

BLACK SEA SECURITY
TURKEY'S ROLE IN CREATING A EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY COMMUNITY:
PAST AND PRESENT

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This article¹ will discuss Turkey's role in creating and developing a Euro-Atlantic security community (with particular focus on the Black Sea Region), the stakes and challenges involved, the changing political architecture of the Region, and the changing definition of security over time.

The Ottoman Concept of Security

The Ottoman Empire and Turkey always had a major involvement and very often a significant role in European security. Owing to an imperial history of six centuries and a republican past of 88 years, this country always identified with the Region within the varying borders of its neighbourhood and territory which at the peak of its power in the 17th Century covered the entire Balkans, Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Northern Black Sea, Middle East and a greater part of North Africa. This fairly wide geographical scope also constituted a constant element of European security at large in the modern ages, popularly referred to as "the oriental" dimension of European diplomacy.

The Ottoman security concept for the Region was largely based on the establishment and protection of security outposts in the Northern Black Sea. For example, the Strait of Kerch connecting the Azov Sea with the Black Sea was controlled by an Ottoman fortress checking passage of the Russian navy to the Black Sea. Numerous other fortresses situated practically every few hundred kilometers along a line running parallel to the Northern Black Sea coastline served as military bases securing this outer defence line as well as the east-west flow of trade. Some of these famous fortresses located in today's Ukraine are Hotin, Bender, Küçükistanbul ("Small Istanbul" in Kamanets Podilski), Ismail and Akkerman. This entire system gradually collapsed through a series of defeats the Ottoman forces suffered, and eventually, the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji practically brought an end to it. However, the 1854-56 Crimean War was a manifestation of the continuing conflicts in the Region amongst the two major Black Sea powers, Russia and the Ottoman Empire, also involving other major European powers such as Great Britain, France and Sardinia. This Ottoman security doctrine of defending the economic, military and political stakes of the Empire at an outer-most periphery was considered at the time as a working system promoting economic activity in the Region as well as preserving peace and stability. Needless to say, this strategy also invited the development of counter-strategies in an urge to balance and eventually replace this imperial power, hence the growth of Russian influence...

Cold War and Post-Cold War Years: Emergence of a New Political Architecture in the Black Sea Region and Developments in Turkey's Focus

Upon a superficial look, one may conclude that not much of this basic texture has changed over time. Indeed, regardless of the birth of new independent states after the collapse of the Ottoman and the Russian Empires and the Soviet Union, the nature of the conflicts and basic

¹ The article is based on a statement delivered by the author at the 10th Black Sea Security Program Regional Workshop organized at the Kadir Has University in Istanbul by the Harvard Kennedy School, 3-5 October 2011.

elements of security strategy, as well as the large ground covering immense common interests, have more or less remained intact. However, at the same time there has been a profound transformation of the political architecture of the Region: the Euro-Atlantic area was significantly enlarged during the post-Cold War with the inclusion of Eastern Europe and most of the Balkan countries, other Northern Black Sea and Caucasus countries also entering into close partnership relations with it. Other characteristics defining this new terrain were skyrocketing economic stakes in oil and gas, new forms of security threats in the form of terrorism and non-conventional warfare, and perhaps most importantly, new elements such as democratic values, human rights and rule of law started to be included in the modern definition of security. Thus, the new scope and political architecture of this enlarged area truly represented a historic transformation. Religious and ethnic controversies have always been part of this frame.

Turkey's central role continues to be a major component of the new political architecture in today's multi-faceted and challenging reality. This central role has become more pronounced in the broadened definition of the boundaries of the Euro-Atlantic interests and the consequent engagements encompassing the Caucasus and the Central Asian Turkic states, with a gradual build-up of implications for the Near and the Middle East as well. Fuelled by the expectations and aspirations to "play the role-model", Turkey's involvement and responsibilities hugely enhanced in the Region. Uniquely situated as a country belonging to the same language group and the same cultural and racial background defining this new vast and relatively unchartered area, but also identified with the Euro-Atlantic institutions, Turkey found itself in a much more broadened regional world than in the Cold War – its role and responsibilities probably exceeding those in the Ottoman times. Interestingly enough, this new domain did not develop as a consequence of imperial interests or conquests, but in the form of new tasks Turkey was now expected to carry out as a result of those profound regional developments. Indeed, Turkey's longest past in democratic experience in the Region, together with its secular regime, constituted a unique potential which might serve as a rich source of inspiration for the future aspirations of various countries that were overwhelmed by the urgency of "removing" their Sovietic past.

