



## ALONE IN VIRTUE

THE “NEW TURKISH” IDEOLOGY  
IN TURKEY’S FOREIGN POLICY

Szymon Ananicz

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# Contents

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY /5**

**INTRODUCTION /7**

**I. THE “NEW TURKEY’S” IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS /9**

**1. AKP – the ideological successor of Millî Görüş /10**

**2. Ahmet Davutoğlu’s concept /14**

**II. THE NEW TURKISH IDEOLOGY IN PRACTICE /19**

**1. Circumstances /19**

**2. The “New Turkey” and the Middle East /24**

**3. Revising the alliance with the West /30**

**4. Towards global power status /34**

**III. THE NEW TURKISH IDEOLOGY AND TURKEY’S  
INTERNATIONAL STANDING /38**

**IV. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS /42**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Turkey's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been active and ambitious. In terms of its underlying assumptions and actual practices, it differs considerably from the policies that the Turkish Republic pursued in previous decades. However, the results of Turkey's policy are inversely proportional to its ambitions, and the country is becoming increasingly alienated on the international stage.
2. Once the West's ally, Turkey has been an ever more problematic partner in recent years. The Turkish leadership no longer views the alliance with the European Union and membership in NATO as based on shared values; rather, it is now merely a cherry-picked and shaky community of interests. It is also no longer underpinned by aspirations to civilizational development based on European norms and values, as it used to be. Turkey is drifting away from the West, which can be seen in the clear weakening of its political ties with the EU and the USA, ever more frequent misunderstandings and crises in mutual relations and the two sides' divergent positions on current challenges such as the war in Syria, the Islamic State problem or the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.
3. Turkey is also increasingly alienated politically in the Middle East. Ankara has been making consistent efforts to establish itself as a regional leader. This aspiration has not only been viewed as a matter of security or the economy, but also as a fulfilment of Turkey's historic mission and a prerequisite of the country's rise to the status of a global power. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the regional developments which followed, Ankara has lost much of the influence it had built in the Middle East and North Africa in previous years.
4. Turkey's growing international isolation is a consequence of the country ever more fully subordinating its foreign policy

to the ideology of the ruling AKP. The world vision offered by that ideology does not square with the diagnoses of Turkey's partners. The objectives it sets for Turkish foreign policy are incompatible with its partners' expectations. Moreover, a foreign policy rooted in ideology is less flexible and less capable of adjusting to current international dynamics.

5. AKP ideology has its roots in the conservative, anti-Western traditions of the Millî Görüş movement and the concepts developed by leading AKP politicians, especially the prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. At its core is a system of dogmas about Turkey's internal situation, its place in the world, its historical mission, and the evolution of the international relations. The ideology envisages a comprehensive reconstruction of society, the state and its foreign policy, with a view to making Turkey a modern global power, although rooted in its traditions. Initiating identity changes in Turkish society and injecting an ambition to the public to make Turkey a global power (boosting the so-called "national will") are supposed to be crucial for achieving this end.
6. Unless there is a change of leadership in Turkey (which is unlikely to happen in the coming years) or the state slips into deep instability, Turkey will continue to see the international situation through the lens of AKP ideology. This ideology will define the strategic objectives and suggest tactical solutions, even despite the failures of Turkey's foreign policy in the short term and its international alienation. Ibrahim Kalın, one of AKP's leading figures, has summed up this attitude in the phrase "alone in virtue".

## INTRODUCTION

When it came to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) embarked on a thorough reconstruction of the Turkish state, society and politics. The first two terms of the AKP government (2002-2011) brought about considerable modernisation and democratisation of the state, a calming down of the political scene in Turkey, rapid economic growth and unprecedented international activity. Those changes were appreciated in the West and led the EU and the United States to hope that the alliance and cooperation on international issues with Turkey could be strengthened.

Building a “New Turkey” has been the slogan of Turkey’s transformation in recent years. During this period, the AKP has considerably consolidated its grip on power and revised its policies, leading to a rise of authoritarianism in Turkey and the country’s growing alienation on the international stage. It was not merely the result of tactical errors on the part of Ankara or a temporarily unfavourable situation in Turkey’s surroundings. The processes in question have deeper roots – they are a consequence of the country’s policy being subordinated to the AKP’s ideology. In line with the slogan under which it is being implemented, it could be termed the “New Turkish ideology”.

At the moment there are no alternative politico-ideological projects in Turkey – nor are any emerging on the horizon – that could match the New Turkish ideology’s popularity, attractiveness, coherence or universality. Neither is there any political power (party or community) that could challenge the AKP’s monopoly on power in the coming years. Thus, the New Turkish ideology will likely remain the main guiding principle of Turkish policy.

This paper looks into the way in which Turkey’s foreign policy has been subordinated to the precepts of AKP ideology. The first part outlines the origins and the main currents of that ideology. The

second part discusses Turkey's efforts to implement this ideology in its foreign policy, especially towards the Middle East and the West, but also globally. The third part is a reflection upon the consequences that pursuing the AKP political ideology has had on Turkey's international standing.



## I. THE “NEW TURKEY’S” IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS

That part of the AKP’s political ideology, which directly influences its foreign policy, stems from two sources. Firstly, it draws on the ideas which the leading AKP politicians took from the conservative, anti-Western Millî Görüş community in which they started their political careers. Secondly, it is based on the concepts of foreign policy and global order dynamics developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu.

During its first two terms in power (2002–2011), the AKP leadership was to some extent influenced by the ideology of the Fethullah Gülen socio-religious movement (the so called *cemaat*), an ally of AKP’s which advocated Turkey’s integration with the EU, a close alliance with the United States and co-operation with Israel. However, in late 2011 a conflict broke out between the Turkish leadership and the Gülen movement and since that moment (and especially since December 2013) the *cemaat* has become marginalised and lost its influence on foreign policy. It will therefore not be analysed here.<sup>1</sup>

During the AKP government’s third term, the ideological profile of the AKP team and the diplomatic service also became much more homogenous. Those members of the party and the administration who did not agree with the interpretation of the New Turkish ideology imposed by the party leadership have been effectively marginalised and their influence on Turkey’s foreign policy is negligible today.

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Gülen movement see: Günter Seufert, Is the Fethullah Gülen Movement Overstretching Itself? A Turkish Religious Community as a National and International Player, SWP Research Paper, January 2014, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2014\\_RP02\\_srt.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2014_RP02_srt.pdf)

## 1. AKP – the ideological successor of Millî Görüş

When the AKP came to power in 2002 it had existed for just over one year. However, its founders and leaders, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (who would later become prime minister and subsequently president), Abdullah Gül (the future prime minister, foreign minister and president) and Bülent Arınç (future parliament speaker and deputy prime minister) had participated in Turkey's political life for years. They had very clear world visions, expectations about Turkey's place in the global order and a distinct vision of the foreign policy that Ankara should pursue. Their worldview was rooted in the ideology of the Millî Görüş movement to which they had belonged for most of their active political careers before they founded the AKP.

The Millî Görüş (or National Vision) movement was founded by Necmettin Erbakan in 1969 as a response to Turkey's forced social and cultural modernisation that started with the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and continued under his successors in the form of Kemalism. According to Millî Görüş members, at the roots of Turkey's problems were the Westernisation and abandonment of the Ottoman Empire's traditions and Islamic values. The movement sought to propose a new social order that would draw on such Western achievements as democracy, industrialisation and new technologies. But at the same time be strongly rooted in Turkey's culture and religion, and especially the traditions of the people of Anatolia, who had been kept on the margins of political life as a result of the Kemalist social engineering.

Millî Görüş rejected what had been the established line of Turkey's foreign policy since World War II. That policy line had been based on an alliance with the United States, regarded as a guarantee of security and protection from the Soviet threat (in practice it meant Turkey's subordination to Washington), as well as membership in NATO and aspirations to integrate with Western Europe. Relations with the Middle East were very limited, usually

frigid and subordinated to the United States' Cold War strategy. Millî Görüş members, including those who are in AKP today, were opposed to Turkey's integration with the West, which they identified with imperialism, exploitation and a threat to Islam. That vision had strong anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli overtones and was based on conspiracy theories according to which the Jews played a leading role in creating the West's destructive policies.

