

## *Chapter 20*

# **Turkey's Changing Role After the Cold War: From Ideational to Civilizational Geopolitics**

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The two years between November 1989 and December 1991 radically changed international politics. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union set the beginning of the end of the post-World War II order, which had been characterized by deterrence and bipolarity. The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era in world politics. The removal of the Iron Curtain in particular fuelled hopes about a democratic future and the end of bloc thinking. Francis Fukuyama enthusiastically proclaimed the “end of history” in Europe and the beginning of a liberal era.<sup>1</sup> A year later, as German unification was being wrapped up, President George H.W. Bush declared the beginning of a “new world order,” one characterized by international cooperation. By 1995, discussions on the “end of the nation state” and the beginning of a “borderless age” became popular.<sup>2</sup>

In ensuing years, however, it became increasingly clear that borders had not disappeared and the divisions of the world had not been overcome. Instead, boundaries were being redefined. Geopolitical considerations became influenced by debates on ethnic and religious identities, gradually replacing political ideology and bloc thinking.

Turkey was among the countries significantly affected by the end of the bipolar world system. With the end of the Cold War, Ankara not only suddenly found itself in the center of a destabilized neighborhood ridden by various ethnic conflicts, it also struggled with the redefinition of its own identity and place in international politics.

The tectonic shifts in Turkey's immediate neighborhood between 1989 and 1992 confronted Ankara with multiple challenges. In 1989, Turkey had to deal with an influx of more than 360,000 ethnic Turkish refugees from Bulgaria who were expelled by the communist Zhivkov regime. In 1990 the conflict between the Soviet Republics of Azerbai-

jan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh broke out. In August of the same year, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. As a neighboring state, Turkey was key for the implementation of the international embargo imposed on Iraq. In January 1991 the Gulf War broke out. Turkish air bases were crucial for the anti-Saddam coalition's air strikes against Iraq. In March 1991, more than 450,000 Kurds fled from Saddam Hussein's retaliation to the mountainous border region between Turkey and Iraq, leading to a major humanitarian crisis in Turkey's border regions. In summer 1991 Yugoslavia fell apart and the Balkan wars began. Turkey was confronted with an influx of Bosnian refugees. In December 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving Turkey with three newly independent and politically instable neighbors; Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Turkey initially had trouble adapting to this rapidly changing international environment. Removed from the enthusiasm of the Western allies about Europe's imminent reunification, Turkey became increasingly isolated and estranged. Once a Western military outpost at the borders of the Soviet Union, Turkey was now forced to redefine its own international role. In this regard, the 1990/1991 Gulf War marked a turning point. The months leading up to the 1991 international intervention redefined Turkey's geostrategic importance in a new area, not only in the eyes of its Western allies but also those of Turkish decision makers themselves. Developments in the immediate neighbourhood compelled Turkey to become active and more assertive in multiple regions.

Turkey became at the same time active in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and in the post-Soviet Republics in Central Asia. As Turkey was lacking economic and political capacities—the country was ravished by hyperinflation, political instability and the military fight against the Kurdish separatist PKK—Ankara's neighborhood strategy sought to capitalize on a common Ottoman history, common religious traditions, cultural affinities and kinship ties. Moreover, supported by the United States, Turkey tried to export its own secular and pro-Western model to the newly independent Turkic Republics of Central Asia.

The emphasis on kinship, religion and secularism in the neighborhood strategy further fueled Turkey's simmering domestic iden-

tity questions. A rising Kurdish movement and an emergent Islamist movement increasingly challenged the Kemalist (named after the founder of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) notion of nationalism and secularism.

Whereas most of the literature on the end of the Cold War deals with the repercussions on Central and Eastern Europe, this contribution puts the focus on a country at the European periphery. I argue in this chapter that in the era after the Cold War, the notions of “East” and “West” were being redrawn along civilizational lines. Turkey, a country with a Muslim majority but part of the Western bloc, has struggled with redefining its own identity as well as relations with its neighborhood and its Western partners. I argue that while the emphasis on Turkey’s Muslim–Turkish but secular identity first seemed to increase Turkey’s role in the neighborhood and also leverage its importance in the eyes of its Western allies, in the mid- and long run identity politics further increased estrangement between Turkey, Europe and the United States.

