Turkey and the Balkans: Overcoming Prejudices, Building Bridges and Constructing a Common Future

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Abstract

Turkey is a historically important regional actor and is trying to contribute to the establishment of a peaceful and secure environment in the Balkans. The region has had a salient place in the Turkish foreign policy agenda in the last two decades. In the 1990s Ankara started to play a considerable role by developing initiatives that aimed at contributing to the end of the conflicts there. This paper analyses Turkey's regional policies in the last decade in order to understand the main continuities and changes. The main research question of the study is as follows: Has there been any considerable change in Turkey's relations with the Balkan countries? The study has two fundamental arguments: First, although the main aims of Turkish foreign policy remain the same, there are now different instruments that have been implemented to an increasing degree. Second, relations have been transnationalising thanks to the spillover effects of globalisation.

Key Words

Turkey, Balkans, positive peace, negative peace, soft power, transnationalisation.

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Introduction

The 100th anniversary of the Balkan Wars is a great opportunity to examine from different perspectives why former friendly neighbouring peoples became enemies and how the outbreak of new wars can be prevented on the Balkan peninsula. Although the beginning of the 21st century witnessed the start of a new page in the history of the region after the formal ending of the violent conflicts of the 1990s, the Balkans have still not attained positive peace. Despite all the international and regional attempts and cooperation, there are still important security issues in the region that have not been solved and limit the potential of a full and durable peace. The continuing existence of important problems has the potential of pushing nationalist-oriented leaders to label political issues existential threats, to call for securitised policies and to implement emergency measures.[1]

Turkey is a historically important regional actor that aims at contributing to the establishment of a peaceful and

secure environment. The Balkans has always had an important place in Turkish foreign policy. In the 1990s the country started to play a greater role in the region by developing some salient initiatives that aimed at ending the conflicts. This paper analyses Turkey's regional policies in the last decade in order to understand the main continuities and the changes. The main research question of the study is as follows: Has there been any considerable change in Turkey's relations with the Balkan countries? The study has two fundamental arguments. First, although the main Turkish aims remain the same, there are now different instruments that have been increasingly implemented. Second, relations have been transnationalising thanks to the spillover effects of globalisation.

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The study comprises the following sections. The first part will explain the theoretical approach. The second section will shed light on the historical background of relations. The third part will analyse the continuing security issues in the region. Then, the fundamental characteristic of Turkey's regional policy in the last decade will be examined. Afterwards, the main regional and international challenges confronting Turkey will be taken into account.

A Changing International System and Changing Identities

In order to give meaning to Turkey's regional policies, one should take into account the changes taking place at both the international and domestic levels. The global conjuncture facing Turkey today is fundamentally different from that during the bipolar system. During the Cold War years, when formulating its foreign policy Turkey had to carefully analyse the attitudes of the then great powers. But since the early 1990s Turkey has had a larger space for manoeuvring and has benefitted from this new conjuncture by launching new initiatives in different regional contexts, ranging from the Caucasus to the Middle East, from Central Asia to the Balkans.

According to the neorealist theory change or progress in global affairs can stem from two factors. First, there can be a change of the number of great powers. Second, the relative capability of the units can change.[2]

Since the early 1990s Turkey has had a larger space for manoeuvring and has benefitted from new conjuncture by launching new initiatives in different regional contexts, ranging from the Caucasus to the Middle East, from Central Asia to the Balkans.

In fact, both kinds of changes are relevant in the Turkish case. Not only has the international system undergone a radical change, but also Turkey's demographic and economic powers have increased considerably compared to two decades earlier. This conjuncture has allowed Turkey to create new initiatives for its neighbouring regions, to be involved in various mediation-facilitation activities and to develop alternative approaches.

In addition, in order to understand Turkey's current approach towards the Balkans, one should also analyse the changes taking place in its national and state identity. As a result of the radical changes of the early 1990s a new discussion started in Turkey as to what would be the direction of Turkish foreign policy in the new millennium. This discussion was closely related to debates about Turkey's identity. According to some, Ankara should prioritise the newly independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia and create new bonds based on the common identity of "Turkishness". For others Turkey should have a much more religiously oriented foreign policy, and the country should try to better its relations with those countries that have Muslim majority populations. Another view was that Turkey's European orientation should continue as was the case during the Cold War.[3]

As a result of the heavy discussion about the future orientation of Ankara's foreign policy, the prevailing opinion has been that while Turkey should follow the European path, it also must not ignore the newly independent states in its neighbouring regions as well as other states and actors that are ignored by the great powers.

