

## **TURKEY'S CHANGING NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Turkey's relations with its neighbors have been steadily improving. Tense relations of the mid-nineties have been in stark contrast to good neighborly relations that Ankara has succeeded to cultivate with its contagious as well as second belt neighbors for the last five years. In order to grasp the reasons that paved the way for such an overall improvement, one has to look at two aspects of Turkish foreign policy: success in putting down the Kurdish insurgence and increasing prospects for accession to the EU. The dynamics of Turkish politics have transformed since Turkey received a status of candidacy in December 1999. Globalization, EU integration process and customs union brought about its own grinding effects over the prominence of traditional statecraft in Turkey. Vast spectrum of civic organizations is increasingly involved in activities formerly pertinent to the security sector on a greater scale and thus becomes the agents of de-securitization process in Turkey. Their impact is becoming visible in debates as to how the national interest will be defined.

### **KEYWORDS**

Turkish Foreign Policy, Relations with Iran, Syria, Russia, Israel, PKK, Pipelines Turkey's EU membership.

Turkey's relations with its neighbors have been steadily improving. Tense relations of the mid-nineties have been in stark contrast to good neighborly relations that Ankara has succeeded to cultivate with its contagious as well as second belt neighbors for the last five years. Amelioration of relations with Russia, Syria and Iran, former rivals for several reasons, are exemplary. The successive Turkish governments seem to have held the common policy that the relations should be governed by the principles of good neighborliness. Trust, engagement and dialogue, rather than confrontation and containment, appear to be the leitmotifs of the present rhetoric. In order to grasp the reasons that paved the way for such an overall improvement, one has to look at two aspects of Turkish foreign policy: Success in putting down the Kurdish insurgency and increasing prospects for accession to the EU.

This article will take a closer look at the reasons of the amelioration of relations with a number of troubled neighbors (Russia, Iran, and Syria) and to delineate the main elements of this transformation.

### **A Changing Environment**

The end to the Cold War did not improve the security environment of Turkey. New generation of threats and challenges generated a broader security agenda for Ankara. Despite initially positive expectations, disintegration of the Soviet and Yugoslavian federations and, not the least, *de facto* partition of Iraq fueled increased insecurities in the vicinity of Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the great disintegration exacerbated Turkey's own Kurdish separatism and PKK's armed insurgency gained momentum after Baghdad's authority failed to function in Northern Iraq. Among the threats Ankara had to cope with, the Kurdish separatism created far greater insecurities for Turkey. It remained to be the epicenter of Turkey's

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<sup>1</sup>"Doksanlı Yıllarda Türkiye'nin Değişen Güvenlik Ortamı," in Gencer Özcan and Şule Kut, (eds.) *En Uzun Onyıl, Türkiye'nin Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Gündeminde Doksanlı Yıllar*, İstanbul, Boyut, 1998, p.13-44.

security concerns for the rest of the decade succeeding the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

Although it has reached to its climax after the Gulf War, the armed Kurdish insurgence had already begun to undermine the premises of classical inside-outside national security dichotomy in late 1980s. As the PKK began to operate more effectively within and outside Turkey, the military gradually assumed greater role to engage in curbing the armed insurgence.<sup>3</sup> "Asymmetrical" and "non conventional threat" required the army to change its mindset, force structure, operational codes and even its inventory.<sup>4</sup> In August 1989, the General Staff had delivered a landmark statement indicating that the threat was coming from within as well as outside Turkey. The decisions taken in the National Security Council's March 1990 meeting heralded new era in the struggle against the PKK. Accordingly, a governmental decree went into force in April 1990 taking extra measures to deal with separatist threat. In 1992 the *National Security Policy Document* pinpointed Kurdish separatism as the major source of threat.<sup>5</sup>

Notwithstanding increased troop deployment in the southeast Turkey and active collaboration with the KDP to uproot the PKK in Northern Iraq, the army had considerable difficulty to contain the armed insurgence until it changed its overall strategy in July 1994.<sup>6</sup> The *Area Superiority Strategy* required the army to have special training, different force structure and relevant equipment in dealing with the insurgence. By the mid of the decade fighting PKK took

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<sup>2</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, London, Hurst and Company, 2003, chapter titled "Turkey and Northern Iraq: Learning to Live with Contradictions," p.312-342.

