

# Imperial Legacies and Neo-Ottomanism: Eastern Europe and Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines whether the presence of imperial legacies in Central and South-eastern Europe affects their foreign policy stances and public opinion towards Turkish accession to the EU. It first discusses the boundaries of the ideational factors affecting the perception of Turkey, namely the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire as a European power in Eastern Europe. Secondly, it looks at the ideational factors in how Turkish foreign policy, more specifically Turkey's EU membership, is perceived by Eastern and South-eastern European political elite and public. The author finds that in places where the Ottoman Empire is perceived in more historically distant terms, the more positive or neutral views are of Turkish membership. It concludes with a juxtaposition of Eastern European stances with Turkey's new foreign policy strategies. It recommends that Turkish foreign policy should not neglect advocacy in the western part of the old Ottoman sphere of influence where new EU members lie. These may indeed be transformed into new allies to support Turkey's bid against the opponents among older EU members.

From Hungary he's soon away,  
In Austria by the break of day,  
Bavaria is just at hand,  
From there, he will reach another land,  
Soon the Rhine perhaps, he will come<sup>1</sup>

In this article, I will examine how the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Central and South-eastern Europe<sup>2</sup> affects the foreign policy stances and public opinion towards Turkish membership to the European Union (EU). My task is made difficult in that it needs to take into consideration questions of institutional and cultural legacy in such large historical swathes within the limited confines of this paper. However, I would argue that the Ottoman legacy does affect countries' stances towards Turkish accession to the EU, in that the Ottoman legacy plays a role in their own identity constructions vis-

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à-vis the European project. I suggest that the new EU members, whose support Turkey may realistically lobby for in its EU bid, come equipped with significant

## The historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Central and South-eastern Europe and Turkey may interact with Turkey's new foreign policy assertiveness in its neighborhood

historical memories of the Ottoman Empire with varying degrees of associations from their direct contact with Ottoman rule.<sup>3</sup>

The central contention of this article is that the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Central and South-eastern Europe and Turkey may interact with Turkey's new foreign policy assertiveness in its neigh-

borhood. Furthermore, while historical arguments may explain how historical legacies create diverging institutional structures and policy outputs and how assumed common legacies are believed to make target countries more receptive to foreign policy overtures by Turkish foreign policy makers. Historical legacies and ideational aspects on both sides are mirror images of one another, and remains under explored. I will first discuss the Ottoman Empire as a European power and its impact on Eastern European countries. I then reflect on Ottoman institutional and cultural legacies in South-eastern Europe and the Balkans. This analysis, I conclude, is particularly apt as some analysts worry about a shift in Turkey's foreign policy, which has been dubbed neo-Ottomanism, that aims for a greater involvement and influence in the former Ottoman territories, even though its architect, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, has repeatedly rejected this title and highlights Turkey's multi-dimensional and conciliatory orientation.<sup>4</sup>

### The Ottoman Empire as a European Power

One of the chief ideational aspects of Turkey's perception abroad is how the Ottoman Empire's legacy is perceived in the region.<sup>5</sup> Turkish accession to the EU lies at the heart of how Turkish foreign policy is evaluated and where most work on ideational aspects are conducted.<sup>6</sup> The perception of the Ottoman Empire as European or non-European has important repercussions when it comes to judging modern Turkey's place and stature in Eastern European eyes. A brief discussion of the historical trajectory of the Ottoman Empire's presence in the eastern part of the continent is necessary in order to map out the physical and ideational borderlines of the historical legacy argument.

The Ottoman rule in Eastern Europe lasted in some territories for close to 600 years. The capture of territory in the Balkans started in the 14<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury (the early years of the Ottoman conquest were 1354 to 1453), and the second conquest and consolidation of power (1453-1595) mainly involved a sort of self-government that became institutionalized later in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, culminating in the “golden age” during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent, when parts of Hungary and Romania came under Ottoman vassalage.

Acquiring their first foothold in Europe with the conquest of Adrianople (1365), the Ottomans then proceeded the Black Sea coast (in modern day Bulgaria), and occupied much of Macedonia, including Salonika (1387). The first Battle of Kosovo two years later was immortalized in the “Kosovo epic”, which was revived by Serbian nationalists following the break-up of the Yugoslav state. Morea, Serbia, Bosnia, Wallachia, and most of the Southern Danube region came under Ottoman rule, following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

By the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was already regarded as a European power. Against the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, King Francis of France would appeal to Süleyman I

after being taken prisoner in 1525. The Battle of Mohács (1526) marked the beginning of the long confrontation between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans in Central and South-eastern Europe. The Ottoman presence was seen as powerful in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it reached the gates of the center of the Habsburg Empire.