Millî Görüş representatives called for the development of closer relations with the Islamic world and for the creation of a just global order that would not be dominated by the United States. Turkey was supposed to play a leading, integrating role in creating that new order, just as the Ottoman Empire did *vis-à-vis* the subordinated peoples before the reform period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was supposed to bring about Western modernisation but, from the movement's point of view, contributed to the Empire's collapse.<sup>2</sup> Millî Görüş maintained close ideological, institutional and personal relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. Like the Brotherhood, it cherished the idea of pan-Islamism and its tenet of a community bringing together all Muslims irrespective of their adherence to the different currents of Islam (Sunni, Shia, or Sufi), above political divisions. This attitude permitted the movement to take a positive view of the Islamic revolution in Shia-dominated Iran.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The call for a return to the Ottoman Empire's tradition was in effect a veiled form of advocacy for a re-Islamisation of Turkey. The Kemalist establishment treated promoting Islam as a threat to the constitutional order and imposed repression against those involved. This is why the Millî Görüş community promoted Ottoman traditions as "cover" for their aspirations to re-Islamise Turkey. Over time, however, the Ottoman nostalgia became important on its own. M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Millî Görüş and the Muslim Brotherhood first established close relations in Germany where the former reached the peak of its institutional development during the period when Erbakan was an *émigré* in Germany. Erbakan was strongly influenced by the Brotherhood's ideology, including its theology, anti-Semitism and contempt for the West. Personal links were also established between Millî Görüş and the Brotherhood: Erbakan's niece married Ibrahim El-Zayat, the chief of the Brotherhood's German branch. For

The movement's vision found its fullest reflection in Turkey's policy when Erdogan was prime minister in the years 1996–1997. In that period Ankara strove to establish close relations with Iran, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, all sharing a hostile attitude towards the West and Israel. It even sought rapprochement with Libya, then under sanctions for terrorism, and to this end concluded an agreement with Tripoli on co-operation in the fight against terrorism.<sup>4</sup> In that period the most populous Muslim states, acting on Erdogan's initiative, established the D8 organisation with a view to creating a counterbalance to the G7.<sup>5</sup> The Turkish prime minister's list of foreign visits was filled up almost exclusively with Muslim destinations and did not include a single Western state. On taking power, Erdogan pledged to loosen the ties with NATO, dismantle the Turkish-EU customs union, withdraw from the informal alliance with Israel and quit the United Nations. He did not manage to deliver on these promises because his position in the ruling coalition was not strong enough for that (and also for pragmatic reasons – he feared the political consequences).<sup>6</sup>

more information on the links between Millî Görüş and the AKP on the one hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other, see: Steven G. Merley, Turkey, the Global, Muslim Brotherhood and the Gaza Flotilla, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2011. [http://www.jcpa.org/text/Turkey\\_Muslim\\_Brotherhood.pdf](http://www.jcpa.org/text/Turkey_Muslim_Brotherhood.pdf)

- <sup>4</sup> Ideological reasons were particularly important here. Speaking at a joint press conference with Erdogan, Muammar Gaddafi backed the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which was in a state of war with Turkey at that time. Despite that, Erdogan wanted to co-operate with Libya and pursue the idea of a Muslim coalition.
- <sup>5</sup> The D8 members, aside from Turkey, were Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria and Pakistan.
- <sup>6</sup> For more information on the Erdogan government's foreign policy see: Alan Makovsky, How to deal with Erdogan, Middle East Quarterly, March 1997, Vol. 4, No. 1, and Galip Dalay, Dov Friedman, The AK Party and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam's Foreign Policy, Insight Turkey, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2013. [http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/20130415155719\\_15\\_2\\_2013\\_dalay.pdf](http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/20130415155719_15_2_2013_dalay.pdf). For more information on Necmettin Erdogan and Millî Görüş see: David Vielhaber, The Milli Görüş of Germany, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Vol. 13, 2012, <https://HUDSON.ORG/content/researchattachments/attachment/1268/vielhaber.pdf>

Erbakan and his aides repeatedly faced repression for undermining the foreign and internal policy paradigm in force in Turkey because the Kemalist establishment, and especially the military, viewed Millî Görüş as a threat to the constitutional order and the secular nature of the state. As part of the repressive measures, Erbakan's successive parties were banned and in 1997 his government was forced to resign under pressure from the military.<sup>7</sup> The crackdowns against Millî Görüş were often approved of by the United States, which strengthened the conviction that there existed a Kemalist-Western alliance against the conservative communities in Turkey.

The politicians who later became AKP leaders, including Erdoğan, Gül and Arınç, were actively involved in developing and implementing the policies of Erbakan's party, even in the face of persecution, which shows their ideological commitment and determination at the time.<sup>8</sup>

However, it would be an oversimplification to say that they have been continuing the movement's policy. When founding the AKP, they distanced themselves from the anti-Western rhetoric, declared they would aspire to membership in the EU, did not put as much focus on the importance of Islam as Erbakan had done, and were not hostile towards Israel. It is an open question whether this "pro-Western" turn was a genuine geopolitical and civilizational choice, or a tactical manoeuvre intended to serve the purposes of internal politics (expanding the potential electorate and eliminating the military from politics), the economy and foreign policy. The motivations of AKP politicians that have been behind Turkey's gradual turning away from the EU in recent years are also a subject of debate: is the turn the effect of the absence of any

<sup>7</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was a member of Erbakan's party at that time and had been elected the mayor of Istanbul from its slate, was also forced to step down and subsequently imprisoned for publicly reciting an Islamic poem.

<sup>8</sup> Abdullah Gül, who later became prime minister, foreign minister and president designated by the AKP, was Erbakan's chief foreign policy advisor.

real possibility to integrate with the EU, or rather a manifestation of the AKP's genuine worldview preferences? Or maybe it reflects an evolution in the Turkish leaders' thinking: from pro-European attitudes towards scepticism?<sup>9</sup> In any case, the fact that Turkey's policy during the AKP's third term in power has been increasingly in keeping with the old precepts of Millî Görüş proves that the party is strongly rooted in that tradition.<sup>10</sup> Even if the AKP does not take direct political guidance from the movement's ideals, they do constitute an important element in the party's mentality and worldview, and at least partly explain its scepticism towards the West, aversion to Israel, nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire and aspirations for Turkey to become the leader of the Islamic world. Furthermore, the conviction that the United States supported the Turkish military in its repressions against Millî Görüş reinforces the distrust towards the West displayed by AKP politicians today.

## 2. Ahmet Davutoğlu's concept

The Millî Görüş ideology offers an insight into the general worldview of the AKP. However, it takes an analysis of the academic works of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the main architect of Turkey's foreign policy, to explain the ideological and theoretical underpinnings of Turkey's policy in more detail. Davutoğlu has been the main foreign policy advisor to the prime ministers Gül and Erdoğan, then served as the minister of foreign affairs (2009–2013), and has been the prime minister of Turkey since 2014. However, before starting

<sup>9</sup> Edelman, Cornell, Lobel and Makovsky suggest that even if the AKP politicians wanted Turkey's integration with the EU at some point, the change of mind was so shallow that they quite easily reverted to their original views once they encountered objective obstacles (including opposition from the EU). See Eric S. Edelman, Svante E. Cornell, Aaron Lobel, Michael Makovsky, *The Roots of Turkish Conduct: Understanding the Evolution of Turkish Policy in the Middle East*, Bipartisan Policy Centre, December 2013, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> The attachment to the Millî Görüş tradition was also visible in the attempts to incorporate into the AKP the direct successors of Erbakan's last party, including members of the Saadet party (and the HAS party), and in particular Numan Kurtulmuş (currently one of AKP leaders and advisor to the prime minister).

his political career, Davutoğlu was an academician. In that capacity he developed a comprehensive international policy concept and formulated a new vision for Turkey's foreign policy, including both theoretical foundations and specific practical recommendations.<sup>11</sup> It was because of his research that he was invited to join politics. This demonstrates how his concepts appealed to the AKP leadership. Davutoğlu enjoys special authority and is trusted by president Erdoğan. This has enabled him to progress so fast up the political ladder and implement his ideas, despite the fact that for a long time he did not have an established position in the party.

