

“Turkish Foreign Policy and Asia”
(Türk Dış Politikası ve Asya)

Presented by
Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı
Chair,
Department of IR, METU

Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı:

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

It was a great pleasure for me now to address to you to change, its change reviews and I hope that I can contribute for the debate a little bit from academic perspective. What we have is diplomatic perspective and it shows how Turkey’s trying to get more involved in global politics that Turkey is a global player, it is also my thesis and I will elaborate a little more about this.

In 1949, ladies and gentlemen, the Turkish government was invited to the first Afro-Asian Conference and the Turkish government has rejected this with the argument that Turkey does not belong to Asia, that Turkey is a European country. From where to where. So, this identity that Turkey was not an Asian country, but Turkey is a European country was related of course to the modern Turkish republic in the early 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. But today, Turkey has an Asia-Pacific strategy was approving how the statemind, how Turkish foreign policy is also ready to reflect or to show flexibility and to adapt new conditions and it is good so. That Turkey is more or less considered now by all Asian countries as an emerging economic player, but also political and cultural player since early 1990s in particular. We are here in this room, some people among us like Mr. Seyfi Taşan, Director of Foreign Policy Institute, intellectual mentor in Turkey, we have been debating in the 1990s, whether we should call these Central Asian countries, Turkish states or Turkic states. So we did not know what it means. If we call them Turkish states, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, what so ever, how they would react. We said Turkic states. So, it was the invention from Professor Metin Heper, in the 1990s, in his writings, we should call them Turkic states, because they are not Turkish. They have Turkish language, we have kinship but they are not Turkish states. It reminds us of course, to the definition of Barry Buzan, when he was writing an article on the late 1990s, calling Turkey and Japan as Westernistic states. Westernistic states means that you have political values, the state structure of the western countries but culturally or religiously you are not European. So, this is very

interesting, though. Westernistic country Turkey and Japan are called Westernistic countries.

In 1950s, when Turkey was applying for NATO, Turkey was not invited to be part of NATO, it was creating very big disappointment here in this country. The argument in 1950’s, by Norway and Denmark for example, we have been against the Turkey membership into NATO. They said, what hell the Turks are looking for in NATO? They do belong to a different culture and religion. Today, Turkish European Union membership debates, some people again in this academic life brings to debate, Turkey is not accepted or is not going to be accepted into European Union, because Turkey has a different culture and religion. Last week I was in Vienna and I would like to share with you this thing. You know, Ukraine is on the way to try to be a part of NATO and the European Union and Stefan Füle, the joke is telling, was asked by the Ukrainian diplomat, who is dealing with European Union affairs, when Ukraine is going to become a member of European Union? And Füle have answered, “Oh, don’t worry we take you, but first, we take Turkey into the European Union. And “When you take Turkey to the European Union?”, the answer was, “Never!” So, this type of argumentations are academic exercises but, the fact is that Turkey is indeed one of the countries, at the moment, which is trying to be with the European Union. Not only here, but also entire world politics. I do not oversee the fact that Turkey is overstretching and having over-self-confidence at the moment which could be very dangerous, if it is not well managed. But the fact that, Turkey is moving to this part of the world is a new one and we have to take it very seriously. Because it is not only the Turkish desire to extent to go there to have more dialogue, but it is also the other fact from those countries. China, India, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam. It was a desire from those countries that Turkish play a role. So, it is not one-sided-love. In this case, Turkey wants to play an important role and Turkey is demanded by the others. There is one reality, we have neglected of course several years this part of the world due to the Cold War conditions. Not because that Turkey did not have interest in those countries, but because the world’s structure was not allowing Turkey to do this. And now, as we see, this region is getting priority for Turkish foreign policy within this multi-lateral structure and then this very important point, I will say for the coming years. Paul Kennedy, is well-known to everyone, is writing actually, in this book, “The Rise and Fall of Great Powers” the interaction between economy and security. The more you get economically well-off, the more you pay for your security. So, the more Turkey’s well off economically, the more Turkey is demanded of course not only be secure, but also transfer this security to the neighboring countries and to the other parts of the world. Anyone, who deals with the Ottoman history or with the modern history of Turkey, they would see that Turkey has been on three continents present. This is why many people call it,