<sup>3</sup>Gencer Özcan, "Dört Köşeli Üçgen Olmaz: Irak Savaşı, Kürt Sorunu ve Bir Stratejik Perspektifin Kırılması," *Foreign Policy*, (March-June 2003) p.38-49.

<sup>4</sup>Serhat Güvenç, "Bir Dış Politika Aracı Olarak Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri: Yetenekler ve Uygulamalar," in Faruk Sönmezoğlu, ed., *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Edition, İstanbul, Der Yayınları, 2004. p. 895-933.

<sup>5</sup>İsmet G. İmset, *PKK Ayrılıkçı Şiddetin 20 Yılı (1973-1992)*, Ankara, Turkish Daily News Yayınları, 1993, p.270-272.

<sup>6</sup>"TSK Bölgede 'Alan Hakimiyeti' Konseptini Uygulamaya Başladı," *Cumhuriyet*, 28 July 1994.

another step further when the TAF increased scale of the operations inside Iraq and began to deploy troops in the security belt formed along the border.

Given security measures tightened by the first half of the decade, political issues pertinent to identity issues were rapidly oversecritized. Thus, having precipitated imposition of extra legal measures, the PKK insurgence eventually contributed to the further consolidation of security sector in Turkey.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the nineties, the military had retained and expanded its central place within the security sector and its *de facto* authority over SFP issues.<sup>8</sup> Its influence became even more conspicuous when issues were concerned the armed forces' operational engagement. So, the more Turkey's security agenda widened, the greater became military's involvement in SFP issues. The military's role therefore became more perceptible, and in some cases uncomfortably coexists with the role of the elected government and foreign policy. Moreover, this occurred at a time when the EU was becoming more sensitive to human rights issues as well as to what was called the shortcomings of democratic control of the militaries in candidate countries, and did so at a time the sources and agents of SFP were becoming more pluralistic across Europe. Oversecritization of Turkey's political system and transgressions of human rights were therefore bitterly criticized by the EU. Against this backdrop, Ankara was not included among the new list of candidates for eventual membership at the Luxembourg summit of 12 December 1997.

### **Assertive Diplomacy: 1995-1999**

By the second half of the nineties, Turkey's SFP seemed to have been guided by two strategies: '2 ½ *War Strategy*' and less formally, peripheral strategy. The former stipulated a new force

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<sup>7</sup>Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye'de Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politikada Askeri Yapının Artan Etkisi," in Gencer Özcan and Şule Kut, ed. *En Uzun Onyıl, Türkiye'nin Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Gündeminde Doksanlı Yıllar*, İstanbul, Boyut, 1998, p. 67-100.

<sup>8</sup>İlhan Uzgel, "Ordu Dış Politikasının Neresinde," in Ahmet İnsel and Ali Bayramoğlu, ed., *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti: Türkiye'de Ordu*, İstanbul, Birikim, 2004, p.315-319.

structure to deal with two pronged conventional contingency at the Greek and Syrian fronts, and simultaneously Kurdish insurgency at home. Formulated by a veteran diplomat and well known expert on FSP issues, Şükrü Elekdağ's strategy guided the establishment and shaped the mindset of the security sector for the latter part of the decade.<sup>9</sup> Although articulated less formally, the latter strategy produced more palpable outcomes as far as Turkey's relations with its outer belt neighbors. The growing relations with Israel, Jordan, Azerbaijan and Ukraine primarily in security related areas led some analysts to label this active policy as the '*Turkish peripheral strategy*.'<sup>10</sup> It aimed to contain or counter balance the contagious neighbors with whom Turkey had troubles.