Within that context the 1990s also represented a time period in which Turkey's Ottoman past came into the discussion more. Traditional Turkish foreign policy tended to ignore the Ottoman period as much as possible and acted as if the Ottoman legacy did not have any influence upon Turkish society or on Turkey's foreign and security policies. But as the Bosnian War started in 1992, Turkey's decision makers came to understand that one could no longer ignore the Ottoman legacy.[4]

This article is based on the assumption that interests cannot be understood by isolating identity. In other words, foreign policy makers can decide about "national interests" only by taking national identity into account. Located both in Asia and Europe, its history being based on both Western and Eastern values, Turkey presents an interesting case study in terms of constructivism. This study argues that Turkey's changing relative position in international politics as well as its identity and its reinterpretation of its own history provide an important way to give meaning to its policies toward the Balkans. The following section will dwell on the historical background of Turkish-Balkan ties based on the structure of global politics and the concept of identity.

Historical Background: The International Structure-National Identity Nexus

Ottoman rule over the region has had considerable impact on the Balkan territories and societies. The Ottoman legacy still exists in the Balkans in many political, cultural and social aspects. One important effect of this legacy is the state borders that are still valid today.[5] The borders of present states were drawn as a result of their wars with the Sublime Porte, as well as the interventions of the great powers. Another aspect of the legacy can be seen in the demographic structure of the regional countries. Ottoman settlement policies contributed to the multicultural and multi-religious nature of the Balkans. In addition to settling Turkish populations in various parts of the region, Ottoman rulers brought the Serbian population to the Banat and Vojvodina, Romanians to the Banat, and Albanians to Kosovo, Epirus and Macedonia.[6] Turkish minorities in the Balkan countries, especially in Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia, as well as the Muslims of Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina, are part of the Ottoman legacy.[7] The fact that Balkan Muslims on the territories of the former Yugoslavia are still called Turks is an important symbol of the living memory of the empire among the Balkan peoples.

Furthermore, from remaining Ottoman buildings to common cuisine and social beliefs, one can see the impact of the empire within present Balkan boundaries in many aspects.[8] Even today there are many Turkish-origin words in the Balkan languages. Even the term "Balkan" itself is a Turkish word meaning a series of mountains.[9] However, after the formation of nation-states, national leaders often resorted to discourse of the "Ottoman yoke"[10] and began to use the Ottoman past as the "other" in order to strengthen national consciousness,

thus overemphasising negative features of the empire and ignoring the positive parts. This attitude on the part of leading elites led to hatred towards Turkey and suspicion towards Turkish minorities living within their borders. This fact made cooperation between Turkey and some of the Balkan states difficult in the succeeding decades.

This historical legacy has had an impact on Turkish-Balkan ties after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey irrespective of how the Ottoman past was perceived (or misperceived). After the Western-style nation-states were formed on the Balkan peninsula, the international system and state identities had their effects on regional relations. As an example, the multi-polar environment in the interwar years allowed regional states to launch regional initiatives, as seen in the case of the Balkan Pact of 1934. The Balkan Pact was an important international treaty in the history of cooperation of the Balkan countries because it was a Balkan-originated treaty and did not come into being through the encouragement of any great power.[11] In comparison, the bipolar structure after 1946 led to the dominance of great power politics in regional affairs. Due to the perception of mutual risks and threats the countries of the region had to act within the limitations of the Cold War environment. Under such circumstances

only countries with similar identities (Eastern or Western) had an opportunity to come closer.

