

BOOK REVIEW

Philip H. Gordon and Ömer Taşpınar (Afterword by Soli Özel), *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey Can Revive a Fading Partnership*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2008.

Elif Şimşek*

Winning Turkey was published by Brooklyn Institute and translated into Turkish in February 2009. It has quickly become a renowned piece of work not necessarily because of its content, but probably because of its promotion to the public as Barack Obama's "bedside book" on Turkey. The book has also gained popularity due to its co-authors' positions in the policy making process of the US government and its influence on Turkish and US public opinion. While Taşpınar, is a professor at the National War College in the US, the other co-author, Philip Gordon, has occupied the post of Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs at the US State Department under Obama administration. *Winning Turkey* tries to analyze the ongoing state of Turkey's problematic relations with the US and the EU, and proposes solutions to restore the troublesome areas of the partnership. It pays great attention to the root-causes of the crisis of confidence between the US and Turkey with the aim of presenting "five steps" in order to challenge the probable Eurasian alternative.

Consisting of six chapters and an afterword, *Winning Turkey* describes the current political situation in Turkey as an ongoing polarization in Turkish society between Secularist/Kemalists and Muslim/Liberals. In its introduction, titled "*Who Lost Turkey*", it explains the root-causes of polarization in Turkish society by

*Elif Şimşek is a PhD candidate in the Department of International Relations, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey.

interpreting a scenario that is focusing on alternatives that excludes the US and the EU in Turkish Foreign Policy. They also stated that a democratized Turkey will be more important for US interests. However, authors acknowledge that it is not possible for Turkey to break its Euro-Atlantic ties as well. As is known to the observers of Turkish politics and society, Turkish political life is deeply polarized along with secular/Kemalist and pro-Islam/liberal lines and these authors seem to support the latter group in this division.

In its introduction, the book argues that the question of “who will win Turkey back”, can be replied by giving the answer to the question “who lost Turkey”. Referring the “intense” polarization among the Turkish society, the authors consider the ethnic and religious identities as the core of division line between secular Kemalists and pro-Islamists. The authors interestingly argue that “the principle challenge to Turkey’s western orientation is coming not from Islamist politicians but from the secularist establishment that has long had close ties to the West” (p. 3). Meanwhile, as the authors put it, both parties of the polarization have no doubts that Turkey's deep ties to the West. They concluded here that five main steps should be taken so as to prevent a serious rupture between Turkey and the West and, thus, not to lose Turkey. These steps can be summarized as “a grand bargain” between Turkey and the Kurds, “Western support” for liberalism and democracy in Turkey, a renewed map for “Turkey’s EU membership”, promotion of a historical “compromise with Armenia”, and “support for a political settlement in Cyprus.”

The second chapter examines the last 20 years of political history of Turkey. Probably, the authors turned to the recent history of Turkish politics, to support their arguments. Here it should be noted that these two chapters already provide satisfactory analysis of Turkish-American literature.

While the authors think that the AKP has brought stability to Turkish political system, they define the CHP and the Kemalists, who were unsatisfied by the general election results, as

the advocates of “radical secularism” with a “civilizing mission”, the first pillar of Kemalism. According to the authors, this form of Kemalism is practiced by the state in the form of “state-enforced secularism” and is not a new phenomenon in Turkish history as it reflects the Ottoman legacy of “long-standing tradition of state domination over religion”. Second pillar of Kemalism is defined as “assimilationist nationalism” through which the Islamic identity of all Muslim minorities in the country are aimed to be replaced with the concept of “Turkishness”, constituting a “common national, linguistic, and territorial identity, [and] superseding tribal and other identities”.

In order to present historical background, the authors firstly stress the fact that revival of Kurdish and/or Islamic identities are the results of the uprisings of 1920s and 1930s, and also they are the root-causes of the Secular/Kemalists’ suspicion against all Kurdish and Islamic movements. The authors emphasize the westernization including cultural re-engineering and creating an authentic Turkish identity as the founding bases of Kemalist vision. Second, they briefly describe the Cold War atmosphere as “realpolitik”. Yet, it was also the Cold War, which is seen as the main force that paved the way to Turkey’s inclusion in “the West”. After covering the Cold War years in which Turkey had been through three military interventions in 1960, 1971 and 1980, they draw our attention to the fact that nine different coalition parties took part into the governments established in the 1990s. The authors define the 1990s as “lost decade” that is ridden by political instability. In addition to Turkey’s adaptation problems to the post Cold War world, which helped the rise of the AKP, the authors add one more factor that has greatly influenced its success: emergence of a new conservative class, namely “Anatolian Tigers”, a group of entrepreneurs who seek creating an alternative network to participate in the free market economy.