According to Davutoğlu's concepts, the bipolar Cold War world system, and the United States' hegemony which followed it, were a historical anomaly, a transitory period that is now coming to an end.<sup>12</sup> The international system is now entering a phase in which traditions, culture and historical heritage, i.e. what Davutoğlu calls "historical depth", will play a role alongside the traditional hallmarks of power such as geographical location, military might, economic prowess or demographic potential. In order to gain the status of a global power, a state needs to skilfully use all these elements. The global power status is reserved for a small number of "ancient powers", which, unlike the younger state entities, possess historical depth. Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, is counted among the ancient powers along with China, India, some European powers and others.

<sup>11</sup> The principal work in which Ahmet Davutoğlu explained his concepts is titled "Strategic depth" (*Stratejik Derinlik*) and its first edition was published in 2001. Since then, the book has had more than 40 editions in Turkey, which shows that the author still considers it to be significant and that the concepts presented in the book are popular in Turkey. There are two theories of why Davutoğlu has never let the book be translated into English. According to one, it was in protest against the dominance of the English language in research. According to the other, the author fears that the claims presented in the book could be too controversial for external readers and if they were published, it would be more difficult for the author to pursue his foreign policy.

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of the interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Yüzyıllık parantezi kapatacağız, Yeni Şafak*, 1.03.2013, <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/yazidizileri/yuzuyillik-parantezi-kapatacagiz-494795>

According to Davutoğlu, the Republic Turkey artificially cut itself off from its Ottoman heritage and, in contrast to the Empire, became an introverted state focused on its internal problems or divisions and conflicts with neighbours. This had its roots in the fact that external actors had imposed an international system on it that served their particular interests.<sup>13</sup> Ankara in that period had no strategy of its own, and was merely an instrument in the hands of the United States, serving the purposes of the US Cold War policy and subsequently, its pursuit of global hegemony. By focusing too much on integration with the European Union, it failed to take advantage of its potential stemming from its links with Asia and the Muslim world. Subordinating relations with the Middle East to its alliance with the West neither served Turkey's interests in the region, nor achieved the expected results, i.e. integration with the EU.<sup>14</sup>

Davutoğlu therefore calls for an end to the “peripheral mentality” in politics and urges an awakening of the “national will”, i.e. a self-assured ambition to make Turkey a global power.<sup>15</sup> In his view, Turkey has all that it takes, including a strategic geographic location at the intersection of many regions, thanks to which it can influence the entire “Afro-Eurasia”. It also has a large and dynamic population, a robust economy and a strong army. Finally, it can draw on the Ottoman heritage, which has the potential, thanks to its universalist nature, of peacefully attracting and uniting different nations and the Islamic world.<sup>16</sup>

In Davutoğlu's interpretation, Turkey maintains deep links with the West due to its geographic location and the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century alliance, but remains insurmountably separate from the

<sup>13</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, İstanbul: Küre Yayınları 2009, p. 558.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 262.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32-33.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41-44, 90-93.



Western world. That is because of the fundamental differences between the two sides, which date back to the origins of the European and Muslim civilisations.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, according to Davutoğlu, the Western civilisation has already reached the limits of its development potential and has “said everything it had to say”.<sup>18</sup>

At the tactical level, implementing Turkey’s global power strategy is supposed to involve the application of five principles formulated by Davutoğlu before he started his diplomatic career and implemented later on.<sup>19</sup> Firstly, in order to gain international legitimacy, Turkey must be a democratic state. Secondly, it should apply the rule of “zero conflicts with neighbours”, i.e. solve the problems in its relations with neighbours which undercut Turkey’s international standing (this concerns the unresolved Cyprus question, the frozen relations with Armenia, hostile relations with Syria, etc.). Thirdly, Ankara should develop closer co-operation with neighbouring regions and other parts of the world. To this end, it should act as a mediator between regional actors involved in conflicts and develop economic and cultural relations. Fourthly, it should pursue a multidimensional policy, i.e. avoid excessive dependence on any single international actor by developing complementary relations and alliances with other states and organisations. Finally, it should pursue a “rhythmic diplomacy”,

<sup>17</sup> In particular, those differences concern their ways of understanding reality and the role ascribed to God in the world. According to Davutoğlu, such notions as religion, state or parliament are mutually untranslatable and inexplicable in the two civilisations. Cf. the article prepared for the European International Studies Association conference in Warsaw in 2013; see İftar Gözaydın, Ahmet Davutoğlu: Role as an Islamic Scholar Shaping Turkey’s Foreign Policy, <http://www.eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/warsaw2013/Ahmet%20Davutoğlu.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> See the interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu on the condition of Western civilisation and the fundamental discrepancies between Western and Islamic civilisations. Kerim Balcı, Philosophical depth: a scholarly talk with the Turkish foreign minister, *Turkish Review*, 1.10.2010, [http://www.turkishreview.org/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=223051](http://www.turkishreview.org/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223051)

<sup>19</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10/No. 1, 2008. <http://arsiv.setav.org/ups/dosya/9595.pdf>

i.e. maintain active, regular and as-frequent-as-possible contacts with foreign partners and be involved in as many international forums as it can. In this respect, the aim of Turkish diplomacy is to focus on long-term measures and laboriously and consistently build its international image and position.

Most of Davutoğlu's works were written before he began his political career, in a different geopolitical reality, i.e. before Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbourhood disintegrated, before the war in Syria started and before Iraq broke up. Nevertheless, the Turkish prime minister consistently stands by his original observations about Turkish policy and the global order. Whenever he undertakes an attempt at self-reflection, he ends up even more convinced that his views are correct. Many of Davutoğlu's statements reveal a deep conviction that he has uncovered the essence of the dynamics of the current historical moment, or even the very laws of history. This is the source of his unfaltering faith that Turkey may become a global power, as long as it adheres to the principles outlined above, even if it appears to fail in the short term.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the interview with Davutoğlu in *Cairo Review*, 12.03.2012, available at: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr\\_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-\\_egypt\\_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-_egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa)

## II. THE NEW TURKISH IDEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

### 1. Circumstances

The process whereby Turkey's foreign policy has gradually become subordinated to the New Turkish ideology has been inextricably linked with the AKP leadership's wider plan for a comprehensive transformation of Turkey's identity, society and politics. It has gained momentum in recent years thanks to a favourable turn of the situation inside Turkey and internationally.

Turkey's domestic political scene has become dominated by the AKP. Opposition groups are weak, fragmented and cannot mount a serious challenge to the ruling party. The influence of the military and the old establishment, which traditionally were the guardians of the state's secularity and the pro-Western foreign policy course, has been minimised. All this has offered the Turkish leadership freedom to pursue a policy that most fully reflects its ideological profile.

Seeking to boost its popularity, the Turkish leadership has often resorted to populist, nationalist, Islamist, anti-Western and anti-Israeli slogans and gestures. It has been a self-propelled process: the slogans raised by the AKP leaders are taken up by an obliging media and the bureaucratic apparatus, and willingly accepted among public opinion, which traditionally tends to trust the authority of their leaders and, as a result, the leaders thereby became hostages to slogans formulated for more or less provisional use.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the unprecedentedly critical comments by the Turkish media on Turkey's membership in NATO and the problems that Turkey and the USA stumbled on when they tried to agree a position on how to counter the Islamic State. [http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/turkey-nato-polarized-membership.html?utm\\_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+\[English\]&utm\\_campaign=9b6dff3b23-October\\_30\\_2014&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_28264b27a0-9b6dff3b23-100877877](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/turkey-nato-polarized-membership.html?utm_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+[English]&utm_campaign=9b6dff3b23-October_30_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_28264b27a0-9b6dff3b23-100877877).

