

Interview with Professor Hüseyn Bağcı on Turkish Foreign Policy

SPECTRUM: First of all, thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to talk about Turkish foreign policy with you. There have been some important changes in Turkish Foreign Policy since Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. This change has been expressed in different ways: increased multilateralism, Turkey's increasing soft power in the region, zero problem with its neighbours. How do you evaluate the AKP foreign policy from 2002 to 2011? Do you see this as a distinct period of Turkish foreign policy?

PROF. BAĞCI: There are two distinct phases in Turkish foreign policy. The first one is from 2002 to 2009 when Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu was the main architect and chief advisor to the Prime Minister in foreign policy affairs. However since 2009, he has been in a position where he has been directly implementing the policies of which he himself was the architect. Therefore, we have two distinct periods of recent Turkish foreign policy: before and after 2009. The first seven years from 2002 to 2009 have been very active in domestic as well as in foreign policy orientation, since Turkey was in urgent need of domestic reforms and in need to know the other countries in its region and associated organisations. If we focus on the period until 2009, for example, Turkey was trying to be elected to the UN Security Council in a non-permanent member status. When one looks at the foreign visits of the Turkish Foreign Ministers in this period (first Yaşar Yakış for three short months, then Abdullah Gül followed by Ali Babacan) it can be seen that there are not so many other Foreign Ministers in the world travelling so frequently. Babacan is the best example in this respect: He travelled more than 100 countries in one year to get the support of other countries for the position of non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council. Likewise, the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, also travelled extensively to more than 60 countries in a couple of years; sometimes in one year, he was visiting more than 40 countries. Therefore, we have been witnessing a very dynamic foreign policy activism in the first five years of the JDP government, I would say, in particular until 2007. This is the period of JDP consolidation trying to give a message to the world that JDP is not a party that is going to change Turkey into a Sharia system, and that it is fully committed to liberal democratic principles. Concerning the EU accession process, Turkey also initiated a domestic reform process. The government worked in collaboration with EU institutions and Turkey became already a candidate in 1999 Helsinki Summit. Then, in 2004, she got the date for the

negotiations and lastly, in October 2005, Turkey started then the negotiations officially with the EU. Thus, all these changes demonstrate that Turkey was like a skyrocket which was getting up fully part of global developments and global policies. So, when we talk about Turkish "soft power" today, the first five years have definitely been very crucial. On the other hand, it is important not to forget that all this new foreign policy activism is the continuation of former policies which the other governments had already started to implement in the past years. In this respect, we may go back until the 1980s when Turgut Özal started to implement this type activism in Turkey's foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy has now become one of the most important instruments to inform the world about Turkey and Turkish culture. In 2007, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül became the President of the Turkish Republic, and Ali Babacan was appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Babacan was both the Foreign Minister and the chief negotiator for the EU. Thus, it was a very heavy position for him. He was not so successful concerning the EU relations, since he was not spending sufficient time in Brussels; he went only for daily talks and left for another country. This was understandable as Turkey was on the way to be elected into the UN Security Council. 2009 May brought some relief because Professor Davutoğlu was appointed as a cabinet member, although he was not elected into the parliament. This is one of those exceptional cases where somebody was elected as a Foreign Minister from outside. Similar cases were seen during Özal period in the 1980s when Ambassador Vahit Halefoğlu was appointed as foreign minister. So, we have similar experiences in the past, and since then Davutoğlu has tried to introduce his concept 'Strategic Depth' which has been discussed and debated worldwide, everywhere, including at our university and in the class of Turkish Foreign Policy course. The people tried to understand what it means. Many people said that it is a Neo-Ottoman policy which I do not share.

SPECTRUM: Do you see any significant shifts in Turkish Foreign Policy of this period?

PROF. BAĞCI: This debate on whether Turkey is changing its entire foreign policy started last year in particular. I never believed in the possibility of such a shift. It is not possible, and today, as we see, Turkey is still part of the West and we will stay as part of the West. Also, the recent developments in the Middle East proved once again why Turkey was not going to have military alliances with the Arab countries. The reason is that they are non-democratic countries. Nowadays, the dictators go one by one. It is probable that if they become democratic in the longer term, Turkey can rethink its stance. However, at the moment, the main orientation of Turkish foreign policy is Western-oriented and it is likely to remain as such. What happened until now is that Turkey gained a new space for manoeuvre and it was good, there is no doubt about it. However, I have never thought that such a policy would result in Turkey's leaving Western institutions. Also, the

policy of 'zero problem' with the neighbouring countries was somehow compatible with the European Neighbourhood Policy; it is not excluded from the European Neighbourhood Policy. I think, all in all, we have a very active and dynamic period in the last eight years. However, how Turkey is going to regulate her relations with the EU and the United States of America after the events in the Middle East and after the death of Usame Bin Laden in particular is not clear.

SPECTRUM: How do you evaluate the differences between Ali Babacan and Davutoğlu with respect to their foreign policy approaches? Ali Babacan had his bachelor degree in industrial engineering while Davutoğlu is a professor in Political Science and International Relations. Do you think that this background has been a positive asset for Davutoğlu?