Soon after the defeat of the Ottoman armies at Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman Empire’s reach in Central Eastern Europe started to decline and Ottoman vassalage receded to the south of the Danube by 1699.<sup>7</sup> But in South-eastern Europe and in the Balkans, Ottoman rule lasted until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was continually challenged by the Russian and the Habsburg Empires. The dynamics of Balkan politics and the rise of nationalism, plus the intervention of the great European powers, resulted in the break-up of the southern Slavic lands, starting with the Serbian revolution which led to its autonomy in 1817, followed closely by Greece gaining independence in 1829. Soon after, the lands of modern-day Romania won independence in 1878. The Bulgarians revolted in 1876, but only became completely independent in 1908. The Treaty of Berlin in 1878, however, was the death knell for Ottoman rule in South-eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup>

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## The Historical Legacies of the Ottoman Empire in Central Eastern European EU Members

The support for the idea of Europe is that Europeans have a sense of common identity, history, culture and traditions. There is a clear congruence as evidenced in various surveys on support for European institutions about what constitutes Europe and what the EU aims to accomplish. It follows that enlargement decisions should be based on kinship and a sense of belonging. Analyses of why there is opposition towards EU enlargement to some countries reveal that opposition has less to do with costs and benefits but on whether the country is viewed as historically

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part of European culture, heritage and identity.<sup>9</sup> In other words, respondents support the EU membership of candidate countries and neighbors which correspond with their idea of Europe.

The parts of Eastern Europe that became EU members in 2004 had close cooperation with the Ottomans, although a majority of these coun-

tries, except for parts of Hungary, never came under direct Ottoman rule. The Polish Commonwealth, which bordered on the Ottoman Empire between 1526 and 1793, provides a good example. Poland was the first European entity to sign a friendship treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1533, and it sometimes acted as a cultural mediator between Western Europe and Ottoman Empire; for instance, some Janissary music and Ottoman cultural motifs were transferred to the Polish collective memory in their view of the Battle (or Siege) of Vienna (1683) which inspired the emergence of the myth of Poland as the bulwark of Christianity. Polish figures lay at the center of the legend of the relief of Vienna in collective European memory with Polish King Jan Sobieski's troops saving Europe from a Muslim conquest. The prophecy of *Wernyhora* claimed that Polish resurgence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century took place only when Turkish troops marched into its territory. The Ottoman Empire also did not recognize the partition of Poland, continuing to accept ambassadors to the Sublime Porte from "Lehistan (Poland)".

Poland became one of the first countries to recognize the Ankara government. Many Polish insurgents against Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century found refuge in the Ottoman Empire, and served in the Ottoman army and the state administration, contributing to the Empire's and later the young Turkish Republic's modernization. A key personality was Konstanty Borzecki (Mustafa Cellaeddin Pasha), whose grandson, Nazim Hikmet, was one of the greatest Turkish poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Poland has the most favorable attitude towards Turkish accession among the old and new members of the EU. Polish politicians have often emphasized that Polish support for Turkish entry to the EU is due to its gratitude for Turkey's stance against the Russian and German assaults against Polish national territory, and later, its support for Polish membership to NATO. But, one should balance this favorable historical-cultural view of Turkey with the public statements by Polish bishops, the Catholic Church, and other conservative circles that present negative perceptions of a Muslim country in Europe, along with discourses that revive the myth of the Battle of Vienna. In 2004, for instance, Poland was one of the most fervent supporters of a clause mentioning Europe's Christian roots in the preamble of the proposed European Constitution. Meanwhile, the foreign policy establishment in Poland generally holds a favorable view of Turkish accession as Poland hopes for an increased role in the geopolitics of alternative energy supplies and routes that pass through Turkey. Poland stands as a staunch US ally alongside Turkey and both countries worked closely in NATO's ISAF command in Afghanistan. Despite these collaborations, at the start of the Eastern Partnership project, which Poland launched along with Sweden in 2008 and whose geographical scope includes nearly all of Turkey's northeast neighbors, including Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Ankara was not consulted. Since its inception, the Eastern Partnership has been a sore point between Ankara and Warsaw.<sup>10</sup>

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Another intriguing case of the Ottoman legacy in Eastern Europe is Hungary. The heart of Hungary, including much of Trans-Danubia, Budapest and a slice of the Great Carpathian Plain, came under Ottoman rule in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, marking the most westerly point of the empire. Notwithstanding that Hungary was the base for Ottoman territorial expansion into Central Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, prominent Hungarian national figures like Imre Thököly fought on the side of the Ottomans against the Habsburgs. A number of Hungarians (along with Poles) in subsequent decades became successful intermediaries between Western Europe and the Ottomans, as well as agents of cultural syncretism in several Western European countries. Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ottoman Empire was a sanctuary for both Hungarian and Polish exiles during their wars of independence against Austria.

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Hungary than any other Central Eastern European country. Atatürk recruited a number of musicians, architects, city planners and agronomists from Hungary to provide expertise for cultivating the barren Anatolian plains. Aside from the restructuring of modern Turkish cities, Hungarian scholars helped create the higher education system in Turkey, especially the vocational and art schools.<sup>11</sup>

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For the next four decades under communism, Hungarians were only allowed to visit one country outside of the Communist bloc, Turkey.

