



The Turkish Model: new dynamics on Mediterranean's policy

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Introduction

Turkey is not a common country. As so, it brings different emotions to academics, politicians and public opinion. The XVII century siege of Vienna and the great Ottoman Empire still frightens many western countries.

The tectonic changes in the international community after the Berlin Wall collapse presented big challenges to Turkey. After decades of foreign policy of westernization, Ankara started to define a more pragmatic approach. With the Islamist Party – AKP – rise to power, the strategic environment was seen as an opportunity to rebuild Turkish regional power, placing prime-minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a rare momentum, influenced by Ahmet Davutoglu political concept of “zero problems with neighbours”.

After decades of major priority on NATO's strategic plans, Turkey lost its importance after 1990's. Ankara's external objectives were lost for a long period, creating an opportunity for a rebuilding from the very beginning. What was a problem became a major opportunity, which could open doors long closed to Ankara interests.

But the Turks also have a name for the missed expectations, and that would be the Sévres Syndrome, when the partition of the Ottoman Empire was led in terms that would turn Turkey completely unviable as country. Only the armed response from Atatürk troops allowed the saving of the key territories.

But we are very far from the “Sick Man of Europe”, as Ottoman's eve was known. Surveys of the Turkish Economical and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) – as some others forums and organizations – show that Turkey is seen in the best image ever. Atatürk's, first military and afterwards political skills, managed to bring Turkey back to Independency. The “Peace at home, peace in the world” secular and occidental type policy, assured a path towards a safe future.

Its geostrategic importance is recognized at all levels from the academic thinking to the political pragmatism. The first Islamic country that president Barack Obama visited was Turkey, showing the world what Ankara means to the USA. On the crossroad of different worlds, Turkey is able to act as a close door or a proximity bridge to the different elements.

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Apart other important theoretical concepts that confirm Ankara current importance, we would like to emphasize the “New Great Game” proximity - don’t forget that 72% of the confirmed gas and 73% of oil reserves are located on the Caspian Sea and Middle East region -, and Asmus, Larrabee and Lesser’s “Crisis Axes”, which confine a complex conflict matrix that intercept a Middle East – Caspian – Balkans arch to a Barents Sea – Russia – Balkans one (Asmus, Lesser and Larabee, 2003).

The combination of both references makes Ankara a main actor in the recent security paradigm that involves some proxy and frozen wars (e.g. Balkans, Georgia, Lebanon and Palestine), and makes its actions extremely important concerning the political and economical interests in the region.

“Where is Turkey?”

This question acknowledges an evolution on the international linkage of the Turkish foreign policy, as it tries to find to answer to the why and how Ankara’s foreign policy changed dramatically.

To understand this evolution we must realize that Turkey experimented five foreign policy periods: Kemal Atatürk (1938), Ismet İnönü and 2nd WW (1952), NATO and Cold War (1990), post-Cold War and regional crisis in Turkish vicinity (2001) and since AKP political leadership (Kiraboglu, 2011).

In the post-World War I period, when Turkey believed that, to survive, it had to leave the external contacts, most of them part of the former Ottoman Empire, and accordingly Ataturk developed a policy towards security above all, avoiding the external problems as much as he could. This period focused on internal cohesion, avoiding border issues disputes with the neighbours but keeping in mind any possible attack (mostly from the USSR). Inonu replaced Ataturk as president of the Turkish Republic but kept the neutral policy, even through a major conflict¹, where it had kinetic situations on the nearest territories.

After this war Turkey had to choose sides! Considering the Marshall Plan², and considering the major threats, Ankara moved towards the West. As a result, and probably seeking protection from the Ottoman past memories, most of their neighbours, except Israel, moved towards the Eastern Block and Soviet Union. During this period, Ankara experimented major problems considering territorial issues – specifically with Greece, Syria and Iraq –, natural resources (mostly water) issues – with Iran, Iraq and Syria –, and security ones - with Armenia, Iraq and Syria, these last two mostly because of the Kurdish card.

However, it was with the NATO membership that Ankara definitely assumed a more proactive and western oriented foreign policy, losing in the process, the freedom to follow its own political agenda, which could be considered as “normal situation” to all the International Society during this Cold War period. NATO’s southern flank deterrence towards the Russian bear was the goal that the Western world asked from

1 Turkish neutrality was only broken in 1945, when it declared war to the “Axis” countries, in order to obtain some post-war gains.

