

CHANGING TURKEY: FROM WEST TOWARDS EAST

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Abstract

The paper analyses the recent and current changes in Turkey at political, economic, social, diplomatic level. The democratic government of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) is ruling the third time by having a majority of the votes. AKP, because of its Islamist roots and more familiarity and support in conservative and Islamist class, known as a covert Islamic and conservative party. The current growing authoritarianism in the policies and actions of AKP; the AKP opposition to the Hizmet Movement (also known as Gülen Movement) – with which it had cordial relations until very recent on many political and social issues; Turkey's growing energy demands, expanding economic linkages, changing patterns in relations with the regional and global countries and institutions, are some prominent factors that actually depict a new form and picture of Turkey. The aim of this paper is to discuss the reasons and facts of political, economic, social and diplomatic change in Turkey as well as the country's policies in various fronts. By keeping in mind the changing factors, the transformation in Turkey and the impacts of this change is being analyzed at regional and global level. The change is analyzed by taking into account the perspectives of increasing globalization, interdependence and interconnectivity. Methodology used in the paper is descriptive-analytical, as to describe the events and then analyze them with arguments. It is concluded in the paper that Turkey being an important strategic location that connecting Europe to the Middle East and with other regions is important for studying as a corridor that now due to domestic, regional and global influences keep on changing. This bears more significance now as Turkey is striving and perusing the policies of her own interests that propel a substantial transformation defining her shift from secularism towards Islamism and conservatism.

Keywords: Changing Turkey, Growing Authoritarianism, Changing Political, Economic, Social and Diplomatic Policies

1. Introduction

Turkey is important to study because of her different and unique geo-strategic, political, social, economic and diplomatic position. Considering her Ottoman past from 1300s to 1923, Turkey was basically an Islam-oriented state until 1924 – a year after the proclamation of the modern Turkish Republic, when mainly due to economic reasons, she adopted a secular constitution and social system. Yet, since then across the modern Turkish society, many social and non-state actors have kept on continuing practicing and preaching Islamic education and values and does have dominant influence in society, economy and politics. For instance, the Gülen Movement or the Hizmet Movement is the most influential Islam-inspired non-profitable social organization with a great social influence which is seen as applying indirect influence on politics and people's choices in the Turkish society. It has been witnessed that the conservative/Islamic and secular ideologies have been in a cold conflict since the founding of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923. The current AKP government has political Islamist roots and is in power for the third time by getting a great support of the conservative Muslims. Despite its recent authoritarian policies, AKP still has public support, which is deemed mainly because of the economic breakthrough Turkey has registered during this party's rule. At foreign level, Turkey's foreign policy is defined by

its stark economic and political approaches in and around her region. Turkey displays a constant evolution in her domestic and foreign policies.

Turkey's strategic location is vital as she bestrides the two continents i.e. Europe and Asia, which renders her as indispensable for accessing and linking Africa, the Middle East, Caucasia, Central Asia, and the Balkans with one another. Turkey's geographical influence reaches out to the South Asia as well as covers the energy rich water resources that include the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey functions as an energy and trade transit corridor among all these regions. In addition, Turkey is going to be a center of cross-transit oil, gas pipelines and economic trade. These developments will surely strengthen the political and economic role of Turkey in the world politics. Turkey's involvement in the foreign politics is growing that make a little shift in her zero-sum policy towards a non-sum zero policy.

Today, the growing energy needs is increasing the interdependence of the states including Turkey – this will produce a change in the structural, political and economic areas of Turkey and obviously cause cross-political impacts, especially on Turkey and at regional and global level. In international politics, the globalization intervenes to that extent where the state's religion, domestic policies, foreign policies, ideologies, politics, social and diplomatic relations are becomes a matter of concern for other states and non-state actors. The aforementioned factors relevant to the state are considered important as playing a significant role in the world politics and among the relations of the states and institutions.

To bring out the regional and political importance of Turkey, the paper describes first the strategic and economic significances, then elaborates and analyzes the structural changes in political, economic, diplomatic and social sphere with its impacts on Turkey and its effects at regional and global level. It also seeks to examine the reasons behind the Turkey's shifting policies towards the East and its implications in the future. The paper will also analyze the nature of Turkey's policies from the East and towards the West and under the shifting policies of Turkey, will examine her relations with the EU and the other dominant powers.

