ was pronouncing the "two-and-a-half wars" doctrine (i.e. that Turkey should prepare to fight two-and-a-half wars simultaneously against Greece, Syria, and the PKK).[5]

Things have changed dramatically since then. First came the "earthquake diplomacy" and the Helsinki deal of 1999, which led to a warming up of Turkish-Greek relations while opening the way to Turkey's EU accession and reform process. Then came the 2002 landslide victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his "black Turks" or "the other Turkey", as the Islamic Movement was seen by the Turkish press following its first electoral victory in 1994.[6] In stark contrast to the cases of Celal Bayar and Süleyman Demirel, Erdoğan and his "black" or "other" Turks had been the outcasts of the Kemalist establishment; they had been kept entirely outside of the political system. In this sense, the ascent of the AKP to power meant a

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[5] Şükrü Elektağ: *2 ½ War Strategy*, Preceptions Journal of International Affairs, Ankara, Vol. 1. No 1.

[6] M. Hakan Yavuz, 2003.

second Revolution (despite its being an evolutionary process) in the history of the Turkish Republic, marking the beginning of the end of the Kemalist statist authoritarian regime. And it certainly meant the end of the "hard-power" dominated policy both at home and abroad. Since then, "soft-power" win-win approach of Turkish foreign policy, brilliantly expounded in Ahmet Davutoğlu's doctrine of "nil problems with neighbors", reflects a feeling of self-confidence and security that helps transcend obsessions of the past.

The Cyprus Connection of Erdoğan's New Mandate

In the light of the above analysis, Erdoğan's third crashing election victory of 12 June 2011, and renewal of mandate with a larger ever popular support, beyond any other intricate complexities, has to be seen as the net result of a growing social consensus for reform and democratization at home, and peace and stability abroad. Regardless of whether Erdoğan has a "hidden Islamic agenda" at the back of his mind or not, what counts in politics is not hidden thoughts – or even intentions – of key players, but political action and net result; which is no longer determined by one sole actor; which now is an intricate process with a complex

network of social forces on the stage. Even considering Max Weber's extended freedom of action of charismatic leaders, this presupposes a state of siege which is not the case in present day Turkey.

In this same light we have to set our expectations of the new Turkish government's role in relation to the protracted Cyprus conflict; taking into account not public statements which most frequently are directed at multiple audiences and are intended to serve multiple internal purposes. A reliable evaluation of solution perspectives should first reside on a rational analysis of the interests that solution would serve, and, secondly, on an equally rational analysis of the forces that move history in the countries involved. As for Turkey, to the extent that our analysis is a valid interpretation of reality, both broad interests and history drivers converge toward a peaceful settlement in Cyprus.

The Cyprus problem is no longer the grand national issue that used to be from Adnan Menderes to the last days of Bülent Ecevit's premiership. What came out, during the recent acrimonious exchanges between Erdoğan and the Turkish Cypriots was that for Erdoğan the Cyprus problem is somehow a liability which costs Turkey some one billion euro a year. The very fact that economic parameters are seriously

accounted for and openly commented on, is indicative of a rationalization which allows room for negotiating a compromise solution. The additional fact that the Cyprus problem was almost completely left out of the election campaign agenda and that social research findings showed considerable segments of the Turkish society positively inclined towards a compromise federal solution while keeping the issue low in their priorities, leaves a free hand to the new government to take the necessary initiatives leading to an agreed settlement.

Last but not least, an early solution on Cyprus would have far reaching positive effects on Turkey's EU accession process. Apart from freeing the blocked negotiation chapters, it will set the pace for a lasting negotiated settlement of the disputes with Greece, thus making the triangle of Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus a paradigm for peace, stability, and cooperation in the turbulent region of the Middle East, and a big asset for the European Union.

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One might argue, in this regard, that the European ambivalence on Turkey's accession path relates to more important considerations which will not be removed once there is a settlement on Cyprus or even on the Turkish-Greek disputes. This argument is only partly true, as it fails to account for the spillover effect that such a momentous development will have on the European public opinion. Moreover, neither Turkey nor the European Union can oversee the fact that more than half of Turkey's trade exchanges are with EU countries and that about two thirds of foreign investment in Turkey come from EU member states.

What is urgently needed, which will immensely help towards a Cyprus solution, is revitalization of the Helsinki spirit, I would say, a new Helsinki deal, reconfirming European will to accept Turkey as a full member of the Union and recommitting Turkey to work consistently in the direction of fulfilling the Copenhagen accession criteria. Turkey's unprecedented economic performance is an additional asset

that sets aside quite a lot of crisis-connected European fears.

Recommendations

To put the record straight, what are the practical steps that one might expect Turkey to take, now that it has a government with a new mandate and a free hand, one might say, to reach a compromise settlement on Cyprus?

I would suggest the following points as food for thought:

1. Turkey should dispel Greek Cypriot fears that it perceives solution in terms of power politics. It needs to convince that the doctrine of "nil problems with neighbors" could be applicable in Cyprus as well on a win-win basis.

2. Turkey should also dispel Greek Cypriot fears, which loomed large in the run up to the referendum of 24 April 2004, that while they would immediately give power sharing, what they would get back in return, which was territory and properties, would be too slow to come, in exceedingly long timeframes that made it look far remote and uncertain.