2 The Marshall Plan was firstly allocated to the Greek-Turkish region and named only as Truman Doctrine. It was extended later to other European countries.

Ankara in the second part of the XXth Century. Controlling Moscow naval access to the Mediterranean Sea, which has to be made through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, Turkey also gave the closest territory to the Cold War enemy.

With the end of the Cold War, Turkish importance was, somehow, neglected by the western friends, only rediscovered with the 1st Golf War. The proximity, first to Iraq, and now to Iran and Syria, gave Ankara the hinge point again. Nevertheless, the fragility of the internal political situation didn't allow a more assertive and independent oriented foreign policy. The major goal was, on period, focused on keeping close ties with Washington and on trying to open the EU doors to Turkish membership on that period.

However, this period opened the way to a more pragmatic foreign policy analysis as part of an introspective process of the country's role in the region. In spite of being a logistics and operational base during the 1st Golf War, Turkey realized that its previous policy was heading to a dead end. As so, and considering that energy and economics are part of the international affairs, Ankara started to develop contacts with the neighbouring countries.

One of the strategic economic goals was to change the nation's economical concept from import substitution to export-led growth, so Ankara started looking for new markets and, for that purpose, became more and more interested not only in the expansion of its diplomatic and political relations but also in achieving regional stability. This was the very first step to its "Southern Corridor" formula.

This pragmatic foreign policy started in the 1990's and received a major push with the AKP government, in particular after 2007, with the "zero problems" policy of Ahmet Davutoglu. The Foreign Affairs Ministry transformed all the Turkish international relations mentality, from a reacting external policy, to proactive one, able to intervene mostly by respected mediation.

So, we have seen a return to the origins, recovering the contact roots with the Caucasus, Middle East and non-European Mediterranean countries. In spite of having all the foreign affairs policy focused on the European Union integration process – and they still have a Ministry for the European Affairs –, Ankara expanded external contacts.

Naturally this is a path with some restraints that must be added to the previous ones that Turkey always experimented, namely the competition with Saudi Arabia and Iran for the regional political control. On this particular, Ankara developed an intense and dynamic policy based on the use of soft power as a major weapon. The greater difference of this approach was the recovery of the Islamic and Turkic cards, and the new type of missions that the Turkish armed forces received.

The Turkic card was played on a historical and cultural level, rediscovering ancestral bonds with neighbour countries through the television and radio broadcasts – mostly with high audiences soap operas –, and through organizations, mostly non-governmental, with education and humanitarian goals.³

3 As major example of the last, we have the Turkish-American Islamic scholar Fethullah Güllen's movement. This religious-cultural – and as we will later analyse, political –, initiative that defined its action field, from United-States to Central Asia, and "provides a unique example of a type of faith-based on a civil society initiative" (Kalyoncu, 2007). According to these goals, the movement implemented schools and humanitarian institutional houses in several Caspian and Caucasus countries, in order to help improving the educational and health standards.

These types of initiatives were met with suspicion by regional competitors (notably Russia) who considered them noxious to its interests and influence in the region.⁴

But on the other hand, facing the same foe, Russia, the Eastern neighbourhood also gave major importance to Turkey, but now in a different field – the energetic security one.

In Central Asia, the Turkic card was the asset. Reviving this historical root on this ex-USSR region, Ankara was able to become an important player in the New Great Game – “the oil and the glory game”. This policy provided an opportunity for a bigger role and influence over the layout routes of the energy pipelines from Central Asia producers to Europe Union consumers.

As a strategic alternative to the Russian monopoly over the energy transportation lines to the West, Turkey is part of several gas and oil pipelines projects, as the Nabucco, the Bacu-Supsa-Ceyhan, the Kirkuk-Ceyhan, the Southern European Gas Ring, the BTE and the BTC, that are to link Turkey, via Mediterranean Sea and Greece, to the Central and Southern Europe. Apart from this, Ankara has been able to develop several bilateral agreements with neighbour countries in order to improve the supply of oil and gas.

But the success of some of these projects is, and will be, influenced and shadowed by Russia’s power and capability to advance reliable alternatives.