The human factor has played an important role here. Within the ruling party, power has been consolidating around Erdoğan, the long-time prime minister and current president, who displays an unshakeable self-confidence and views the internal situation and international affairs through the lens of the New Turkish ideology. With the help of the government-controlled (or self-controlling) media which dominate in the Turkish information space,<sup>22</sup> and also aided by the state apparatus, Erdoğan has been creating an image of himself as the nation's mentor whose role is not limited to effectively governing the state, but also includes making judgments on moral and ideological issues concerning private and public life and international affairs.<sup>23</sup> A similar image of a moral and intellectual authority has been built around prime minister Davutoğlu, albeit on a much smaller scale. This concentration of power in the hands of the president and, to a lesser extent, the prime minister means that the role of the professional diplomatic services has diminished. As a result Turkey's foreign policy has been less and less defined by the caution and pragmatism typical of the diplomatic services, and increasingly informed by the characters and ideology of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu.

Embarking on the pursuit of global power would be much more difficult without the impressive economic growth that Turkey experienced under the AKP government. Dependent on Inter-

<sup>22</sup> On the surface, the Turkish media scene seems well developed, but in reality freedom of the media in Turkey is subject to considerable limitations. Most media outlets are *de facto* controlled by the AKP or apply self-censorship. For more information, see the Special Report by Freedom House, Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey, 2014, <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Turkey%20Report%20-%202014-3-14.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> For example, Erdoğan once argued that Muslims had discovered America before Columbus and anyone who did not believe that “had no respect for themselves”. A recurrent motif in Erdoğan's speeches concerns the involvement of external “forces” in undermining the AKP's rule. The conspirators include Israel, the West, Western media and the “interest lobby” (international financial organisations). The quotes were taken from: [http://www.todayszaman.com/national\\_Erdogan-disbelief-in-muslim-discovery-of-america-lack-of-self-esteem\\_364672.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/national_Erdogan-disbelief-in-muslim-discovery-of-america-lack-of-self-esteem_364672.html), <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25450624/>

national Monetary Fund loans just a decade ago, Turkey has become a regional economic leader with a stable macroeconomic situation and rapidly growing standards of living, a G20 member, an IMF creditor and a generous development aid donor.<sup>24</sup> This economic success has enabled Ankara to pursue an active foreign policy and present itself as a model of a modern, rapidly developing state *vis-à-vis* the stagnating or crisis-affected countries in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Africa.

The evolving international situation has also created favourable circumstances for the development of the New Turkish ideology. Once the process of Turkey's accession to the EU was halted by the EU member states, the Turkish government was free to pursue such policies and express such views that would risk harming that process if the admission of Turkey into the EU was still a real possibility.<sup>25</sup> The stalemate in the accession negotiations thus partly lifted the limitations on Turkey's ability to pursue an independent policy, often against the EU line, to criticise the West and use rhetoric with clear Islamist overtones.<sup>26</sup>

The United States' policy towards the Middle East and Turkey has also contributed to this process. The invasion and occupation of Iraq and the subsequent unravelling of that country consolidated

<sup>24</sup> In 2013 Turkey spent more than US\$ 4.3 billion on development aid. <http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/12/09/report-turkey-ranks-first-in-international-humanitarian-aid>

<sup>25</sup> The accession process was *de facto* suspended immediately after it was launched in 2005. The formal reason concerned Turkey's refusal to recognise Cyprus as a member of the Turkish-EU customs union, to which the EU member states responded by blocking certain negotiation chapters. However, the fact that EU member states are not interested in admitting Turkey to the EU is an important reason behind the impasse.

<sup>26</sup> For example, when the EU criticised the detention of the *Zaman* newspaper's journalists in December 2014, Erdoğan responded by saying: "[The EU should] mind their own business. [...] They say they will give a democracy lesson to Turkey. Take the trouble to come here, so that Turkey can give you a lesson in democracy. [...] Turkey will not take advice from the EU", <http://www.afp.com/en/news/erdogan-says-eu-cant-give-turkey-democracy-lesson>

Turkey's conviction that Washington was having a destabilising impact on the region.<sup>27</sup> From Ankara's point of view, the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011 and Washington's lack of interest in the region in the following years created a geopolitical vacuum in the Middle East. This vacuum has opened a space for shifts in the relations among regional actors, leaving Turkey with the choice between projecting its own vision of the Middle Eastern order, or letting other players shape the region in line with their interests.

The outbreak of the Arab Spring was a particularly important factor. The AKP leadership believed that the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and the popular revolt against Assad in Syria proved its claim that the existing international system (in which Turkey, too, had been marginalised) is now eroding. The Arab Spring elevated Turkey's relations with the Arab world to a new level. Before, those relations were focused mainly on areas without a strong ideological dimension (such as trade exchange, visa relations, promotion of tourism, etc.). The advent of the Arab Spring brought to the forefront ideological and identity issues such as the scope of Turkey's responsibility for Middle Eastern states and societies, questions about the region's preferred political models or the role of Islam in the Middle East and in Turkey's relations with other countries in the region. The New Turkish ideology was supposed to offer answers to these questions.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> This conviction is reinforced by Washington's policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which favours Tel Aviv according to Ankara and gives it free rein to apply repressions against the Palestinians.

<sup>28</sup> The factors mentioned here explain the growing role of the New Turkish discourse in Ankara's policy. Even though these were the political assumptions of the AKP team from its first years in power, it tried to justify its actions with practical reasons. Greater involvement in the Middle East was explained as an effort to find new markets for rapidly developing Turkish companies, rather than global power ambitions or aspirations to lead in the Muslim world. Rhetoric with Islamist overtones, and certainly anti-Western rhetoric, was very rare; much more frequent were statements showing Turkey's sense of shared values with Europe. During the first two terms of the AKP government, its representatives would also deny any claims about

Over the 12 years of the AKP's rule, the significance of specific ideological elements in the party's worldview has undergone change. The attitude towards the West seems to have evolved most: the AKP is now much more sceptical about the West than it was during its first years in power (assuming that the initial pro-Western policy was not just a tactical manoeuvre designed to neutralise the opposition, and stemmed from a sincere faith in European integration and the values behind it). Declarations about Turkey belonging to European civilisation were frequent just a couple of years ago, but now they have clearly given way to signs of Turkey's self-identification as part of the Middle East and the Muslim community, which is represented as exploited, or even persecuted by the West.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the belief in Turkey's potential to be a global power and a regional leader seems to be the most constant trait of the AKP's worldview. It is an overarching element in the party's ideology, to which all the other elements are subordinated if the circumstances so require.

The framework of the AKP leaders' specific worldview, convictions and beliefs is one of the most important factors determining Ankara's policy. The ideological factor has the greatest impact on: (1) Turkey's policy towards the Middle East, (2) its aspiration to revise relations with the West, and (3) the efforts to gain the status of a global power.

their nostalgia for the Ottoman past. See, for instance: "I am not a neo-Ottoman, Davutoğlu says", *Today's Zaman*, 25.11.2009, [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_i-am-not-a-neo-ottoman-davutoglu-says\\_193944.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_i-am-not-a-neo-ottoman-davutoglu-says_193944.html)

<sup>29</sup> E.g. the following statement by Erdoğan at the forum of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference: "Those who come from outside [the Muslim world] only like the oil, gold, diamonds, cheap workforce, conflicts and disputes of the lands of Islam. Believe me, they do not like us." <http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=AJRdD--ItTzDZj+GMLRah5Y?newsId=365530&columnistId=0>

## 2. The “New Turkey” and the Middle East

Turkey’s global power aspirations, its self-identification as part of Asia and its nostalgia for a leading role in the Islamic world find the fullest embodiment in the AKP’s policy towards Muslim countries, especially the Middle East and North Africa. Building up power in that region has been the priority of Ankara’s policy, which it has consistently pursued for the last 12 years. According to the Turkish leadership, the region is of key importance for the global order. Therefore establishing itself as its patron would grant Turkey the status of a global power.<sup>30</sup> However, Turkey’s attitude towards the region cannot be reduced solely to the pursuit of *realpolitik*, i.e. a calculated effort to optimise its own geopolitical position and minimise the threats coming from an unstable region. Neither is this policy solely about seeking new markets. From Ankara’s point of view, the stakes in the Middle East are higher. The Turkish leadership is guided by a strong belief in Turkey’s special mission as the successor of the Ottoman Empire and at the same time a modern, powerful state whose democratic government is an emanation of not only a single nation’s will, but also the hitherto suppressed historical and religious traditions of the entire region. Thus, as Turkey seeks to become the patron of the Ottoman Empire’s former territories and, more broadly, the entire Muslim world, this is not only a matter of security or the economy, but also a historical mission.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, Clash of Interests: Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs, December 1997-February 1998 Volume II, No. 4. According to Davutoğlu, the Middle East is a region of crucial importance for the world because of its straits on which global trade relies, its natural resource wealth, and its geographic location, which provides the key to the security of the entire “Afro-Eurasia”. It was because of the region’s importance that it became an arena of constant rivalry between external powers after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the formation of new, artificial states. As a result of the policy pursued by the West, which feared that democratisation in the Muslim states would inevitably lead to their Islamisation, power in those states was vested in the hands of authoritarian regimes disconnected from local traditions and focused on the pursuit of their own interests and the interests of the West.



