

TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY IN A CHANGING STRATEGIC AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT" FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES IN THE 55TH GOVERNMENT PROGRAM UNDER MESUT YILMAZ"

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The ad-hoc nature of the implementation of Turkish foreign policy under Necmettin Erbakan, the first Islamic leader of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi - RP), and his coalition partner Tansu Ciller, leader of the True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi - DYP) and Foreign Minister since June 1996, and the different interests and emphases placed by coalition Partners to foreign countries and international organisations have led to the belief that the Turkish government had no clear-cut foreign policy aims. This policy seemed to emanate from the ministry of Foreign Affairs bureaucrats who had to produce solutions to their day to day problems¹.

This view has been strongly supported by many observers of Turkish foreign policy. However, two significant developments have taken place in the last two years under the 53rd (under Tansu Ciller) and 54th (under Necmettin Erbakan) governments. The first one is the establishment of a customs union with the EU an industrial products and the second one the establishment of D-8 (Developing 8 Muslim Countries).

A customs union came into existence between Turkey and EU formally on January 1st 1996. The union was the result of painstaking efforts on both sides since 1993, particularly to ensure that the European Parliament - so often critical of Turkey's human-rights record - would endorse the agreement, which it did on December 13th 1995. The union provided tariff-free access to each other's markets principally in industrial goods, while Turkey embraced the EU's external barriers an trade with non-member states².

The credit, if any, for the customs union should be given to Mrs. Tansu Ciller, who has bulldozed the Foreign Ministry into signing the Customs Union agreement at any cost for Turkey³. She acted under the wrong assumption that once the customs union was established, full EU Membership would almost automatically follow, gaining for her tremendous domestic political support. Since the entry into force of the customs union it has become clear that the EU signed and approved the Customs Union Resolution because of the sheer economic advantages it would grant to EU exports to Turkey. At the end of the first year's implementation this has come true and the balance of trade has sharply moved in favour of the EU. Furthermore, the EU has not fulfilled its promises of financial assistance to Turkey and leaders of major EU countries have further strained EU-Turkey relations. They have refused to treat Turkey as a prospective member like other European countries, even though they promised to apply the same criteria to applicant countries.

According to some foreign and Turkish observers the Welfare Party has not been philosophically warm towards the EU as an institution nor to the European identity culturally, while showing great interest in maintaining commercial ties with European firms. Abdullah Gül, a former minister of state and one of Erbakan's closest advisers, put this attitude in these words: "Our opposition to the European Union is based on the idea that we are from a different culture, we have a different identity and a different economic structure from the European countries"⁴. Indeed the Welfare Party criticized the signing of the Customs Union and was concerned about Turkey's non-participation in the EU's formal decision-making

procedures in the long run. After the December 1995 general election Erbakan was much softer than ever before. Then his party emerged from the election as the winner and had 158 members in the parliament out of 550. After the ratification of the European Parliament Erbakan stated: "We are not against the customs union. We are against the form of the agreement, the text and the way it is applied"⁵.

However, the Erbakan Government did nothing for full membership nor showed any reactions to the EU in this respect. Although, Erbakan tried to follow his own partisan agenda contradicting the main lines of established Turkish policy, one can say that there was continuity in this even though he gave lip service to such foreign policy issues as the EU and relations with the US and Israel. The establishment of D-8 which implies an economic opening to two ASEAN countries (Malaysia and Indonesia) and some African countries (like Nigeria and Egypt) might have been an excellent opening had it not been perceived as a religious grouping. By including a few non-moslem developing countries, as it is to be expected, this may yet be saved as a rational economic cooperation scheme ⁶.

Turkish foreign policy has never experienced such a damage and loss of credibility concerning its image. Certainly, the high tension and internal crisis in Turkey since the very first day of the coalition has had a direct impact on its foreign relations. As the coalition broke down after one year the total atmosphere of the country changed in a day. In the words of Bülent Ecevit, currently vice-prime minister, "the nightmare (meaning the coalition under Erbakan) has ended".