### **Turkey During the Cold War: A Frontier State Against Communism**

The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 entailed a radical break with the country’s Ottoman past. The young Republican regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk implemented an authoritarian modernization program that aimed at reconstructing state and society. Republican Turkey was modeled on the ideal of Western European nation states. Comprehensive political, legal and cultural reforms such as state-imposed secularization, the introduction of the Latin alphabet, and a language reform were accompanied by a foreign policy that was strongly orientated towards France and Britain. This Western orientation entailed a conscious turning away from the country’s Eastern neighborhood.

Tevfik Rüştü Aras, one of the first foreign ministers of the young republic, declared that “Turkey is now a western power—the death of a peasant in the Balkans is of more importance to Turkey than the death of a king in Afghanistan.”<sup>3</sup> As much as the young republic’s foreign policy orientation towards Europe was ideologically driven and aimed at establishing Turkey as a European power, it also represented a prag-

matic adaptation to the realities of the post-WWI era. After all, most parts of the neighboring Middle East had come under direct or indirect European rule and most of the policies affecting the region were made in Paris or London.<sup>4</sup> Parallel to the restoration of relations with former adversaries France and Great Britain, the young republican regime was careful to preserve friendly relations with its large neighbor, the Soviet Union. However, at the same time the Republican regime was eager to prevent any advancement of communism in Turkey.

At the end of WWII the Turkish government felt threatened by Stalin's call for a revision of the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits and claims on the two Turkish border provinces of Ardahan and Kars. The fear of a Soviet intervention drove Turkey closer to the United States. The Turkish government tried hard to be integrated into the emergent Western bloc. Washington first remained cautious, as it was wary of Turkey's reliability and also feared that any intervention in Turkey's favor could jeopardize the postwar peace settlement. However, efforts of the Turkish government proved successful when Soviet-American relations deteriorated in 1946. The same year, the Turkish government decided to introduce a transition from single party rule to multiparty democracy. In 1947, Turkey received a first grant of \$100 million under the Truman Doctrine to develop its military capacities.<sup>5</sup> In 1949, Turkey became a member to the Council of Europe and in 1952 it became a member of NATO. Integration with the alliance and European institutions was seen as an important guarantee against the Soviet Union and the threat of communism, but at the same time, it was seen by the Kemalist elites as a confirmation of the country's aspired Western identity. Despite the fact that at that time Britain and France saw Turkey's role for the alliance mainly in a Middle Eastern defence context.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of NATO allies, Turkey's geographic location is what mainly counted. As the only NATO member bordering directly on the Soviet Union, controlling the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits and commanding a large standing army, Turkey represented an important outpost at the Alliance's southeastern flank.

Turkey's relations with its communist neighbors such as Bulgaria in the West and the Soviet Union in the East were restricted by the framework of the Cold War. Relations with the Middle East remained

rather weak. Ankara acted as a status-quo power in the Middle East. The Baghdad Pact signed in 1955 between Turkey, Great Britain and the pro-Western governments of Iraq, Iran and Pakistan was to establish a defensive regional organization to contain leftist revolutionary regimes and to preserve the status quo in the region. Turkey was motivated to contain Arab nationalism at its doors, because Arab nationalist regimes were seen as providing a gateway for Soviet influence. Ankara also believed that cooperation and alignment with the policies and the security interests of the United States and Great Britain would establish Turkey's credibility as a reliable ally. Alignment with the West went so far as that Turkey voted in 1956 in the UN General Assembly against Algeria's independence.<sup>7</sup>

Alignment with Western interests, however, neither leveraged Turkey's importance within NATO nor furthered its role in the Middle East. Many allies still doubted Turkey's commitment to Western security and most Arab regimes thought that Turkey acted like a "henchman of Western imperialism."<sup>8</sup>

The 1962 Cuban missiles crisis highlighted Turkey's dilemma. The Kennedy administration's secret deal with the Soviet Union in order to de-escalate the crisis included a swap. In return for the withdrawal of Soviet nuclear weapons from Cuba, the United States removed nuclear missiles based in Turkey. The fact that decisions concerning Turkey's security were made over its head increased the feeling of being a second-class NATO member and raised suspicions about Washington's commitment to Turkey's security. But Ankara hardly had any alternatives.