Under the AKP rule, no other direction of foreign policy has been developed as intensely as the Middle East. This tendency was already visible during the AKP's first term in power when it manifested itself in the policy of "zero problems with neighbours".<sup>31</sup> Its assumptions ran counter to the original paradigm in which the neighbouring countries were perceived as threats. Now Turkey started seeing them as a space in which to project its own power and expansion ambitions. From Turkey's point of view, its power stems not only from the rapidly growing strength of its economy (especially in comparison to the neighbouring states), but also, even more importantly, from the appeal of the Turkish political, social and cultural model, which reconciles traditional values and the Ottoman heritage with the demands of modernity (e.g. integration with the EU). The new *pax Turcica* formula was therefore supposed to offer an antidote to the region's problems: political and religious conflicts, as well as socio-economic underdevelopment.

Before the Arab Spring, Turkey sought to establish itself as a regional leader in three ways. Firstly, through intense diplomatic efforts, it sought to establish and maintain good political relations with nearly all the major actors in the region, including Syria, Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan, Libya, and the Gulf states. It remained neutral in regional conflicts in order to be able to act as an honest broker and to build up its prestige and influence (e.g. in the conflict between Hamas and Fatah in Palestine, between Hamas and Israel in the years 2006 and 2008, between Syria and Israel in 2008, between the Shia and the Sunni in Iraq in 2010, or between Somaliland and the government of Somalia

<sup>31</sup> As part of the "zero problems" policy, Turkey also tried to repair or strengthen its relations with the Balkan states, Cyprus and Armenia, but it appears that the Middle Eastern dimension of that policy was far more important for Ankara. For useful information about the AKP government's policy towards selected Middle Eastern states, see: Eric S. Edelman, Svante E. Cornell, Aaron Lobel, Michael Makovsky, *The Roots of Turkish Conduct: Understanding the Evolution of Turkish Policy in the Middle East*, Bipartisan Policy Centre, December 2013.

since 2010). Secondly, it sought to build its image as a brotherly state and a model of successful modernisation in Islam-dominated countries. To this end, it promoted the Turkish culture and lifestyle (e.g. by large-scale student grant programmes, opening of Turkish universities and foundations in Muslim countries, launching Arab-language television channels and broadcasting Turkish soap operas), and also promoted tourism in Turkey and eased (or abolished) visa regimes. Thirdly, it effectively intensified economic contacts, as demonstrated by the fact that the Middle East's share in Turkey's trade exchange increased from 9% to 27 % between 2002 and 2012.<sup>32</sup>

The peak of Turkey's involvement in the Middle East came with the advent of the Arab Spring. Ankara saw the erosion of the old order and the popular uprisings as an opportunity to transform the efforts it had hitherto made into real influence. It acted as the advocate of the "Arab street" against the crumbling regimes and subsequently supported the new governments in Tunisia, Egypt and initially in Libya. The Syrian conflict turned out to be the greatest challenge. When protests first started in Syria, Turkey tried to persuade Bashar al-Assad to implement democratic reforms, and when those efforts failed, it started to actively support the anti-Assad opposition and took other measures with a view to removing him from power, incurring a huge political and social cost and placing its own security at risk.

Turkey's diplomacy towards the states and societies of the Middle East has been marked by a patronising style stemming from its sense of superiority and belief in the universality of the Turkish culture and development model. In contacts with the states and societies of the region, the Turkish government has consistently made references to a community of religion, shared history, and to brotherhood, whereby Turkey is usually represented as the "older

<sup>32</sup> According to figures of the Turkish Ministry of Economy. <http://www.ekonomi.gov.tr>

brother”.<sup>33</sup> This “seniority” manifests itself for instance in Turkey’s tendency to relativize the sovereignty of its Middle Eastern partners. From Ankara’s point of view, between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of the Arab Spring the Arab states were governed by authoritarian regimes in many cases imposed by the West and disconnected from the local peoples and traditions, which meant that Turkey was authorised to make judgements about the internal situation of those countries (*vis-à-vis* Mubarak in Egypt during the protests in Tahrir Square, or Assad after the protests in Syria broke out). This also explains Turkey’s practice of establishing relations with selected political and social actors while sidestepping official governments: the development of intense contacts with the Kurdistan Region in Iraq to the exclusion of Bagdad offers the most glaring example of this practice,<sup>34</sup> others include the contacts with Hamas (rather than Fatah), or the close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation which positions itself against most governments in the region.

The ideologization of Turkey’s policy has also made it less flexible. It limits the Turkish leadership’s willingness to adjust policy to

<sup>33</sup> For example, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu often take part in joint prayers with officials and ordinary believers in the Muslim states they visit. This attitude is also visible in numerous statements by Turkish officials, e.g. Erdoğan, who said during his visit to Iran that Teheran was his second home, and during a visit to Algeria - that the Israeli operation in the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was tantamount to an attack against Turkey and Algeria. Quotes: <http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/11/20/attacks-against-al-aqsa-are-attacks-against-all-muslims-turkish-president-says>, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/02/02/Turkey-s-rival-Iran-is-Erdogan-s-second-home.html>. Turkey also emphasises the mutual ties between Turkish society and the societies of other countries of the former Ottoman Empire, for instance by implying that the social and political problems of the partners (“brothers”) equally affect Turkey because it is home to large diasporas of nationals of countries in the region. Cf. Davutoğlu’s speech at Brookings Institution. [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2010/11/29-turkey/20101129\\_turkey.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2010/11/29-turkey/20101129_turkey.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> In one notable case, Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Kirkuk without asking for Bagdad’s consent. The status of Kirkuk is the subject of dispute between the federal government and Iraqi Kurdistan.

the current situation, a tendency that has been on the rise in recent years.<sup>35</sup> It is visible in the way Turkey has been choosing its partners in the Middle East and in its steadfast support for those partners despite the high political costs and absence of any tangible benefits. The Muslim Brotherhood, which the AKP considers to be its ideological cousin, has been Turkey's main partner in the Middle East in recent years. This choice has determined Turkey's decision to opt for Hamas as its main partner in Palestine, instead of the more moderate and more influential Fatah. This preference became particularly visible after the Arab Spring, when Turkey stood by the Muslim Brotherhood not only when, under the leadership of Mohamed Morsi, it formed the government of Egypt, but also after that government was ousted and the Brotherhood was in fact eliminated from political life in Egypt. In that case, ideological reasons prevailed over pragmatism, because Turkey has paid a price for continuing to support the Brotherhood: its relations with Cairo, a potentially important partner in the Middle East, have been frozen since.<sup>36</sup> Ankara has pursued a similarly inflexible policy in relation to the Syrian opposition where it also favoured the Brotherhood, even though it immediately became marginalised within the ranks of the anti-Assad opposition.<sup>37</sup> This

<sup>35</sup> Before the Arab Spring, Turkey tolerated social and political phenomena to which it has been principally opposed since the outbreak of protests. It looked the other way when people demonstrated in Iran after the presidential elections (2009), and was not bothered by the civil war in Sudan as it developed co-operation with Khartoum. Neither did it object to the corruption and lack of social legitimacy of the Arab regimes with which it co-operated intensively. See: *Roots of Turkish Conduct...*