This “special” relationship can be seen in the positive attitude of Hungarian foreign policy makers regarding Turkish entry into the EU. It is also evidenced in public opinion surveys conducted by the Hungarian as-

sociations such as the Hungarian Europe and the Eurobarometer (annual public opinion surveys conducted by the European Commission) where the Hungarian population comes up as one of the most favorable of all the member countries surveyed on Turkey’s candidacy, which place Turkey after only Croatia and before Ukraine in the countries they would favor joining the EU.<sup>12</sup>

Hungary’s positive attitude can be contrasted with that of Austria to put it into perspective. Austria’s opposition solidified when the EU was deciding on a date to open negotiations with Turkey in 2005. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik argued that Croatia should be made a member before Turkey and she led the Austrian government’s proposal to hold a referendum about Turkish membership. Austria, emerging from the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire as a nation-state, has struggled between overemphasizing its Catholic character and being part of the great German *kultur-nation* in the interwar period and immediately after World War II.<sup>13</sup> Many Austrians, mainly those on the right, view Turkish culture as simply not European and invoke the history of the confrontation between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. In addition, strong resistance against Turkey’s membership has been shaped by the image of Turkish migrant worker as being unable to integrate into Austrian society. The mayor of Graz in 2005 in the heat of the “Turkish question” debates stated that “Graz has always been Western Europe’s last bastion against Turkish invasion, and has a long history of resistance against Turkey, and today the fight has to be continued.”<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the conservative Catholic groups who defend Christian notions of solidarity, the center left and the Greens consider relations with Turkey as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the Muslim world and West, and also with its Muslim immigrant population. Yet they disapprove of Turkey’s mem-



Photo: REUTERS, Nikolay Doychinov

International amateur actors re-enact a scene from the battle for the fortress near the town of Shumen, some 350 km (217 miles) east from the Bulgarian capital Sofia. Bulgaria celebrates the anniversary of the battle, as part of the liberation struggle against the Ottoman Empire 568 years ago.

bership on the grounds of its alleged human rights abuses and lack of progress on women's rights.

In summary, Central Eastern European EU members, which had historical encounters with the Ottoman Empire as a European power, generally have a positive view of Turkish accession to the EU. This agrees with the analyses of Eurobarometer data on attitudes towards Turkish membership. The more European citizens view Turkey as historically part of Europe, the less they oppose Turkish membership. The opponents of Turkish membership use ideational arguments to frame their lack of support, in which Turkey is perceived in cultural, historical and values terms as not part of Europe and continues to be seen as a confrontational and an alien empire. Austria is a clear exception in Central Eastern Europe, but Austria also does not share many of the features of the new Central Eastern European members. Austria, like Germany, has a significant Turkish popula-

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tion, which is absent from any of the Eastern European countries. The Ottoman Empire is a distant memory for Hungary and Poland, and thus they have neutral or positive associations for its heir, modern Turkey. Austrian references to the Ottoman Empire frame the perceptions of modern Turkey and the perceptions of Turkey in the EU. In his analysis of the Turkey debate among Austrian stakeholders, Günay explains how the Turkish question, largely neglected until 2004,

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gained momentum and took central stage in the views towards eastern enlargement and the start of accession negotiations with Turkey.<sup>15</sup>

After surveying the western most countries of Central Eastern Europe, this assessment will continue with those EU member countries that have once directly come under Ottoman

rule in South-eastern Europe. Whether the presence of historical legacy renders countries more receptive to the foreign policy of Turkey can be tested in these countries more effectively. Bulgaria and Greece will be given special attention due to both the existence of the historical legacy condition and the Turkish population in their borders.

### **Historical Legacies in South-eastern Europe**

The institutional and cultural legacies of the Ottomans in South-eastern Europe and the Balkans have been investigated from the path dependence approach. This approach, favored equally by historians and sociologists, has identified historical legacies of empires as the source for current institutional performance of successor states. They argue that in contrast to the institutions of the countries of South-eastern Europe that were under the Ottoman Empire's influence, the Habsburg Empire's successor states have institutions which perform more efficiently in a market economy. However, such path dependence arguments lack sound empirical evidence for the continuity between the imperial and modern-day institutions and also suffer from essentialism; in other words they use self-perpetuating clichés and generalizations about the backwardness and ethnic violence in the Balkans, and is a process of recasting themselves against its "others". Moreover, the proponents of the path dependence school need to account for and make space in their explanations for external shocks, such as warfare, economic crises and massive population movements. Furthermore, they may need to qualify how recent (20<sup>th</sup> century) developments did not significantly change the direction of institutional development.

Students of Turkish foreign policy have been indulging in a form of path dependence when it comes to its pro-active foreign policy in South-eastern Europe and the Balkans. After noting that the Turkish interest in the Balkans is not a new phenomenon, Othon Anastasakis contends that foreign policy under Davutoğlu takes advantage of a geopolitical “window of opportunity” and a power vacuum in the region in order to exert a more forceful influence.<sup>16</sup> Anastasakis argues that while the Turkish foreign policy makers’ nostalgia for the Ottoman Balkans as a golden age of multi-ethnic co-existence may be an overreach, the historical justification of Turkish foreign policy has its roots in the Balkan people’s recollections of Ottoman rule as well as in Turkish narratives and perceptions of the Balkan people.<sup>17</sup>

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Greece has had the most problematic relations with modern Turkey in terms of territorial and cultural identity, Turkey’s relations with its Greek minority and Greece’s treatment of its Turkish minority. It is thus where the proactive policy stance of Turkey runs into the most problems. The population exchanges following World War I and the subsequent forced migrations from Turkey of its Greek population remain painful issues for Greece’s public. The unresolved status of Cyprus has only made matters worse. Since 1999, however, there has been a significant rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, leading to Greece’s open support for Turkey’s candidacy, the necessity of which was argued by the Greek side on pragmatic grounds. But relations soured quickly thereafter with the impasse on Cyprus in 2004. The restitution of property nationalized in the first decades of the Republic, including those once guaranteed by the Ottoman Empire that belonged to the powerful Patriarchate, is one of the unresolved issues mentioned repeatedly in the Commission’s progress reports on the Turkish candidacy in the past decade.