In view of the rise of leftist tendencies within Turkey, right-wing parties regarded NATO membership as an instrument to contain communism and Soviet influence in the country. The fear of communism also helped build peculiar domestic alliances in favor of NATO. Even Islamists and right-wing nationalists joined the domestic pro-NATO front. In the 1960s the fear of communism went so far that Islamists accused anti-NATO protesters as of being un-Islamic and of spreading communist thought.<sup>9</sup> One can argue that throughout the Cold War, Turkey's role as a NATO member shaped perceptions of national interest and in a broader sense national identity.<sup>10</sup>

## Changing Priorities in a Radically Evolving Neighborhood

The chain of events beginning with Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* that led the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union radically transformed Turkey's immediate neighborhood. Once the most Eastern outpost of the Western bloc, Turkey now found itself in the middle of a region in flux—one characterized by various political crises and ethnic conflicts with major repercussions for Turkey's own stability. Thus, for Turkey the end of the Cold War entailed the end of a certain predictability and regional stability. What came was just the opposite: a rise of uncertainty and regional instability.

Parallel to the rise of instability in and around Turkey, NATO allies seemed utterly fixated on the stabilization of Central and Eastern Europe. Turkey had drifted to the margins of their agenda. As a result Ankara feared a downgrading of Turkey's geostrategic role. In view of these developments many Turkish policy makers felt nostalgia for the days of the Cold War when Turkey had its clearly defined role and "when the East was East and the West was West and never the twain should meet."<sup>11</sup> Ankara entered a difficult process of soul searching, assessing alternative geostrategic options.<sup>12</sup>

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 challenged the emergent, yet fragile post-Cold War world order and at the same time represented a historical moment for its configuration. In retrospect, America's response to Saddam Hussein's naked aggression represented an important opportunity for Turkey to redefine its geostrategic role. In this process, President Turgut Özal played a crucial role. Appointed by the military after the coup of 1980 as minister of economy, Özal had been in charge of neoliberal reform policies and Turkey's transition to liberal market economy. In the first elections after the coup, held in 1983, Özal won with his newly established Motherland Party an overall majority. In 1989, he was elected by parliament as president of the republic. Turgut Özal was the first to break with Turkey's foreign policy tradition of a cautious and restrained approach towards the neighborhood. He was ready to take risks. Against the advice of the Turkish military leadership, the foreign ministry, the resistance of cabinet ministers and strong public opposition—according to a survey 70 percent of the people asked opposed Turkey's active involvement

in a war—Özal decided to place Turkey at the forefront of the emergent international coalition acting against Saddam Hussein. Despite of high inflation and the negative effects of an embargo, Özal reassured President Bush of Turkey's support for the embargo imposed on Iraq and even offered to provide troops.<sup>13</sup> In the months leading up to the military intervention, Özal became a frequent interlocutor of Bush—giving the president insights and assessments about developments within Iraq, the capacities and the motivation of Iraqi armed forces and Saddam Hussein's psyche. In that time, Turkey also opened an informal channel between Washington and Tehran. Özal was able to assure Bush of Iranian President Rafsanjani's approval and even indirect support for the war on Saddam Hussein.<sup>14</sup>

As Iraq's neighbor and a major trading partner, Turkey was crucial for building economic and military pressure on Baghdad. Turkey joined the embargo and closed the two oil pipelines leading from Iraq into the Turkish harbor of Yumurtalik, deployed military forces at the border and opened the Incirlik base for air operations from Turkey. While the closing of the pipelines increased the economic pressure, the provision of the air bases to the U.S.-led international coalition enabled the opening of the northern front and enhanced military pressure on Saddam Hussein.