2. Economic and Strategic Significance of Turkey

Turkey is the world's 16th largest economy. According to the analysts, Turkey – due to her growing economic revenues, establishing economic and energy linkages – will soon be in the top ten influential actors of the world politics.¹

Turkey is considered as one of the best choices for attaining economic and energy influence, needs and profit. As currently Turkey is in focus of many countries which want to export or import their natural resources including oil and gas via Turkey to across the other regions in order to get multiple political and economic goals. Regarding this, there are multiple proposals and plans from different sides includes the under-consideration transportation pipeline project of Israel and Greek Cypriot natural gas via Turkey,² the proposed natural gas pipeline project from Azerbaijan to Turkey to the other European states,³ Turkey has increased her stakes in the proposed Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) and the Shah Deniz Project in the Caspian Sea, which springs from one of the world's largest gas fields, feeds the South Caucasus Pipeline (also known as the Baku-Tiflis-Erzurum Pipeline) and the TANAP, which is planned carry Azeri gas both to Turkey and to other markets in Europe, with Russia the blue stream gas pipeline project that currently effectively works, Gazprom natural gas project that is under-consideration⁴. These all proposals stir many political challenges, leads to shifts and tunes in Turkey's foreign policy and affecting the politics and interdependence structure of the region.

On issue of Israeli and Greek Cypriot natural gas, Turkey is at the present undergoing sour relations with both the states: With Israel, the remittance agreement is pending on Freedom Flotilla incident and the Turkish casualties, while with Greek Cyprus; the aggravated differences exist since 1974 on Cyprus's reunification issue. February 11, 2014 saw the US arbitration for launching the peace talks between Turkey and Greek Cypriot on the Cyprus issue. It is rather interesting to note here that the USA – of which direct involvement was during the summer of 1974 by slapping sanctions and arms embargoes on Turkey and Greece after the Turkish

intervention on Cyprus to purge Greek Cypriot militia – has come to the fore by volunteering to mediate on a more-than-a-half-century-long international conflict. This starkly indicates myriad political and economic interests of the United States in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. For instance the pivotal economic reason behind the resuming Cyprus negotiation is the billion of dollars that will be got by those stake-holders involved in the pipeline projects.⁵ The political reason behind these talks is to prevent the growing influence of Russia in Europe by establishing Cyprus as Russia's alternative in order to reduce European Union's increasing dependency on Russian's oil and gas.⁶ Russia is the most dominant energy exporter to the European Union; Russia's exports to the EU amount to its 34 percent of gas sales.⁷ Recent gas field discoveries in the past decade in Israel i.e. The Leviathan field and the Tamar field are important for changing the strained political environment of the region. The Leviathan field with its reservoir of 19 trillion cubic feet of natural gas is the largest gas field to have been discovered in the past decade. Another Israeli field, Tamar contains about 11 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Greek Cyprus gas reserves are about 3.5 to 6 trillion cubic feet.⁸ The Israel's gas field constitutes equivalent almost a year's worth of European gas demand and these are considered to be a better substitution to Russia's gas imports.⁹ Israel and the Greek Cyprus feels the dire need to extend gas pipelines from their region in the face of dire need and demand – by considering the carriage expenditures and potential incomes of supply to other states; as according to an estimate, through Turkey export charges will be 2 to 3 billion dollars while by liquefied form of gas hauled in tankers, these countries would bear the charges of 10 to 15 billion dollars.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, oil and gas are two energy resources for which today every state is striving hard to get. This energy components change and increase importance of Turkey from energy and political perspective. Strategically located as an energy hub, Turkey would play a key and decisive role in the world politics as the surrounding regions of European Union, Middle East, and West Asia depend deeply on her.¹¹

The recent agreement on February 28, 2014 between Turkey and Azerbaijan was held on the Trans-Anatolia Gas pipeline (TANAP) that will carry gas from Azerbaijani natural gas field of Shah Deniz II field to Europe through Turkey. The Shah Deniz field is located in the Caspian Sea and renowned as one of the world's largest gas field. This project will be effective from 2018. Approximately, Turkey will get six bcm natural gas while 10 bcm that is equal to about 1.5 percent of Europe's complete consumption will supply to Europe. This pipeline project is not only fulfilling the growing energy needs of Turkey but also increasing the regional political and economic importance of Turkey particularly as an energy passing corridor. While on domestic level, this pipeline project is providing about 5000 jobs in the 21 provinces of Turkey.¹² As according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) released figures the unemployment rate in Turkey in 2013 is increased from 0.5 points to 9.7 percent that is unexpectedly high. The construction of the pipeline projects via Turkey are effectively but not fully reducing the unemployment rate in Turkey.¹³

In history, the relations of Turkey and Russia are consisted of two factors; contention and friendship.¹⁴ In 2000, a considerable change came in Turkey and Russia bilateral relations when both the states established close relations mainly in energy, trade and political sphere.¹⁵ Turkey's growing energy demands for oil and gas increasing very rapidly day by day.¹⁶ After USA, Russia and China, Turkey is in the list of countries that are rising as emerging economic giants as Turkey is expanding very speedily by her economy in the West and East.¹⁷ Russia is one of the major suppliers of oil and gas energy resources to Turkey. In 2014, Turkey imports of natural gas 58 percent and oil imports are 12 percent. Turkey purchases natural gas from Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia and liquefied natural gas from Algeria and Nigeria. However, Turkey's heavy reliance on Russian gas makes Russian resources vital for Turkey.¹⁸ Turkey has signed and established many gas and oil transportation projects that indicate the dire dependency of Turkey on Russian oil and gas resources. These projects includes Russia's export of gas through the western route of Ukraine and Bulgaria; Blue Stream gas pipeline project that was constructed under the Black Sea and which increased Turkey's dependence on the Russian gas; Gazprom Project, one of the biggest gas projects across the globe through which Russia wants to create its monopoly over Europe and the Middle East.¹⁹