In the second half of the decade Turkey stepped up its efforts on the diplomatic front to cut off the PKK's logistics. By the early 1996, Ankara dropped its policy of critical dialogue with Syria calling for end to sponsor the PKK's activities within Syria and Lebanon. In a note delivered on 23 January 1996, Ankara bluntly warned Damascus that its current policy would be retaliated in kind. Given the continuing Syrian indifference to continual Turkish warnings, the following months witnessed a great leap forward towards the improvement of bilateral relations with Israel in military affairs, which had already taken off in 1993. The Military Training Cooperation Agreement of 23 February 1996, The Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement of 28 August 1996, strategic dialogue forums attended by the top SFP elite of respective countries, joint air and naval exercises, and large scale modernization projects made the alignment the key stone of Ankara's peripheral strategy.<sup>11</sup> Although the alignment, claimed Turkish authorities, had never been geared to take joint measures to check Syria, the agreements were perceived by the Arab countries as a classical alliance forged against Syria in particular. So it became another source of irritation for Syria and Iran,

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<sup>9</sup>Şükrü Elekdağ, "2½ War Strategy," *Perceptions*, (March-May 1996) Vol.1, No.1, p. 33-57.

<sup>10</sup>Alan Makovsky, "Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Turkish Periphery Strategy?," in Henry J. Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p.170.

<sup>11</sup>Gencer Özcan and Ofra Bengio, "Decade of the Military: The Case of the Alignment with Israel," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1&2, (Spring 2001) p. 90-109.

whose efforts, however, to form a counter alliance proved futile in the rest of the decade.<sup>12</sup>

### Syria

Historically speaking, Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors were poisoned by a variety of issues. Yet, for Ankara the regionalization of the Kurdish issue after the Gulf War stood out as the most burning issue for several reasons. Its regionalization caused controversial outcomes/windfalls for all neighbours. While the creation of the state of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq brought these countries together in search of taking counter measures, they, almost with no exception, played the Kurdish card against the each other for a variety of purposes. Providing shelter, transportation and training facilities to the PKK and hosting its leader in Damascus for almost two decades, Syria's war by proxy against Turkey remained an excellent case.

Turkish Syrian relations remained soured particularly after 1984 when the PKK intensified its activities within Turkey. However, Ankara's policy was a critical dialogue with Damascus involving carrots rather than sticks. The protocols of July 1987 and April 1992 assuring Syria of regular down flow of the Euphrates were Turkish efforts of the kind, yet with no tangible result.<sup>13</sup> However, after 1996 as a result of frustration with the Syrian indifference to Turkish demands, Ankara changed its policy and began to pressurize Damascus to stop its support for the PKK. Turkish policy was two fold: It stepped up its efforts to contain the Syrian policy first by forging closer diplomatic military relations with Israel, secondly by resorting to the threat of use of force more often lest Damascus ended its support for the PKK. In a note to Damascus delivered on 23 January 1996, Ankara made it clear that it retained the right to resort to self defensive measures if Damascus failed to revise its policy as

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<sup>12</sup>Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Old Grievances, New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and Its Alignment with Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (April 2001) p.51-92.

<sup>13</sup>For the text of Protocol dated 17 April 1992, "Türkiye-Suriye Güvenlik Komitesi Toplantı Tutanağı, Şam 17 Nisan 1992" *Diplomat*, Vol. I, No.1, (15 April- 1 May 1992) p.2.

regards the PKK.<sup>14</sup> In May 1996, both countries were reported to mass troops along the border at the heels of bombing shook Damascus and Latakkiya.<sup>15</sup> In September 1996, the tension increased further with Turkey's involvement in Kurdish civil war in Northern Iraq assisting the KDP in its struggle against the PUK. In the meantime, Ankara suspended high level diplomatic contacts and the meetings of the joint security committees discontinued until the final showdown in September 1998 when Turkey launched '*detering pressure policy*' against Syria.<sup>16</sup> It called on Syria to cease hosting Abdullah Öcalan in Damascus. After the Egyptian and Iranian good offices, Syria bowed to the pressure and swiftly deported Öcalan immediately after the conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 20 October 1998 in Adana.