The Europeanization of the foreign policy attitudes towards Turkey in Greece among the elite is evidenced by the public statements of Greek politicians on Turkey’s accession progress. Both the New Democracy Party and PASOK have commended the positive progress of Turkey up to 2005 and onto 2009. Relations between Greece and Turkey improved further when a decree was adopted in August 2011 that ordered the return to the Greek Patriarchy and foundations of the properties nationalized in 1936. Viewing the progress of democratization as a European issue and seeing a Europeanized Turkey as a good and a less dangerous neighbor has been noted as a sea change in most analyses of elite opinion.<sup>18</sup>

Public opinion surveys on Turkish membership conducted in Greece are few and far between. They, nonetheless, shed light on the changes in attitude. An analysis of the trends in Eurobarometer surveys conducted between 2005 and 2010 shows a significant opposition to Turkish membership. In this sense, an exception was made for Turkey among all of the other enlargement countries in the

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Western Balkans, which the Greek public views in positive terms. The contrast between support for further enlargement in the 2006 and 2008 surveys, conducted within two years of the start of Turkish accession negotiations, and support for Turkish membership is especially stark. The survey of 2007 is where enlargement questions are repeated but the Turkish membership question was skipped,

while in 2006 and 2008 questions specifically on each future candidate were included. In 2006, 71 percent of the Greek public supported enlargement in the Western Balkans, while only 24 percent viewed Turkish membership positively. In 2008, while 72 percent of the Greek public said yes to further enlargement, 78 percent opposed Turkish membership.<sup>19</sup> When the responses to the questions are analyzed, a significant majority of Greeks in 2006 and 2008 viewed Turkey as not historically part of Europe (82 percent and 83 respectively). The cultural and religious arguments used in Central Eastern Europe for opposition to Turkish membership are not used in Greece, which is a significant difference between Eastern and South-eastern European members of the EU.

Bulgaria for this brief analysis occupies a special place. To reiterate, it is hypothesized here that the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and national identity formation against the historical “other” is expected to be a significant factor in shaping attitudes towards Turkey’s new foreign policy overtures. Köksal explains that both Turkey and Bulgaria, as nation states that emerged from multi-ethnic empires, have a tendency to carry previous administrative practices into their new administrative structures.<sup>20</sup> Bulgaria had come under direct Ottoman rule and a Turkish minority continues to exist in Bulgaria and plays a polarizing role in past and present Bulgarian politics.

Bulgaria’s relations with Turkey in the 1980s were hostile due to the maltreatment of the Turkish minority by Zhivkov. The anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish sentiments continued into post-communist nationalist politics in Bulgaria, reflecting the Ottoman oppression of the Bulgarians in their independence struggle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, relations improved in the late 1990s and early

2000s as a number of bilateral trade and cooperation treaties on soft security issues were signed between the two neighbors.

In terms of the public perceptions of Turkey, Bulgaria can be cast in the group of very polarized countries. Public opinion is divided evenly into those opposing and those for Turkish membership with a significant group of undecided in between. The Turkish minority, represented by the Hak ve Özgürlükler Hareketi, polarizes Bulgarian public opinion, viewed by some as corrupt and opportunistic. The important factors are the simultaneity of perceptions of Turkey as a trading and security partner, and the dominance of the historical legacy of Ottoman Empire as the Bulgarian nation's "other." Neo-Ottomanism is perceived by the Bulgarian public not as a unifying force for good and prosperity as Turkish policy makers hope, but as a neo-imperialist ambition of Turkey.<sup>21</sup> During the Bulgarian national elections of 2009, the governing party, GERB (Citizens for the Economic Development of Bulgaria), gave significant support for the progress of Turkey in membership preparations and *acquis* adoption, while the candidates from the opposition parties (most specifically ATAKA), including the nationalist and far-right parties, ran on a platform of "say no to Turkey in the EU," and advocated putting Turkish membership to referendum.

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The 2008 Eurobarometer survey conducted one year after Bulgaria joined the EU (the Turkish membership question was again skipped in 2007) revealed a significant polarization of the populace on the issue of Turkey's membership. The percentage of supporters was 45 percent, as opposed to 39 percent against. When one compares Bulgaria to the other Eastern European members, where the average support was 35 percent for Turkish membership, Bulgaria was 4 percentage points above the average and can be characterized as a positive skeptic.<sup>22</sup> It should be added here that in the 2008 Eurobarometer survey, the support for Turkey's EU membership turned out to be more popular in some Central Eastern European countries than in Turkey itself. While 55 percent of the respondents in Turkey supported Turkish membership, 57 percent of respondents in Poland and Slovenia and 64 percent of those in Romania were supportive of Turkish membership.