A salient example of the changing international circumstances on Turkish foreign relations was the détente period. Thanks to bourgeoning relations between the opposing blocs Turkey started to pursue a more active policy toward the region, as can be seen in the conclusion of the Agreement on Migration and Family Unification between Sofia and Ankara in 1968, with its aim of bringing families together that were separated because of the expulsion policies of the Bulgarian regime in the 1950s.[12]

Turkey's Balkan agenda was preoccupied with security issues in the 1990s because of the succession wars of Yugoslavia. Due to the changing international circumstances Turkey could develop its own initiatives to contribute to its solution. At the time Turkey was trying to find a new place and identity for itself in the international system and its foreign policy towards the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars led to that search for a new identity.

From the very beginning of the Bosnian War, Turkey started a substantial number of initiatives in the international platforms and argued for the necessity of an international military measures. As the then president, it

called the Organization of the Islamic Conference to an extraordinary meeting, proposed an action plan for the solution of the conflict, convened a Balkan Conference, undertook many initiatives at the UN, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO to convince its Western partners of a military campaign, and made efforts to reach an agreement between Bosniaks and Croats. In summary, Turkey followed a consistent, active and assertive policy throughout the war.[13]

> Despite the fact that more than a decade has passed since the end of the violent conflicts, ethnic nationalism is still a fact of life in many parts of the ex-Yugoslav territories.

Throughout the conflict, Turkish decision makers emphasised that Turkey was a great state that should play a leading role in regional affairs. In addition to launching many international initiatives, it also declared its readiness to participate in all possible diplomatic and military measures that were decided upon by international organisations like the UN or NATO. By referring to the expectations of Bosniaks from Turkey, Turkish decision makers made sure that they would listen to these expectations

and act accordingly. Furthermore, the Turkish political elite compared Turkey's role in Bosnia to that of the US in the Persian Gulf since the Bosniaks perceived Ankara as a major actor in the Bosnian affairs.[14]

The Turkish governments at the time saw that as long as they proved their importance in the Balkans, they were taken into consideration in international platforms, as can be seen in the visits of officials from the UN and the EC, as well as American politicians, to Ankara, and Turkey's invitation to the London Conference. Therefore, one could state that Turkey's traditional Western identity, and its interest in the maintenance of this identity in the post-Cold War period, was an important factor in the formulation of Turkish policies. By being active on the Balkan stage and undertaking a supportive role for Bosniaks in the international platforms, Turkey attempted to prove its importance to the Western world.

In the case of Kosovo War, Turkey pursued an active policy as well, though with a low profile. Turkey's efforts to show its importance for the Balkans and for Western security played a role in its formulation of the policies in the Kosovo conflict too. Despite Kosovo's different legal status within Yugoslavia, Turkey joined the Western world's

efforts to find a solution. Although it was not as active as it had been during the Bosnian War, it stated beforehand that it would not hesitate to join a possible international military intervention. It warned the Western countries not to be too late in reacting to the atrocities in Kosovo. In spite of being more cautious in comparison to the Bosnian conflict, it aimed at not remaining on the sidelines of international efforts but to take an active part in them. Kosovo was another case where Turkey could present itself as an important ally of the West in the Balkans. That was an important reason for Turkey's participation in the air strikes.[15]

Regional Security Issues: From Negative to Positive Peace Through Small Steps

Although the current security environment of the region is radically different than in the 1990s, it has not yet reached the level of positive peace. Considering that the concept of security has acquired multiple meanings and cannot be limited to military security, there are still many security issues in the region. One of the biggest issues today is the predominance of ethnic nationalism in many of the countries. Although Yugoslavia was one of the best examples of multiculturalism, in the 1990s this was replaced with mono-ethnic identities. Despite the fact that more than a decade has passed since the end of the violent conflicts, ethnic nationalism is still a fact of life in many parts of the ex-Yugoslav territories. This can be seen in the high level of support that nationalist parties have from the electorate. Because of emigration during the wars, the ex-Yugoslav territories in which wars were waged lost part of their multicultural structures. Strangely enough the dominance of the nationalist approaches has also been reflected in the legal structures in some countries. For example, according to the constitution in Bosnia Herzegovina only the members of three major ethnicities can be a candidate for the presidency. Despite the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the Sejdić and Finci cases in favour of changing the relevant law in 2009,[16] the authorities in the country have not made the necessary change yet.