After the Adana Memorandum of Understanding signed, Ankara pursued policy of cautious optimism towards Damascus. However, diplomatic contacts were gradually upgraded, and as Syria expressed its intent to take confidence building measures, Turkey reciprocated positively. In this regard, the signing of military training cooperation agreement in June 2002 with Syria was a remarkable event displaying the military's changing perception of Syria.<sup>17</sup> Since then, the improvement gained further momentum and developed at an unprecedented pace.

The improvement was marked by high-level visits as well. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül visited Damascus in April 2003, his Syrian counterpart, Farouq al-Shara in January 2003, and Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa Miro as the first Syrian premier to visit Turkey in 17 years came to Ankara in July 2003.<sup>18</sup> The most important visit of the year, however, was Asad's 6-8 January 2004 trip to Turkey, the first ever by a Syrian head of state. Although the

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<sup>14</sup>"Suriye'ye Sert Nota," *Milliyet*, 1 January 1996.

<sup>15</sup>"Sınırdaki Hareketlilik," *Milliyet*, 8 June 1996; "Suriye'ye Gözdağı," *Milliyet*, 12 June 1996; Yasemin Çongar, "Suriye'ye Savaş Uyarısı," *Milliyet*, 22 June 1996.

<sup>16</sup>Deniz Zeyrek, "Suriye ile Diplomasi Bitti," *Radikal*, 2 October 1998.

<sup>17</sup>Serkan Demirtaş, "Ortadoğu'da Yeni Süreç," *Cumhuriyet*, 21 June 2002.

<sup>18</sup>"Turkey, Syria Open a New Page in Ties," *Turkish Daily News*, 30 July 2003.

Syrian leader carefully avoided addressing the controversial issues such as Hatay, -a province transferred by the French to Turkey in 1938 but still claimed by Syria on its official maps- he openly stated that “the PKK has no presence and activity in Syria.”<sup>19</sup>

In April 2003 and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara has called for a regional consultation mechanism between Turkey, Syria and Iran on Iraq.<sup>20</sup> In April 2003 Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul conferred with Syrian leaders in Damascus on bilateral relations and past-war developments in neighboring Iraq, in a sign of flourishing ties despite signals of unease from the United States. In Damascus, he said Turkey was determined to develop relations with the United States further but added that this should not be an obstacle to maintaining good relations with Russia, Syria and Iran.<sup>21</sup>

Most probably, the improvement went in line with the revision of the National Security Policy Document in August 2002. Displaying a change of heart at Ankara for the neighbours, the revision reportedly maintained that the bilateral relations with Iran, Iraq and Syria would be improved bearing in mind that Turkey’s policies towards the Middle East should not be under an Arab mortgage, obviously referring to the continuation of alignment with Israel.<sup>22</sup>

### **Iran**

Throughout the decade, ideological tension and border security issues complicated bilateral relations. During the first half of the decade relations went through continual crises due to a number of issues. Allegations of the Iranian involvement in political assassinations claiming lives of leading Turkish intellectuals have

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<sup>19</sup>Soner Çağaptay “A Turkish Rapprochement With Middle East Rogue States?,” Analysis Of Near East Policy From The Scholars And Associates of the Washington Institute, *Policywatch* No. 825, 9 January 2004.

<sup>20</sup>“Controversial Visit Cancelled,” *Turkish Daily News* 12 April 2003.

<sup>21</sup>“Turkey, Syria Eye Closer Ties,” *Turkish Daily News*, 30 April 2003.

<sup>22</sup>Lale Sarıbrahimoğlu, “Military Prepares New National Security Policy Document,” *Turkish Daily News*, 8 August 2002.



been raised throughout the decade.<sup>23</sup> However, by the second half of the decade, Iranian support for the PKK eclipsed other thorny issues. Turkey's SFP establishment accused Iran of providing transportation facilities and shelter for the PKK. On the Iranian side, Turkey's rapprochement was followed warily. However, interdependence dictated by geography, growing trade volume and convergence of views over the Northern Iraq helped countries push negative aspects into the background.