Recent crises in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea with Russia has increased the strategic, political and economic importance of Turkey for the EU and USA mainly due to the Black Sea region.²⁰ The Black Sea is crucial for Turkey and Russia due to energy resources and trade route to Europe where they are speeding up to create their influence in a new world order. During the Cold War phase, Turkey's policies at the Black Sea region

were completely pro-NATO or pro-Western mainly to promote democracy, open trade and to counter soft security challenges includes illicit drugs, human trafficking.²¹ Currently Turkey is moving towards Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus region.²² Today, Turkey and Russia bilateral relations are growing in maritime security, energy and trade and political fields. Due to the Black Sea region, Turkey is mutually important for Europe as for providing transit energy and trade route to it and for Russia in a sense that by friendly relations she makes lessen the ethnic unrest in Russian's influential areas includes Georgia and Romania.²³ A large amount of Turkey's trade deficit is generated by Russian tourists, while Turkey is the fifth largest trade partner of Russia.²⁴

On the Black Sea, Turkey is working as a corridor to provide energy from east to west. This corridor is an alternative for the EU from its dependence on Russia for energy resources. Turkey, with the help of the close cooperation with Azerbaijan, Georgia and the USA, is now supplying gas and oil to its own country and to Europe through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipeline. By this, Turkey plays an important role in curtailing the monopoly of Russia on the hydrocarbon sources of the Caspian Sea.²⁵ While the Nabucco gas pipeline project that lies ahead for Turkey to link Caspian and the Middle East to the Europe, this pipeline needs much gas to supply. However, this pipeline route that passes through Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary provides threat to Russia of which Southern Stream gas pipeline project covers almost the same route. Nabucco project seems to be inferior and failing: Firstly, it has insufficient gas sources and secondly, its construction support depends on EU.²⁶

3. Transformation in Domestic Political Policies and Identities

AKP (Justice and Development party) is basically originated from the Milli Görüş (National View) that was renowned as an Islamic Movement that played a crucial political role for establishing Islam in Turkey.²⁷ AKP came into power first time in 2002 then 2007 and in 2011 by having an enormous support of conservative Islamic and economic class.²⁸ Recently unprecedented changes are made by AKP in domestic political structure and policies such as introduced a variety of policies and passed laws that significantly curtailed constitutional freedoms that were most recently promised and adopted in the 2010 Constitutional Referendum. For instance, the AKP-majority Turkish parliament summarily passed a crucial law that strengthened the sway of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) by authorizing the Turkish intelligence service with a methodical eye on the actions of Turkish citizens, extending the service's mandate to having a strong say about planning the foreign policy and handling critical issues like terrorism. The most debated aspect of the MİT law has been its enabling the MİT chief and its officials with extraordinary protection against any legal action. This simply means that, in Turkey, it is no longer possible to call some state authorities to account for their transgressions. Opposition parties in Turkey, especially the CHP, remark that this law acts as a shield for the PM Erdoğan by protecting him from any probe on corruption allegations that have been on the news since the last quarter of 2013.²⁹

Sweeping acts such as the new Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) law is also seen by the naysayers as an attempt to place the Judiciary under the influence of the AKP and silence the voice of allegations.³⁰

Bills that were passed recently to ban the social media such as the YouTube and the Twitter and to restrict the Internet categorically aimed to close down all websites and restrict access to the media that revealed "political privacy". Yet, the ban on Twitter was removed after the local elections by a judicial order from the Constitutional Court.³¹ Turkey's telecommunications watchdog (TIB) has removed the YouTube ban that was its sixty-seven days long YouTube on orders of the Constitutional Court that ruled it violates freedom of speech.³² Moreover, currently AKP has begun a war against Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement,³³ a faith-inspired, transnational civil, non-political and non-profitable movement that was inspired by Gülen since 1960s. Cherished as an authoritative religious scholar and opinion leader, Fethullah Gülen holds an extensive influence on the Turkish society, education, humanitarian assistance, media institutions, intercultural dialogue and business sector. The Hizmet Movement predominantly works for promoting the cause of education in Turkey and all over the world by establishing private schools and centers for co-existence.³⁴ Before graft or corruption allegations about the AKP in December 2013, the party and the Hizmet were

considered as close allies. The differences first surfaced in November 2013 when PM Erdoğan expressed his intentions to close down the private tuition centers that prepare students for university entrance exams across Turkey. About 30 per cent of the entire private tuition centers in Turkey were opened by Hizmet-inspired people; however PM's extensive discourse of closing institutions opened by free enterprise drew ire.³⁵