<sup>36</sup> Turkey has already paid a dear price for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood at that time: the cost of transporting Turkish goods via Egyptian territory, an important transport route to the Persian Gulf, increased considerably. Cairo has started energy co-operation with the Republic of Cyprus and Greece, which was clearly aimed against Turkey, and, together with Saudi Arabia, effectively blocked Turkey's efforts to obtain the status of temporary Security Council member in the UN in 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Turkey backed the Syrian National Council (SNC), in which the Muslim Brotherhood was a dominant player, until November 2012, when the SNC joined a broader National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. In the new organisation, the Brotherhood's position was much weaker than in the SNC. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Qatar became the

not only undermined Turkey's influence on the Syrian opposition but also adversely affected its relations with the Gulf States, and especially Saudi Arabia, with which Turkey could co-operate on the crucial issue of the Syrian conflict, if only it followed a more flexible and pragmatic policy towards the rebels.<sup>38</sup>

The “New Turkish” ideology is also reflected in Turkey's policy towards Islamic State (ISIS), which has made considerable gains in Syria and Iraq in 2014. At the level of declarations, Ankara considers Islamic State to be a terror organisation, but at the same time it follows a more lenient policy towards it than any other state in the region and did not participate in the anti-terror operation initiated by the United States in Syria and Iraq in 2014. While it is clear to any external observer that Islamic State poses a direct threat to Turkey,<sup>39</sup> Ankara invariably locates the sources of instability in the Middle East in the continued existence of the Assad regime and considers Islamic State to be a secondary problem. This is another illustration of how Turkey's policy is based on a long-term outlook, unwilling to make *ad hoc* tactical adjustments. Turkey believes that the country is capable of tackling even the most dangerous problems in the Middle East on its own, without co-operating with other actors, or even by acting against them.<sup>40</sup>

main patrons of the new grouping, as a result of which Turkey lost much of its sway over the Syrian opposition. While Ankara backed the new formation and has been providing logistical support to it, Turkey is no longer as committed to the Syrian opposition on the international stage as it used to be in the times of the SNC.

<sup>38</sup> There are many indications that Turkey maintains informal, working relations with various opposition and militant groups in Syria and tolerates their presence in Turkish territory. This does not change the fact that Ankara does not have any important political partners among the Syrian opposition.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, Jihadi militants have kidnapped the staff of the Turkish consulate in Mosul, and Turkish police forces have been involved in armed clashes with Jihadi militants, with casualties on the Turkish side).

<sup>40</sup> Szymon Ananicz, Tough decisions for Turkey in the war against Islamic State, *OSW Analyses*, 15.10.2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-10-15/tough-decisions-turkey-war-against-islamic-state>

At the same time, it demonstrates Turkey's liberal attitude towards radical Islam.

### **3. Revising the alliance with the West**

Ankara's ambition to revise its alliance with the West is another example of how Turkey's foreign policy is subordinated to the New Turkish ideology. Turkey believes that the West, and especially the United States, is still the strongest pole of global politics but its power is eroding. The West remains an important economic and security partner for Ankara and still serves as a point of reference (although no longer a model) in terms of internal modernisation. However, the AKP leaders no longer want to continue the policy of the "old Turkey", which in their view satisfied itself with the status of the EU's weaker partner, one that was lower on the ladder of civilizational advancement and aspired to join an exclusive club. Neither do they want Turkey to be the United States' bridgehead in its Middle Eastern policy, or a passive bulwark against Islamic radicalism and instability in the Arab world, as was supposed to be the case under the previous governments. Instead Turkey now seeks to be independent in its foreign and internal policies. It wants to shape its relations with other actors in the Middle East and elsewhere, independently of the West's preferences. Nevertheless, it expects the West to respect its interests in mutual relations and regional affairs.

At the core of Turkey's relations with the West are the EU accession process, the alliance with the United States and its membership in NATO. The impact that the new ideology has had in these three areas is very clear. Over the 12 years of AKP rule, Turkey's attitude towards European integration has evolved from one of initial enthusiasm and active efforts to gain membership, towards deep scepticism, stagnating negotiations and considerable slowing down of the EU-modelled reforms, and even towards a rise in authoritarianism. While Ankara explains this away with the obstructionism of Cyprus, France and Germany, it seems that if

Turkey itself were more committed to integration with the EU, it would continue the internal reforms regardless of the actual status of the accession process. In this way, it would be implementing its declared objectives concerning social, political and economic development, and would undermine the arguments of those EU member states which are sceptical about Turkey's European aspirations. In the absence of such efforts, it may appear that Turkey is not convinced about integration with Europe and has been instrumentally using the accession process to its internal ends. Such suspicions seem all the more plausible if one takes into account the fact that the weakening of Turkey's pro-EU aspirations has coincided with the consolidation of power in the hands of the AKP. The party currently has no serious rivals on the political stage and does not need the argument of the accession process in political battles, as was the case during AKP's first two terms in power. Turkey's turning away from the EU is not merely a response to the expectations of public opinion, which is increasingly sceptical about the EU, since the AKP team themselves actively contribute to creating and perpetuating a negative image of the West among the public in Turkey.

In its relations with Brussels, Ankara has been ever more frequently and vocally challenging the European Union's authority to make judgements about the state of Turkish democracy. It has been calling into question the EU's political and economic model and accusing the EU of Islamophobia and indifference in the face of the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria, all emphasising Europe's aversion towards Muslims.<sup>41</sup> The Turkish leadership, and president Erdoğan in particular, have been building an image of the European Union and, more broadly, the West, as conspirators intent on undermining the AKP government, and therefore Turkey as such, through direct actions (plots, hostile media campaigns) or alliances with the government's rivals inside Turkey (including

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/gundem/Erdogandan-islam-dunyasina-ca-gri-2031418>

the PKK or the Fethullah Gülen movement).<sup>42</sup> It seems that those efforts are not just an attempt at deflecting responsibility for Turkey's internal problems (e.g. the crisis over Gezi Park in 2013), but are an expression of leading AKP politicians' genuine mistrust of Europe and its real intentions in relation to Turkey, which dates back to the time when the AKP leaders were still members of Millî Görüş and the West was supporting the Kemalist governments, viewing them as a bulwark against the Islamisation of Turkey.

The economy is another area in Turkey's relations with the EU where important value shifts have taken place. The evolution of the southern gas transit corridor project offers a very clear example of this. According to the EU's original plans, the role of Turkey in that project was to be limited to providing a transit corridor between the Caspian region and Europe. However, the TANAP project that has been pushed through by Ankara (and Baku) puts Turkey in the position of the main player in terms of gas supplies to the EU market as well as the main beneficiary (by improving its energy security, ensuring diversification of supplies and granting it a substantial degree of control over the infrastructure).<sup>43</sup> A similar logic is behind Ankara's talks with Russia about the construction of a new gas pipeline across Turkey's territory to the EU border, as an alternative to the South Stream, which are on-going despite the political and economic confrontation taking place between the EU and Russia (the sanctions).<sup>44</sup> Ankara has also been

<sup>42</sup> This was how the authorities interpreted the outbreak of social protests in Turkey in the summer of 2013 and the corruption scandal involving high-ranking officials in December 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, Turkey is filling the gap being left by the West in the Southern Corridor, *OSW Analyses*, 4.06.2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-06-04/turkey-filling-gap-being-left-west-southern-corridor>

<sup>44</sup> The talks were officially opened during Vladimir Putin's visit to Turkey in December 2014. See: Szymon Kardaś, The unwanted gas pipeline: Russia has halted the construction of South Stream, *OSW Analyses*, 3.12.2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-12-03/unwanted-gas-pipeline-russia-has-halted-construction-south-stream>



increasingly assertive in trade relations and has been questioning the provisions of the Turkish-EU customs union, which, in its view, mainly benefits the EU member states.<sup>45</sup>

In its relations with NATO and the United States, Turkey also clearly aspires to gain a more independent status and revise the terms of co-operation. Especially with regard to the Middle East and North Africa, there have been very few situations in recent years in which Turkey's interests were in line with those of the USA and other NATO allies. On the other hand, there have been many situations which revealed significant differences between the two sides: for instance when Ankara refused to allow the United States to use its territory in the invasion of Iraq, maintained friendly relations with Syria and supported it politically (especially after the assassination of the Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in 2005), established diplomatic relations with Hamas (considered by the West to be a terror organisation) in 2006, pursued an anti-Israeli policy,<sup>46</sup> tried to bypass the West's negotiations with Teheran on the Iranian nuclear programme,<sup>47</sup> attempted to independently play the situation in the South Caucasus after the war in Georgia,<sup>48</sup> initially objected to the intervention

<sup>45</sup> See the article by the former Turkish minister for the economy and taxes: <http://www.turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/2012-1-HayatiYazici.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Turkey became critical of Israel after the latter launched the Cast Lead operation in the Gaza Strip in 2008–2009, without notifying Turkey in advance of the move. Ankara was involved in mediations between Israel and Syria at that time and perceived the absence of notice as a humiliation. Another crisis came with the 2009 conference in Davos where a row took place between prime minister Erdoğan and the Israeli president Shimon Peres. Relations between the two countries were frozen after the attack of Israeli commandos on a ship carrying humanitarian assistance to Gaza in 2010, in which 9 Turkish nationals were killed. In 2013 Israel apologised for the killings. This paved the way to talks about normalisation of bilateral relations. However, those negotiations have been stalled.