### New Europe and Neo-Ottomanism Juxtaposed

This section, which takes stock of public opinion surveys and the discussions about historical legacies as signifiers of attitudes towards a country's foreign

policy stance, juxtaposes the new proactive foreign policy of Turkey with how it is perceived by the elite and public in the EU members in this region.

Turkey, for the countries that came under the Ottoman domain, remains Europe's "other." Theorists of nationhood in South-eastern Europe and the Western Balkans continue to assess this "other-ness" as a national identity marker. The experiences of their confrontation with the Ottoman Empire are prominent features of these countries' historiographies, but the tradition of co-existence since the 16<sup>th</sup> century is just as important. In contrast to the guest worker popula-

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tion who reached their third generation in Western European countries, such as in Austria and Germany, the Turkish population in countries such as Poland and Hungary, is negligible in numbers.

While students of nationalism claim that Turkey is a useful tool for constructing identities in Eastern Europe, some foreign policy analysts

from the region highlight the unique history that binds Turkey to the new member countries (for example, in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria). The bonds, according to these Eastern Europeans, may serve as the bedrock on which future relations can be built. The agendas and priorities of Eastern Europeans, which will resume the seat of the Council President in the coming five years, will have considerable influence on the future of EU enlargement. That being said, it is important to remind readers that strategic decisions on enlargement will still require unanimity in the European Council, thus the presidencies' impact will remain limited.

Balcer and Zalewski claim that the Eastern European members' interests and policies align when it comes to Turkish membership and further enlargement of the EU.<sup>23</sup> If one surveys the foreign policy stances of individual new members, one would see that some of the new members of the EU have approached Turkish membership rationally as a geostrategic move to balance against Trans-Atlantic rivals in the resource-rich and securitized regions of the world where Turkey is located. Other members have evoked its Ottoman past as not "European" or "civilized" enough to be a member of the European family of nations.

The rhetoric older EU members use to respond to the challenges of social integration has also been picked up by some Eastern Europeans against the "non-assimilating" sections of their populations or against their eastern neighbors that are knocking at the door and demanding closer relations with the "exclusive" European club. The path dependence arguments are used to explain the variance

in institutional performances, lack of social capital and market institutions in the region as well.

As argued above, the historical legacies arguments are mirror images of the recent foreign policy of Turkey in rhetoric and goals. It is not claimed that these may have an interaction effect, but that the new foreign policy streak in Turkey says that it should command leadership in its wider region because the cultural affinities and historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa would make these countries more receptive to Turkey's policy overtures. The architect of this "proactive policy,"<sup>24</sup> Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, emphasizes that Turkey belongs to both the East and the West and has the capacity to lead in both. Neo-Ottomanism, coined by its discerning observers, not by its architects, could define this new attempt, encouraging engagement and a projection of influence recalling Turkey's multicultural, Muslim and imperial past. Davutoğlu's policy of "zero problems with the neighbors" hopes to place Turkey into a position of influence in the Arab world and the Balkans. In his book *Strategic Depth* Davutoğlu describes his policy of engagement as rebuilding ties around the former Ottoman Empire.<sup>25</sup> Davutoğlu also argues that Turkey, thanks to its geographical location, has a strategic position which until now it has failed to exploit and that Turkey should develop an active engagement in regional political systems in the Middle East, the Balkans and Transcaucasia. He gives further clues to his foreign policy strategies by suggesting that rather than being a mere "bridge" between the West and the Muslim world, a previously repeated mantra of Turkish foreign policy makers during much of Republican history, Turkey should act as a "central country", breaking away from a "static and single parameter policy." Instead of a neutral party, it could become a "problem solver" by contributing to "global and regional peace."<sup>26</sup> Turkey is a superior amalgam, argued by Davutoğlu:

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In terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast landmass, it may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character. Like Russia, Germany, Iran, and Egypt, Turkey cannot be explained geographi-

cally or culturally by associating it with one single region. Turkey’s diverse regional composition lends it the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously; in this sense, it controls an area of influence in its immediate environs.<sup>27</sup>

The advocacy of a change in foreign policy priorities comes, according to Kirişçi, as part of the three-decade long liberalization of the Turkish domestic economy. Turkey has changed course from being a coercive regional power into a “trading partner through the use of economic instruments and soft power.”<sup>28</sup> Turkey’s influence has been backed by a rise of a new business culture and new elite who sees improving relations with neighbors as creating new markets in regions that are under-exploited for Turkish banks, retail chains and private schools.