3. Drastic shortening of timeframes should particularly apply to the withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island. The provision in the Annan Plan for the stationing of a 6000-strong Turkish contingent for seven years after the implementation of the agreement and for a 3000-strong one for another seven-year period could not be legitimized in the minds of the people as reasonable or necessary.

4. As timeframes, particularly on the return of land and properties, would be necessary to give time for relocation of Turkish Cypriots, Turkey should show readiness to accept such guarantees of the implementtation of the agreement to be, so that to dispel any fears that it will not keep its commitments.

5. While Greek Cypriots should accept such arrangements on the property issue that would address the will of the vast majority of the Turkish Cypriots to live in a compact area, as well as practical needs within the agreed upon federal framework, Turkey should convince the Turkish Cypriot negotiators not to insist on arrangements that stink of ethnic cleansing. I would recall, in this regard, the principles underlying the Cyprus Academic Dialogue Property Proposals, which, while allowing for Turkish Cypriot majority of population and land ownership in the Turkish Cypriot constituent state to be, give priority to

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humanitarian criteria and suggest arrangements that would allow, and even encourage, gradual social and economic interaction among citizens of the two communities.[7]

6. If the motto of a settlement is "power sharing for peace" as far as Greek Cypriots are concerned, "land for peace" should be the motto for Turkey, which should show readiness to accept such arrangements that would allow the return of substantial numbers of Greek Cypriot refugees to their homes and lands. Linking the issues of "territory" and "property" we might set a balancing rule whereby the more the land to be returned under Greek Cypriot administration, the higher the percentage of Turkish Cypriot land ownership in the Turkish Cypriot constituent state.

7. With regard to the security issue, the Turkish government should show readiness to accept such arrangements that would address the "double minority concerns" in Cyprus, that is, the Turkish Cypriot concern for being a minority in Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot concern for being

a minority vis-à-vis the over-populous and overpowering Turkish mainland.

8. This would entail, at first hand, Turkey's unequivocal commit-ment to withdraw Turkish military forces the presence of which in Cyprus is not covered by international treaties.

9. It would also entail a commitment to withdraw, under agreed upon arrangements and incentives, a substantial number of Turkish citizens who have settled in the northern part of Cyprus, the presence of whom on the island dramatically upsets demographic structures, while constituting a burden on cultural identities and social stability.

10. Turkey should show readiness to reconsider the 1960 guarantees, in the light of the European framework and of Greek Cypriot concerns at the possibility of unilateral intervention.

11. In the face of the disquietingly slow pace of the Cyprus peace talks between the two leaders, Erdoğan might bring back his proposal for broadening the negotiation procedure (with the participation of Turkey, Greece, and the EU). Having pronounced the measures noted above and having thus established the necessary trust, he might help settle stalled issues on the spot

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[7] Cyprus Academic Dialogue is a bicommunal forum established in 2010 by Greek and Turkish Cypriot academics and intellectuals. Its Property Proposals were submitted to party leaders of the two communities and the negotiators as well as the UN and the EU representatives in Cyprus before being released to the press last February.

in unison with the two community leaders, the UN and the EU. The spillover effect of such a statesmanlike initiative is so self-evident that it does not need to be elaborated on.

Concluding Remarks

Considering the current negative political atmosphere in large segments of the Greek Cypriot community, one might retort: "Well, why should Turkey take all these steps while there is little or no chance of Greek Cypriot reciprocation?"

The answer is: "There is".

Those Greek Cypriots who are now refusing basic power-sharing principles and are insisting on absolute legalistic approaches on the issues of governance, property, and the settlers, are among those who overwhelmingly endorsed Christofias' handlings of the peace talks as long as those talks kept the solution prospect alive. Failure of Christofias and Talat to deliver, regardless of who was to blame, pushed large segments of a desperate Greek Cypriot community

back to simplistic reflexive attitudes according to which "Turkish intransigence" was behind the deadlock. Failure of the leaders to deliver played the fiddle of nationalism, a new brand of Cypro-centric ethnic nationalism which emerged with Tassos Papadopoulos and makes its come-backs whenever solution perspectives fade out. This is why a Turkish positive initiative that might bring back hope might turn things upside down in the Greek Cypriot community and make its leadership reciprocate.

Concluding, I feel the need to point out that Greek Cypriots have to become aware that they will never reach solution in an open confrontationist antagonism with Turkey, or with public lecturing on justice confined to internal audiences, or even with recourses to international legal forums, a practice that has already backtracked.

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A conciliatory gesture by the Erdoğan government, at this particular juncture, will pass the message to the Greek Cypriots that they can reach a settlement by coming to an understanding with Turkey through direct dialogue in a broadened negotiating procedure,

It is high time Cyprus got reconciled with its Geography; certainly not through submission to the dominant power of the region; but through a balanced cooperation based on mutual benefits, and through safeguarding to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots the conditions to live peacefully as autonomous historical and cultural entities.

The European framework, within which Cyprus has already been functioning and towards which Turkey is aspiring, provides all necessary guarantees of such safeguards.

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Chrysostomos Pericleous is the author of the book "The Cyprus Referendum: A Divided Island and the Challenge of the Annan Plan", I.B.Tauris, 2009 (recently published in Turkish as "Kıbrıs: Tarihsel Süreçten Referandumuna", by Galeri Kültür Yayınları, Lefkoşa, Kıbrıs).

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