

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN ITS DYNAMIC TRADITION

TANSU ÇİLLER

A PEACE-ORIENTED FOREIGN POLICY

The Turkish Republic, since its foundation in 1923, has followed a consistent policy of protecting its national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and ensuring its security, while striving to attain the level of development and welfare of modern developed countries.

Turkish foreign policy has always been conducted in conformity with the principles of respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. It is peace-oriented and characterised by realism, consistency and continuity. There has never been room for adventurism.

Maintaining friendly and mutually beneficial harmonious relations with all countries, promoting peaceful international relations and co-operation, seeking to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, and thus contributing to regional peace, stability, security and prosperity have always been at the core of Turkey's foreign policy objectives. Good neighbourly relations with all the countries around it, is a matter of priority.

Turkey is the only country which is a member of NATO, the OECD, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Economic Co-operation Organisation and the Black Sea Economic Co-operation all at the same time. It is also an associate member of the European Union and the Western European Union. This is due to Turkey's multifaceted foreign policy, its affiliation with both the Western and the Islamic Worlds and its ability to reconcile varying interests.

The regions that surround Turkey, extending from the Balkans to the Caucasus and Central Asia, and from the Black Sea to the Middle East have always been hotbeds of international politics. As a bastion of democracy and stability, Turkey has always sought to create a peaceful environment in these regions.

Certainly, not only geography and history directs Turkey's relations with other countries. Relations are strong and fruitful as long as they satisfy mutual interests.

THE POST-COLD WAR ENVIRONMENT

Turkey, in the wake of the Cold War, is the only country which has witnessed so many dramatic transformations in almost all its neighbours and adjacent regions. All these developments did not only affect the political and strategic landscape around Turkey, but enhanced, at the same time, its strategic importance. While opening up new avenues, these changes have also presented new challenges. Thus, a new frame of reference for our foreign policy has inevitably emerged.

Turkish foreign policy has displayed an astute ability to swiftly adapt itself to the new circumstances of the post-Cold War environment. Turkey's aptitude in meeting the challenges posed by this new environment has not only rendered its foreign policy far more dynamic in nature, but has also proven its traditional wisdom.

Faced with different challenges, the international community was also compelled to redefine its objectives. A new set of international relationships emerged, which is far more complex than those previously encountered. The ending of bi-polarity made relations smoother between individual states. Former Soviet Republics and newly independent states of former Yugoslavia were welcomed to the community of nations.

Turkey offers itself to most of these countries as a model of stability with fifty years of democratic practice and a hundred and sixty years of genuine modernisation towards full integration with the West. It proves that a Muslim country can modernise its state structure and society within a secular and a pluralistic democratic system.

We see that regional politics have become much more active in the post-Cold War era. The challenge now, is to cope with multi-directional risks, threats and uncertainties while at the same time showing the ability to seize the opportunities budding in international relations for a better and more secure world.

DIFFICULTIES AHEAD VS. ZEST FOR CO-OPERATION

Most of the countries in Turkey's environs have succeeded in freeing themselves from the 'strait jacket' of having to confront power bloc politics. In the new architecture, they are eager to work together within the new pluralist system. And yet, tragically, they are also afflicted by a rising tide of ethnically-based nationalism and aggression, which makes any co-operation extremely difficult.

The aggression and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina have left indelible scars on the human conscience and memory. The initial hesitant attitude of the international community and its policy of appeasement encouraged the aggressors to defy all calls to sanity. Blatant defiance of international law and flagrant violation of UN Security Council resolutions went unchecked. The tragedy was halted eventually with effective intervention by NATO. Turkey's contributions served as a vital component of the efforts which led to the cessation of hostilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the subsequent Dayton Peace Accords. Turkey is still actively participating in the implementation of both the military and the civilian aspects of the peace accords and also in the international efforts to reconstruct and rehabilitate Bosnia-Herzegovina. Turkey believes that the international community must remain committed to this cause while at the same time maintaining its vigilance towards any ill intentions against the independence and territorial integrity of that country.

A similar tragedy still prevails in the Caucasus, where twenty per cent of Azerbaijani territory is still under Armenian occupation. More than a million Azeris have been displaced. Turkey supports all peace initiatives and plays an active role within the OSCE Minsk group which is seeking to find a peaceful solution to the Azeri-Armenian dispute. The establishment of a climate of peace and stability in the Caucasus will be conducive to initiating fruitful co-operation in the region to the benefit of all.

Turkey also supports international preventive diplomacy initiatives and participates in the UN peace keeping and peace enforcement operations.

Turkey considers economic interdependence as the best recipe for international peace and stability. It therefore aims to foster economic interdependence among the countries in its periphery. Turkey believes that once people start co-operating and working with each other and realise that prosperity is born out of economic co-operation, their perceptions of threat will gradually disappear.