It is important to note that the new coalition government under Mesut Yilmaz, since July of this year, will basically attempt to become a "restoration coalition", not only in domestic policy but in Turkey's international relations as well. It will try to rationalize foreign policy action by reducing the weight of domestic considerations as far as possible. The new foreign minister Ysmail Cem is a well respected person in and out of the country. Although he is facing very complicated foreign policy issues, the internal and external conditions are in his favour. In other words, Ismail Cem will not seek , unlike the previous government, glamorous diplomatic achievements but rather take incremental steps in all directions, as required by Turkey's newly found geo-strategic environment after the post cold war period.

Following the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Turkey's position vis à vis the newly independent republics, and its own allies, as well as its regional role have changed substantially. In order to evaluate the new government's program, it would be useful to have insight into the changes affecting Turkey's foreign relations⁷.

Since the end of the Second World War Turkey has been seen and treated as a staunch ally of the West against the expansionist ambitions of the Soviet Union. This treatment, which has brought Turkey politically, economically and institutionally closer to Europe, has led many Turks to assume that Turkey's place in the Western camp has become organic, that Turkey has an intrinsic right to take part in all organisations that call themselves "European". Turkey also expected that Europe and America would follow an equidistant policy towards Turkey and Greece in their disputes.

Turkey's relations with the West began to cool beginning with the US protest and threats against Turkey to prevent a possible Turkish military intervention in Cyprus after the 1963 Christmas massacres of Turks in the Island. This continued with the 1975 arms embargo and closure of US bases in Turkey, the admission of Greece to full EC membership in 1981 and the freezing of Turkey-EC relations after the military takeover in Turkey that same year.

These developments made Turkey aware of the pragmatic and transient nature of European and American policies towards it, made it to understand that the underlying character of the western interest was based on security and strategic considerations, that grew less important

in the 1980s. The miraculous economic development of Turkey since the early 80s under the then prime minister Turgut Ozal coupled with the opening of CIS countries to multi-dimensional relations with it, made Turkey an important regional actor with significant omnidirectional roles to play in Europe, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Caucasus, the Black Sea region and Central Asia. Turkey's role in the first and second Gulf Wars, as a benign neutral in the first, and supporter of the Coalition Forces under US leadership in the second, seemed to resurrect its traditional value as a strategic partner, this time in the Middle East. The US appreciated more Turkey's role in the region than did Europe. But at least Europe, under British presidency in 1992, paved the way for a customs union with Turkey as a partial reactivation of relations frozen more than a decade ago⁸.

The Program of the Turkish Government under Mesut Yilmaz cites continuity, stability and rationalism as the main features of the foreign policy, policies of the Republican era since Atatürk, that will continue to guide the present government. The chapter on foreign policy describes Turkey as a secular democratic republic, powerful and credible in its region, friendly with its neighbours, safeguarding the principle of maintaining peace in the world and championing human rights and freedoms.

This part of the program probably rejects the earlier Government's dogmatic approach to some foreign policy issues and underlines the modern and rational character of the Turkish state.

The Program promises a leadership role for regional cooperation and solidarity as a necessity arising out of Turkey's place an the cross-roads of many regions and cultures, stretching from the Balkans to Caucasia and Central Asia and the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean to the Middle East.

The aim of the program in this connection can be described as the acceptance of a "regional centre role" (bölge merkezli dýþ politika) for Turkey that has been developing for many years. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone covers a wide region from the Balkans to the Caucasus and the shores of the Northern Black Sea.

In relation to the USA, the European countries, the Russian Federation and countries of the Asia- Pacific region, the government expresses its will to conduct our relations of friendship or alliance by paying attention to reciprocity of interests. This paragraph probably aims at stressing more clearly that, because of alliance or friendship interests Turkey will not be any more expected to make unreciprocated sacrifices or contributions. This may also be interpreted as a reaction to decisions of earlier governments, such as the acceptance of NATO enlargement without taking into account Turkey's qualms⁹, or the easy acceptance by Turkey of the entire EU conditions for a customs union. This paragraph may also be interpreted as acceptance by Turkey that the nature of relations between Turkey and the West have taken a new turn, where the dominant security interdependence is replaced by realpolitik and the safeguarding of mutual interests in the new world conditions.