Turkey adapted well and fast to the emerging needs of the Region both during and after the Cold War, always bridging the Euro-Atlantic values and interests with the regional ones. In this connection, it is important to remember not only Turkey's membership in the NATO, Council of Europe, OECD or the OSCE from the very inception of these organizations as well as its long-lasting relationship and customs union with the European Union, but also in the former organizations of the CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) and its economic version the RCD (Regional Cooperation and Development Organization)² in co-membership with Iran, Pakistan, Great Britain and the U.S. These organizations were dissolved in 1979 as a consequence of the Iranian revolution but the RCD was replaced in 1985 by the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization, seated in Tehran), this time leaving the Great Britain and the U.S. out.

Immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey took the initiative of establishing in 1992 the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) headquartered in Istanbul, inviting all Black Sea countries including Armenia with whom Turkey had no diplomatic relations. It was really at this time that Turkey's regional activities started intensifying in the north (Black Sea and the Caucasus) and in the east (central Asian

² CENTO was established in 1959 and headquartered in Ankara. RCD was established in 1964 and seated in Tehran.

CIS countries), clearly a shift from its previous focus in the south (Middle and Near East). Turkey was among the very first countries establishing diplomatic relations with the new CIS countries, as well as engaging in ambitious political, economic and cultural relations with them.

Turkey's bilateral trade with its immediate Black Sea neighbours rapidly expanded and it launched impressive investment and construction activities in the region. Turkish President Süleyman Demirel played a leading role in the conclusion of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline agreement ("Agreement of the Century") signed by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan in November 1999 at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul. This Agreement brought an entirely fresh dimension to Turkey's diplomatic and economic perspectives defining this country as one of the major candidates for the enormous new prospects for providing the east-west route for the flow of energy resources, thus a significant new role in its "bridging" missions and in energy security. In 2003 the Turkish national pipeline company BOTAŞ launched another initiative for a transit gas pipeline NABUCCO which would transport Caspian and Middle East gas to Europe. The NABUCCO agreements were eventually signed in Istanbul by Turkey, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania in July 2009. In the political plane, institutionalization of regular meetings of Turkish speaking countries' heads of states, establishment of the TURKPA Parliamentary Assembly of the same regional countries based in Baku, as well as of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) headquartered in Almaty, all served as other important initiatives promoting a security community in the region.

The Turkish Navy's initiation of collective maritime security measures in the Black Sea will be discussed later in this article in more detail.

Turkey's systematic efforts in creating an environment for dialogue and security in this totally new world constituted a singularly important input serving the interests of regional security, with extensive implications for Black Sea security. Therefore, when the second wave of dramatic developments took place in Afghanistan and in Iraq at the outset of the century, Turkey had already gone a long way in demonstrating its leadership promoting the creation of a security community in the Black Sea Region. All these new independent states having acceded to the OSCE and to the Council of Europe³, having established working ties with the NATO and with the EU, Turkey's relationship with these countries naturally carried the significant added value of being in a position to offer them the much-needed encouragement and guidance towards integration with those Euro-Atlantic institutions as well as playing the role model. Turkey's political leadership under Presidents Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel, who provided the visionary wisdom and the diplomatic machinery to skillfully execute this fairly difficult and sensitive mission, are to be commended highly.

New Prospects and Challenges Brought by the 21st Century as Turkey's Focus Shifts to the Middle East

The extent to which Turkey can sustain this role in the interest of Black Sea regional security depends much on domestic and external challenges and strategies. Obviously, it also requires political wisdom, vision and consistency at the domestic and international leadership levels, as well as the preservation of the high quality of the Turkish diplomatic machinery. A brief assessment of the recent developments will follow in terms of some selected topics.

³ The Central Asian Countries did not accede to the CoE.

However, it should immediately be noted that the intensity of Turkey's focus on Black Sea security matters seems to have lasted for slightly longer than a decade and shifted towards the Southern Middle East Arab region since last mid-decade following the NATO and Allied interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Prospects: Can Turkey Play New Roles?