Another important issue is that there are still disputed borders in the Balkans, as can be seen in the problems between Kosovo and Serbia as well as the rhetoric of the *Republika Srpska* leadership. World history shows us that only in regions in which there is no dispute over borders can there be a durable peace. In fact it is this lack of territorial issues that led to the integration project in Europe, a good example of a security community.

Therefore, it can well be assumed that solving the border issues is a *sine qua non* for the establishment of a positive peace in the region.

Another important security issue is related to the mushrooming of organised crime due to the violent events of the 1990s. The problem has reached such a level that it has become an issue for the EU member countries as it was mentioned in the 2003 European Security Strategy Document.[17] The degree of the problem can be better understood when it is remembered that during the chaotic environment in Albania in 1997 when a pyramid scheme failed one million Kalashnikov weapons were stolen from the army barracks[18] and it can be imagined that some of these weapons were sent abroad. The range of activities of the regional crime groups varies from drug trafficking to weapons trafficking to human trafficking. The following example is interesting in order to prove the importance of the issue: In 2010 when organised crime groups stole electric wires in Sofia, two thirds of the capital city remained without electricity for one week.[19]

If EU membership prospects had been clearer for western Balkan countries, these vitally important problems could have been solved in an easier way. But due to reasons stemming from the regional countries' reluctance to reform themselves as well as the European Union's economic crisis and enlargement fatigue, there is no clear light at the end of the tunnel yet. This ambiguity in their membership prospects complicates the transformation processes on the Balkan peninsula. If the accession of western Balkan countries is delayed further, there is a potential danger that a Balkan ghetto will be formed.[20]

> In response to changing regional and international circumstances as well as Turkey's growing self-confidence Ankara's approach in the last decade has been dominated by soft policy instruments.

Another vital issue is the persistence or even increase of economic problems in most of the countries. Experiencing multiple transition processes it took a long time for the Balkan countries' GDP to return to their 1989 levels. Romania was able to reach its 1989 GDP only in 2004, Croatia in 2005. For Macedonia and Bulgaria it took longer, until 2006.[21] The fact that the unemployment rate in Bosnia Herzegovina is more than 40% and 50% in Kosovo gives us a clue about the depth of the economic problems. The economic crisis in the EU member states

only exacerbates the level of problems in the Balkans.

Another problem is the difficulty in dealing with the past. All the parties have one-sided answers to the questions of what happened in the 1990s and why. All parties generally argue that it was only they who were the victims and it was the other party that was the aggressor. There is not any considerable attempt to look at the narratives of the other side.

This section analysed the main security issues in the region by examining security in a wider context. In summary, although the era of violent conflicts seems to have ended in the region and there is no indication that any war or conflict might emerge in the future, there is still no durable peace. In other words, the transition from negative to positive peace is still continuing.[22] In the following section the main parameters of Turkey's Balkan policies in the 21st century will be examined.

Turkey and the Balkans: Recent Developments

The main parameters of Ankara's post-Cold War foreign policy were determined in the early 1990s as a result of painful processes, and many of the policies that we have had since the early 2000s are a continuation of that period.

Taking into account the fact that the fundamental goals have remained almost the same, one can see partial difference in the instruments.

With the aim of overcoming the bitter memories of the past, Ankara stands behind an approach focusing on the future that is imagined to be a more constructive type of relationship.

The Yugoslav succession wars and transition processes of the 1990s had a fundamental impact on Turkish decision makers' attitude towards the region since they in general attempted to respond to the regional challenges at the time. The main idea was to develop a variety of new initiatives to stop the conflicts and convince the international community to act in a more active way. During and after the conflicts, as the UN, OSCE and NATO missions were sent to stabilise the post-conflict environment Turkey was an active participant. Just to give an example, officers from the Turkish armed forces were active participants in the United Nations Protection Force, Implementation Force, Stabilization Force in Bosnia Herzegovina; Operation Alba in Albania; Essential Harvest, Amber Fox, Concordia, Proxima in Macedonia; and the United Nations