According to the authors, skeptics of the AKP government argue that it is contradictory for Turkey to sustain close ties with the West as the latter has a great sympathy towards the Kurdish minority in Turkey, Armenian genocide claims and the Greek

Cypriots. On the other hand, the crisis of confidence between Turkey and the US did not totally arise from the suspicion of Turkish society. For this reason, in the third chapter of the book, the authors gave several reasons of this crisis with the US, such as the split over Iraq and different policies on Israel, Armenia and the Kurds.

For the authors, the first sign of the split with the US is Turkish Grand National Assembly's rejection of a motion on 1 March, 2003 to allow the US military forces to use the Turkish territory for its military deployment in the occupation of Iraq in 2003. It seems that they find similarities of the two shocking events that occurred in 2003, "March 1st" and the "hood event" of July 4th (Çuval Olayı in Turkish) in which a Turkish special forces liaison office was raided by the US forces and Turkish officers were detained for more than two days and they were treated like terrorists by inserting hoods to cover their heads. While the Turkish rejection of the motion came to symbolize Turkey's lack of support for the US; in the Turkish public opinion, the 4th of July "hood event" came to represent America's hostility towards Turkey. Majority of Turkish people convinced that the US considers Turkey not as a strategic partner, but a mere "logistical partner". The authors conclude this chapter by highlighting US-Turkish splits over Iraq, Armenia and Cyprus issues as damaging "common strategic interests" between two countries.

Alongside the US-Turkish splits, they also pay attention to the problems of Turkish-EU relations which gained a new momentum after the Helsinki Summit in 1999 but stalled from 2005 on. In the fourth chapter, the authors describe the well-known problem of digestion on the part of the EU, and analyze the positions of those EU members which oppose Turkey's membership, such as Germany, France and Austria. They also stress Greek Cypriot's opposition against Turkey's participation in discussions of the EU security missions. The authors express that for these reasons Eurasianist foreign policy orientation has begun to attract Turkish public's attention.

Despite their consensus on not “exaggerating” the possibility of adopting a Eurasianist foreign policy orientation, the authors discuss Turkey’s Eurasian alternatives in the fifth chapter. The authors claim that both the Kemalists and Islamists clearly comprehend the costs of breaking ties with the West. Nevertheless, they warn that, “Turkey’s close relations with the west could not be taken for granted either” (p. 49). To the authors, other reasons of the popularity of the Eurasianist vision are perhaps related to the ongoing political stability and economic growth. According to them, political stability and economic growth in the country contributed not only to a growing sense of self-confidence and self importance but also to an “optimistic” belief in country’s status as a regional power in the future. Taking into consideration of Turkey’s economic growth and military power, the authors argue that Turkish people are demanding more respect from the US and the EU.

Here, the authors cite the concept of “strategic depth” used by Davutoğlu to describe Turkey as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified category. It is worth mentioning that the authors, define “strategic depth” not as “Islamization” but as a “counter-balancing” of “Kemalism’s obsession with Turkey’s western identity”(p. 51). However, they do not endorse this opinion; practical implementations of the “strategic depth” imply a kind of new-Ottomanism.

Lastly, the authors analyze Turkey’s ties with Russia, Iran and Syria to determine “where all this new regional activism of Turkey leads.” They envisage two possible scenarios: continuation of current course by the AKP government or a dramatic split between Turkey and the West. According to the first scenario, even if tension and political differences with the West are not avoided, this situation cannot lead to the West’s losing of Turkey. Their second scenario, after a possible “military” or a “judicial” coup against the government will the West lose Turkey? Even if the authors are sure that such a development is unlikely, they still remain cautious as saying that “it would be naïve to exclude” such an option.