Later this discourse evolved into downright statements and hateful speeches by the Turkish Prime Minister while addressing the public rallies during local election campaigns. While the answer to the question why AKP moves against Gülen so fiercely is still unknown, it may be that Prime Minister Erdoğan may be increasingly disturbed by the civil influence of the Hizmet and the Hizmet's insistence as a civil society element about cleaner politics after allegations of corruption in state mechanism.³⁶

AKP and the Hizmet has posed for a friendly picture during the last decade, and according to a number of analyses, the educated human resources of the Hizmet in and outside Turkey expedited the deep-seated social and economic reforms by the AKP. It is mentioned that the party would find it difficult otherwise to reap so quick benefits in terms of development.³⁷ Currently, AKP's attitude against the Hizmet and the protesting segments of the Turkish society lead the cynics to think that by bringing forth authoritarian policies like banning the Internet and the social media AKP approaches its intention to render Turkey into an Islamic state. While a segment of the society was expecting a radical loss in AKP's votes in the local elections with a possibility that the Hizmet sympathizers would support the opposition, the substantial victory of AKP proved it wrong. However, the ongoing tensions and potential policies, an altogether different voter response may await the party in the national and presidential elections across the country.³⁸

But the recent research survey findings that has been conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy last year on Gezi park protest on June 6-7, 2013 in İstanbul's Gezi Park and the second one on July 6-7, 2013 across Turkey indicates that the 82 percent people saying that this incident was a conspiracy that staged against the government. The survey findings also show that still the majority of the Turkish people is in support of AKP.³⁹

Notwithstanding that it was only the local elections; PM Erdoğan spoke to his supporters from the balcony of the AKP headquarters as if it was the party's victory after the forthcoming national elections. He used the expression, "New Turkey" by saying, "I thank you very much because you have protected the new Turkey's struggle for independence. Every single individual in the 77-million people should know that the new Turkey won today. This is the wedding day of the new Turkey." The word "New Turkey" here is not merely addressing the conservative and Islamic policies of the AKP but also throwing light on Turkey's foreign policy shift from European Union to the Muslim World mainly towards the Middle East. The term also addresses Turkey's balanced approach for growing energy and trade relations with all the regional powers in order to fulfill her own energy needs.

AKP takes pride as the first Turkish political party which remarkably boosted the Turkish economy by incorporating herself with the standards and demands by the European Union and European markets. Even though she may have cut speed in the wake of recent internal problems and recent paradigm shift in geopolitics, Turkey moves on steadily. On the horizon are two critical destinations, namely the presidential and national elections. There may be a burning need to lower tensions to make it there with composure.⁴⁰

As far the growing authoritarianism by AKP in Turkey is concerned, the recent policies of ban on YouTube, Internet, Twitter, kicking and slapping of a protester by PM Erdoğan's aide, PM Erdoğan's exchange of harsh words with protesters, use of tear gas and violence against the protesters on Gezi Park revolt's first anniversary are for the time regarding as solutions to overcome the social conflicting and disturbing situation.⁴¹ Otherwise the past record of AKP indicates that having of a conservative identity, the party constantly talked about freedom, equality, education and human rights. For instance, during the previous terms AKP has launched a number of reforms for the non-Muslims to overcome their problems.⁴² It provided them the religious freedom by making the constitutional changes under that the non-Muslims were free to continue their practices in their own religious places includes mosques or temples.⁴³ AKP is opposes the headscarf ban.⁴⁴ AKP may be seen as identical with the Gülen Movement from the perspective of Islamic vision – yet the Movement is starkly apolitical. AKP ranks

lauded and facilitated on many fronts the Gülen Movement participants such as on social welfare, democracy, religious freedom and rejecting differences in race, nationalism and ethnicity.⁴⁵

4. Transformation in Foreign Political Policies and Expanding Trade Relations

Turkey have strived for the EU full membership since 1987 but is still unsuccessful in this regard. She has faced numerous challenges that are pushed forth by European states such as lack of freedom of expression, undemocratic practices, lack of human rights, conservative ideology, Kurdish issue etc. Turkey, during her long quest for surpassing the level of Western civilization and most lately for the EU, started with sweeping reforms that attempted to wipe her Ottoman past, went on with constitutional changes which started by removing the name of religion as Islam from the 1924 Constitution so as to 'secularize' the state and her citizens, and throughout these years she strived hard to transform her policies, culture, values, and systems accordingly to the rules and laws indicated by the European states and the EU. Yet, her Islamic and Ottoman legacy seem to constantly haunting Turkey that however much she approaches nearer to the European integration, it actually escapes from her and keeps her away from the EU membership. The last decade demonstrated that Turkey has been very active to make political, trade and diplomatic relations with the Middle East, African and Asian countries. The reason behind this shift in Turkey's foreign policy means a move from the West to East and is based on multiple interests and reasons such as growing economic needs i.e. oil and gas, reaching out to newer and more lucrative markets, and most importantly, staying entrenched in her Muslim conservative Turkish past, ideology as well as transnational brotherhood that lack in the European side. Turkey's increasing relations with the Middle East and other states of the region caused many problems, opposition and challenges for her EU membership.⁴⁶

