

# The Turkish Model: Acceptability and Apprehension

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## ABSTRACT

*Many actors have been interested in probing the approach that enabled Turkey to transform the country into a model of success within a few years. Ironically, this model is at the same time both a source of encouragement and apprehension for Islamic parties and the West. Although it presents an inspiration to Islamic parties and provides them with moral support and hope for change, this article investigates the considerations preventing them from reviewing their approaches to imitate the Turkish model. It assesses the Western interests and concerns over this model and discusses to what extent the West is interested in promoting such a democratic process elsewhere. Prior to analyzing these responses, it discusses the structure and elements constituting the Turkish model.*

The growth of Turkey and rise of its power and role have earned the admiration of many actors who have been interested in probing the approach and prescription that enabled Turkey to transform the country into a model of success and moderation within a few years. However, the Turkish model is controversial because the admiration it inspires has its limits for each actor has its own interests and concerns.

Ironically, two different international players find the Turkish model to be at the same time encouraging but also a source of apprehension. They can be categorized into two basic groups: political Islamic parties, particularly in the Arab world, and the West, particularly the United States. Although the Turkish model, especially the AKP experience, presents an inspiration to the Islamic parties and provides them with moral support and hope for change, they worry that it disregards the real meaning of political Islam and that it holds an

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brought to power an Islamic-rooted party, encourages regimes in the Arab World to start on a real democratic process.

The West has also accepted and encouraged the Turkish model since it sends a message to the Islamic world that the West can be a reliable partner with Muslim countries and moderate Islamic parties. It can, therefore, use its relations with Turkey and the AKP as an illustration of this type of partnership. However, the West is also apprehensive of promoting the Turkish model in the neighboring region because it is concerned that this could bring to power the Islamic opposition, which often has a more critical attitude toward the West. This article assesses to what extent the West is interested in promoting the model and in encouraging a comprehensive democratic process elsewhere in the region as well as how much the Turkish model is useful in serving Western interests and policies.

Prior to analyzing the responses, interests, and concerns of those players over the Turkish model, this article will discuss the structure and elements constituting this model.

### **The Turkish Model: Structure and Features**

The multiple-affiliations of Turkey have contributed to fostering the country's position regionally and internationally. Turkey's location has given different identities to its people and society. It belongs to the Islamic world, the Middle East, the Turkic world, and Europe. This natural diversity has wide ranging implications on the country's profile. All these, in addition to Turkey's steadfast economic growth and its increasing strategic role, have contributed to transforming it into a 'model country' for the region.

The country itself is not the only model, Turkey's current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) is also one. The AKP has its roots in the Islamic political movements of Turkey, but has succeeded in developing a new modern ideology and program as well as practicing politics

overly close relationship with the West. This article questions whether they have the readiness or the ability to reevaluate their approaches and programs to imitate the model. It investigates the considerations and obstacles delaying or preventing them from doing so. In addition, it examines whether the outcome of the Turkish democratic process, which has

under the strict secular constraints of the Turkish legal and political system. Despite the AKP's strong ties with the West and its support for Turkey's full membership to the European Union, it has also reoriented Turkey towards its own neighborhood, the Islamic world, where it can play an influential role.

The combination of modernism and traditionalism, secularism and Islamism, and its dual Western and Eastern orientations is unique to Turkey

Today, Turkey is exerting its efforts to appear as a model for modern, moderate and secular Muslim countries. Since 2002, the AKP has committed itself to developing Turkey's position both as a Western country and as a democratic Muslim country that maintains its traditional common values. The combination of modernism and traditionalism, secularism and Islamism, and its dual Western and Eastern orientations is unique to Turkey. We cannot overlook its singular geographical location at the door posts of Europe and Asia as well as its historical imperial inheritance.

The Turkish President Abdullah Gül has insisted on Turkey's significant role as a model. He said, "[T]he whole world appreciates that Turkey, with a Muslim majority population, managed to establish rules and associations based on democracy and a free market economy...Turkey has been a role model for all the world with its democratic and secular system, and contemporary cultural identity."<sup>1</sup> He pointed out certain distinct features that enabled Turkey to build its own model and introduce this prescription to its neighborhood, particularly Middle Eastern countries. He argued that "Turkey's role in the Middle East is a function of what it represents in this volatile geography as a European, democratic, and secular country that is attached firmly to the principles of a free-market economy and has a valuable and unique experience in implementing reforms, modernity, and regional cooperation."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, there are key advantages and policies that have helped Turkey's rise and in forming its unique position to serve as a role model. These are:

- political stability based on a real democratic process;
- expanding domestic freedoms based on fundamental reforms;
- economic growth based on a free-market economy and on the country's expanding network of economic partners;
- external openness based on tolerance and dialogue between civilizations;
- good relations with all neighbors and with global powers based on policies of zero-problems with neighbors and multi-dimensionality;

- fostering the country's engagement in Europe and in Western organizations based on its Western identity; and
- active involvement in the Islamic world based on the country's Muslim identity.

These advantages and policies represent the AKP's 'project for change,' which comes from its new program that looks to review and evaluate Turkey's unique position and potential. In this context, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has described his party as "a pioneer party in our political history...a leading and revolutionary party...a party which challenges the status quo, changes the old patterns, and goes beyond the limiting boundaries."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this party has produced its own rhetoric and approach. Although it stemmed from Turkish Islamic political movements, it did not reiterate or simulate the rhetoric or practices of the consecutive parties of that movement. Rather, it created its own formula, benefited from the later assays as well as the ideas and experiences of many Turkish political parties and social movements.