“Neo-Ottoman Nostalgia” in literature. But Turkey is now having more opportunities to go to certain areas. Not only by Turkish Airlines, which is one of the greatest airlines in the world now. but also with culture, economy and more trades. So, Turkey is not one of the permanent power centers, but Turkey is one of the emerging centers together with China, together with Brazil, India and some other new emerging countries. Also Turkey is among G-20 and when you look at G-20, many Asian countries are there and this is opening Turkey a new window of opportunity from Australia to New Zealand, from Sri Lanka to many other Asian countries and I think more and more the Turkish presence, I make now predictions for the future, more and more Turkish presence will be seen in those countries. Not only as the opening of the embassies, in Myanmar, in Brunei, in Cambodia, in Vietnam, people go there. Turkey is making profit of this globalization proces and Asia is providing Turkey this opportunity much better than Europe in this framework because we are already in Europe, we are practically in there. But this part of the world is a new field and this new field can bring Turkey, many many advantages if it is managed well.

To academics, I would like to mention here within this context, of course, that Turkey has been always a bridge between Europe and Asia. This is the classical mainstream way of thinking. But it is true. I mean, we can not deny that the Ottoman intellectuals and now even today they try to transfer this modernity from Europe into the Islamic countries. It was before Mahadir Muhammad from Malasia, who said that Islamic world has to live a renaissance, but also Turkish president now, former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Abdullah Gül, who said that Islamic world has to change and has to go to new relations and Turkey is one of the leading examples. Some countries say yes and some countries say no. Turkey is not fitting in our concept. But whatever it is, Turkey is modernising herself with another important country, this is Russia and I think Russian modernization and Turkish modernization both are European problem. You can not ignore this modernization process of these countries, whether it is authoritarian, democratic, less democratic, semi-democratic, deficit democratic, whatever it is. But, this processes can not be neglected. To academics I mentioned, one is Kishor Mahbubani from Singapore, who has been writing first and article but later on a very interesting book, “Can Asians Think?” When the book was dated is was 1990s and it was early 2000s writing another one and Kishor Mahbubani is representative of Singapore to United Nations, he evolves one of the leading intelectuals actually to sat that Asia is coming, Europe, and America should take it in a very serious way.

Another point is here, Professor Ferguson, who is very contraversially (55.50) he has published actually two books, 2010 and 2012, “The West and the Rest” and the other one is the “Decline of the West”. The begining of the twentieth century, is talking about the West is experiencing a deep crises not economic

sense alone, but also in philosophical and political and cultural field. China is the emerging power and it is not by incident that Chinese president and American president met last week, in California and they have been talking this non-official pictures spreaded to the world, we used actually to get pictures from Soviet leaders or Russian leaders, but now Chinese leaders, now coming into the picture and I think this is very important to see how this Asia is coming. But, one point I would like to mention here. When we say Asia, we may not see this part of the world alone non-European culture. But it is Budizm, Taoizm and Islam, Christianity, I mean, you have been voting for Tagore, Tagore was telling, this is to be read in Barry Buzan’s book, security, he says, Indian culture is composed of three civilizations: Hindu, Muslim and Christianity. So India, in this framework, important to be seen as that you have given the numbers and figures. European, we have numbers, figures, that India is going to be the third largest economy in the world in a few years. I think the Turkish position and I underline here my thesis again. Turkey is not strong alone. When we think that Turkish is now moving, we may say that Turkey is not alone. No, Turkey is doing this with the European Union. Turkey is negotiating with European Union. Turkey is possible candidate for the full membership into the European Union and since 2005, since the negotioations officially started, Turkey is an expensive country, we are not anymore a poor country. even in the numbers but also in the eyes of the other European countries. This is probably few point that Turkish Prime Minister is right, when he was speaking on last Friday in İstanbul, in the figures, Turkey, at the moment very important for the European big projects and this is concerning the investment and the invention for the future. But at the same time, ladies and gentlemen, Turkey is stronger with Russia. Russia and Turkey, 3.6 million people last year from Russia, this year, inshallah it will be more. So it means, the Russian and the Turks, for the first time, they experience a very interesting pshychology they do not have concept of enmity, both countries are trying to develop themselves, even some under authoritarian according to European criteria of course. Structures, but whatever it is, Turkey and Russia are two important players in Asia, in Caucasia, and in Central Asia anyway. So, I think, Turkey is number four in Russian foreign trade and Russia is number two in Turkish Foreign Trade. And this Russian-Turkish relations, I would like to mention that, one should take it much more seriously than ever before. I do not say that Turkey is leaving the West, no no, it is not. Turkey is staying in the West remaining in the West, and will act with the West. Also, in the long run, if it would not have been the case, then Turkey should have left already all the European institutions. On the contrary, Turkey not only wants to remain in it, but also expand it and is doing I would say very aggressive diplomatic even in this framework. Lastly, Turkey is the strongest with the United States of America. The Turkish security is provided by America, the latest visit of Turkish Prime Minister to America as proved once again the policy leading from behind is