However, the tension turned out to be a crisis in February 1997 when the Iranian ambassador Muhammad Bagheri attended to address an Islamist gathering called the *Night for Jerusalem* expressing critical views in public on Turkey's rapprochement with Israel and close relations with the US. It caused a diplomatic disaster triggering a crisis when both countries recalled their ambassadors mutually.<sup>24</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss details of motivations that played decisive role in shaping foreign policy towards Iran in the period of 1996-1999. However, one would maintain that Turkey's policy of confrontation of the period was driven by internal factors. The relations started to show the signs of gradual improvement after 1999. In 2002 revision of the NSPD, in comparison to the way it was mentioned in 1997 NSPD, Iran was covertly referred as a source of threat given Iran's aspirations of development of nuclear power and WMD and its continued support for the PKK. Both countries realized that they could not effort to sustain the policy of tension during the period that prospects for US intervention to Iraq were looming large. The rapprochement was marked by the opening of pipeline construction of which raised concerns and reactions from Washington to carry Iranian natural gas to Turkey.

Relations between Turkey and Iran improved noticeably in 2003, during which four high-level visits took place from Turkey to Iran.<sup>25</sup> Throughout 2003, Iran claimed to be cracking down on PKK

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<sup>23</sup>Mahmut Bulut, 'Türkiye'den İran'a 5 Uyarı' *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 26 December 1996.

<sup>24</sup>"Tahran'a 4 Kritik Mesaj," *Milliyet*, 2 March 1997 and Selin Çağlayan, "Demirel'den Tahran'a 'İyi Komşu Ol' Çağrısı," *Hürriyet*, 4 March 1997.

<sup>25</sup>"Turkey Renovates Border Gate with Iran Amid US Tension," *Turkish Daily News* 31 May 2003.

terrorists within its borders. In early July 2004, in the aftermath of skirmishes between the Iranian security forces and the PKK in the vicinity of Urumiyye, Tehran handed over a number of militants to Turkish authorities.<sup>26</sup> In early 2004, two countries also settled the issue of overpricing of the Iranian natural gas.

In April 2003, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref was also in Ankara for talks dominated by economic cooperation.<sup>27</sup> In the cultural sphere there were also advances. A December 2003 treaty on educational cooperation between Turkey and Iran stipulated mechanisms for Turkish students to study in Iran, paved the way for the two countries to share curricula and provided for reciprocal scholarships.

### **Russia**

By the first half of the decade Ankara's relations with the ex-foe neighbor remained soured. The transition period after the collapse of the Soviet Union was governed by contending approaches to a variety of regional issues. They were mostly articulated through a zero-sum mentality addressed in the context of geostrategic rivalry. However, the second half of the decade saw bilateral relations evolving into a different context, and living through a substantial transformation of the mutual perceptions. Two issues are of relevance to see the transformation: Firstly, in retaliation of Turkey's stance over the Chechen war, which broke out in 1994, Russia vigorously played the Kurdish card. As the Chechen leaders were given high level reception in Ankara, Russian authorities increasingly tolerated the PKK's activities in that country. Secondly, Turkey's will to foster special relations with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan caused uneasiness in Moscow. The route of main energy pipeline that would carry their crude oil and natural gas turned to be bone of contention putting these two countries at loggerheads. *Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline* issue therefore soon after became the symbol of Turco-Russian rivalry. Later two countries had diverged views on the Turkish Straits' security. Turkey's efforts to provide security for its

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<sup>26</sup>"Iran PKK'yı Vurdu," *Milliyet*, 7 July 2004.

<sup>27</sup>"Turkey, Syria Eye Closer Ties," *Turkish Daily News*, 30 April 2003.

largest city were ill perceived by Russians who accused of Turkish authorities, who accused of gearing the 1994 regulations to closing off the waterway to the Russian tankers for crude oil and LNG.