The new Turkish foreign policy opens the door to exploit the country’s strategic location in the “New Great Game” but requires a delicate balancing act between its interests and those of European Union and Russia, because of Ankara dependency from Moscow gas supply.⁵

With the second NATO’s biggest armed forces, with an annual budget of 14 Billions USD, Turkey changed one of its primary missions from deterrence in West and Southern borders, to an expeditionary and projectable military influence, turning the Armed Forces international missions a very fruitful foreign affairs asset, from Afghanistan to the Balkans – where the military assumed the commanding effort in the Theatre of Operations.

Afghanistan was, and in fact still is, a symptomatic case, as the Turkish military assumed a different posture from the leading military contingents on that Theatre of Operations. Avoiding kinetic missions, they invested the maximum assets to civil--military (CIMIC) activities and humanitarian operations, with notorious success. The 2000 military men presence allowed a different approach, passing the image of “brother Islamic country” helping the locals, instead of occupying forces.

There are no ISAF’s unclassified sources about the issue, but this military approach doesn’t follow the exact mission received from the ISAF Commander. The Turkish military are not a target in the Theatre of Operations, but their areas of responsibility are not totally secure, as the Turkish forces avoid military confrontation. Nevertheless, this action has many supporters, because it follows the major goals of the Ankara’s foreign policy⁶, considering the involvement of Turkish construction companies on that country.

4 Using different excuses, most of the schools were shut down by the authorities and the volunteers had to face legal charges.

5 In fact the trade relations with Russia have improved. There are plenty of joint-ventures, notably the building of the Blue Stream pipeline and the first Turkish nuclear plant.

6 Turkish forces in Afghanistan rank between those with fewer casualties, and those accounted for happened in result of accidents.

Concerning the great Mediterranean area, the Turkish renewed their interest on the Middle East in the 1990's, but it was with AKP that it boomed, mainly after the second term elections in 2007, being expressed by the growing trade, diplomatic exchanges and free movement of people and goods⁷ (Zalewski, 2012). Commercial relations were mostly developed through multilateral Free-Trade Agreements, like the ones with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. But bilateral agreements were also signed with the three countries on the southern border: Syria, Iraq and Iran.⁸

The regional battle for hearts and minds (Akyol, 2012) brought a more competitive ground as many interests were being played on Mediterranean chessboard. Iran is trying to export the "true Islam" model to the region, and the Turkish "liberal Islam", supported by the Western powers, is affecting their leverage. But this rivalry is much more than just rhetoric because of issues like the Syrian situation, as they are in different sides of the barricade, Iraq⁹ and NATO's missile shield.

Being a Sunni country with links to the Western world, Saudi Arabia is a different regional competitor. The Arabic card is the influence that Riyadh hopes to earn. Indirectly, Saudi Arabia has an internal issue that gives strength to Turkish islamists political movements – wahhabism. This conservative and extremist Islamic movement promotes Güllen's and other islamist Turkish movements in order to face this threat, proved already in some Caucasus countries and Russian republics, and that could spread all over in the Islamic world.

However, both for internal and external reasons, Erdogan manage to become the leader of the oppressed Islamic people. Forced by his own political supporters, the Turkish prime-minister "exported" his image to the neighbour countries, reacting against the United States, Europe and, lately but strongly, against his former best friend in the region, Israel.

The arch of instability in the Mediterranean Sea represents a recent pivotal reference in international affairs, considering the actors and the differences between its Northern and Southern margins. Deeply involved on internal affairs, Brussels disregard this process, and, as a consequence, weren't prepared to face recent events on the region. As so, Ankara manages to take advantage of the perceived gap, developing an active political influence over several of these new democratic movements.

The "Arab Spring" got everyone by surprise, imposing mandatory changes on the external policies of the world's most important countries. With a false start, where it kept its support for the non-democratic friendly regimes, like with Ben Ali and Mubarak, Turkey was the first country to realize the real dimension of the freedom movements, and proceed to a fast change of pace. Starting as powerless bystanders, maybe studying where the action would lead, Turks became active supporters of the freedom movements, – that was the international flip flop we assisted. However, seeing it as a common revolution is a major mistake, and Ankara soon realize that there is no unique Mediterranean region, so it had to face different interlocutors, movements,

7 Visa requirements were abolish with many neighbour countries.

8 The latest, for instance, is one of the priorities for Ankara, concerning his energy security policy. Take notice for example of the May 2010's nuclear fuel swap deal with involving Iran, Brazil and Turkey. Iran's best bridge to the international community is still Ankara, which is exemplified by the fact that the talks between Iran and the six powers concerning Tehran nuclear program are held in Turkey.

