

Engin Akçay, Erkan Ertosun, Farkhad Alimukhamedov, Ikboljon Qoraboyev (Eds.), *Half a Decade in Turkey: Ambassadorial Insights*, Turgut Özal University Publications, 2014, 276 pages, ISBN: 978-605-4894-07-9

Emre TURKUT*

“All wars represent a failure of diplomacy.”¹

Not so long ago, the world has witnessed two world wars. These wars destructed many cities, killed millions of peoples and left a paradigm behind that even needs to be solved today: the stark impossibility of preventing these massive wars.

I could not help myself from not starting with the above quotation in terms of preventing the wars and thus, sustaining the peace on the planet. This wonderfully-put quotation, indeed, sheds light on philosophically under-examined aspect of the dilemma, albeit ahistorically acknowledged and conceptually assumed. It is a salient fact that all wars emerge from failures of diplomacy. Diplomacy may present a crucial but no less effective way to prevent the wars that trigger many irreversible ravages on this beautiful blue world.

In this manner, “Half a Decade in Turkey: Ambassadorial Insights” is a book dedicated to understand and pay attention to vocabularies of the ambassadors who are one of the many significant players in the strategic game of diplomacy. The book mainly focuses on the highly-ranked diplomats who served in Turkey as ambassador for at least five years. To gather the unique ambassadorial perceptions, at the outset, twenty-three interviews were intended; however fourteen of them became possible, so fourteen ambassadors from various countries and diverse cultures were interviewed in this *sui generis* book. These countries include both key players of the world in the sense of diplomatic strength such as Holy See, Iran and economically the most promising countries such as Brazil and Malaysia

*LLM Candidate at University of Kent, UK

¹ The saying is commonly attributed to Tony Benn who was a British politician.

as well as Turkey's still close allies that shared historical and geographical ties to some extent such as Albania and Palestine. It goes without saying that interviews of ambassadors from the Middle East and Asia also constitute an integral part of the book. This dispersion along with the five-year service criterion particularly enables both readers and experts to see the very valuable insights and perceptions of ambassadors from a wide variety of countries on Turkey that pass the test of confidence and reliability.

Some key features of the book will be pointed out and discussed below, however I shall limit myself to focus on two points that I take as crucial for understanding the unique value of the book. But before jumping to the review's discussion part, it must be underlined that the project team spent fifteen months to be able reach these priceless assessments and interpretations on Turkey. The questions, moreover, had focused on both personal/daily life and the discipliner/vocational experiences of the ambassadors. The book consists of mainly three chapters. The first chapter outlines the underlying ideas and the story of the project. Second chapter is formed of the interviews of ambassadors. And third, which may be readily appreciated by the readers in terms of contribution to the international studies, includes two external analyses from renowned scholars –namely, Beril Dedeoğlu and William Hale- specialized on international relations.

Turning back to thorny debate of the review, in many ways including aforementioned aspects, the book's contribution to international relations and international law scholarship is undoubtedly substantial. However, I want to pursue briefly by raising two points. The first is the reality that the book challenges some of the 'so-called' basic tenets in terms of 'international relations' traditions. First chapter of the book provides a lucid illustration by quoting Sir Henry Wotton's saying which reads: 'An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country'.² This book project, on the other hand, provides a very sincere ground for ambassadors through interviews. They are asked to express ideas on their everyday lives in Turkey as well as foreign policies of their home countries *vis-à-vis* Turkey. In this manner, the book listens carefully and without any prejudice what is said by diplomats by promoting a new approach of sincerity on international affairs and placing the ambassadors on its centre where we can see true *selves* of ambassadors besides the hegemony of their home states identity. This may sound as an overstatement; however my opening the review with that quotation is not in vain. As aptly put by Akçay, Alimukhamedov and Qoraboyev in the introductory chapter of the book, 'Diplomats have traditionally been described as necessary "strangers" ... [t]his confinement of ambassadors to the status of stranger may have stemmed from the general logic of international relations which condemned states to continually distinguish between "us" and "them" and to be prepared for a hypothetical risk posed by "them"'.³ In a world where conflicts are becoming more global and convoluted, as international community we may need a new phase where the pursuit of peace on the ground is desired as much as national

2 E.Akçay, E.Ertosun, F. Alimukhamedov & I. Qoraboyev (ed.), *Half a Decade in Turkey: Ambassadorial Insights* (Ankara: 2014), 9.

3 *Ibid*, 15

interests. Therefore, it would be a shame if the book's influence were limited to solely international relations scholarship, further; it attempts to fill an important gap in the sense of constructing a more amicable and peaceful international community.

Yet, we now arrive at the second and more crucial and somehow, critical contribution of this book. One thing is clear that foreign policy-making requires many significant indicators such as economic limitations, diplomatic relations or historical ties *etc.* that need to be taken into account. What is important here in this book is that the interviews may expose fruitful road maps and introduce new foreign policy options for Turkey in the near future as being internal eyes and closely following Turkey's international agenda. This may be precious considering the jamming in international relations particularly in the Middle East and Europe. Despite the fact that all the ambassadors express their supports for Turkey's accession to the European Union, except for one or two ambassadors, the Ambassador of Belarus Valery Kolesnik, on the other hand, proposes a Eurasian option for Turkey by making valid arguments to some extent.⁴ However, even if there might be divergent reasons underlying their thoughts, some ambassadors also stressed that European Union does not take Turkey's candidacy seriously and plays a double game from time to time in this process.⁵ For all that, regional unions and initiatives that challenges the economic hegemony of the United States and the European Union may want to develop close relations with Turkey and this could be a seminal contribution to Turkish foreign policy. Furthermore, this entails the EU to re-locate their position precisely in favour of the full membership of Turkey. From all these perspectives, the book contributes to Turkish foreign policy by full-disclosure of the Turkey – EU relations.

Taken together, the project team accomplished a great work by presenting this book. The insights in the book would be very instrumental in every circle of international studies, for both academia and diplomatic circles. Further, the book's message is not solely for people who study and teach international relations at universities, think-tank institutions or policy-makers, but also for those who want to understand the dynamics of international affairs. In this vein, I personally believe that 'Half a Decade in Turkey: Ambassadorial Insights' may be one of the bedside books for anyone who is interested in such studies, if the book creates the profound effect that it deserves.

⁴ *Ibid*, 245

⁵ *Ibid*, 27, 42 & 194