Mission in Kosovo, OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission and Kosovo Force. In addition, in the framework of the Partnership for Peace Training Centre Turkey has provided training to officers of the countries that aim to become full members of NATO. In brief, by looking back at the main course of Turkey's activism in the 1990s one can state that it was more political and security oriented.[23] However, it is noteworthy that even some of the military missions have included cultural components as well. For example, Turkish Armed Forces established Turkish language courses in Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Macedonia, Romania and Kosovo. So far, 21 language courses have been opened and 3,393 officers from various Balkan, Central Asian, African, and Caucasus countries have attended them.[24]

In response to changing regional and international circumstances as well as Turkey's growing self-confidence Ankara's approach in the last decade has been dominated by soft policy instruments. Though the political and security dimension in bilateral and multilateral relations have continued without any interruption, there has been an increasing use of economic and cultural instruments as well, something that might be interpreted as one of the results of the Europeanisation of Turkish foreign policy.[25] The intellectual basis of

Turkey's new approach was explained by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu in his article "A Forward Looking Vision for the Balkans".[26] At a time when most of the international actors have lost their enthusiasm in launching new initiatives for the remaining regional problems, Turkey stands as an actor within the region that is closely following the developments and working to contribute to the solution of regional issues. The main characteristics of Turkey's new policies are its vision-oriented, forward-looking and values-based approaches. In addition, its fundamental policy principles are regional ownership and inclusiveness, regional reintegration, an emphasis on European integration, and a development of a common stance in regional and international organisations.[27] With the aim of overcoming the bitter memories of the past, Ankara stands behind an approach focusing on the future that is imagined to be a more constructive type of relationship. Another feature of the Turkish approach has been its insistence that the region belongs to its own people who should be the key actors deciding on its future.

Since 2009 Bosnia has been at the top of Turkish foreign policy's agenda mainly because of the fragility of the inter-ethnic relations within the country and the resulting deadlock in the functioning

of the political system. As Turkey was not part of the US-EU attempt, known as the Butmir process, to contribute to the solution of the problems in Bosnia Herzegovina, Ankara launched its own initiative to bring the parties together and encourage them to have more dialogue with each other.[28] Although the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the war in 1995, it could not create a functioning stable political system. The fact that following the October 2010 elections it took 15 months to establish a new government is an important sign of the political stalemate. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the leaders of the *Republika Srpska*, mainly its President Milorad Dodik, to question the territorial integrity of the country and his frequent calls for a referendum for independence create a continuing political crisis in the country.[29]

The Turkish initiation of two trilateral mechanisms has been an important sign of the relaunch of an active foreign policy. Within that framework, there have been regular gatherings of the foreign ministers of Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as the foreign ministers of Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia. As a result of that initiative the foreign ministers of Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia have come together eight times and the foreign ministers of Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina

and Croatia have gathered four times since 2009. In addition, the leaders of Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia have held joint summits twice.[30] The summit in İstanbul produced the İstanbul Declaration on 24 June 2010, which is considered an historic document since it guaranteed the territorial integrity of Bosnia Herzegovina.[31] This summit has a historical importance because for the first time Serbian President Boris Tadic and Bosnia Herzegovina President Haris Silajdzic came together.[32]

Considering the total failure of the Butmir process organised by the EU and the USA, that Turkey's initiatives have borne some early fruits is noteworthy and can be considered a success, though limited. First, as noted above, the recognition of Bosnian territorial integrity by Belgrade at the İstanbul Summit is of historical importance. Second, as a result of Turkey's active engagement, Bosnia Herzegovina sent an ambassador to Belgrade following a three year interruption. Third, in 2010 the Serbian parliament adopted a declaration condemning the crimes in Srebrenica.[33] Furthermore, Turkey also tried its best to facilitate Bosnia Herzegovina's membership to NATO in order for Sarajevo to be accepted into the Membership Action Plan.[34]

In the recent years there has been the most astonishing improvement in

relations between Turkey and Serbia. In fact, although the Ankara-Belgrade relationship witnessed tough times in the 1990s as soon as the conflicts on the Yugoslav territories were over, both sides did try to mend relations. But it never reached the current level. It has been emphasised by the leaders that the Turkish-Serbian relationship has been enjoying a golden period and is in the best shape ever. The rhetoric used by the decision makers, that although Turkey and Serbia do not have common borders they are still neighbours, is an important indication of the degree of the rapprochement.[35] The fact that good ties continued following the 2012 Serbian elections despite the election of a more nationalist group has shown that the bourgeoning ties are not dependent on a particular party or government.