9 In Iraq *Shia* are being supported by Tehran patronage and the *Kurds* and *Sunnis* by Ankara interests. That is a situation mostly enhanced by Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki, who repeatedly alleged against "Turkish interference on internal affairs".

interests and perspectives leading to totally different results. A major influx of weapons and money provided by Turkey to those territories, in order to give the movements a chance of defending themselves gave different abilities to stand for their interests. But in the end of the day, we have those ethnic, political or religious movements with capabilities to fight for individual interests.

In general, Turkish economic and commercial policy led the relations with the non-European Mediterranean countries, seeking for new and bigger markets. The approach to the western Mediterranean countries, for instance, was quite concentrated on this commercial prospect. Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are economical partners, with increased trade numbers, but political and diplomatic relations are relatively irrelevant, even considering an improvement during this period, especially with Tunisia¹⁰. The former, however, became one of the most important countries in the process as it was the first one to receive an open support from Ankara, showing a major turn in the “zero problems” policy. As so, AKP become a source of inspiration to the mainstream Islamist Tunisian party, the NAHDA - Arabic for “awakening” or “renaissance”.

Being one of the major commercial partners since 1980's, with 15 billion dollars in contracts, mostly on public construction¹¹, the Libyan case was a matter of *realpolitik*. Focused on the economic prospect, Ankara didn't stand by NATO's side during the first moments of the uprising. This pragmatic policy was only abandoned after it became clear that, forced by the international community coalition, Kaddafi's regime was falling apart. Turkey intervention tried to negotiate a quick and soft landing, as it proved Kaddafi was wrong when calling the North Atlantic mission a crusade. Ankara kept its momentum, taking advantage of it in the final days of the conflict, and thus becoming one of the most important partners on the reconstruction of the country.

Egyptian case was far more complex as Mubarak led a friendly regime, because there was no trustful forecast that assured the president step-down. Cairo was, and still is, a highly important commercial and economical partner, with a trade volume of 3 billion dollars – balance of trade favourable to Turkey on 1.3 billion – and where Turkish interests go from textiles to tourism, and the country is seen as a “promise land” for Turkish investments, especially as a result of the Free Trade Agreement signed in 2005.

Also important are the diplomatic and political relations between the two countries. Since 1966 that Cairo and Ankara have privileged relations, mostly based on a similar foreign policy, prioritising security and stability, only with disagreements here and there about specific issues.¹²

Many refer that Egypt is now experimenting the same situation that Turkey previously was in, namely the military in power and on what concerns the Islamist movement. In fact, both military forces are involved on internal political and economic interests, stability and foreign affairs policy, and maintaining a favourable *status quo*. But the military in Egypt are too strong and internally connected to the previous regime, not benefiting of the same civilian support as the Turkish did – even if labelled as the “Guardians of the Republic” -, and there are some doubts about their unclear political goals through the ruling of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

¹⁰ However, it was in Tunes that Erdogan had one of the most important speeches of this period.

¹¹ Turkish investments on Libya were one of the most important foreign ones, being essential to the economical development of a pipeline network as well as major harbor facilities.

¹² Cyprus is an example of these “issues”, as Cairo supported the Cyprus-Greeks on the island's partition.

Analysing the Egyptian Islamists, and what would be the future role of the Muslim Brotherhood, is quite easy to find connectivity with the AKP roots. Abdel Futouh, former presidential candidate and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, even called himself the “Egyptian Erdogan”. However some doubts persist about the political and social intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Cairo acknowledges that Turkey is important as a possible sponsor of necessary investments in the country. However, with Turkish increased interest on a regional role, relations between the two countries became more competitive, with Ankara intervening on “Egyptian” matters, like Gaza, Palestine and the Golan Heights.

With the actual internal situation, and considering Erdogan’s popularity, Egyptian leaders began to realize their external challenge.