From Turkey's perspective, the Balkans and the Caucasus are gateways to Europe and Asia respectively. By virtue of its historical, cultural and present ties with the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Balkans and Europe, Turkey can tap the full potential for trade and other economic links with all countries in these regions. We have played a leading role in initiating schemes to promote and facilitate interdependence through regional economic co-operation and development. Ultimately, this will serve to diffuse tensions and foster greater political stability.

In this context, Turkey has followed an active policy in promoting co-operation in the Black Sea region. It initiated the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC) with the aim of uniting the economic and trade potentials of the region. The BSEC, covering a vast economic space

from the Adriatic to the Pacific with a total population of 325 million people, has a tremendous potential to bring prosperity to its 11 member states. It is a complementary bid for peace and stability at this end of Europe. Its role and institutions have been consciously designed to link the member states to the wider European market.

The Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO) is yet another illustration of Turkey's purposeful efforts for regional co-operation. Together with Iran and Pakistan, Turkey was a founding member of this organisation which was revitalised in the early 1980s. A decade later, Turkey spearheaded the initiative to enlarge the ECO to embrace a vast area and a population of 300 million with membership extended to the Central Asian republics, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, to comprise ten countries in all.

We are committed to sharing our experience in democracy and free market economy with Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics in their endeavours to successfully realise their reforms. Turkey's close affinity with these countries, based on historical, cultural and linguistic ties, provides a solid foundation for co-operation. Such co-operation can consolidate their independence and help their integration with the international community.

Turkey has extended loans and aid exceeding US\$1.56 billion to Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics. Our volume of trade has surpassed US\$600 million. Furthermore, several projects worth over US\$5 billion have been undertaken by Turkish companies operating in this region and some 8,000 students from these countries have been awarded scholarships in Turkey.

Once a recipient country, Turkey currently provides economic, financial, commercial, technical and humanitarian aid to some 50 countries on three continents.

RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

Turkey's relations with Europe date back to the fourteenth century. The Ottoman Empire, on whose ruins the young Republic of Turkey was established, had been an active player on the European scene for six centuries.

Throughout the Cold War years, Turkey stood as a steadfast ally and a bastion of democracy against communism and totalitarianism. In the subsequent period, Turkey has assumed an even greater role and strategic importance for the security and stability of Europe.

Turkey's aim to fully participate in the restructuring and integration process of Europe remains at the top of its foreign policy agenda, reflecting the aspirations of the Turkish nation. The issue here is the fulfilment of Turkey's objective of full integration with the West, through full membership in the remaining major Western institutions, namely the European Union and the Western European Union.

The presence of a Turkish population of around three million in Europe adds another important dimension to our current relations with European countries. Turkey is capable of acting as a bridge between the European Union and the Islamic World.

The partnership between Turkey and the Western World offers a wide range of opportunities for co-operation for both sides. Nearly half of Turkey's foreign trade today is conducted with the countries of the European Union.

Turkey's commitment to a free market economy, furthering its democracy and integration with the West, has taken on a fresh meaning with the conclusion of the customs union with the European Union, as of the beginning of 1996. The customs union, which we consider a crucial step towards full membership in the European Union, will yield benefits for both

parties. It creates an environment conducive to business, investment and trade, paving the way for much closer co-operation.

In the new international landscape, relations between Turkey and the United States are conducted within the framework of 'enhanced partnership'. Today, Turkey, in terms of global and regional politics, shares with the United States, a set of common strategic, security and economic interests which naturally draw the two countries still closer to one another. We seek to further enhance our relationship with the United States in a wide spectrum, and particularly, in the field of economic co-operation.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Turkey has always attached great importance to co-operation and collaboration with its important neighbour to the north, Russia. We support the reform process in that country, which is crucial for its contribution to the future stability of Europe. We consistently seek to establish a climate of mutual trust and confidence in our relations with Russia and to further develop our economic co-operation. The two countries have much to gain by mutual understanding. Bilateral economic relations with Russia are developing rapidly. The trade figures for 1995 have exceeded US\$3 billion. The contracts of Turkish construction firms operating in Russia are estimated to value US\$6 billion. Some thirty thousand to forty thousand Turkish workers are employed in these projects.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Turkey maintains friendly relations with the Arab countries and Israel. It has historical ties with the Arabs and the Israelis, which date back in time. Security and stability in this region is of cardinal concern for Turkey. The guiding principle of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East has been to advocate dialogue and mutual tolerance for the solution of the disputes between the Arabs and the Israelis and to stay out of any involvement in these disputes.

Today, Turkey regards the Middle East peace process as the most important and viable strategic concept for achieving stability in this region. That the peace process is irreversible is more than a hope. However, it is also true that the peace process, which held the promise of a real breakthrough in the region, seems to have lost its initial momentum. We are aware that the path ahead is filled with pitfalls and that a lasting solution will not come easily. It is our earnest desire to see that all the obstacles blocking the path of the peace process are overcome and the process is indeed crowned with success.