Recently, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev has invited Turkey to be a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), which was formed on Thursday with a treaty signed by the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. The union aims to challenge the economic power of the United States, the European Union and China. The Eurasian Economic Union will be mainly controlled by Russia and it will be a dominant economic regional organization in comparison of EU. Turkey matters to become a part of this organization because of her strained relations with the EU most recently. Since the time Turkey filed her application to become a member to the privileged European Union in 1987 and sat at the table of negotiation by 2005, she has waited for full membership while tackled with newer challenges. Losing hope, Turkey now seems to tilt towards East much seriously as she explores becoming a part of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization). In November 2013, during a joint press of the High-Level Cooperation conference held in St. Petersburg, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on the Russian President Putin to allow Turkey to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed his request by these words "*Include us in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and relieve us from this pain,*" with a hidden reference to Turkey's long EU membership process. Turkey was accepted as a dialogue partner by the Shanghai Five at its annual summit in Beijing on June 7, 2012.⁴⁷

On the Crimea issue, Turkey has adopted a specifically cautious foreign policy towards Russia. Turkey has historical and ethnic links with Crimea, as from 1478 to 1774 Crimea was a part of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, 12 percent of the current Crimean population i.e. 300,000 people are ethnically Tatar Turks. On the basis of time-tested historical linkages and good relations, Turkey can play its diplomatic influence over Crimea after the intervention of Russia and the initiative for referendum to safeguard the sovereignty of Ukraine and the freedoms of the Tatar Turkish population. But, Turkey has not posed any diplomatic challenge for Russia, because it primarily wants to stay safe from potential energy crises to be initiated by Russia in retaliation. Turkey is heavily dependent for gas and oil sources on other states. Among all, Russia is the most prominent energy-rich country on which Turkey heavily depends.⁴⁸

Turkey has tried to change its dependence on Russia for oil and gas reserves. In recent past by favoring the Iranian gas. However, Iran refused to export its oil and gas reserves on cheaper price to Turkey. Turkey's much

interest in Cyprus reunification talks were basically due to having a potential share from prospective oil and reserves in and around Cyprus i.e. East Mediterranean.

Turkey also tried much to reduce its conflicts with Iraq to overcome its energy problems. Securing the energy futures of Turkey in a peaceful region has been one of the prominent driving forces behind the current Turkish foreign policy.

Yet, December 28, 2011 spelt a tremendously surprising change in Turkey's foreign policy when the country signed an agreement with Russia on the construction of the Southern Stream gas pipeline project under the Turkish exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea. By this deal, Turkey will have obvious benefits as well as apparent losses. While the country will get cheaper gas and oil from Russia as a benefit, it will suffer considerable loss as it will by its own hands transfer its monopoly over Europe to Russia. This deal also supposes to reduce the Russian dependency on Ukraine which was included in its previous plan of Southern Stream gas pipeline project as a by-pass. Turkey seems to have increased its dependency on Russia, which no doubt was much aggressive towards Turkey in the past. Despite this rapprochement, Russia opposed Turkey's permanent membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization due to Turkey's pro-US policy on Syria and its alliance in NATO.⁴⁹

The Ukraine incident elevates the strategic importance of Turkey for the European Union and the USA, while it is a fact that Turkey's full membership to the EU is on stake. Now the question is whether Turkey this time would adopt the same pro-NATO policies to undermine Russia as it had adopted during 1990s.

At the present, the circumstances are dissimilar as Turkish-Russian relations are much flexible than in the past. Turkey has now a balanced and responsive foreign policy; it does not restrict itself only to the European Union template, rather it strives to keep influential relations with the Muslim World particularly with the Middle Eastern and African states. Years showed that the EU has essentially disregarded and disappointed Turkey. Turkey's current foreign policy espouses prudence which holds primary importance to Turkey's own energy needs and survival. Only the balanced approach in foreign decisions and policies can save Turkey from any serious consequences ahead that can be caused by its growing dependency on Russia.⁵⁰

A thorny problem in the history of the modern Republic of Turkey, Kurdish issue has been in the top-level agenda since the inception of the Republic in 1923. Especially in the years 1925 and 1937-8, Turkish governments exercised an iron-hand over the Kurdish populations in the eastern provinces of Turkey, ignoring their demands of equal rights. Thus, across Turkey, Kurds were deprived of using their own language in daily dealings and at educational institutions, and were denied representation in political sphere at large. In time, categorical denial of rights and oppression over the people of the region gave way to exploitation by the evil of terrorism which adopted the discourse of struggling for an autonomous region or even a separate homeland. By the first half of the 1980s, a proxy war between the Turkish Armed Forces and the Kurdish separatist militants of the PKK under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan erupted. This has continued for several decades and resulted in approximately 40,000 casualties.⁵¹