Democratization: Turkey's post-Second World War role in the *military* security of the Region came into being by its NATO membership in 1952 as the eastern-most flank of the Euro-Atlantic defence system against potential military threats during the Cold War. Turkey's current role during the post-Cold War period has probably become even more important with NATO's new definition of threats also including non-military challenges – para-military and terrorist threats, threats against democratic stability, and threats against the rule of law and human rights, all of which constitute outstanding concerns in the Black Sea Region. This new phenomenon therefore brings to mind a crucial regional role Turkey can potentially play in Euro-Atlantic security: a more determined approach towards a gradual achievement of security and stability in the Region through the promotion of democratic norms and values.

These norms and values are already binding references for the OSCE and CoE members of the Region and Turkey can certainly inspire not only the Black Sea or Central Asian CIS countries but also its neighbouring Arab nations. It is worth noting that most of the new independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia look to Kemal Atatürk's progressive and secular Turkey as their main source of inspiration for consolidating their status as the young, modern and proud members of the international community. This inspiration might have seriously influenced these countries' choice of affiliation with the Euro-Atlantic institutions. As for the Arab nations, it is no secret that the developments of the Arab Spring have unveiled similar aspirations and the Turkish Government immediately responded by publicly supporting these aspirations. Indeed, Turkey is closely watched (in the very literal sense of Turkish TV broadcasts enjoying highest ratings in these countries) by those peoples as a "relative in the family" who has succeeded adopting the universally recognized norms of democracy and rule of law. Turkey's contributions as a "role-model in the family" building on this momentum at this point in time, might serve in the long run as an invaluable instrument mutually for the Euro-Atlantic security as well as for the progress, stability and prosperity of Arab peoples.

Energy Security: Another significant area of Euro-Atlantic focus in the Region concerns energy security, a new element of the post-Cold War regional economic and political architecture which entails securing alternative, secure and stable transport routes for oil and natural gas to European markets from eastern resources. Turkey has been involved proactively in this process from the very beginning of negotiations of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline Agreement of November 1999 (Istanbul) and the gas Pipeline NABUCCO agreements of July 2009 (Istanbul). Turkey, as a politically stable member of both Euro-Atlantic and Black Sea institutions and geographically situated at the crossroads between Europe and the Caucasus, must continue to be a major player in the search for the safest, economically most feasible and politically most reliable transport routes.

Protracted Conflicts: Still another Black Sea security issue which closely concerns Turkey involves the "protracted conflicts" of the Caucasus.

Immediately in the aftermath of the outburst of the military conflict in August 2008 between Georgia and Russia on the issues of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, Turkey offered the initiation of a Platform of Stability and Cooperation. Although the idea has not yet been transformed into action, the proposal is still on the table and it may always be reactivated at a more opportune moment.

Moreover, the long-lasting conflict of Nagorno-Karabagh is an issue in which Turkey has been even more systematically engaged, in efforts to negotiate a settlement. Apart from its involvement as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group dealing with the conflict, the courageous initiative the Turkish Government took in 2009 in signing the Geneva Protocols of Normalization of Bilateral Relations with Armenia raised new hopes for a breakthrough towards the settlement of this crisis. This unique opportunity should not be allowed to stop at a dead end.⁴ Indeed, prospects for Turkey's normalization of its relations with Armenia carry an indisputably interesting incentive for this economically and geographically isolated country. Therefore Turkey's leverage in the Region particularly as a democratically stable neighbour and a singularly important economic partner should be well estimated by the parties of the conflict and by the international community in the search for a settlement. However, it would be politically unrealistic to anticipate, as it was the case immediately after the signing of the Protocols, that Turkey could agree to proceed further in the process in the absence of any progress towards the liberation of 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory currently under Armenian occupation.

Challenges

Having reviewed Turkey's past and present role as well as possible new prospects in creating a Euro-Atlantic security community, this analysis would not be complete without considering certain challenges facing Turkey in pursuing such missions and new roles.

External Challenges: In order that those missions could achieve their objectives, it would be fair to anticipate that they are also recognized and supported by the leading Euro-Atlantic powers, a *sine quo non* which would also require the re-examination of some aspects of the Euro-Atlantic perceptions about Turkey.