also covering Turkey and the USA will act together in Asia. All together in Asia-Pacific. Anyway. So, Turkey is then having China, Russia and America. With those big powers, Turkey is trying to get somehow new type of relations and present there. I underline that Turkey is not a big power, not providing technology, not providing big economic achievements, etc. But, Turkey is a manager, player and I think it is good it is like Ronaldo. He is a good player I mean, whether your place is Manchester United or Real Madrid. It does not matter. He is shooting the goals, you know. which Club is buying him, the more they pay, the best he will play. Turkey is exactly what I said, Turkey is a player. Player has much more self-confidence. Increasingly self-confidence. I would say, for the next generation in Turkey, this is my prediction, Turkey is today, 76 million. In 2025, we will be 90 million people. With 90 million people, Turkey will be, after Russia, will be second biggest European country. Populated and the population we see on the streets more than 70% of people under 35 years old. With such a young dynamic generation and Turkey can do many things. If there is no mismanagement. I underline this, because the political management is very important but, the pessimist. I am optimist, but the pessimists always the people are better educated but I keep my optimism, because I think countries like Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, even Australia, South Africa. They come now more and more into the international politics and G-8 can not run the war as before. So, they need more talk, they need more delegation of power and Turkey is number 16 developing economy at the moment in the world. If it is going to be like this, in ten years time, Turkey most probably number eleven in the world economy. At the moment Turkey is the sixth biggest economy in the European context. This topic today, I am going to finish, this actually providing a new vision for Turkish foreign policy. Whether this is successful or Turkey is going to be successful to reach the expectations is another question. But Turkey is undertaking such steps, undertaking such a vision, it is important. Many people are surprised in the world. How Turkey can do this? In Islamic world anyway. There is no other country, like Turkey, which can be democratic on the one hand and developed on the other hand. At least 78% in a year without being a full-member of European Union. So it is important. It means on the one hand European union negotiations are going on, but on the other hand Turkey's economy is doing well. So, Turkey is a part of European Union. I would say, Zbigniew Brzezinski in his articles early 2000s, it was the time that, so every European country had 25000 per capita income. Turkey would have joined at that time in 2002, European Union countries should have sixteen thousand dollars. But it was 35000 dollars at that time Turkish per capita. They also around 11000, it means, Turkey would directly contribute for the European welfare. So, this is maybe, what makes Turkey much more self-confident. Turkey is not looking from the perspective of a poor country, Turkey is looking from the perspective of young businessman, who is extending, who is inspiring, who is willing to

make more of it. I think this is the key of the generation to change. Asia is providing this. I think the Turkish generation and the Asian’s new generations. They have first time such an opportunity to come and to talk with each other and discover. Common point, how they can reach and also they are technologically developed and they understand each other. This is what we need so much actually in today’s world. Today’s world structure, does not reflect the real power of the world. It is not anymore acceptable. But we can not change it. It was a Hungarian diplomat, who said for several times that, if you look into the mirror in the morning, it does show you ugly. It is not the problem of the mirror. Problem is you. The world does not look so bad, but the mirror is showing something wrong. Then the mirror has to be changed. It means the system which we have. It is not anymore solving the problems of the world. Can the Asia countries do this? I don’t know. Can Turkey do this? I don’t know. But the fact is something has to be changed. Thank you very much.