After the war, in spring 1991, faced with a growing number of Kurdish refugees at the Iraqi-Turkish border, Ankara mobilized Washington. Together with British Prime Minister John Major, Turgut Özal was able to convince President Bush of the humanitarian crisis at the Turkish-Iraqi border, and that a "massacre of the Kurds by the Iraqi army could turn the victory in the war into a debacle for the West."<sup>15</sup> In April 1991, the UN passed resolution 688 which enabled the allied forces to establish safe havens on Iraqi territory. The ensuing Operation Provide Comfort started protecting Iraqi Kurds and delivering aid. This also entailed the establishment of a no-fly zone north of the 36th parallel, enforced by U.S., British and French air forces. President Özal suggested to send Turkish troops into northern Iraq, but Bush, who was critical of any boots on Iraqi ground, turned down his offer.<sup>16</sup> Operation Provide Comfort laid the basis for the establishment of the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Northern Iraq (KRG).

Özal's active role in the Gulf War highlighted Turkey's new geo-strategic role and initiated a more assertive Turkish neighborhood policy. In contrast to its role during the Cold War, when Turkey was a backbencher of international politics, it suddenly became catapulted to its forefront.<sup>17</sup> Turkey began to reimagine its geostrategic importance. In contrast to the Cold War, its new role was no longer that of playing a "military obstacle" vis-a-vis a Soviet offensive into Europe, but one of fulfilling such a task in regard to aggression emanating from the Middle East.<sup>18</sup>

President George H. W. Bush's visit to Turkey in July 1991, the first of a U.S. President since that of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1959, was to honor Turkey's new role. Bush's visit was to be later followed by Bill Clinton's visit in 1999, that of George W. Bush in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2009 and 2015. The sequence of visits of U.S. presidents highlights that from the Gulf War on, Turkey gradually came to play a central role in U.S. strategies towards the Middle East.

Turkey's new activism in the region initially remained within the confines of Western policies. Turkey only became assertive where its assertiveness was in line with its Western allies, and especially the United States. This was also the case in the Balkans—even though the bloody Yugoslav wars of secession posed a new and different challenge to Turkey.

## **The Rise of Identity Politics**

The end of the Cold War signaled a shift from ideology based to identity-based politics. The crisis in the Balkans caused by the violent falling apart of Yugoslavia represents one of the most important developments in this shift. Slobodan Milošević's speech in Kosovo in 1987, where he incited Serbian nationalism with references to the Ottoman conquest and at the expense of the autonomy of majoritarian Muslim Albanians, set the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia.

In the beginning, Turkey refrained from any direct involvement in the developments in the Balkans. Ankara waited and watched what positions Europe and the United States would take.<sup>19</sup> However, the Turkish public became increasingly concerned with the fate of Muslim communities in the Balkans. Many Turks had family ties with Muslims



in the Yugoslav Republics of Bosnia, Macedonia, and Kosovo, as well as Albania. Passivity in regard to the massacres on Muslims in Bosnia incited indignation among many Turkish citizens. Moreover, the events became instrumentalized by an emergent Islamist movement. The Refah Party's discourses depicted the sufferings of European Muslims in civilizational terms, as part of a new world order that is characterized by Western (Christian) hegemony and the repression of Muslims. The pictures of the genocidal massacres had a deep effect on Turkish society, much beyond Islamist constituencies. Fundraising for the Muslim brethren in Bosnia and demonstrations for Turkey's active involvement were expressions of solidarity with developments in the Balkans. President Özal also pressed for a more active Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkan crisis, however meanwhile his party had lost the majority in parliament and the president and his foreign policy positions became rather isolated. Despite growing pressure, the new Turkish government's stance towards the Yugoslav wars in general and especially Bosnia remained observant and cautious.

Turkey's policies changed only when Western policies shifted in 1992. The Turkish government only recognized the independence of the former Yugoslav republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after the United States and the European Community did in April 1992.<sup>20</sup>

Later, the Turkish air forces participated in reinforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia and deployed 100 soldiers to Zenica.<sup>21</sup> Between 1992 and 1995, Ankara contributed troops to the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), as well as to its successor the Implementation Force (IFOR), between 1995 and 1996 and then between 1996 and 2004 to the Szabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR). Turkey was also actively involved in NATO operations in Kosovo.