An important high-political event in recent years has been the recognition of Kosovo by Turkey one day after Kosovo's declaration of independence, and when discussions were continuing about whether it was in line with international law. How can we explain Turkey's positive attitude toward Kosovo independence since the country traditionally follows a cautious position toward such movements? Another important question is whether this policy represents a change or continuity in Turkish foreign policy.[36]

It was the then Turkish President Turgut Özal who was the first leader to recognise İbrahim Rugova as president of Kosovo. This was a symbol of Turkish sympathy towards the Kosovo Albanians. However, as the conflict started between the parties in the late 1990s, Turkey first tried to maintain dialogue with both the Serbians and Albanians. Turkey supported the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and also emphasised the rights of Albanians in Yugoslavia's 1974 Constitution. In the aftermath of the NATO intervention in 1999, Turkish forces participated in KFOR and Turkey also paid attention to the problems of the Turkish minority living in Kosovo.

As the conflict was going on in Kosovo in the second half of the 1990s, Turkish politicians discussed the future of Kosovo and Turkish policies towards the region. Both leftist and rightist political parties in the opposition supported the recognition of Kosovo independence in sessions of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Almost all the opposition parties in the parliament accused the government of only supporting the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and not paying adequate attention to the problems of Kosovo. Therefore, from the very beginning the government's cautious policies led to a heavy internal discussion. At this point, one can argue that a policy can be re-evaluated if it

leads to a reaction from other actors, as Charles F. Hermann emphasised in his model analysing change and continuity in foreign policy.[37] This can clearly be seen in Turkey's policy toward Kosovo.

> Considering that the regional countries have been experiencing a transitional period and their economies need more investment, there is much that can be done in terms of increasing Turkey's economic ties with the region due to Ankara's past experiences of harmonising its economy with the global trends.

In addition, as the negotiations between Albanians and Serbians reached a deadlock in 2007 and Western countries, led by the US, started to look more positively on the idea of Kosovar independence, Turkey also started reconsidering its policy. If the discourse of Turkish politicians and diplomats from 2005 onward is analysed, one can notice the beginning of a change in Turkish policies. Hence, Turkish recognition of Kosovo's independence on 18 February 2008 represents continuity rather than change. According to Hermann's model, we can interpret it as a programme change, in other words a tactical change,

not a total restructuring. It should also be noted that Turkey's recognition of Kosovo did not lead to any deterioration in its relations with Serbia; in other words both countries "agreed to disagree" on the issue of Kosovo.[38]

An important feature of Turkey's Balkan policy in the last decade has been its emphasis on soft power.[39] In a continuation of the foreign policy approach of the Turgut Özal years economics is important in Turkey's foreign relations. Emphasising the liberal view that increasing economic relations will lead to an improvement in political relations and economic interdependence, Ankara has been advocating better economic ties with regional countries. However, as it is not the state but the private sector that is expected to increase trade and investment, the basic aim is to facilitate and encourage an increase in bilateral trade relations. The practice of taking businesspeople on the foreign trips of key decision makers was started during the Özal era; however, it was suspended during the coalition governments that followed. This practice was resumed by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) after it came to power in 2002. It can be considered as an indication of the impact of "trading state" approach in Turkish foreign policy.[40] There are also some indications that Turkish companies are being affected by the

dynamism of Turkish foreign policy and they have started to use similar rhetoric. For example, General Director of Ziraat Bank, the largest public bank, Can Akın Çağlar stated that they aim to transform the "local power" of the bank into "regional power" and they want to be "big player".[41] Hence, the multi-dimensionalisation of Turkey's foreign relations is visible in the sphere of economics as well.