This fight provided no solution, rather invited the regional Kurdish militia and foreign powers forces to intervene in a way similar to the current Syrian scenario. With Iran supporting the Kurds of Turkey against Turkey in finances and ammunition, Turkey has always been conscious and serious on Kurdish issue, especially after the founding of a semi-autonomous state in the north of Iraq in 1991 and the recent rise of Kurds in Syria.⁵² Syrian Kurds' Democratic Union Party (PYD) is actually the second name of PKK, which has unleashed terror in Turkey.⁵³

In order to achieve substantial solutions and to not get further frustrated on the Kurdish Issue, Turkey has recently changed her suppressive policy towards Kurds and adopted diplomacy and peace. Since 2002, AKP governments of Turkey registered visible progress by initiating for reforms related to Kurds in Turkey by allowing them to use the Kurdish language in daily use and in educational institutions, besides giving them representation in the media. As a result of the 2007 elections, AKP got approximately 53% votes in the Southeast Anatolia,

which has considerable Kurdish population. This was termed as a big success of Turkish government on Kurdish issue. Later, the political representation of Kurds in the Turkish Grand National Assembly was granted to Kurdish parliamentarians. At the present, BDP is the pro-Kurdish (and PKK) party in the Parliament. Starting a “Kurdish Initiative” as also mentioned in the previous examples, Turkey has seen significant peace and progress in her Southeastern Anatolia region which used to be hit with violent terrorism. A radical shift from the traditional Turkish public and foreign policy took place when the Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with President Barzani of the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdish state to maintain peace in the region. This evolved into signing an agreement for supplying gas and oil from Iraqi Kurd region via Turkey to the other countries of the region. Through this agreement, Turkey could also address her own growing energy needs.

Marking the aforementioned perception shift, Turkish PM Erdoğan began to use the word “*Kurdistan*” in his speeches to please the Kurds living in Turkey. This led to many analysts interpreting this discourse in various tones, associating it to the soft stance of Turkey and suggesting a spectrum of possibilities on the Kurdish issue – most significantly, a potential near-future prospect of Turkey to consent for the founding of a semi-autonomous Kurdish province or region. However, considering Turkey’s history of diplomatic relations, such soft words are oft policy-based; especially, regarding the assertive Turkish nationalism under the hood of state machinery, it would not be easy for any Turkish state individual or institution to initiate a radical reform that will lead to divide the sovereignty of a country like Turkey into autonomous bodies.

Another reason behind Turkey’s recent shift of softer domestic policy towards Kurds is wish for tapping the Kurdish vote bank by offering them prospects of peace, further freedoms and development schemes, all of which would cement peace on Turkey’s volatile southern borders with Iraq and Syria.

Meanwhile, Turkey has also adopted a milder stance on Syria issue. Earlier, Turkey supported democracy and thus an urgent change of regime in Syria; yet now, Turkey neither opposes, nor supports the Assad regime. Turkey had a number of reasons to boldly oppose the Assad regime in Syria: Firstly, Turkey was striving to promote its democratic stance against Syria to showcase how committed she was for the full membership to the EU and how diversely she was involved with the Middle Eastern politics. Secondly, Turkey was asserting its military position as a key member of the NATO in geography of non-NATO countries. Last but not the least, Turkey and Syria have long had a long history of political, ideological, territorial and cultural differences, which manifested itself in diplomatic relations as well. Syria provided ample support to Kurds to keep Turkey busy in countering disturbance in her geography. Things have changed significantly by 1998 as both states established friendly diplomatic and trade relations, became more focused on the regional trade while keeping a closer eyes of security for each other.

In the wake of the so-called Arab Spring, the shift in Turkey’s stance on Syria became more apparent: At first, US changed her stance on Syria and Turkey made it thus clearer that she wants to keep herself secure from the ongoing Shite-Sunni sectarian issues and ensuing enmities of Iran and Russia which support Syria in rain or shine. In addition, Turkey simply did not want Syria to further provoke Turkish Kurds to enlarge the tension in the region towards the Turkish soil.