How is this proactive stance perceived in the region? Austria stands out as a fervent opponent of Turkish membership. Both actions by Austria and the reactions by Turkey are justified in ideational terms. Turkey has recently vetoed the election of Austrian Foreign Affairs Minister, Ursula Plassnik, to

**In Central Europe Turkish membership is viewed significantly more favorably than in the rest of the EU-27**

the office of secretary general of the OSCE, creating a strong reaction by the Austrian foreign affairs ministry. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu explained Turkey’s position along these terms: “We have notified not only Austria but also Lithuania [the

rotating president of the OSCE] that it is impossible for us to accept a person who discusses our European identity as the secretary-general of such an important international organization.” Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger (of the ÖVP- Austrian People’s Party) warned that Austria will very carefully consider which stand to take on Turkey from now on due to the country’s decision to speak out against Plassnik’s application. To add to this complication, Turkey (along with Italy and Portugal) nominated a Turkish diplomat for the top OSCE position. The foreign affairs spokesman of the FPÖ, currently the largest party in Austria, called for the negotiations on Turkey’s EU candidacy to be brought to an end.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, opinion polls conducted in Austria as well as Eurobarometer numbers show that a majority (61 percent) of Austrians oppose Turkey’s EU membership. Around 59 percent of the polled citizens said the same in May 2009. The OSCE episode demonstrates both the rift between the EU members who belong to the international institutions that Turkey has an influence on (for example, NATO and the OSCE) and new Turkish foreign policy makers.<sup>30</sup>

According to Eurobarometer surveys in recent years, the European public does not seem to question the European-ness of the successor Balkan states.<sup>31</sup> On the question of Croatia's EU accession, the 2009 survey respondents are divided into half. Just over half of the EU-27 (the number of those saying yes are higher in new members than in old members) opposes the membership of Serbia. Turkey's membership is likewise supported by more than half of the respondents, but the responses vary on the country: 64 percent in Central and South-eastern Europe support Turkey's membership.<sup>32</sup>

In Central Europe, therefore, Turkish membership is viewed significantly more favorably than in the rest of the EU-27. When surveyed in more detail, the highest support for Turkey's membership is in Poland and Romania, then in Slovenia and

Hungary. A plurality of Bulgarians, Estonians and Lithuanians are also in favor of the Turkish entry. A relative majority of Czechs and Latvians are against it, but the gap between those for and against is relatively narrow. Amongst the countries in the EU-10, only in Slovakia does an outright majority of the population oppose Turkish membership. It should be added here that the high support for Turkish membership could be a manifestation of high overall support for the enlargement project as a whole from countries which have just joined. Support for further enlargement is uniformly high amongst new members.

When respondents from EU-27 were asked about certain associate and candidate countries' membership prospects, Turkey comes out as the least popular, but not by a large margin (see Fig.1 below). Countries can be placed into two groups in terms of popularity: a Northern group and a Southern group. While support for membership of Northern European and EFTA countries is uniformly high (78- 60 percent), support for the memberships of South-east European countries and Ukraine decreases from 2009 to 2010 and does not exceed 40%. Ukraine is the most popular country in this second group, while percentage of support for Serbian membership comes closest to that of Turkey. The decrease in support for the poorer candidate and associate countries may be the result of the pessimistic mood in Europe following the financial crisis. The popularity of EU enlargement may have clearly suffered as a result of pressures for austerity in southern EU members and the lack of generosity towards the less fortunate neighbors in the east and south of the continent. This could be evidenced in the decrease of support from one year to the next.

The emphasis on "zero problems" with Turkey's neighbors and extending Turkey's sphere of influence in its neighborhood interacts with the policies of Eastern European countries in other interesting manners

“Do you favor the membership of...?”	For	Against	Do Not Know
Switzerland	75 % (77%)	16% (13%)	9% (10%)
Norway	74 % (78%)	17% (12%)	9% (10%)
Iceland	60 % (71%)	28% (16%)	12% (13%)
Montenegro	36 % (41%)	48% (41%)	16% (18%)
Ukraine	37 % (43%)	51% (42%)	12% (15%)
FYR of Macedonia	35 % (40%)	50% (43%)	15% (17%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	35 % (40%)	51% (44%)	14% (16%)
Serbia	34 % (38%)	53% (47%)	13% (15%)
Turkey	30 % (31%)	59% (55%)	11% (14%)

Fig.1 Support for EU Accession of Other Countries in Comparison to Turkey (Source: Eurobarometer Survey 2010 and Eurobarometer Survey 2009. 2009 survey results are printed in parentheses)<sup>33</sup>

That being said, the emphasis on “zero problems” with Turkey’s neighbors and extending Turkey’s sphere of influence in its neighborhood interacts with the policies of Eastern European countries in other interesting manners. From

**Ankara could benefit by approaching these new member countries in Eastern Europe strategically, especially in terms of relations with Russia**

the Turkish perspective, Balcer and Zaleski’s claim, discussed in the previous section, could be affirmed in that new members may be valuable partners, albeit with some reservations. Eastern, Central and South-eastern Europeans are expected to play a leading role in the develop-

ment of EU policies that are of key importance to Turkey. They are proactive policy actors within the (newly revised strategy and framework) of the European Neighborhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership (Poland in particular), and the Black Sea Synergy (Romania in particular). Many of the new member states also

have improving bilateral ties with the countries from the former Soviet Union, especially with Russia and Ukraine. Ankara could benefit by approaching these new member countries in Eastern Europe strategically, especially in terms of relations with Russia. Through coordinating policies on energy with Poland, and realizing the potential for cooperation with Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria on security, trade and environmental issues regarding the Black Sea Region, Ankara can complement its policy outreach regarding security issues in the Caucasus and the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region.