Most space is devoted in the program to EU-Turkey relations. The new Government considers Turkey's full membership in the EU not only as an objective but also as a right borne out of existing treaties. However, the new foreign minister Ysmail Cem warned the Turkish public recently that the objective of EU-Membership should not turn into an "EU obsession or idee fix". This means that Turkey will be prepared for the worst: that it could not become a full member. According to Cem, Turkey has other priorities like the oil pipeline project which will solve the energy problems of Turkey¹⁰. Yet, the program aims at ensuring a Balance of mutual interests in Turkey's relations with the EU, just as in the entirety of Turkey's relations with the West and the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, the government expresses its determination to complete the adjustment of internal legislation to those foreseen in the

Customs Union Resolutions, including the passage of a new customs law, protection of intellectual property and copyright law, participation in international conventions for the protection of such rights and conclusion and implementation of free trade agreements with CEE countries.

Although it does not say how the government program promises to implement the financial cooperation between Turkey and the EU for helping to adapt the Turkish industrial sector to conditions of competition by the customs union or to reduce the difference between the EU and the Turkish economies. In the EU-Turkey Association Council meeting of March 6th 1995, a financial agreement was signed to provide financial assistance to Turkey of over three billion ECU's to be spent over the next five years. Greece vetoed part of the finances and the European Parliament set out conditions for another part to be spent only in South-East Turkey. Under these conditions Turkey has refused to accept this financial assistance. Like in many clauses of the Association Agreement the EU has resorted to fiat when it came to fulfilling its agreements with Turkey. Any dispute resulting from non-fulfillment of these agreements by the EU is subject to the inoperable clause of dispute resolution of the Ankara Treaty of 1963; whereas in the customs union agreement, if disproportionate protection measures are taken by any party against violation of terms, there is a compulsory arbitration clause. There is no doubt that the new government will exert every possible pressure on the EU to fulfill its financial obligations.

Again, the Government promises to consolidate and build upon the customs union which marks the final phase in the Turkey-EU Association Agreements. Disregarding the attitude of Europe which considers Turkey as an "eligible" but unlikely candidate for full membership in the foreseeable future, the government states that it will consolidate and develop what is actually and legally vested in our relations with the EU, including the customs union, and will insist on the EU fulfilling its obligations towards Turkey.

This government has made no reference to political cooperation with Europe, to Turkey's inappropriate place in the EU dominated MEDA program, nor to the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. It has, however, promised to continue and increase the activities of the Turkish armed forces that contribute to deterrence and peace in the region also within NATO and WEU. The experience gained will be introduced to the Balkan and Caucasian regions.

It seems that Turkey will also continue to have economic and military training cooperation with some countries. As it will be recalled Turkey has been rather generous in recent years in providing military training for officers coming from neighbouring countries. Last year Turkey signed a military cooperation agreement with Israel similar to the one signed with many friendly countries. The government program states that in the Middle East, Turkey will continue to pursue a peaceful and balanced policy and will develop its relations with all countries in the region as well as with the Arab Moslem world, with which Turkey has historic and religious ties.

The immense suffering caused to Turkey's economic interests and domestic security by the situation in Iraq will be kept in view and attempts will be made to end this situation by keeping in mind the UN-resolutions, human rights and principles of international law.

Again in the neighborhood, the need for establishing a durable peace and security in the Caucasus region is expressed as another objective of the government. Turkey has been playing a significant role both in the OSCE Minsk group, and in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation platform to help the establishment of a dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The government reiterates its readiness to continue its dialogue efforts, yet underlines the need that Armenia must evacuate all occupied Azeri territories. In recent weeks, there have been some developments in Turkish-Armenian relations. A joint business association between Turkish and Armenian businessmen has been established. The oil pipeline route perspectives have also contributed to a political cooperation. It is to be expected that Turkey and Armenia will establish diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. An opening of a common customs door would bring the two nations closer to each other. President Ter Petrosyan of Armenia has been sending and receiving positive signals from the Turkish side. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation has been an instrumental forum in this respect. The future of Turkish -Armenian relation, one could say, are at the beginning of a new era and will overcome the existing historical burden which still disturbs relations¹¹.