Turkey has followed a composed foreign policy in the last twelve years, which marked itself with the dictum, “*Zero Problem with Neighbors*”. Now that the change of Turkish policy on Syria and Kurdish issue has been a radical shift, the country adopted a number of policies for the solution of Kurdish issue, including the desire to found a buffer zone at her southern border with Syria i.e. the Syrian Kurdish territory Rajavo in order to keep check on Kurdish movements but failed. Therefore, Turkey has held tight at the peace policy as a last and better solution. Yet, grievances exist on Kurdish issue and according to Turkey, Syria still incites Turkish Kurds to unleash disturbance across the Turkish soil.⁵⁴

At present, Turkey focuses on establishing thriving political, diplomatic and trade relations with the Syrian Kurds through their political groups in order to keep them under her influence. Recently, high level official meetings were conducted in Ankara with the Democratic Union Party (PYD) of Syria on trade issues.⁵⁵ The recent statements of PKK’s imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan have been surprisingly pleasant and constructive as he

appraised Turkish PM for his reforms for Kurds and offered his support; all of these came as solace to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan while he has been battling with corruption charges and allegations against himself, his family and the government ministers. In current situation, a virtual ceasefire and substantial peace in Turkey may highlight Turkey's peace policy towards Kurds as a role model for Iran where Kurds has been actively clashing with the Iranian military since the 2011 ceasefire.⁵⁶

The recent declaration by the PYD for a semi-autonomous region in Syria causes tension for Turkey expressly. Such declaration is so far not been officially supported by the Syrian regime. Yet, this declaration contains a great meaning in Kurdish history and for Syria where Kurds never rebelled against the government. In Syria, Kurds reside mainly in the Northern provinces i.e. Qamishli, Afrin and Kobni where Arabs and Assyrians too live as minorities.⁵⁷

On trade matters, Turkey is swiftly enhancing and strengthening her trade relations not only to the European states but towards the Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Asian and Southeast Asian, African, Mediterranean and Black Sea countries. Turkey joined the UN in 1945 and in 1952 it became a member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). In 1964, Turkey became an associate member of the European Community. Over the past decade, it has undertaken many reforms to strengthen its democracy and economy; it began accession membership talks with the European Union in 2005. Currently, due to energy and trade needs, Turkey is indulging herself in different international and national trade institutions. As currently, she is the member of the European Council, the organization for cooperation and development (OECD), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the D-20, the D-8 and the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) and possibly soon become a member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and of Eurasian Union. Turkey is chiefly a large free-market economy that based on industrial, agricultural manufacturing products, tourism, vegetables and fruits, natural resources include cotton, crude oil, and auto production.⁵⁸

5. Regional and Global Impacts

- 1- Turkey is becoming a source of integration of Europe, Middle East, Balkans, the Central Asian states, Caucasia, Asia, and the Southeast Asia. This will be actually integration of economies, energy sources, and dependency – cultural and political. A new era will emerge in that Turkey will have economic, political, strategic center of the world activities.
- 2- Turkey is important for transecting different gas and oil pipelines across the regions particularly the Israel and the Greek Cypriot gas pipeline can solve conflicting relations of both states with Turkey such as particularly long awaited the Cyprus issue.
- 3- Turkey is politically significant for USA, European Union and Russia that are in silent Cold War with each other mainly for the energy resources. It is a bitter fact that Turkey worked hard for the EU membership but her hopes are still on stake. On the other hand, Turkey is craving badly for fulfilling energy needs mostly of oil and gas. Turkey's adopted a balanced policy approach on Ukraine crises where she did not hold a bold stance in favor Turkish Crimean Tatars against Russia due to her dependency on Russian natural gas. Turkey's changing aggressive stance on Syrian Crisis in order to reduce tensions in the Kurdish region, her policy to settle down the Kurdish issue with dialogue and peace process, recent agreement with Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region on supply of oil, growing economic relations with Iran in order to flourish her economy and reduce natural gas dependency from Russia, her growing economic and cultural relations with Russian influenced areas of Balkan and the Central Asian states indicates the shift in Turkey's foreign policy from traditional economic political approaches to the centric and mainly focused economic approaches. Currently Turkey's foreign policies are going to be more economic centered. Now for Turkey, the most important object is to get economic and energy needs from all the sides i.e. West, East, South and North.
- 4- In the future, Turkey seems to become a great economic and energy hub and also vital due to her political and strategic position. Due to the dependency of many regions on her, Turkey will be able to play decisive role in deciding their destiny. However the current Turkey's democratic and humanitarian

support to conflicting war-ravaged states, refugees, poor states and displays of brotherhood, zero-sum and compromising policies shows that she believes in peace, prosperity and human dignity.