One could also agree with the observation that the support from Eastern European member states in the Council could be a particular valuable asset at a time when Turkish accession has come to a stand-still amidst the blocks and freezes on negotiating *acquis* chapters. The challenges to its bid mounted after Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy replaced Schröder and Chirac, whose support Ankara could count on. The replacement of Sarkozy with François Hollande, the leader of the French Socialist Party, may or may not improve support for Turkish membership in France. One thing that can be asserted with more certainty is that the changes in Franco-German leadership will not be enough to alter the opposition of the political elites of these two countries to Turkey's bid. New members in Eastern Europe, either as a block or piecemeal, may join forces with the UK, Spain and Sweden, the countries most favorable in the European Council towards Turkey. Eastern European EU members could bring their collective weight and enhance their desired assertiveness against the Franco-German bloc by arguing that Turkey would be an important security and economic asset. Further, they could call on France to respect the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (against proposals for a "privileged partnership"), and thus bear on the debates on the Cypriot question and on the continued isolation of Northern Cyprus.

As Eastern European countries increase their voice and assertiveness in the EU, Turkey could benefit from such new advocates against its opponents in the Council

## Conclusion

It was the starting claim of this article that the new Turkish foreign policy and the foreign policy stances and public opinions in Eastern Europe are mirror images of one another. The proof of the impact of historical legacies is found to some extent in the public opinion polls and elite opinions about Turkey's membership to the EU and how these opinions are framed and justified, as this article

has tried to show. However, it would be beyond the confines and claims of this article to say that there is an interaction effect between these opinions and the new foreign policy strategies under Davutoğlu. As Eastern European countries increase their voice and assertiveness in the EU, Turkey could benefit from such new advocates against its opponents in the Council (vis-à-vis the new voting rights rules post Lisbon). Turkey should work to nourish the generally positive attitude that these countries have towards Turkey's membership to the EU.<sup>34</sup> Turkey could approach the new members in other international and European organizations.

It can be said that in Central Eastern Europe a non-essentialist approach to the question of Turkish membership, without divorcing itself of historical trajectories and richness of the common narratives, is a necessity. In order to nurture

**There is more to be gained by a proactive strategy towards East and Central Europe whose publics are mostly positive or neutral at worst towards Turkish membership in the EU**

such an approach, a “differentiated” communication strategy and more pro-active cultural relations should be taken up by the Turkish government in the coming years to appeal to the hearts and minds of the public and intelligentsia in Europe, particularly in Central Eastern Europe. Beyond a communication strategy, the

onus lies on Turkey to speak to all European stakeholders about what actually happens in Turkey in terms of democratization and economic reforms.

Practicing influence in the wider region should not mean targeting all efforts on eastern and southern neighbors as Turkey has so far done. Turkish policy makers should make concerted efforts in targeting the foreign policy elite as well as public opinion of the countries in the immediate west and north of the Ottoman historical territories. More importantly, there is more to be gained by a proactive strategy towards East and Central Europe whose publics are mostly positive or neutral at worst towards Turkish membership in the EU. Increased cooperation with Turkey could deliver positive results on justice and home affairs issues, immigration, energy security and trade, as issues new members of the EU in Eastern Europe need to deal with urgency.

This is not to exaggerate the particularity of Turkey, as the results of the polls reveal that further enlargement in general finds the strongest support in countries that have recently joined, as the strong backing for Ukraine's potential membership in Poland, Hungary and some Baltic countries shows. If Turkish accession is judged on its own merits by these countries, it could be mutually beneficial for both Turkish foreign policy strategies of late, and for Central Eastern European countries who are finding their own voice.

## Endnotes

1. This excerpt is taken from a poem which was written for the Venetian Doge Giovanni Cornaro after his victory over England in 1573. The text was transposed into a German folk ditty about the Siege of Vienna and survives to this day in that context.

2. Central Eastern Europe as a geographical term is used in this article to include the following countries; Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic as well as Austria.

3. Adam Balcer and Piotr Zalewski, "Turkey and the 'New Europe': A Bridge Waiting to be Built," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2010), pp. 37- 46.

4. See a recent report prepared by BOUN-TÜSIAD Foreign Policy Forum (DPF), "Türk Dış Politikası'nda Çok Yönlülüğünün Yakın Tarihi: Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Devamlılık ve Değişim," to find out more about the continuities and ruptures in the last two decades of Turkish foreign policy see the forums website (April 2012) at [http://www.dispolitikaforumu.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=54&Itemid=8&lang=t](http://www.dispolitikaforumu.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=54&Itemid=8&lang=t)

5. Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu ve Mehmet Karlı, *Another Empire: A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the Justice and Development Party* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2012); Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "Pan-Ottomanism in the Light of Two Centuries of Europeanization: Why EU Membership Remains Turkey's Ultimate Goal," Unpublished Working Paper, Universitat Osnabrück Summer School (2011).

6. İsa Çamyar and Mustafa Tagma, "Why Does Turkey Seek European Union Membership? A Historical Institutional Approach," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2011), pp. 371- 386.