The Turkish and communities akin living in the Balkan countries are considered bridge-building elements in relations with countries where they live. The government promises to support the improvement of economic, cultural and social conditions of these countries. As regards Turkish citizens, the government promises to address the problems of Turkish citizen communities living in other countries by creating an "Upper Council for Citizens Living Abroad" to include the members of such communities. The creation of such an institution had become necessary both because of the size of these communities, now around 3,5 million in Europe (in Germany alone over two million), mainly in EU countries, and because some of the host countries are reticent in granting them minority and citizenship rights. Although there is also great resistance by the Turkish side living in those countries to accept the citizenship of the host country; they do not recognize the double citizenship. It is well known that in some countries children under 16 are also required to obtain visas to join their families.

The 55th Government under Mesut Yilmaz found itself suddenly with significant challenges in respect to Cyprus and Greek issues even before it had obtained a vote of confidence from the Parliament in July. On the question of the Aegean problems one should recall that in March 1996 the then also prime minister Mesut Yilmaz had proposed a new discussion of the Aegean issues without excluding an eventual arbitration. Again the new government believes that "issues of our vital interests should be resolved through mutual understanding and a constructive and peaceful dialogue". In this respect, the joint Greek-Turkish declaration made earlier this month in Madrid may be considered as a first step. If, however, the understanding in the Aegean does not have an impact an the existing diplomatic warfare which Greece has been and is still conducting against Turkey in the European organisations, illustrated by recent trends and events in the Cyprus negotiations in New York and Montreux, then, this declaration from Madrid will not serve its purpose. A strong political goodwill is not in sight from either side. A new diplomatic step is needed.

On the Cyprus front two contradictory Western attitudes are observed. One is the effort made by UN Secretary General and a host of Cyprus mediators led by Mr. Richard Hoolbrooke to get leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities to agree an the future of the island around a federative setup; the other is the European Commission's announcement that negotiations may begin in keeping with the earlier promise made to the so-called Cypriot (Greek) government for full membership, in a manner that would rock the UN-US efforts. It is also to be expected that the EU will get further headaches in this Cyprus question, because of the unequal attitude towards the Turkish community in Cyprus and Turkey, as Werner Adam put it in his recent article¹².

The EU had also strained relations with Turkey by supporting Greek arguments an the Kardak/Imea rock islands crisis in the Aegean Sea in January/February 1996 and by promising full membership to the Greek Cypriot administration after the Luxembourg meeting of the EU's intergovernmental conference. In the latter case, several European leaders

claim that even if they start negotiations with the Greek Cypriot Government, that does not mean that full membership will materialize before there is a solution to the problem in the island. Everybody knows, however, that Greece, enjoying the rights of a full member, can cajole or threaten other members in favour of Greek Cypriots; this is called "EU-solidarity", at the cost of Turkey and at no cost to other European countries.

The new Turkish Government, in the face of the EU attitude and the introduction of Russian missiles and arms in the Greek part of Cyprus, has redefined Turkey's approach to the Cyprus question by stating " Our government believes that Cyprus has an increasingly vital importance, not only for the security of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus but also for that of Turkey... We will continue to support the TRNC in every field by being masters of our rights and obligations resulting from existing treaties."

The strategic importance of Cyprus to Turkey was ignored by previous governments in the handling of the Cyprus issue. This importance was previously underlined in a report by a working group of the Foreign Policy Institute in Ankara¹³.

In response to EU declarations regarding full membership of Cyprus without the agreement of Turkey, Turkey will no doubt refer to Article 2 of the Treaty of Guarantee for Cyprus of the London Agreement of 1960 and take the necessary steps.

Even though the Government program does not stipulate what these steps may be, we understand from recent statements made by the Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, (who ordered the military operation of the Turkish forces on the island in July 1974 as then prime minister of Turkey, and who, it seems will guide the foreign policy of the present government, although there is one foreign minister), that in case membership negotiations with Nicosia should begin, Turkey would bring Northern Cyprus under its protection. Some foreign observers call this already an Anschluß¹⁴.