After a false start, Ankara, mostly by the political dynamics of the government, made it an easy win. The visit of the Turkish prime-minister Tayyip Erdogan to Cairo, in September 2011, where he had a triumphal popular reception, met field marshal Hussein Tantawi¹³ and addressed the Arab League where he assumed the Turkish new politic toward the “Arab Spring” movements, is an open example. In his speeches, Erdogan, exalted the path taken by the Egyptian freedom movements, and attacked Israel for its recent actions. But it was in Tunes, three days later, that Erdogan, side by side with Tunisian prime minister Beji Caid Sebsebi, completed the step toward his vision of the future saying that the country should have nothing to fear from the influence of Islam in politics: “The most important thing of all, and Tunisia will prove this: Islam and democracy can exist side by side!”

Concerning this issue much has been written about the Turkish model for the “post-Arab Spring” countries, but is that real or is just a headline that the international press, has always defined as a resume for the Turkish intervention in the subject?

First of all, we should ask: what are we talking about exactly? Are there references and influences of Kemalism and/or Islamism? President Gül refers, indirectly, that the Turkish model is “Islam, democracy, market economy and modernity” (Akyol, 2011). We agree with this perspective, adding that democracy, through elections, brings the military to accept the political power and Islam to accept secularism.

But can Turkey be a model for these countries? The first pools winners, in Tunisia and Egypt, evoked the “Turkish Model”, and that’s a fact. However, are they interested and prepared to follow that model? There are major differences between most of the countries involved and between them and Turkey. Their social, political, judiciary and military organization is far different from what we can see in the Turkey, sometimes even fractured, with tribal organization, very weak and extremely conservative on religious matters. Under this framework, hoping strong central governance, secular and democratic is a matter that most of these countries are not prepared to follow, yet. Considering these Turkish model characteristics, most of the movements don’t even want to take it as a reference.

So, we do believe the model is not suitable for the “Arab Spring countries”, at least for the moment but, considering the common root causes and general characteristics, it can work as a sort of “inspirational spring”, showing an example of a democratic Islamic ruled country, which follows social and political secularism, and brings together political Islam and democracy.

¹³ Tantawi is the head of the ruling council that took over when Hosni Mubarak was toppled in February 2011.

How to face the Mediterranean environment?

Despite the recent events, it was with Syria that the “zero problems” policy seemed to achieve main goals. Since 1999 the bilateral relations are recovering from a continuous competition on issues like Hatay¹⁴, water¹⁵ and Kurds¹⁶. However, it was with Erdogan and AKP that bilateral relations started to increase, reaching 2 billion dollars on trade, a huge development on economical relations, the launching of a joint dam project – on Asi river – and excellent diplomatic relations where the visible faces of that growth. Those good relations led Washington to believe that Ankara would be the unique regional actor to influence Syria and Iran, and through that, the US was “listening to the region” (Badran, 2011).

When the rebellion started and the Army begun to violently crash the freedom movement, Erdogan felt he could control Assad. Through multiple diplomatic visits¹⁷, Ankara tried to influence Assad to reach a negotiated solution. In this case Turkey had economical interests in stake, but mostly geopolitical issues to consider, namely on its Southern border.

It was only in August 2011, when he realized that Assad was not going to reform, stay away from Iran or deal a truce, that Erdogan assumed his leadership on calling for an international community intervention. The situation was heading to a civil war that should be stopped, regarding humanitarian issues, so Ankara called for the Arab League, United Nations and, recently, NATO¹⁸ intervention. Erdogan direct political action included mediation between the two parties, but, at the same time, gave protection to civilian refugees and to the Syrian Liberation Army, on Turkish territories.

Independently of the future results, Turkey abandoned the “zero problems” policy, taking sides on the conflict. That was a major change on Turkish external affairs.

Inserted on this new environment Iran plays an important security and geopolitical card on this Syrian situation. The historical good relations with Turkey, for more than 4 centuries, based on a non-interference policy, cooperation on political and economic multinational forums, like the ECO, and 10 billion dollars annual trade, were affected with US arrival to the region and Ankara’s more active regional policy.

Iran feels it is defending its national survival by trying to win the completion with Turkey for regional primacy. That is why it considers a primary goal to maintain such a sphere of influence. Teheran is trying to assure legitimization above any possible doubt at international community level, to force the United States to abandon ideas of a military attack, considering the dangerously unpredictable consequences, and influences the oil market, assuring a major increase on the oil revenues. All this process would assure the Iranian strategic goals, and the political survival of the country.