However, just as was the case with Iran, SFP elites in Moscow and Ankara realized that zero-sum game approaches would bring about detrimental results for both countries.<sup>28</sup> The turnabout occurred in the aftermath of Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's visit to Turkey on 16-17 December 1997. The visit concluded the \$30 billion natural gas deal called the *Blue Stream* envisaging Russia to supply large amount of natural gas through an underwater pipeline in the Black Sea, and to catch the lion's share in Turkey's growing natural gas market. It signaled new period that Turkey desired, expressed Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz, "to cooperate rather than compete with its great neighbor". In this positive atmosphere, the Russian government resisted the pressure from the nationalist circles calling for giving asylum for Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's leader who came to Russia after he was extradited from Syria in October 1998, deported him.<sup>29</sup>

Turkey also contributed to the rapprochement lifting some of the limitations imposed by the 1994 Traffic Regulations. Moscow accepted the new regulation that was put in effect in 1998.

Prime Minister Ecevit's visit of November 1999 bolstered the atmosphere of cooperation and displayed the level importance that Ankara attached to the improvement of bilateral relations. It aimed to foster cooperation against international terrorism, completion of technical formalities of the *Blue Stream*, and reinvigoration of economic relations.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, the visit took place at the heels of the Russian army's new offensive in Chechnya raising

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<sup>28</sup>Barçın Yinanç, Dışişleri Bakanı İsmail Cem ile söyleşi, "Petrol Savaşı Yok," *Milliyet*, 5 October 1997.

<sup>29</sup>Oktay Pirim ve Süha Örtülü, *PKK'nın 20 Yıllık Öyküsü*, İstanbul, Boyut, 1999, p.90.

<sup>30</sup>Duygu Bazoğlu Sezer, "Russia: The Challenges of Reconciling Geopolitical Competition with Economic Partnership," in Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirişçi, eds., *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multi Regional Power*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London, 2001, p.157.

opposition within Turkey. On his occasion, Ankara adopted different approach than did it during the first Chechen war of 1994-1996 underscoring its support for the territorial integrity of Russia. Two respective governmental decrees of 26 September 2000 and 3 October 2000 were put in effect to severe the activities of the '*Caucasian Chechen Solidarity Group*', an umbrella organization coordinating wide range of activities Caucasian diaspora organizations active in Turkey. Although the complaints on behalf of Russia continued since then, the tone and frequency of complaints have been far lower than were they before.<sup>31</sup> In addition to mutual political will on both sides, diversified relations as a result of increasing trade volume, construction activities by Turkish firms in Russia and growing number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey brought stabilizing impact on bilateral relations compelling both countries not to take harsh stances over the disputed issues. Recent developments are noteworthy in this respect. In April 2004, when the Ajaria crisis broke out, Turkey and Russia swiftly consulted each other and refrained from any intervention that could escalate the tension. In the following months both countries displayed mutual understanding and reached to compromise over the issue of pricing the natural gas coming through the Blue Stream.

Among these positive steps, the amelioration of relations between the security establishments is the most remarkable. Turkish and Russian navies pioneered the forging of a multinational *Search and Rescue* [SAR] unit called *BLACKSEAFOR* with the participation of all the Black Sea riparian countries in April 2002. In the same month they signed the *Document of Black Sea Confidence and Security Building Regime*. Another development was the conclusion of Turco-Russian Military Training and Cooperation Agreement in 2003. However, the signals that Moscow considers to take a more constructive approach for the BTCP are also noteworthy as far as the future course of relations is concerned. In December 2001, the Russian giant oil company *Lukoil* called for dismiss of parochial approaches towards the BTCP that the Turkish straits would not be suitable for heavy tanker traffic, and that expressed its interest to take part in the project or connecting BTCP with the existing Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline. It would be overoptimistic to assume that

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<sup>31</sup>For the texts of government decrees, see [www.kafkas.org.tr](http://www.kafkas.org.tr)

views of the two countries would no more diverge on such issues. However, it is a good omen that the arguments based on geostrategic rivalry have been losing ground.<sup>32</sup> In this regards, the last visit paid by President Putin openly represented the changing agenda of the bilateral relations.<sup>33</sup>

### **Changing Security Perceptions: *Post-Helsinki Zeitgeist***

The dynamics of Turkish politics have transformed since Turkey received a status of candidacy in December 1999. Increasing prospects of EU accession has been exerting tremendous impact on Turkish foreign policy. One can contend that the impact stemmed from different roots. First, in accordance with the EU's inclination for vertical integration, Turkey's SFP environment has been diversified at an unprecedented pace. Turkish society has become more receptive to open debate as interest groups develop and, in return, they are now far better organized to transmit their demands across Europe through peer associations accredited with the Union.