EU: Obviously, a significant challenge involving the European Union is linked to the strategic decision the EU must eventually make about having a large muslim population as a member of its Community. This may also very likely be the key to the definition of the EU's vision about its own future role in world politics.

U.S.: The United States, too, should reconsider its recent perception of Turkey as a "model moderate islamic country". In the opinion of practically all Turks and all Turkish political parties, this definition is both utterly wrong and counter-productive because although the overwhelming majority of the Turkish population is muslim and they had never thought they were "moderately" or otherwise muslim (nobody knows what "moderately muslim" really means), the country is constitutionally secular, therefore it is neither "islamic" nor "moderate islamic", nor could it constitute a "model" on that basis. It is widely believed in Turkey that labeling Turkey as a "model moderate islamic country" in complete ignorance of all its hard-won assets as a secular country would almost imply undoing all the legendary secular reforms achieved under Kemal Atatürk's leadership and it might also send entirely

⁴ Protocols are pending ratification in both Armenia and Turkey.

wrong messages to the international community: For the EU, the issue of a country in accession being highlighted for its “different” religious and “therefore cultural” background would only add to the already existing problems of popularly accepting this candidate country as “one of them”; for the Caucasus and Central Asian countries, it would take away all the reasons of inspiration felt by those nations for the Turkish Republic’s 88 year-old secular and modern background; and for the muslim Arab peoples, the introduction of the concept of “moderate” islam would bring a chilling, confusing and alienating effect in their feelings for their Turkish brothers in Islam, former holders of the Office of the Caliph.

Needless to say, preservation of the foregoing attitudes in the Euro-Atlantic Community would only end up being counter-productive for Turkey in the pursuance of its possible democratic leadership missions in the Region.

The Montreux Regime and Black Sea Security: Turkey has been a central actor in the major regional security arrangements of the post First World War. One very important landmark is the Montreux Convention of 1936 regulating passage between the Black Sea and the Aegean through the Turkish straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. In essence, this Convention provides free passage for non-military maritime activity but limits military passage, tasking Turkey with the execution of its provisions. The idea is to restrict non-littoral navy presence in the Black Sea and also check the passage of Black Sea navies through the Turkish straits down to the Aegean Sea and beyond. This Convention has served as an ingenious international instrument for the security of the Black Sea *as well as* for the Aegean, by way of preventing the escalation of a military competition, even though the major naval forces were sometimes unhappy about Turkey’s role executing its provisions.

In that sense, Turkey has been occasionally challenged by both littoral and non-littoral states. From Turkey’s point of view, however, preservation and enforcement of those restrictions have been considered a vital national and regional security safeguard and any challenges raised against those provisions would be responded to in the most determined manner. This vital regional and national security issue from Turkey’s point of view was once defined in the following words in 1947 by General Kazım Karabekir, then Speaker of the Parliament and the former commander of Turkey’s eastern front against occupying Russian forces in the 1920s: “Turkish Straits are the throat of this Country, just as the eastern frontline provinces of Kars and Ardahan constitute the backbone of its body”. This was a historically popular reaction to the Russian threat those days against Turkey’s determined attitude in executing the restrictive provisions of the Convention in the face of Moscow’s pressure to make a more favourable use of passage for its navy through the Straits. In time, with the huge increase in the number of free passage of commercial vessels and the emerging phenomenon of the transportation of enormous quantities of gas and oil, Turkey’s concerns regarding the safety of the Straits were multiplied many-fold in view of new navigation and environment problems.

Meantime, pressure for flexing the restrictive rules regarding the passage of military vessels continued on and off. Most recently, similar concerns were raised by the United States supported by some Black Sea governments early this century. The justification was to strengthen the fight against escalating terrorist threat and to upgrade the capabilities of the NATO naval forces in the Black Sea. The Russian Federation strongly opposed this idea and Turkey, although a NATO member, also had strong reservations on the grounds that accommodating such requests would amount to a violation of the Montreux Convention and furthermore, the safety of the Black Sea against terrorist threats was actually secured within

the framework of the Convention, the Turkish Navy for one being actively engaged in operations such as the Blackseafor and Black Sea Harmony.