<sup>47</sup> In May 2010 Turkey, Brazil and Iran negotiated an agreement that was supposed to solve the problem of Iran's nuclear programme. In this way, they bypassed the negotiation format established by the West. However, the Turkish-Brazilian initiative was ultimately rejected by the United States.

<sup>48</sup> After the war in Georgia in 2008, Turkey came up with a proposal addressed

in Libya, looked the other way when Al-Qaeda and other Jihadi groups were expanding operations in Syria, refused to take part in the anti-terrorist operation in Iraq and Syria, and remained passive *vis-à-vis* the Russia annexation of Crimea.<sup>49</sup>

It is also Turkey's objective to become ever more independent and self-sufficient in terms of security policy, an ambition that is clearly visible in Ankara's decisions concerning arms purchases. Turkey's decision in 2013 to open negotiations with China concerning the purchase of an air defence system, taken despite strong opposition from NATO allies and their protests that the system would not be integrated with NATO systems, is a case in point. Turkey took that decision because it would offer its domestic companies opportunities to participate in the production of the system and was in line with Turkey's ambition to maximise the share of its domestic defence industry in new purchases of arms and military equipment for the army. In this way, Ankara seeks to become relatively self-sufficient in terms of defence and be independent from the West, even at the expense of major tensions in relations with allies.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. Towards global power status

The "New Turkey's" ambitions are not limited to the neighbouring region but also extend to Ankara's active participation in the shaping of the global political stage and having a say on issues that are

to Russia and the South Caucasus states to create a Caucasus Platform of Stability and Co-operation. According to Ankara's plans, the West was not supposed to participate in the new organisation.

<sup>49</sup> See: Szymon Ananicz, Turkey on the Russian military intervention in Crimea, *OSW Analyses*, 5.03.2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-03-05/turkey-russian-military-intervention-crimea>

<sup>50</sup> Those objectives are reflected in a number of arms programmes that Turkey has been implementing for the navy, the army and the air force. It has yet to be decided if the contract will be awarded. See: Szymon Ananicz, Andrzej Wilk, Friction between Turkey and NATO?, *OSW Analyses*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-10-02/friction-between-turkey-and-nato>

of no immediate concern or of limited importance for the Turks. Turkey has been trying to build an image of itself as a constructive state co-deciding on the world's most important problems, working to foster dialogue between civilisations and especially interested in making sure that the rights of Muslim societies are respected.<sup>51</sup> Ankara's policy towards the United Nations illustrates those aspirations. Thanks to diplomatic efforts, Turkey earned the status of a temporary member of the US Security Council in the years 2009–2010. In that period Turkey focused on global security issues such as the problems of North Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and the international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, while putting less focus on local issues of direct concern to itself. It tried to renew its seat on the Security Council in 2014 (without success) by organising a large-scale diplomatic offensive and promotional campaign to this end.<sup>52</sup> Together with Spain, Turkey managed to promote the "Alliance of Civilisations" initiative within the United Nations, the objective of which is to overcome prejudice and promote dialogue between religions and cultures. Ankara has been one of the most vocal advocates of a reform of the United Nations. It has been questioning the overrepresentation of the West in the Security Council and the absence of emerging powers such as Turkey, Brazil or India. In recent years it has also objected ever more strongly against the obstructionism of Russia and China, which has paralysed the UN in the face of the war in Syria.

Under AKP rule, Ankara has also stepped up its activity within the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, where it managed to have a Turk, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, appointed as the Organisation's

<sup>51</sup> The visit of Pope Francis to Turkey in 2014 may serve as an example – on that occasion president Erdoğan tried to act as a representative of the entire Islamic world *vis-à-vis* the head of the Catholic Church and called for an end to Islamophobia in Europe. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/in-historic-visit-pope-hopes-turkey-can-be-great-peace-maker-Erdogan-slams-islamophobia-isil.aspx?pageID=238&nid=74945>

<sup>52</sup> See the dedicated website to promote Turkey as a UN Security Council member: <http://www.turkey4unsc.org/>

secretary general for two terms, i.e. for ten years in total. Ankara has also tried to reinvigorate the D8 organisation as an alternative to the G7. The breadth of its ambition is visible in the fact that it has gained observer status within the African Union, takes part in meetings of the Arab League, and has established informal partnerships with the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>53</sup>

Turkey has also been seeking closer relations with more distant states and has been working to build influence in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia or Latin America. To this end, it has intensified contacts with such regional powers as China, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa or Brazil, as well as smaller states of regional importance. The purpose of those contacts is not only to strengthen economic contacts – they also concern political and security issues, even if such issues do not have any direct bearing on Turkey’s interests. Ankara’s mediations between the federal government of Somalia and the separatist Somaliland or its large-scale military training programmes for the armies of Bangladesh or Afghanistan are some of the examples which illustrate this.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, Ankara has been generously funding efforts to expand its influence in areas that Turkish diplomacy had previously neglected. The substantial amounts it has been spending on development aid (in total, more than US\$ 4.3 billion in 2013<sup>55</sup>) have been an

<sup>53</sup> For more information see: Adam Balcer, Turkey Goes Global, Demos Europa, 2012, [http://www.demoservices.home.pl/www/files/Turkey\\_goes\\_global\\_implications\\_for\\_the\\_EU\\_PP\\_A\\_Balcer.pdf](http://www.demoservices.home.pl/www/files/Turkey_goes_global_implications_for_the_EU_PP_A_Balcer.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> More than 3000 officers of the army of Bangladesh have been trained in Turkey since 2004, and since 2001, around 3300 Afghan troops have undergone training in the Turkish army’s training centres. In 2011, Turkey launched a programme to train 15000 Afghan police officers.

<sup>55</sup> See: <http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/12/09/report-turkey-ranks-first-in-international-humanitarian-aid>. For more information, see: OECD Development Co-operation Report 2014, p. 386.

important instrument in this respect. The funds are directed not only to neighbouring states (where recently they have been primarily directed to the Syrian refugees), but also to more distant countries such as Pakistan, Somalia, Afghanistan or Kyrgyzstan.

### III. THE NEW TURKISH IDEOLOGY AND TURKEY'S INTERNATIONAL STANDING

Two periods can be distinguished in analysing the impact that the implementation of the New Turkish ideology has had on Turkey's international position. The first one spanned from the AKP's rise to power to the outbreak of the Arab Spring and was a time when Turkey considerably strengthened its position on the international stage. From the Western point of view, Turkey's new, active foreign policy of that time, buttressed by a dynamically developing economy and internal democratic transformation, had a stabilising effect on the surrounding region. In particular, the policy of "zero problems with neighbours" had a very positive reception as it offered an opportunity to resolve the Cyprus issue and normalise relations with Armenia. The rapprochement with Syria and Iran was less welcome, but it was treated as understandable given Turkey's geographic position. With Ankara's influence in its international surroundings rising, the EU could hope to be able to pursue its interests more effectively through Turkey, i.e. to strengthen the European Neighbourhood Policy in the Caucasus, keep Russia's global power ambitions in the Black Sea region in check, and ease conflicts and promote modern, secular development model in the Middle East. Those expectations were reinforced by the conviction that Ankara was determined to pursue integration with the EU, which gave the Union a sense that it held some sway over Turkey's policy. The country's global power ambitions were not seen as a product of political ideology, but rather a natural consequence of Turkey's burgeoning economic and political status. There was therefore no concern that Turkey could adopt a fundamentally different perspective on international affairs.