PROF. BAĞCI: Let's say, it helps, but it is not necessarily a precondition to become a Foreign Minister. Being a politician means that one is elected and one has the support of the entire bureaucracy behind you. This is what is crucial about these posts. The advantage of Davutoğlu is that he is professor of international relations, he is close to the philosophy and Western way of thinking. He was the main architect of this type of policy before Babacan. Babacan did not understand foreign policy properly and he never claimed it also. Basically, it was a decision by prime minister Erdoğan and President Gül to make him the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Then he understands economy and had experiences abroad. One may not forget, he is also a graduate from METU. However, the main idea here is that every government needs a Foreign Minister and Foreign Ministers may not necessarily be experts on international relations. In Turkish history, we have many foreign ministers who have never studied international relations but who were very successful like İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil or in the 1950's under Adnan Menderes government Prof. Fuat Köprülü. Thus, of course it is an advantage if this post is filled by those who understand international relations. In this respect, Davutoğlu is timely a good choice for the government.

SPECTRUM: We would also like to address the similarities and differences in the foreign policies of Özal and the present JDP government. You mentioned some similarities. What about the differences and how do you evaluate them?

PROF. BAĞCI: It is more correct to talk about a continuation in foreign policies rather than differences. Turgut Özal's period prepared the ideas and the background of the policies that are now being pursued by the JDP government. Therefore, I believe that there is no separation but an "intellectual continuation" of the ideas of Turgut Özal.

SPECTRUM: How do you think that the recent issues in Libya will affect the Turkish-Libya relations?

PROF. BAĞCI: First of all, in this crisis Turkey made a very clear position that it is on the side of the West. From the beginning, Turkey used a 'double policy' so to speak. It started to play with each side: Turkey initially was trying to keep good relations with Gaddafi as nobody knew whether he was going to leave or not. At the same time, Turkey was also very careful with the opposition forces from the beginning. But now, after the intervention of NATO and the support of opposition forces by France and European countries, the situation has changed. In the final analysis, Turkey has taken the side of the West. It is, historically speaking, the second time, like in 1958 Algerian question. If it is unjust intervention in Libya by NATO and by France from the very beginning, then Turkey made a mistake. If Gaddafi survives, then it will go into the Turkish-Libyan relations as a breakdown, as a very negative period of bilateral relations because it was Tayyip Erdoğan who got the Human Rights' Prize from Gaddafi just a couple of years ago. Now, however, he is against him. This is very difficult to explain, but I can explain it from the *real politic* point of view. Turkey is taking a clear side on the West, because there is no other way around. If we go one step further, the policy of 'zero problems with the neighbouring countries' was adopted at a time before the crisis in the Middle East had started and when all the dictators were still in power. Now, however, dictators go one by one and the problem is that the people in the Middle East and North Africa try to be more democratic and pursue an independent foreign policy. Thus, Turkey is facing real problems now in terms of its future foreign policy. Instead of zero problems, I would say, multi problems in Turkish foreign policy have already started, and Davutoğlu is going to have a very interesting period as his ideas in the Middle East have been designed for a stable Middle East, not for an unstable one. Thus, either he is going to revise his position or he is going to fail. The future is open.

SPECTRUM: Concerning Turkey-EU relations do you see a decrease in the willingness of Turkey to be a member of the EU and a decrease in Turkey's policies with respect to the EU accession in view of all these developments that are going on in the Middle East?

PROF. BAĞCI: First of all, Turkey-EU relations is a process, and a process might have ups and downs. It is like a child starting to evolve in the stomach of the mother and then we see how the baby grows. There will be a birth to this relationship in the final analysis but I do not know when, whether in 9 years or in 90 years. The fact is that Turkey - EU relations continue officially. There is just a slowdown in the relations but not an official breakdown. Neither side shows reluctance to continue the negotiations. So, we had ups and downs in the EU relations in recent two years. Particularly, the slowdown of the relation is due to the troubles which Turkey faces with Cyprus and with those who openly state their opposition against Turkey's membership such as the French president, Sarkozy. However, there is not a

common voice within the EU itself; there is not only French voice, Austrian voice or Dutch voice, but there are also Italian, British and Swedish voices. So there are different interpretations of this issue. The problem is that Turkey has to convince all the 27 countries to have its membership accepted, which seem very difficult to accomplish indeed. On the other hand, none of the European countries officially attempt to suspend negotiations. All prime-ministers and presidents explain their opposition individually and not as part of their governments' official view like Merkel in Germany or Christian Social Democrats from Bavaria. So there is no suspension but a slowdown in the relations, which has always been the case so far. In the coalition government it is always like that negotiations should go on, *pacta sunt servanda* is still functioning.