Chapter six, which shares the book's cover title, "Winning Turkey", proposes a course of action for Turkey and the US within the framework of five important steps in order to maintain Turkey's western style democratic orientation. In their detailed explanation of each of the five steps, key points are based upon harmonization of the US and Turkish national interests while still favoring of the former's. On the Kurdish problem, authors support other solutions than military. They are also in favor of limiting both Turkish and the US military actions and strikes against terrorist targets, while saying that Kurds also need a good relationship with the US and Turkey. After generally describing the current situation in Turkey, they identify three different approaches to the Kurdish problem: the Kurds themselves, the hard-liners and the moderates (including the AKP and those who oppose judicial attempts to close down Kurdish political parties). Yet they urge that the readers should not be confused by thinking that each of those tendencies represents a united block in their own right. They point to the possibility of sub-divisions among these tendencies within each group and even within the AKP. The authors underscore that the nationalistic elements even within the AKP are very much "reluctant to be portrayed as soft on Turkey's foremost national security issue", the break-up of the country by the Kurdish separatists (p. 64). Moreover, they stressed this disagreement within the AKP by citing Erdogan's speeches on his opposition to the ban of Democratic Society Party (DTP) by a high court ruling.

Discussing democracy and liberalism, in Turkey, the authors are of the opinion that democracy and liberal values are the principles that bind Turkey to the West. Yet, they agree that there need to be a new constitution to be drafted by a "broad-based constitutional council" rather than by a narrow group of experts, what they call, "party friendly hand-picked professors." They state that exclusion of that consensus in the making of a new constitution will harm the legitimacy of a new system which is based upon an "AKP constitution, replacing the military constitution of 1980" (p. 71).

Encouraging Turkey's full membership in the EU, the authors support a "renewed set of mutual commitments" between the two parties, in line with what they have already committed. However, they do not believe that Turkey could be a full member of the EU before 2018, when neither Turkey nor the EU will likely be the same as they are today. In short, they urge the EU not to break ties with Turkey in order to keep it EU oriented. For this reason, they specifically suggest political measures, favorable for the immediate interests of both sides, such as a new role for Turkey in European Security and Defense Policy, an energy dialogue and exchange programs.

On the other problematic areas of Cyprus and Armenia, authors are convinced that each side exacerbated the other's position in the problem. For this reason, they urge the US and the EU to accelerate their diplomatic efforts and confidence-building measures to resolve those bilateral conflicts between the parties. On the Armenian dispute, for instance, they suggest that Turkey should take more convincing steps, such as not to prosecute those historians who express that Armenian genocide took place and to repeal the Article 301 in order to better understand "the trauma of 1915 for the Armenian people and the Diaspora". On Cyprus issue, they also call Turkey to take more concrete steps like withdrawing Turkish troops from northern Cyprus and give a chance to the realization of the establishment of a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation on the Island by two communities.

In general, the authors give introductory information and basic facts on contemporary developments in Turkish Foreign Policy, as well as on domestic tension and tendencies within the society which influence foreign policy orientations of the country. They try to explain the causes of Kemalists' reaction against the AKP government, though without directly calling it as 'Sèvres paranoia'. According to them, Kemalists, who have closer ties with the West than those of the AKP supporters, are Euro-skeptics, Eurasianists and those who even consent to military coup to get rid of AKP. While they provide various data to prove the paranoid perceptions of the Kemalists, they do not refer sufficiently the

existing “coup paranoia” among the AKP supporters. In the same manner, it is interesting that their future scenarios are limited by two alternatives: Turkey will either be a US friendly state under AKP government, or it will be a lost with a government thrown out by another military coup. They refrain from naming other alternatives that can come out after the next general elections in 2011.

Overall, “Winning Turkey” is a descriptive book on recent developments in domestic and foreign policy of Turkey. The authors focus intensively on the recent redevelopments but they overlook the likely outcomes in the near future. However, the authors seem to be reluctant to touch on another hot debated and sensitive political problem related to the court cases of Ergenekon, closure of the ruling AKP and Kurdish DTP. Soli Özel briefly deals with these issues in his afterword. Without labeling the Kemalists as West-phobic, he describes them as people in favor of authoritarian–secularists and admirers of Vladimir Putin. He pays attention to the definition of westernization pillar of Kemalism and stresses “litigation against AKP”. He detects that the judicial process is more political than legal in Turkey. In order to support this opinion he gives examples of the AKP and the DTP cases.

To summarize, *Winning Turkey* tries to envisage that Turkey is still looking towards the West, regardless of its problems of political identity and cultural belonging. Currently, in Turkey, there are political fault lines fed by the blocks of secular-Islamic, Sunni-Alevi as well as by some remnants of extralegal organizations. Moreover, the end of the Cold War transformed the basic parameters of Turkish relations with the West. If the US and the EU want to win Turkey, and the AKP wants to be in the same line with the West, all of them should maintain their closer ties with each other.