Increasing involvement of non-state actors in the formulation process of SFP in Turkey has become one of the novel aspects of the politics. As newly emerging yet strong actors begin to exert growing influence over SFP issues, the official apparatus has been losing its prominence in economic and financial affairs. 'Foreign policy below' or 'grass roots statecraft'<sup>34</sup> has its own reflections in Turkey. Globalization, EU integration process and customs union brought about its own grinding effects over the prominence of traditional statecraft in Turkey. Vast spectrum of civic organizations is increasingly involved in activities formerly pertinent to the security sector on a greater scale and thus becomes the agents of de-securitization process in Turkey. Their impact is becoming visible in debates as to how the national interest will be defined. While these new actors put their weight behind those who propagated revisions in

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<sup>32</sup>Seçkin Ürey, "Rusya Sıcak Denizlere İniyor," *Milliyet*, 29 August 2004.

<sup>33</sup>"Gaz Sorunu Çözülüyor, Putin İşadamı Ordusunu da Getiriyor," *Hürriyet*, 25 August 2004.

<sup>34</sup>Pınar Bilgin, "Individual and Societal Dimensions of Security," *International Studies Review*, No. 5 (2003), p. 216.

outstanding national issues, as was the case of Cyprus, the traditional circles fail to mobilize large sectors of society to support their own position.<sup>35</sup>

It was therefore not a coincidence that debate over national interest undermined state's position over one of the issues that was traditionally considered as major national cause, namely Cyprus. To put it in a nut shell, by the second half of the nineties the debate over Cyprus dramatically shifted the focus of the main argument that TAF was keeping its troops there for the sake of Turks living on the Island. The emphasis was rather put on that Turkey's presence there had been required for the sake of Turkey's own security needs. So the new paradigm required the issue be over-securitized further. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delineate the details of the Annan Plan, yet the end result was an impressive compromise among contending agents of SFP in Ankara. Compromise removed stumbling blocks giving more freedom of maneuverability to the new AKP government. Diplomatic initiative taken by the AKP government led to what happened in April 2004 referendum redefining all the parameters of the Cyprus imbroglio and freeing Turkey of being the scapegoat for the post 1974 stalemate in the Island.

Secondly, Ankara would definitely like to avoid any conflict with its neighbors because such a contingency would obviously butter the breads of those who claimed that Turkey's accession should be delayed on the grounds that its neighborhood was still perilous.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, the way certain sections of Turkish polity stood against US unilateralism as regards the Iraqi issue was bolstered, if not inspired by the EU's stand on the issue.<sup>37</sup> The Turkish position on Iran and Syria also seems influenced by Brussels. With EU accession

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<sup>35</sup>Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye Dış Politikasında Karar Alma ve Uygulama Süreci," in Sönmezoğlu, *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, p. 829-894.

<sup>36</sup>Ahmet Davudoğlu, "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı," *Radikal* 26 February 2004.

<sup>37</sup>Kemal Kirişçi, "Between Europe and the Middle East: The Transformation of Turkish Policy," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2004).

in mind, observed an expert, Turkey wanted to treat its Middle Eastern neighbors *la Europe*.<sup>38</sup>

So truly, given both Iran and Syria became de facto neighbors of the United States after the occupation of Iraq, *the treatment à la Europe* have paid more dividends in return. Therefore, the possibility of Turkey's unilateral intervention in regional affairs will be limited by further Europeanization of its SFP sector.

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<sup>38</sup>Çağaptay, *op. cit.*