As far as the establishment of security and stability in the Middle East is concerned, one absolutely crucial problem that must be addressed is terrorism. Terrorism is a major threat and a very important issue in the region. Turkey, for its part, works hard to build an awareness that for peace and stability in the Middle East to be lasting, the international community has to put an end to all forms of terrorism in the area. One cannot afford to be selective in this task. Anyone who thinks that terrorism in one country is merely that country's own problem alone, is tragically mistaken. Turkey believes that a united front is essential to eradicate the scourge of terrorism.

The end of the cold war initially brought no good tidings for the Middle East. Soon afterwards, local tensions in the Middle East erupted into a global crisis with the Gulf War. The invasion and the annexation of one country by another was an unacceptable move to which the international system had to respond with drastic measures.

Yet, Iraq indisputably remains an important country for stability in the Middle East. Turkey fully supports the basic premise that maintaining the territorial integrity and unity of Iraq is of utmost importance. In close consultation with its allies, Turkey conducts a policy of peace and stability in line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The ongoing

consequences of the Gulf War have had a direct bearing on Turkey. The United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq have already cost the Turkish economy well over US\$27 billion.

The implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 986, permitting Iraq limited oil exports for the purchase of food and medicine, will enable us to re-operate the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline. We are also following up on necessary procedures for the partial compensation of our losses due to the sanctions regime in force against Iraq.

We are following with concern the recent developments in Iraq and we hope that they will not jeopardise these efforts. Turkey has also actively supported the evacuation of US citizens and US local employees on humanitarian grounds. Under the prevailing conditions in Northern Iraq, we support the establishment of a provisional local authority with the full participation of Kurds and Turcomans and other segments of the local population until the re-establishment of the effective unity of Iraq.

RELATIONS WITH ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

Turkey attaches great importance to further promoting its economic, commercial, social and cultural relations with Islamic countries with the majority of which it has close historical ties. It shall continue to assume a leading role within the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and participate constructively in the co-operation activities of its Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Co-operation (COMCEC), which meets under Turkey's chairmanship.

TURKISH ECONOMY

The Turkish economy has displayed a very high growth with the successful implementation of a series of economic programmes since 1980. It should be noted that Turkey is one of the fastest growing economies in the OECD. Consequently, Turkey has started to attract international lending, gained access to international capital markets and used external finance to implement its adjustment policies.

Last year the GNP growth rate was 8.1 per cent. In the first half of 1996, this figure rose to 10.3 per cent, due mainly to the growth in private consumption and capital investments.

On the other hand, the volume of Turkish exports rose from US\$12.9 billion in 1990 to US\$21.6 billion in 1995 due to diversification in export products and access to new markets. The volume of imports increased from US\$22.3 billion in 1990 to US\$35.7 billion in 1995.

Turkey offers all suitable conditions for direct foreign investment. Indeed, foreign capital investments in Turkey have reached US\$17 billion.

The climate for foreign investments in Turkey has become even more attractive for potential investors with the enactment of liberal foreign investment laws. Turkey encourages foreign investors to set up their own businesses in Turkey. Today, all fields of activity which are open to the Turkish private sector are equally available to foreign participation and investment.

Turkey is also keenly interested in the venture to transport Caspian oil to world markets. When its proposal for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline materialises, Turkey will become an important energy terminal.

CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

Turkey has been a multi-party democracy since 1946. We all know that standards in democracy and human rights evolve over time. There is no country which can claim to have

achieved perfection in this field. Hence, there is always room for improvement for everyone. Turkey is determined to go along this path to meet the aspirations of its people.

Here, I would like to point out a fact which is often neglected when Turkey is the subject of discussion. Democracy and human rights do not exist in a vacuum. They are influenced to a large extent by internal and external factors. It should be borne in mind that for ten years now, Turkey has been fighting a blind terror aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of the country. It will continue to conduct its fight against terrorism on the basis of respect for human rights and the rule of law and will ultimately prevail.

I should also like to underline Turkey's concern over human rights violations, xenophobia and racism directed against the Turkish population living in Europe.

CONCLUSION

Turkey is located in a region of great challenges and great opportunities. Many of the goals which the Turkish Republic set in the early 1920's have been successfully achieved. Our traditional guide-lines and principles have served us and our friends well.

Turkey is, today, a trusted and respected member of the international community whose friendship is sought by many.

As we move ahead, so does the world. There will always be new challenges to meet. But they can also be uplifting ones. The challenge of building a stable, prosperous, democratic community of nations which live together in peace and harmony is surely a worthy aim. All we need is the vision and the will to reconcile our differences and build a better world for ourselves and for future generations. Turkey is determined to work rigorously to translate this ideal into reality.