The Blackseafor (Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Force), initiated by the Turkish Navy in 2001 and joined by the Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian and Romanian Navies, was the first such joint cooperation mechanism for maritime security in the Black Sea. The Blackseafor was followed by another initiative by the Turkish Navy in 2004, namely Operation Black Sea Harmony, which was launched as a twinning operation of the Mediterranean Active Endeavour and was joined by the Russian, Ukrainian and Romanian Navies although all Black Sea littoral navies are still invited to join. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the NATO in the meantime also raised NATO presence in the Black Sea and parties eventually felt that many of their concerns were being addressed.

The issue, however, may still be revived in the future, which is a standing concern for Turkey who has consistently defended the word and the spirit of the Montreux Convention successfully, although not always fully satisfying all parties concerned. It should be noted that during the harshest times of the Cold War the Black Sea remained peaceful, the situation is much better now, and Turkey will always be more than appreciative of the understanding and support from the international community for its efforts.

Internal Challenges: Apart from those external issues, the following problems facing Turkey in this domain are self-rooted.

Prioritization of Democratization Objectives in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Turkish administrations, its political parties, civil society and mass media have not yet fully recognized the crucial leadership mission Turkey can play in promoting the Euro-Atlantic democratic values in the Region. This “mission” has yet to acquire due strategic foreign policy priority, just as it was recently declared in connection with the developments of the “Arab Spring”. This last one, personally voiced and followed up by Prime Minister Erdoğan, was almost the first such example of a foreign policy move given top priority but it remains to be seen if this move will not constitute an isolated case. Indeed, although Turkey always set the example of a country representing the Euro-Atlantic values in its relations within the Region and always adopted a guiding role for the new independent states of the Region in the process of their accession and adaptation to the Euro-Atlantic institutions, it almost never went so far as to actively and systematically engage in promoting the institutional values of the Euro-Atlantic. Some exceptions have been the Government’s seconded international officers in the OSCE and its contributions particularly to democratic policing and fight against trafficking. It may now be the right time for Turkey to identify and attribute high priority to a foreign policy objective to systematically engage in playing a lead role promoting a wider range of Euro-Atlantic norms and values in the Black Sea Region and in Central Asia just as it has been declared for the Middle East.

In the same vein, if Turkey is to set a foreign policy objective as a role model in this domain, it should review some of its own deficits in complying with the requirements of rule of law and urgently rectify some shortcomings particularly believed to be currently handicapping the judicial system of the country with adverse repercussions on human rights

PKK Terrorism: Finally, problems inflicted in Turkey by the terrorist organization PKK continue to constitute a grave security threat with trans-boundary implications. It would be plain commonsense to conclude that unless its own main security issue is settled, Turkey

will always feel handicapped in sufficiently playing its roles in promoting security in the Region, a situation which would hardly serve the interests of members of the Euro-Atlantic Community.

Conclusions

Turkey has always been a major actor in European security. Its critical role in serving the Euro-Atlantic security has its roots in the Cold War. Stemming from those roots and developed with the birth of a new political architecture in the wider Euro-Atlantic security zone including the Black-Sea and CIS Countries in the post Cold-War period, Turkey has assumed exceptionally responsible new roles unprecedented in its history. The central role-model mission thus came to be attributed to Turkey is really a product of its Euro-Atlantic identification and its cultural, ethnic and geographical commonality with the new members of the Region. Responding to the needs and anticipations of this unique situation, Turkey has engaged in a series of systematic efforts to extensively promote bilateral and multilateral relations with the new countries of the Region, bridging in the process the basic interests and values of the Euro-Atlantic Community with those of the new members of the Region. The success of those efforts have yet to stand the test of time and will depend upon Turkey's determination in the continuation of its past policies as well as in its assumption of new leadership roles.

In pursuing these policies Turkey will be faced by external and internal challenges. In view of the historically significant responsibilities and stakes involved, both Turkey and its international partners should spare no efforts in solidarity towards the achievement of their goals in the further development of the Euro-Atlantic Community. It is no secret that there is a long way to go before fully accomplishing the mission but in view of the impressive achievements already recorded, there is every reason to believe that the potential for success and the stakes involved largely outweigh the challenges in the final analysis, making every effort worthwhile.