7. Peter F. Sugar, *South-eastern Europe under the Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).

8. Ibid.

9. See more on the support for Turkish membership in EU countries, Ruiz Antonia Jimenez and Jose I. Torreblanca, "Public Opinion and Turkey's Accession: Making Sense of Argument For or Against," *EPIN, European Policy Institutes Network Working Paper*, No. 16 (2007); and Natalie Tocci (ed.), *Talking Turkey in Europe: Towards a Differentiated Communication Strategy* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2009).

10. See in this context the analysis by Erszabet Nagyne Rozsa, *Turkey and the EU's Eastern Partnership. Lessons to Be Learned Regarding Turkey's EU Accession* (Budapest: Magyar Külügyi Intezet, 2011).

11. See in this context Orhan Tekelioğlu, "Modernizing Reforms and Turkish Music in the 1930s," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2001), pp. 93-108; and Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (I.B. Taurus: London, 2004) for discussions on the role of Hungarian émigrés on the infrastructure projects during the early Republic. Adnan Saygun explains how Belá Bartok was entrusted with the job of instructing Saygun as a young Turkish composer, who was commissioned to write the first Turkish opera (Adnan Saygun, "Bartok in Turkey," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (1951), pp. 5-9).

12. European Commission, *Eurobarometer Survey No. 73* (Brussels: TNS Opinion and Social, September 2010).

13. Anton Pelinka, "Gesetzgebung im Politischen System Österreichs," Wolfgang Ismayr (ed.), *Gesetzgebung in Westeuropa. EU-Staaten und Europäische Union* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), pp. 431-62.

14. For an interesting debate on Turkish membership in Austrian domestic politics, see European Stability Initiative's Report, "Who is Who on the European Debate on Turkey," 2005, retrieved from [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_turkey\\_austriadebate\\_whoiswho\\_en.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_austriadebate_whoiswho_en.pdf)

15. Cengiz Günay, "Austrian Stakeholders in the EU- Turkey Debate," Natalie Tocci (ed.), *Talking Turkey in Europe: Towards a Differentiated Communication Strategy* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2008), pp. 59-84.

16. Othon Anastasakis, "Turkey's assertive presence in South-east Europe: Between Identity Politics and Elite Pragmatism," Kerem Öktem et al. (eds.), *Another Empire: A Decade of Turkey's*

*Foreign Policy under Justice and Development Party* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2012), p. 187.

17. Ibid, p. 191.

18. Athanasios Kotsiaros, "Yunanistan," Sait Akşit et al. (eds.), *Avrupa Birliği Ülkelerinde Türkiye'nin Üyeliğine Bakış* (Ankara: Zeplin İletişim, 2009).

19. European Commission, *Eurobarometer Survey, No. 66; 67; 68; 69; 71 and 73* (Brussels: TNS Opinion and Social, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009 and 2010).

20. Yonca Köksal, "Minority Policies in Bulgaria: The Struggle to Define a Nation," *South-east European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2009), pp. 501-521.

21. Martin Lessenski, "Bulgaristan," Sait Akşit et al. (eds.), *Avrupa Birliği Ülkelerinde Türkiye'nin Üyeliğine Bakış* (Ankara: Zeplin İletişim, 2009).

22. European Commission, *Eurobarometer Survey, No. 69* (Brussels: TNS Opinion and Social, 2008).

23. Adam Balcer and Piotr Zalewski, "Turkey and the 'New Europe': A Bridge Waiting to be Built," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2010), p. 38.

24. Fuat Keyman, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 8, Issue 1 (2009), pp. 35-41; Fuat Keyman, "Proactivism in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Global-Local Nexus," Kerem Öktem et al. (eds.), *Another Empire: A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the Justice and Development Party* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2012), pp. 19-33.

25. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik ve Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2009).

26. William Hale, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 'New Era,'" *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2009), pp. 143-4.

27. Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Vision," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2008), p. 78.

28. Kemal Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy; the Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 40 (2009), pp. 29-57.

29. ÖVP, the Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party) and FPÖ, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria). The European Affairs spokesman of the smaller BZÖ (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, Alliance for the Future of Austria) agreed to go along with this call. (*Austrian Independent*, "Turkish OSCE veto causes a stir," June 7, 2011.)

30. Ziya Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the New Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and Critique," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2011), p. 58; and for a more detailed account of rising economic elite from Anatolian provinces see Şebnem Gümüşçü and Deniz Sert, "The Power of the Devout Bourgeoisie: the Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 6 (November 2009), pp. 953-968.

31. Please see Figure 1 for the division of support for the non-EU states' accession in the EU-27.

32. European Commission, *Eurobarometer Survey, No. 71* (Brussels: TNS Opinion and Social, 2009).

33. European Commission, *Eurobarometer Survey, No. 71 and No. 73* (Brussels: TNS Opinion and Social, 2009 and 2010).

34. See the Plenary Session notes of the EP (March 8, 2011) for a more detailed view of the EP Parliamentary Group opinions, retrieved from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/pressroom/content/20110304IPR14935/html/MEPs-divided-over-Turkey%27s-accession-to-the-EU>.