This threat affects bilateral relations with Turkey, leading Iran to use the weapons that may pressure Ankara: energetic security, as 11% gas and 38% oil

14 Hatay is a city reclaimed by Damascus but that is part of Turkish territory.

15 Especially after the construction of the Great Anatolian Project (GAP), the Syrians considering that Turkey isn't respecting the international law on this issue.

16 Syria allowed the PKK to have Safe Heaves in their territory. That was a card played to pressure Ankara.

17 Most of the negotiations were conducted by Ahmed Davutoglu and, at a certain point, it received Assad's promise that it would pull back the Army and make an agreement with the freedom movement. Eventually, a contact made by Teheran changed the all plan, forcing Damascus to maintain the pressure on the movement.

18 NATO intervention in result of a mortar attack on Turkish border targeting the refugees camps.

consumption comes from Iran, stopped Intel cooperation on PKK, and the long range missiles (Shahab) which which are able to target Turkish territory.

Even playing as a moderator between the West and Iran, mostly on the Iranian nuclear program, Turkey lost some abilities to influence Teheran. As a regional player, however, Erdogan gained this competition against the Ayatollah's regime by far, never being considered the "Iranian model" by any freedom movement that came out from the "Arab Spring". At this point, Ankara may try to force Teheran to reconsider the Turkish importance, in order to assure a link to the international community, through a confidence building policy.

Until the recent past, Israel was the closest friend Turkey had in the region and the partner that Ankara needed for political, security and even economic matters. Whatever the Turks may say about Israel, the military cooperation, more than a technology issue, was a security one; in fact, it didn't represent a threat and Tel Aviv had never use the Kurdish card against Ankara.

The Turkish-Israeli cooperation is vast, involving the political, economy and security areas.

However, recent events lead to a more conflicting relationship. The 2006 Lebanon War, the Davos Conference incident and the flotilla attack resumed some of the problems that the bilateral relations were experiencing. Erdogan particularly felt betrayed by the 2006 events, as it was mediating a Syrian-Israeli truce, and the events overtook his approach. He answered by supporting Hamas on the post-election period, substituting Israeli forces by Syrian ones in the series of annual air exercises¹⁹ and supporting, with political and diplomatic assets, the Palestinian independency.

Poor diplomatic communication, but mostly the result of public opinion pressure, led to a decline in the quality and quantity of the relations between the two countries, with Ankara's main goal being the return of a positive feedback from the Islamic world public opinion, where the Davos Conference gave de stage and the Gaza flotilla incident the opportunity to reach a worldwide audience.

There is also a new issue affecting the bilateral relations – Cyprus's oil reserves. Tel Aviv signed a joint-venture with Cyprus concerning the Aphrodite field that span waters between the two countries. Always a sensitive issue, the natural resources disputes may escalate as a major threat to regional security, as Israel is trying to become an energy exporter after two major gas reserves were discovered since 2010, while Turkey struggles to keep and develop itself as an energy hub.

The political perspective caused by the unsolved Cyprus issue, at the brink since the 1974 Turkish invasion of the Northern part of the island, is a problem that remains unsolved even under the rule of international law. The support for the United Nations plan, refused by the Greek part of the island, was an evidence of this fact. However, Nicosia, considering the European Union patronage, didn't want to solve this issue. Cyprus is, in fact, one of the reasons deterring the fulfillment of the EU membership, as Ankara insists on closing the sea-ports to Cyprus ships.

The natural resources and border definition are also problems that oppose Turkey to Greece, alongside with other issues like the definition of the maritime continental platform and the capability to explore the territory.

¹⁹ In 1999 both countries signed a Euro-Asian Security Agreement that allowed Israel to train pilots in the Turkish air space.

At the moment, the situation has improved, but it remains an open issue, affecting Eastern Mediterranean security, mainly because of Greece financial situation which may polarize the bilateral relations, as the social and political turmoil may open way to nationalists and, as consequence, to the revival of the historical confrontation.

But in spite of these incidents and disputes, even considering the actual situation, Turkey may soon resume efforts to mend their bilateral relations with Tel Aviv and Athens – because Ankara must understand that these bilateral conflicts don't fulfill national interests.