On the domestic level, the Balkan wars and the sufferings of Bosnian Muslims certainly supported the rise of the Islamist Refah Party (RP), which won the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara in the local elections of 1994. The Islamists also capitalized on growing social disparities and the decline of leftist parties. From the mid-1980s on, competing discourses of ethnic and religious identities, had gradually begun to replace economic struggle as the defining factor in political organization and protest.<sup>22</sup> The Refah Party combined in its political

messages the fight against inequality and injustice with religious references and a language of moral principles.<sup>23</sup> The RP propagated social justice based on Muslim solidarity. Their discourse moved religious references to the center of political debates.

In retrospect, one can hold that the sufferings of Bosnian Muslims during the Balkan Wars and the international community's inertia triggered a political discourse that would later position Turkey as a champion of the rights of oppressed Muslims in the world.

Since the early 1990s Islamism and an emergent Kurdish separatist movement were two identity-based political movements that would increasingly challenge the Kemalist political settlement.

The rise of the Welfare Party and the Kurdish question were not only expressions of the politicization of suppressed religious and ethnic identities, but they were also a result of the distorted distribution of wealth, resulting from a developing capitalist economy. The Islamist movement was supported by lower income groups and the Kurdish question emerged in Turkey's poorest and economically underdeveloped provinces.<sup>24</sup> The military conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish separatist PKK had flamed up in the 1980s and reached a climax in the 1990s. Most of the country's eastern and south-eastern provinces were under a state of emergency.

At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided Turkey with three new neighbors to its east: the independent former Soviet Republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ethnic conflicts among and within these countries and beyond had an immediate, destabilizing effect on Turkey. Many Turkish citizens are of Abkhaz, Circassian, Chechen or Georgian origin. Many of them have sympathized with the different conflict parties. Due to common ethnic origins, Turkey openly sided with Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but refrained from getting actively involved in any military conflict.

The newly independent Turkic Republics in Central Asia provided another new arena for Turkish foreign policy. Encouraged by the United States, Ankara entered with Russia and Iran into a race over influence in the region. Ankara hoped to capitalize on common ethnic grounds and expand its economic, cultural and political sphere of influence in Central Asia. Another objective was to explore new sources for energy

and decrease Turkey's dependence on Russian gas supplies. However, Turkey's ambitious Central Asia policies failed. Ankara underestimated Russia's continuing presence in the region, that is geographically and historically rather disconnected from Turkey and overestimated Turkey's own economic and political capacities as well as the strength of ethnic communalities.

At the same time, one can assert that Ankara's emphasis on ethnic and religious commonalities with neighboring regions reinforced domestic debates on Turkey's identity. However, the political scientist Hakan Yavuz rightly emphasizes that despite the fact that the emergence of new independent states in Central Asia and the war in Bosnia have played a role in the re-imagination of Turkish identity, during the 1990s, Turkish foreign policy continued to be mainly influenced by debates in Washington and in major European capitals.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Shift Towards Civilizational Geopolitics**

In his famous article on "The Clash of Civilizations," Samuel Huntington argued in 1993 that the divisions of the Cold War into a First, Second and Third World were no longer relevant. Instead, he predicted that the majority of conflicts in the new, post-Cold War world would occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. Samuel Huntington defines civilizations as "the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people."<sup>26</sup>

"The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."<sup>27</sup> In contrast to "class and ideological conflicts where the key question was 'Which side are you on?' and people could and did choose sides and change sides in conflicts between civilizations, the question is "What are you?" That is a given that cannot be changed'.<sup>28</sup> Although Huntington held that a civilization is defined by various core elements, religion was the constitutive factor in his conception. He contrasted a rather vaguely defined Western civilization with non-Western ones such as Confucian, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox that are all defined by religion. Moreover, the reduction of different traditions and

histories to a common religious background suggests monolithic and homogeneous cultural blocks and does not allow any kind of liminality and hybridity.