There are two crucial issues. First, the EU has the responsibility to prepare the candidate countries for the membership. How they do and how long they do is another topic. The EU can put forward any arguments to stop the negotiations. On the side of Turkey, it is true that in Turkey, the number of people who are in favour of the EU membership decreased now around thirty percent and this is very dangerous sign for the Turkey-EU relations. There is a *fatigue*, as we call it in Turkey. I agree with the view that the more Turkey is getting democratic and rich, the less the wish for the EU membership will be. Turkish modernization and democratization are not driven externally by the EU alone anymore. Turkey has reached to a situation in which it is not so dependent on the EU anymore. So, this development is a problem for the EU countries. Ten years ago, EU was inevitable for Turkey, but today it is not, and this is a big problem. Now the EU is trying to revise its policies and trying to make the EU appear nice to Turkey and to the Turks. They give a great deal of advertisement within the Turkish Airlines; they make television programs on how nice the EU is, but the recent economic crises which covered Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and others do not make EU look very attractive. Also, the recent elections in Finland demonstrated once again that many anti-Euro or anti-European political movements will gain importance within the EU countries and this is a crisis within the EU which has nothing to do with Turkey. So, this is another development and Turkey has to consider all these developments carefully and continue its own democratization process and economic development.

SPECTRUM: According to your calculations, when will Turkey be a full member of the EU?

PROF. BAĞCI: Nobody can say this, because this does not depend on Turkey alone. It can be five years, ten years. We never know.

SPECTRUM: Any guess?

PROF. BAĞCI: I cannot say. Sorry.

SPECTRUM: Can Islamic world be an alternative to the existing relations of Turkey? If so, why? If not so, why not?

PROF. BAĞCI: It cannot, because there is an asymmetric relation between Turkey and Islamic world. I personally want Turkey to cooperate with these countries concerning our democratic, economic, and political history; I want Turkey to make social, political and cultural initiatives at a more comprehensive scope. However, the answer to the question of 'whether it can be an alternative to Turkey's existing relations?' is 'No'. The relations with the Islamic world can be complementary, but not an alternative.

SPECTRUM: Our next question will be about the coming elections and its possible repercussions on the foreign policy of Turkey. According to your opinion, what will be the effect of the elections which are to be held in June 12? Do you think that there is a correlation between the elections and the Turkish foreign policy?

PROF. BAĞCI: I don't think so. This will be the 24th election in Turkey. This demonstrates that the democratic process is functioning in Turkey. But the foreign policy is something which does not dependent on domestic politics alone. So, which is more influential? Does foreign policy shape domestic policy or does domestic policy determine foreign policy? I would say that domestic politics influences foreign policy more. If there is one party government again, and then it continues to follow the same policies pursued by Davutoğlu, we will see how the government will be reacting to these regional and global developments. If it is a coalition government, the foreign minister will not be Davutoğlu anymore, because in the coalition government, the biggest party has to give the foreign ministry to the smaller coalition party. I don't know whether this will be the case. But the elections, of course, are important for the democratization process and it has an indirect effect on foreign policy. After the elections, if a one party government is formed, we have to expect certain movements in foreign policy towards Cyprus, probably towards the EU. In the Cyprus issue, once again the United Nations is getting involved, until the end of the year, probably there will be some other negotiations but it was a big mistake of the EU to accept the Southern Cyprus as a full member to the EU. This is a political, historical mistake done by the European politics and politicians. They will never admit it officially, but we know that it is a mistake.

SPECTRUM: After the elections which will be held in June 12, there will be a meeting in New York with the participation of the leaders of both side of Cyprus and Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of the United Nations, is planning to end this negotiation-solution process and even the creation of a new map is being discussed? Five countries will be in the meeting including

Greece, Turkey and United Kingdom, The European Union will be the observer. What kind of role can Turkey play in this meeting?

H. BAĞCI: Nothing. There will be a lot of meetings but there will be no solution at the end of the year. This is foreseeable. It is just a game played over and over again. The biggest advantage towards a resolution of the Cyprus problem has been missed in 2004 when Kofi Annan's plan was rejected. All the other attempts now are just for gaining time but not for solving the problem and I can assure you that Ban Ki-moon will also not be successful to solve the Cyprus problem. For this, either the Southern Cyprus will recognize the North or act together in one state, a plan which was rejected by Papadopoulos in 2004. But negotiations are the good ways to maintaining the dialogue but unfortunately the final solution will not be achieved. There is a lot of stake involved, Christofias is also not interested. How can one expect that Christofias comes to an agreement with Dervis Eroğlu when he couldn't do it with Mehmet Ali Talat? I do not think this is possible. Both parties missed a big opportunity in 2004, when the Kofi Annan plan was put into the referendum. A new referendum has to be made and this time the North should say no and south should say yes. But the South, will not say yes, not in the foreseeable future that I can tell you. I cannot say when Turkey will be a member of the EU, but in this case I can tell you that Ban Ki-moon's plan will not be the solution.

SPECTRUM: Professor Bağcı, thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to talk with us on the current state of Turkish Foreign Policy. Thank you very much for the interview.

PROF. BAĞCI: You are welcome. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about my views.

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