The new Turkish Government is facing multi-faceted challenges. The regional and global developments will force Turkey to be an active player and contribute to peace and stability in the region and in the world. Whether the new Turkish Government under Mesut Yılmaz will master these challenges is an open question. But, Turkey cannot be a passive player in these developments. Time for Turkey is out. What remains is a new vision in handling foreign affairs and improving the already damaged image of Turkey.

But the most important is to reach stability at home and in the region.

Notes / Anmerkungen

1 Undersecretary Dr. Onur Oymen of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has actually been the "real foreign minister during the 54th government under Erbakan and Ciller. The "official" foreign minister Tansu Ciller devoted herself to domestic affairs. She was strongly criticized by the Turkish press because she was not spending her time on foreign affairs and not coming to the ministry. She was conducting her business from the house where the Turkish foreign ministers reside. Sometimes she came to the foreign ministry only once in one month. Onur Oymen has conducted the foreign affairs and participated at the international conferences where actually Mrs. Tansu Ciller should have been. Onur Oymen developed and designed at this crucial time Turkey's European Policy by himself. See for this; Onur Oymen, Turkey's European Foreign Policy; Perceptions, March-May 1997, Volume 11, Number 1, Ankara, P. 7-15

2 Philip Robins, Turkish Foreign Policy under Erbakan; Survival, Summer 1997, p.86. For a Turkish View concerning human rights and democratization in Turkey, Ihsan D. Dagy; Ynsan Haklary ve Demokratikleme: Türkiye -Avrupa Birliği Yıpkilerinde Siyasal Boyut (Human

Rights and Democratization: The political dimension in Turkey-EU relations), in: *Türkiye ve Avrupa* (Turkey and Europe) by Atila Eralp (editor), Ankara 1997

3 During the discussions before the signing the customs union Tansu Ciller was criticized by oppositions parties strongly. Motherlands Party under Mesut Yilmaz and the Democratic Left Party under Bülent Ecevit threatened in the parliament that if they would come to power they would "reconsider" the agreement. Now, they are in power and the public opinion is expecting whether they really will do it.

4 Philip Robins, Turkey's Foreign Policy under Erbakan, *Survival*, Summer 1997, p.16, William Pfaff, "Turkey's Painful Struggle Between Old and New", *International Herald Tribune*, May 19,1997, Faruk Pen; Die gegenwärtige Lage in der Türkei unter der neuen Regierung, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 11 -12/97, 7. März 1997 und Udo Steinbach; Außenpolitik am Wendepunkt? Ankara sucht seinen Standort im internationalen System, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 11-12/ 97, 7 März 1997.

5 Cited from Philip Robins, p.86

6 Together with Turkey members include Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the above mentioned countries, middle powers from the predominantly Muslim world.

7 For recent changes of Turkey's foreign and security policy see, Andrew Mango, *Turkey, The Challenge of a New Role*, The Washington Papers /163, Westport,1994, Henri J. Barkey, (Editor) *Reluctant Neighbor, Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, Washington DC.1996

8 For details of the cooperative and adversarial aspects of Turkey -EU relations see the special section of *Foreign Police Quarterle*, Vol,19, Nos.1-2, Ankara

9 For details in this respect see Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, *NATO Enlargement: Does it enhance Security*, *Foreign Policy*, Ankara, March 1996, Nos 1-2 ,pp.23-30. To me the NATO enlargement could have-not been stopped by Turkey and enlargement will certainly bring some problems for Turkey but also new opportunities. Hüseyin Bağci; *Neue Probleme, aber vor allem Vorteile für die Türkei*, Die NATO-Osterweiterung aus türkischer Sicht, Das Parlament, 16 Mai,1997, P.9

10 Interview with Ysmail Cem in *Sabah Daily* with the title Once Petrol "first oil", Sunday, 17 August 1997

11 For a comment in this respect see, Mensur Akgün, Yki Konu: Kybrys ve Ermenistan (Two Issues: Cyprus and Armenia), *Yeni Yüzyyl*,(Daily), 17 August 1997

12 Werner Adam's comment in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from 13 August 1997

13 See: Document: Towards a Solution in Cyprus, *Foreign Policy Quarterly* Vol. XX Nos-34. pp 119-121

14 John Hitchens, Cyprus must not be prisoner of Turkey, *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 1997

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