The political scientist John Agnew has highlighted that discourses on civilizational geopolitics categorize the world along the cultural civilizations to which people who inhabit these regions are thought to belong. These discussions have had a huge impact on Turkey's self-perception and its perception by others.

I argue that from the 1990s on, the Turkish political establishment began to position Turkey as a liminal state, underscoring its hybrid identity and its unique geography between the civilizational concepts of East and West as a meeting place for different cultures. As much as this strategy aimed at increasing Turkey's economic and political influence in these regions and guaranteeing energy supplies, it also hoped to leverage Turkey's strategic importance for its Western and especially European allies. An example of Turkey's conscious re-positioning in the framework of emergent civilizational geopolitics as a country that guarantees for European security and at the same time links the East to the West was President Özal's address to the Western European Union Parliamentary Assembly in Paris in 1991. In his speech he defined Turkey as "a drawbridge of Europe's fortress of contemporary civilization and its gateway to the Middle East."<sup>29</sup>

Özal's statement largely was in alignment with Washington's views. The Clinton Administration (1993–2001) saw Turkey as part of the European security architecture. Turkey was considered to be important for Europe's security, but in light of rising Islamism and Kurdish extremism it was also considered to be instable. Its secular character should therefore be stabilized through the anchoring within the EU. Consequently, the United States became an important advocate and promoter of Turkey's integration with the European Union. Ian Lesser argues that from Washington's perspective Turkey's integration with the EU was about more than its place in Europe and its positive effects on Turkey's stability, "it was about regional security and the development in the European periphery—and beyond."<sup>30</sup>

The European Union Summit of Lisbon in 1992 acknowledged Turkey's new geostrategic importance for the EU and called for the deepening of relations. Behind the scenes, the Clinton administration

strongly urged allied EU members to send positive signals towards Turkey. Within Europe, views on Turkey differed. While the UK and Italy supported Turkey's membership in so far as it would strengthen Europe's Atlanticism, others such as Greece, France, Denmark or Germany were rather critical of Turkey's potential accession.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, Turkey failed to undergo a profound democratization process. Turkey had experienced the transition to the market economy at the beginning of the 1980s, but economic liberalization was not accompanied by more political freedom. Turkey had difficulties in adapting to the emergent liberal democratic order. Turkish democracy still functioned within an authoritarian secular Kemalist framework guarded by the powerful military, suppressing Kurdish, Islamic and leftist political identities. The rise of Islamism and Kurdish nationalism even further hardened Kemalist authoritarian secularism.

While NATO allies often overlooked undemocratic developments in Turkey during the Cold War, Turkey's democracy deficit increasingly strained relations with the West in general but specifically with the EU in the post-Cold War era, when most former communist countries experienced the transition to democracy. In its ambition to become a member of the EU, Turkey fell behind the Central and Eastern European reform states.

The critique of Turkey's accession to the EU soon attained a culturalist notion highlighting Turkey's different, Islamic nature as the major obstacle for membership.

Whereas during the Cold War, the perception of political Europe had been identical with "free Europe" as opposed to "communist Europe," with the end of the bipolar world system, the conceptual definition of East and West changed.<sup>32</sup> Europe's boundaries were slowly redrawn along civilizational lines. In the following years, debates on civilizational geopolitics would increasingly overshadow other pro and con arguments in regard to Turkey's accession process.

Opponents as well as supporters of Turkey's membership to the EU would mainly refer to Turkey's Muslim identity and distinct geopolitical place and weaken Ankara's positioning as a hybrid country that bridges East and West. Whereas opponents referring to Turkey's Muslim identity doubted its Europeanness and problematized its location,

supporters highlighted Turkey's strategic importance for European security and its ability to combine Islam with democracy and market economy as strategic asset.