However, in the case of the economic relations with the Balkan countries there is still ample place for improvement. Though Turkey's trade volume and direct investments have increased considerably in the last decade, their place in Turkey's total trade is quite low. A comparison with the beginning of the 2000s gives an idea about the increasing trend: Turkey's trade volume with the Balkan countries was just US $ 2.9 billion in 2000, increasing to US $ 18.4 billion in 2011, a six fold increase. There was also a similar increase in Turkish direct investment in the region: In 2002 it totalled about US $ 30 million; and it increased to US $ 189 million in 2011. Turkish investments mainly concentrate in construction, banking, communications, retail and the mining sectors. Yet only 7% of Turkish total foreign investment is conducted in the region despite its geographical proximity.[42] In addition, the Balkan countries carry out an important proportion of their trade with EU countries and Turkey is not among the top partners. Considering that the regional countries have been experiencing a transitional period and their economies need more investment, there is much that can be done in terms of increasing Turkey's economic ties with the region due to Ankara's past experiences of harmonising its economy with the global trends.

In addition to benefitting more from the economic ties, Turkish foreign policy has also started to use another element of soft power, namely culture, and primarily language. The Yunus Emre Association started its activities in 2007, and so far 10 Yunus Emre Cultural Centres have been opened in five Balkan countries; Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Romania. At these centres not only are Turkish language courses offered, but there are also other cultural activities organised as well. The role of language in Turkey's ties with the region has only been lately recognised despite the fact that there are many similar words between the Turkish language and the languages of the region. In some places the Yunus Emre Centers have also been active in spreading the teaching of the Turkish language in public schools as well. The centre in Sarajevo is a good example since as a result of its attempts in the academic year of 2012-2013, 59

primary and secondary schools started to offer Turkish as an elective course, as a result of which 4,863 students have been taking Turkish courses.[43] There is no other regional country that has such an ambitious attempt to increase cultural relations. One can notice that the Turkish language has been emerging as a *lingua franca* in the region, unrivalled by any other regional language.[44] In addition, one can add the influence of increasing number of Turkish universities in various Balkan countries, such as Epoka University in Albania, the International University of Sarajevo and the International Burch University in Bosnia Herzegovina. Benefitting from culture has surely been part of the foreign policy of the Western countries so far, but it seems that Turkish decision makers have also become aware of the increasing salience of soft power instruments as a result of globalisation.

Another important soft power instrument of Turkey has been the scholarships that Ankara has offered to foreign students since the early 1990s. When the scholarships were first started, they mainly focused on the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union. However, after a while, they started to cover the whole world from Europe to Asia, and from Latin America to Africa. A recently established institution called the Presidency for Turks Abroad and

Related Communities is responsible for the granting of scholarships. Thanks to global technological developments, like the start of online applications, in 2012 there were 45,000 applications from 160 countries, 1,600 of which from the Balkan countries. In the last decade the number of foreign students studying at Turkish universities has increased by 70%, reaching 26,000 from 145 countries.[45] Considering the holders of Turkish grants from the Balkan countries the number increased from 467 in 1992 to 721 in 2011.[46] It should also be noted that Turkish scholarships are the most comprehensive scholarship programme offered by any country in the region.

Another important proof of soft power is the increasing interest in Turkish media in the Balkan countries. The launch of a new channel by the Turkish radio and TV broadcasting organisation TRT, called TRT Avaz, is a noteworthy development. It broadcasts some cultural programmes as well as daily news in the Balkan languages, and hence has a potential to be a cultural bridge. Another salient recent development has been the opening of the Directorate of the Region of the Balkans in the Anatolian News Agency (*Anadolu Ajansı*, AA) in Sarajevo last year. Broadcasting in all three local languages, Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian, the Turkish news agency provides not only a medium to transmit

the developments in Turkey to the region, but also to broadcast the events in Bosnia to the Turkish public. Since the Turkish media is mostly dependent upon foreign news sources on Balkan issues, and the media in the Balkans is also taking its news about Turkey from foreign broadcasting organisations, the AA office in Sarajevo has great potential. It is of symbolical importance that a member of presidency, Bakir Izetbegovic, attended the opening ceremony.[47] Another important development is the recent opening of Sarajevo branch of public broadcasting organization, TRT.