- 5- The graft corruption allegations on AKP, the protest of the people for AKP accountability, ban on social media and the Internet because of the releasing of audio cassettes on the YouTube, Twitter and Internet sites that document the conversations of PM Erdoğan, his son and of other party members and later the leakage of state security level secrets on Syria issue, hard suppression of Gezi Park protests and a hard stand and harsh remarks against the Gülen Movement, slapping and kicking of a Soma miner and protester by PM Erdoğan's aide are all the temporary solutions that have been adopted. AKP since after 2002 to till now, has adopted the policy to support democracy and freedom for outside world like for Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Sudan and on the Kurdish issue from the very beginning, it brought many democratic reforms there for the better solution to the problem. AKP brought many rights to the minority groups by making the Constitutional changes; it also lauded the services of the civil society, most notably the Hizmet or the Gülen Movement in education, economy and social prosperity. With having such background of AKP, it may not be appropriate to link growing authoritarianism with AKP's intentions for bringing Islam or conservatism to Turkey. As authoritarianism cannot be the part of an Islamic ideology since Islam preaches peace, love and human dignity, AKP seems to have adopted the authoritative policies in order to overcome the dispersed conflicting situation for making inside the state peace for establishing the functions of the state machinery smooth. This sets Turkey different from any Middle Eastern country, where authoritarianism has grown out of examples of long-lasting monarchies or dictatorships. However, it is suggested that dose of 'protective' authoritarianism in a democratic country like Turkey should be wisely administered, lest any potential backlash may lead to severe disturbance of socio-political fabric which has taken so long to weave.
- 6- Now today due to her geo-strategic location, Turkey is moving towards democracy, openness and globalism. Turkey is binding itself and the other regions in chain of interdependence, cooperation, and peace. More interdependence is reducing the conflicting problems; for instance when Pakistan and India became nuclear powers that left no opportunity for both for more conventional wars. Both now sit at the table of dialogue for peace and cooperating with each other in different fields.
- 7- In case of Turkey, the clash between the identities is existed but in covert form. For instance, her entrance into the EU is still at risk after so many years passed in constant reforms and structural changes mainly due to her Islamic roots. Turkey's move from the European states to the Middle East states and the other Islamic periphery regions including Africa, the Central Asia, and Asia is actually the realization of the aforementioned fact. Even still Turkey did not get the free trade privileges from EU. That is why Turkey is in a problem while exporting its goods to the European Union as she has to pay heavy taxes on export. This may radically change when Turkey becomes a hub of rich oil and gas pipelines such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline which carries Azerbaijani oil to Turkey, the natural gas supply pipelines from Israel and Greek Cyprus, all of which will increase the dependency of energy-aspirant European states on Turkey.
The identity-conflicting gap between the European states and Turkey will lose its importance. For instance, Middle Eastern states are Muslim states; however they are undeniably popular with the West because of their oil-generated wealth and rich oil reserves. United States, Russia and China also have economic and identity differences with one another and with many others; yet, it is now the period of economic openness, interdependence and cooperation that leaves behind all identity differences and conflicts. Turkey is a potential economic giant and in the future, on the grounds of EU interdependence, she can compel European states for full membership in the EU. A precursor to this has recently happened as a part of the custom union agreement with the EU. The agreement stipulates EU to include Turkey in the free trade agreement i.e. the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that is to be held between the United States and the EU. If the agreement is not entertained, Turkey will have the right to renounce her custom union agreement with the EU. It should be remembered that Turkey is conducting one third part of the EU trade and such a renouncement would spell a loss for all the parties.
- 8- Turkey will play an effective role in enhancing the economies of the developing Asian and African regions and she will share the existing growing balance of the region particularly with the South Asia with India and China by establishing economic and diplomatic relations there.

6-Conclusion

Turkey has a unique and crucial geo-strategic location that propel her towards new developments, economic boom and interconnectivity, social and political prosperity and becoming a problem-free state. At present, Turkey's policies are growing more economy and energy centered. Despite weathering latest crises in the Middle East head-on, Turkey deserves to be lauded for her role as a mediator among the states and being the helper of poor, conflict-ridden, and natural disaster affected nations. Turkey moves on as a peaceful state that supports democracy.

Basically a Muslim state, Turkey is constitutionally secular. Islamic values and beliefs are openly practiced in the society. In addition to the state's religious authority Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı which streamlines the practice of mainstream Islam across the country, a variety of non-state and civil society organizations that are inspired from Islam too disseminate the positive messages of the faith. Gülen Movement plays a significant role in providing faith-inspired and scientific education in Turkey and across the world in various private educational institutions founded by Turkish philanthropists and foundations. The Movement is non-political and comprises of non-profitable organizations that have an indirect but fairly extensive social influence across the conservative and other social classes of the society. TUSKON is a large business organization made up of seven confederations and is one of the leading business communities inspired by Gülen and the Hizmet Movement. In addition, the largest circulated Turkish daily Zaman and Turkish weekly Aksiyon, Samanyolu TV channels, as well as charitable organizations like the Kimse Yok Mu augment the visibility of the Movement in the Turkish public sphere. Since the Movement is a produce of the Anatolian heartland, it is society-based and incorporates an assortment of Anatolian and Muslim traditions that surpasses language, race or ethnicity; therefore it would not be possible removing it by coercion.

Turkey's economic, political, cultural and diplomatic inclinations to the Middle East, the Balkan states, the Central Asian, Asian and African states are on the basis of Islamic commonality so encouraging, supportive and progressive. The change indicates the unity of the Muslim world by having same religion, values, and feeling of oppression from the West on identity clash.

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