In 1997, European Christian Democrat parties, the major opponents of Turkey's accession, issued a joint declaration claiming that "the European Union is a civilization project and within this civilization project Turkey has no place."<sup>33</sup> In view of the negative messages emanating from European capitals regarding Turkey's accession, most parts of the Turkish public became convinced that the "the 'Iron Curtain' that once divided Europe was being replaced by a "cultural/religious iron curtain."<sup>34</sup> This time, however, Turkey seemed to have moved behind that curtain.

## Conclusion

The end of the Cold War marked a turning point for Turkey's international role. Although Turkish foreign policy continued to be influenced by policy strategies and debates in Washington and major European capitals, with the end of a bipolar world order Ankara gradually discovered its neighborhood. From the early 1990s on, Turkey tried to become more active and developed strategies toward multiple regions. Since Turkey lacked financial and political capacities, Turkish foreign policy emphasized emotional links through culture, kinship and religion. The strong emphasis on identity, had the effect that Turkey also gradually re-discovered its own Ottoman heritage. This did not take place without tensions. From the 1990s on Turkish domestic politics have been characterized by high polarization around identity issues. Debates revolve around the role of religion and the inclusion of non-Turkish ethnic identities such as Kurdish identity. Foreign and even more so the neighborhood policy have on the one hand mirrored these debates and on the other hand they have reinforced them. This also explains various contradictions in Turkish foreign policy.

While in the wake of the Cold War Ankara's foreign and neighborhood policy tried to present Turkish secularism as a model for Turkic states in Central Asia, this strategy was undermined by Ankara's own policies towards the Balkans, emphasizing a common Islamic and Ottoman heritage with local Muslim communities. From the early 2000s

on, Islamic and Ottoman references became dominant, while the promotion of Turkey's secularism lost traction.

On the one hand this reflected the power shift within Turkey—in 2002 the Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party came into power—on the other hand it also resonated with civilizational discourses in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. After 9/11, Turkey and its reformed Islamist ruling party served as a democratic anti-thesis to Islamist extremism à la al-Qaeda.

As much as civilizational geopolitics seemed to work in Turkey's favor—Turkey played a major role in the policies of both George W. Bush and Barack Obama towards the Middle East—it also gradually alienated Turkey from its Western allies. Turkey's accession to the EU seemed less and less likely and Turkey became increasingly active in the Middle East. However, Turkey's growing involvement in the Middle East was less the consequence of a strategic turning away from the "West," but rather an inevitable result of the fact that Turkey became increasingly isolated from European integration processes.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of Turkish foreign policy after 2002, positioned Turkey as the center of a cultural geography defined by the Ottoman Empire. Besides more economic and political activism in the Middle East, this also entailed increased cultural diplomacy. Ankara financed the renovation of Ottoman architectural sites across the region. This also included a stronger emphasis on Ottoman legacy within Turkey. The Islamic conservative government's neo-Ottoman policies were reflected in education, architecture, music, clothing and political rhetoric, causing many domestic controversies and furthering domestic political polarization.

Tarık Oğuzlu speaks in the context of Turkey's ever stronger involvement in the Middle East of the "Middle Easternization" of Turkish foreign policy. Oğuzlu highlights that not only Turkish foreign policy has been increasingly informed by political developments in the Middle East, but that internationally, Turkey as a country became increasingly defined through its importance for policies towards the Middle East.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore one can conclude that the end of the Cold War and the rise of civilizational debates had a huge impact on Turkey's self perception as well as on its relations with others. From 2010 on, Turkey's

relations with its Western partners and allies have been increasingly overshadowed by Tayyip Erdoğan's and the ruling Justice and Development Party's pan-Islamist, culturalist and populist anti-Western rhetoric. References to Ottoman grandeur and the emphasis of a common heritage with Muslim communities have been important to boost Erdoğan's and his party's international image as in the voice of a marginalized global Muslim community and such discourses have also shored up his and the party's support within Turkey. Today, thirty years after the end of the Cold War, Turkey has been hardly associated with a Western or European country, although still a NATO member and an official candidate for EU membership, Turkey has moved over the last years to the East. From the perspective of civilizational geopolitics, it has been perceived as a Middle Eastern power and a Muslim state.



## Notes

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