Another important feature of Turkey's ties with the Balkan countries is its ever increasing transnationalisation. In a landmark study, Kemal Kirişçi argued that transnationalisation has been a major feature of Turkish foreign policy towards its neighbouring regions, mainly thanks to three channels: economy, movement of people and civil society.[48] The Balkans is an appropriate case study to examine the increasing ties beyond the state-to-state level. The importance of economic ties and the importance attached to them by the Turkish decision makers have already been explained. Due to Turkish attempts in recent years all the Balkan countries, except the EU members, have become a visa-free travel area for Turkey and vice versa. Therefore, there has been a considerable increase in

people's mobility. For example, in 2000, 28,620 people from Bosnia Herzegovina visited Turkey, and 56,522 in 2011. In the case of Serbia there has been an increase from 128,409 in 2000 (at the time Yugoslavia) to 137,934 in 2011. In the case of Macedonia there has been an increase from 108,904 to 130,648.[49] An important consequence of this increasing mobility has been the increasing level of contacts between the universities and NGOs.

Another dimension of transnationalisation has been the activities of municipalities, especially those in which an important number of Balkan-origin people lives. For example, the Bayrampaşa municipality in İstanbul, 50% of the residents of which have origins in the Balkans, has been quite active in that regard. Since 2005 the municipality carries out different social and cultural activities within the Project of Ramadan in the Balkans (*Balkanlar'da Ramazan*) in various countries.[50] Another example is the İzmit municipality, which is also involved in various projects, such as the construction of a centre for social and cultural activities in Momchilgrad (Mestanlı) in Bulgaria, as well as the building of a children's park in Travnik in Bosnia Herzegovina.[51]

Another important facet of transnationalisation of relations has been

the increasing popularity of Turkish soap operas in many Balkan countries. Although the trend started in the last few years, it reached its peak with the *Magnificent Century* series.[52] Though a thorough scientific study needs to be conducted in order to grasp the reasons for their popularity, it can be stated that cultural similarities have played an important role in the creation of this huge interest. The author of this study has met people, mainly in Bosnia Herzegovina, who learnt to carry out daily conversations in Turkish just through these series. Hence, it can be argued that the interest in Turkish series will increase the number of Turkish speakers as well.

Conclusion

This study has two main arguments. First, that Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans is no longer just based on political-security issues, and there has been an increasing importance in soft power. Second, there has been a transnationalisation of relations as well, as seen with the activities of municipalities, the popularity of soap operas and the increasing level of engagement of businesspeople. In this framework it can be stated that there are some elements of change, mainly with regard to the actors and instruments but

the basic goals remain the same, namely the construction of a stable and secure region strictly and extensively anchored in the Euro-Atlantic structures.

But there are important challenges ahead. The western Balkan countries have not yet reached a durable peace since there are still frozen conflicts waiting to be solved. Though Turkey's courageous initiatives have let the parties contact each other and make some goodwill gestures, and Ankara has the ability to talk to the most of the parties, the main problems are still there. Second, an increasing reference to the Ottoman past has different connotations in the region. Although the references to the Ottoman Empire in the formulation of Turkey's foreign affairs started back in the 1990s, it has become more pronounced. There are different interpretations of this phenomenon. According to some whether Turkey accepts it or not, the Ottoman past already has an impact on all foreign policy aspects. But according to other actors in the Balkans, Turkey has a "hidden agenda" and is trying to recreate the Ottoman Empire. This claim has always been rejected by the Turkish leaders, but still even misperceptions should be taken into account. A Turkish foreign policy embracing even the most concerned actors does have more potential to contribute to the solution of the problems.

In brief, changing international circumstances in general and Turkey's changing place in it in particular have led to a reconsideration of Turkish identity and subsequently its perception of interests. That is why one can notice the use of new instruments and the emergence of new actors in the formulation of Turkey's ties with the region. The roots of these changes can be traced back to Turkey's Europeanisation process when Turkey acquired a new understanding of security. It is also noteworthy that although Turkey's European accession process has been suspended, its impact is still visible. Hence, Turkey's Balkans policy can be considered a success since Turkey has been able to start its own initiatives, get the support of regional partners and get some concrete results. However, there are challenges ahead if Turkey wants to move further.

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