The AKP's policy also had a positive reception in the Middle East. Countries of the region welcomed Turkey's efforts to build closer relations with them as an opportunity to expand their economic contacts. For those whose relations with the West were frigid (Syria, Iran, Libya), relations with Turkey were a way to mitigate

the impact of international isolation. Ankara was also helpful in easing regional or domestic tensions, e.g. when it persuaded the Sunnis not to boycott the Iraqi government in 2010 or acted as a mediator between Syria and Israel in 2008. Finally, when relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv broke down, Turkey was seen as a new ally in the Middle Eastern states' rivalry with Israel. The Middle East countries do not see Turkey as a threat to the regional order or to their own political systems.

The second period started with the outbreak of the Arab Spring. At that time it became clear that there were widening differences in the understanding of the international order between Turkey and its partners, and as a result, their relations soured rapidly. For Ankara, the Arab Spring and the transformations it triggered in the Middle East were primarily a cue for Turkey to accomplish its historical mission and reclaim its position as a regional power, but the West saw the developments in the region as highly undesirable. While Turkey tried to actively play the local conflicts and got involved in the rivalry between individual groups and factions, for instance by backing the Muslim Brotherhood or becoming entangled in conflicts with the Islamic State, the West sought a restoration of the *status quo ante*, i.e. first and foremost, stability of the Middle Eastern states (with unchanged borders), the rule of secular forces as an alternative to the Islamists (including the Muslim Brotherhood), and guarantees of security for Israel. The gap between the positions of the West and of Turkey widened further because Turkey strongly emphasised the moral superiority of its policy and the duplicity and opportunism of the European Union and the United States. This situation coincided with a regression of democratic standards in Turkey and the rise of authoritarianism, accompanied by the conservative-religious and often anti-Western rhetoric. This further contributed to alienating Turkey from its Western partners.

Differences also emerged between Turkey and the Middle Eastern states. The regional actors saw no need to accept Turkey's

leadership. They interpreted Ankara's references to the shared Ottoman past, which were no longer as veiled as they had been in previous years, merely as an expression of Turkey's particular nationalism, rather than a universal spiritual heritage or an attractive political programme for the region. Ankara lost its credibility as an honest broker who could come up with broadly acceptable proposals for a new regional order after it unequivocally chose sides in a series of conflicts, i.e. backed the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria against Assad and the Syrian Kurds, supported the Brotherhood in Egypt as they strove to gain power against the military dictatorship, and sided with the Kurdistan Region and the Sunni minority against Al-Maliki's regime in Iraq. In other Middle Eastern countries involved in the region's conflicts, Turkey's image also deteriorated: in particular, this refers to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt, which perceive Turkey's activities as a threat to their own regional interests and their internal political legitimacy. The players whom Turkey supports (the Muslim Brotherhood, the Free Syrian Army, the Iraqi Kurds) have not been too willing to accept Turkey's patronage, either. They are aware that Turkey's backing is limited to actions which are "soft" by Middle Eastern standards and that Ankara is not prepared to use force, and therefore cannot significantly change the situation in a region ruptured by wars and crises.

To an external observer, Turkey's policy could seem like a fiasco, and its international position as risky isolation. However, the AKP leadership does not share this diagnosis. Their foreign policy is founded on deeply held ideological assumptions and buttressed by a strong belief that they correctly understand the dynamics of history. This means that Turkish foreign policy is not intended to produce immediate results, but rather to reach objectives in the long term, yet with a guaranteed prospect of success. Ankara is therefore less willing to adjust its foreign policy strategy and tactics *ad hoc*, because it is ideology, and not the current balance of power or current developments, that is the point of reference for its assessment of the situation. The statement by Ibrahim Kalın,



one the leading AKP politicians and ideologues who described Turkey's position on the international stage as being "alone in virtue" (*değerli yalnızlık*), sums up the Turkish leadership's unwillingness to adjust their policies and act more flexibly: being alone may be impractical in the short term but is a commendable stance because it stems from a correct moral choice and a true understanding of the nature of history.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> The concept of being "alone in virtue" has also been embraced by Turkey's current minister of foreign affairs. When commenting on Turkey's failure to obtain the temporary seat on the UN Security Council as a result of objections from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, among others, he said that Turkey was alone because it had been isolated by the entire United Nations, but he preferred this kind of solitude to co-operation with the Egyptian regime. See: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/177195/incirlik-airbase-for-anti-sil-coalition-to-be-part-of-a-single-package-turkish-fm.html>

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Turkey's foreign policy over the last 12 years has been very consistent in its strategic assessment of the country's national interest, international developments, as well as the ambition to play an increasingly important role in the region and in the world. The Turkish leadership has remained faithful to the ideological underpinnings of its policy. If that policy line gets corrected, it is usually as a result of sudden and significant international developments in Turkey's surroundings or the country's own failures or limitations (which Turkey views as transitory, nonetheless). However, such corrections do not undermine the conviction that the strategic vision defined by the New Turkish ideology is valid.

Turkey's foreign policy is closely linked with the country's internal policies and is an inherent element of the New Turkey which the AKP government has been trying to build. It is therefore unlikely that Turkey would thoroughly revise its internal policy without changing foreign policy, or alter foreign policy without a shift in internal policy. Given Turkey's current political setup, it is also unlikely that the country will change the objectives and directions of its foreign policy of its own volition in the coming years, although it may make some tactical adjustments, enter periods of greater or lesser activity, or change its rhetoric (as has been the case to date).

The implementation of the New Turkish ideology has created a major challenge for relations between the West and Turkey. The difference between the two sides' perceptions of the world has been widening, and the community of values professed by the two sides in previous years has been giving way to a shaky community of interests and a sense of civilizational separateness. It seems ever less realistic that Turkey will continue to seek integration with the European Union. There are also deepening differences in the two sides' views of NATO (which manifest themselves in the context of both the Middle East and Russia). The process whereby Turkey has been drifting away from the West is also driven by

internal developments, including the rising authoritarian tendencies in Turkey. Economic ties should remain an important linking element, because Turkey has no alternative to economic co-operation with the EU. However, this factor will merely mitigate the differences, and will not create positive impulses for the development of strategic co-operation.

While the Middle East has been the most important direction of foreign policy for the AKP government, relations with the Middle Eastern partners have not compensated for Turkey's weakened ties with the West. The New Turkish ideology is as foreign to most players in the Middle East as it is to the West. The Middle Eastern partners are not interested in accepting Ankara's patronage, do not share its diagnoses of the regional situation and do not subscribe to the solutions to crises proposed by Turkey.

Given the persistence with which Turkey has been following its ideological assumptions in the Middle East despite the absence of visible results, no significant shift in its policy should be expected in the coming years. This, in turn, means that Turkey will likely become further entangled in the problems of the Middle East, become ever more isolated in its policies. The costs of this policy will likely exceed the gains. They include the risk of Middle Eastern instability spilling over to Turkey itself.

At the same time, it should be noted that Turkey has demonstrated its ability to make radical turns in its Middle Eastern policy (e.g. in relation to the Iraqi Kurds or the Assad regime before and after the outbreak of the Arab Spring), while all the time believing it was sticking to its course. This warrants caution in predicting Turkey's tactics in the region. However, it is unlikely that Ankara will give up its guiding principle, i.e. the ambition to establish itself as a regional power.

Internal political developments will ultimately determine the future of Turkey's foreign policy. That policy is inextricably linked

with the AKP and its leaders (especially Erdoğan and Davutoğlu). Today in Turkey there seems to be no realistic alternative to the AKP and Erdoğan (and in the context of foreign policy, also to Davutoğlu), which justifies the conclusion that Turkey will likely continue with its present policy. However, it may also happen that Ankara will have to curb its ambitions in the event of a major internal political or economic destabilisation.

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