However, Ankara's involvement in the Southern Mediterranean has also a multinational and multilateral facet, considering the common projects with International Organizations like the EU, NATO and OSCE, this last organization through the Mediterranean Initiative. Considering the regional security approach, the North Atlantic Council developed in 1994 the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) initiative, "in order to provide regional security and stability" (NATO, 2006). Some actions were launched under MD's auspices, bringing the Mediterranean region to the center of the security and political debate. But this approach in such a large scale had an almost irrelevant outcome on the field. However, it is under NATO's mandate that the anti-missile shield, that will eventually protect Europe from the Iranian long range missiles, is being developed.

European concern about the southern margin of the Mediterranean led to a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), launched in 1995. Known as the Barcelona process, this initiative had dialogue, cooperation, peace and stability goals, involving the EU and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region, including Turkey. This framework aimed to reinforce the interaction between the member countries, especially after the 2000 Valencia Conference, where it was approved a "Common Strategy for the Mediterranean Region". Latter, in 2004, after the last enlargement, with the purpose of not only avoid new dividing lines between European Union and its neighbours, but also to create, around the Union, a ring of "prosperity, stability and security", the EU launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) considering the eastern border countries and the non-European Mediterranean countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia.

This political approach that offered everything but the institutions, as interesting as it was, suffered from some "European diseases" since the beginning: good theoretical ideals with diffuse implementation. One of the most criticised aspects was the fact of the Mediterranean region was seen as one. The situation escalated with the inclusion of the eastern border countries in the overall program. Another criticized aspect was the, unfortunately very common, individual initiatives that affect the overall European policy for the region.

The biggest one was the French president Sarkozy designated as "Mediterranean Initiative", launched in 2008. Defining as goals the dialogue, political coordination and cooperation on matters of energy, security, counter-terrorism, immigration and trade, this French initiative soon was accused of not-bringing anything new, and affecting the EMP efficiency. Turkish participation was seen as an alternative to the EU membership, a perspective that created an open wound in Ankara's interests and

perceptions towards EU. Even considering that it had several cooperation processes with Europe, as the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), this type of solutions didn't fulfill Ankara's ambitions.

Under this political framework, Turkey decided to follow an autonomous approach. Currently Ankara doesn't feel at ease working along with Brussels, because of four major reasons: it doesn't agree with this vision of a common policy concerning all these countries; it feels like a small European candidate state applicant in the hands of countries like France and Germany; it deters Turkish independence on foreign policy issues; and, last but not least, Ankara doesn't recognize a unique and strong European Union policy that is able to face the regional problems.

This was proved by the European response to the "Arab Spring". Even considering the "Partnership for Democracy" and the package of measures called three "M" (Money, Mobility and Market access), it was weak and not centralized, with each country seeking to achieve their own objectives. The ideal of "assuring a smooth path to democracy" for these Southern Mediterranean countries was not on the center of gravity of the European policy.

Turkey considers that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership should be revived, but in a different perspective, more dynamic, larger and stronger, where she should have a pivoting role.

The Turkish Model – which path for the future?

A conservative approach suggests that Ankara will not change sharply its political orientation in the next years. As it developed a new "zero problems" foreign policy with AKP, in order to face a new international environment, Turkey is not ready to invert this strategy.

This pragmatic and intervening policy made Turkey to become a more independent regional actor, with real influence in a broad "Southern Diagonal". However, the "model" image seems to be extremely exaggerated, mostly because its unique characteristics doesn't allow it to be implemented on different countries.

Being a reference and an important regional actor, Ankara needs to confirm its current geopolitical *momentum*. So its foreign policy must be kept, independently of the political party on the government and internal political, social and economic status.

Reinforcement of the bilateral and multilateral alliances will help Turkey to keep the pace, independently of the international evolution. Close ties with all neighboring countries may be impossible, considering normal interest disputes, but it will be essential to maintain, at least, open doors for diplomacy. On the other hand, cooperating with strong actors such as the USA or the European Union will assure the necessary autonomy for its own policy.

Considering all the factors, it seems that, more than an alternative approach, Turkey will probably consider its ability to use soft-power, and reinforce it by a more assertive foreign policy, with different levels of commitment, thus opening the way to become a regional power - a goal long followed by the AKP's leadership.

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