Because of the constitutional restrictions that ended the successive efforts of previous Turkish political Islamic movements, the younger generation of this movement has followed a new approach in Turkish politics. Early on, they realized that the success of their new party would depend on its structure and program. This time, they chose a new path, which permitted the party to adopt various ideas, based on embracing the secular system, strengthening its Western association and, deliberately, avoiding the Islamic rhetoric and ideology. They also tried to expand the party's constituents to include a broad spectrum of political, social, and economic figures and activities.

The closure of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) and the late Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*) deepened the rift between the two factions of Necmettin Erbakan's political Islamic movement: The first faction, led by Recai Kutan, formed the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*). The second faction, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, established the AKP. Initially, they may not have intended to divide Erbakan's movement, but the repeated bans of certain of Turkey's political parties drove the younger generation to search for a solution to this endless dilemma.

The AKP focused on a new approach that abandoned the role of religion in politics. In this regard, it has painstakingly striven to maintain the commitment to keep Islamic references and symbols out of Turkey's public diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> Gül expressed this thought, "a religious party was detrimental to religion itself."<sup>5</sup> The AKP's program has also affirmed this view and stated, "Our party refuses to take

advantage of sacred religious values and ethnicity and to use them for political purposes...it is also unacceptable to make use of religion for political, economic and other interests.”<sup>6</sup> For this reason, Erbakan accused the AKP of “...taking away its religious gown...its leaders have declared this without denying it.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he indicated indirectly to his external and domestic opponents and rivals who supported the division of his movement and said “Tayyip Erdoğan did not establish the party on his own, but he was ordered to do so.”<sup>8</sup> Other Turkish Islamists believe that the AKP does not represent the real meaning of political Islam.<sup>9</sup> However, the AKP founders did not discard Islam. Instead, they consider it to be an indigenous element and representative of the traditional values of most Turkish people. Sociologically, Turkey cannot abandon Islam for two reasons. First, it is a historical political marker. And, second, it is an integral part of Turkish cultural identity. Islam is accepted as part of the existing social dynamic of Turkey. It is not seen as a source of fear and terror.<sup>10</sup> Because of that, it seems that the AKP does not feel the need to reiterate Islamic slogans or programs. Rather it prefers to expand political and cultural freedoms, which enables Turkish society to have the freedom to practice what they believe in.

To provide their party with an identity, the AKP has adopted a rather vague ideology called ‘conservative democracy.’ The concept refers to ‘common Turkish values’ (an indirect reference to Islamic values).<sup>11</sup> The aim is to conceptually provide a middle ground between the party’s supporters, the traditional secular elite, the nationalists, and perhaps even the military establishment. Most Turkish people and influential actors agree upon the values, and therefore the terms of ‘democracy’ and ‘conservative.’ Democracy represents to the Turkish people, similar to all nations, their aspiration for more freedom, while the notion of ‘conservative’ constitutes the continuity of Turkish national identity and their common values.

The AKP has shown more interest in strengthening democracy than in delivering on the demands of its Islamic supporters. This approach may signal a shift away from a strategy of struggling to capture state power on behalf of Islam to one of seeking to foster a civil society and a deeply rooted democratic order that together will embody Muslim values and limit state power.<sup>12</sup> Reforms were first implemented at the formal level, while adopting policies would be dealt with at a later stage. In general, the AKP avoids open conflicts, and constantly adopts its positions based on the expectations of other political players.<sup>13</sup> In this context, the AKP cannot be considered a ‘religious party’ because it does not seek the religious transformation of state and society. Rather it seeks to maximize its seats in parliament to enhance its political power, but it does not seek to institute Islamic law

in the political and social sphere or make political claims on the basis of religion. The AKP is, however, deeply involved in Islamic social ethics and cultural norms, and stresses the religious values and interests of its pious electorate.<sup>14</sup> It seeks to expand the sphere of religious freedoms for all in the country.

The discourse and approach of the AKP is close to the Islamic social movement of Fethullah Gülen, the traditional Islamic rival of Erbakan's movement. The AKP and the Gülen movement are compatible with secularism and both of them focus on tolerance and dialogue. Gülen accepts the secular system in Turkey. He does not favor the application of *Sharia* (Islamic law) in Turkey. Instead, he underlines that the vast majority of *Sharia* rules concern people's private life, while a few rules do relate to the management of state affairs.<sup>15</sup> He argues that "Islam does not propose a certain unchangeable form of government or attempt to shape it. Instead, Islam establishes fundamental principles that orient a government's general character, leaving it to the people to choose the type and form of government according to time and circumstances."<sup>16</sup>

However, Gülen has denied any political ambitions in Turkey. He has stated "I have never had, nor will I ever have, any [political] ambitions."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, some suspect that his movement does play a significant role in the AKP and its government. They claim, "Gülen now helps set the political agenda in Turkey using his followers in the AKP as well as the movement's vast media empire, financial institutions and banks, business organizations, an international network of thousands of schools, universities, students' residences, and many associations and foundations."<sup>18</sup> Greg Barton, acting director of the Centre for Islam and the Modern World in Australia, has rejected this claim and wrote, "I would suspect that the vast majority of the Gülen movement members are personally supportive of the AK Party but this is very different from saying that the movement, despite its frequent denials, is in fact party-political. I simply don't see any compelling evidence that the movement wants 'to become the government.'"<sup>19</sup> In any case, the Gülen movement's pragmatism and its long-term strategy of achieving its goals without challenging the secular system or being targeted by the state's institutions are compatible with the AKP's realistic approach.

In addition, the AKP has assembled a broad coalition of the economically and politically dislocated and disaffected. This unprecedented alliance brought together pro-Islamic reformists, bankers and financial professionals, and owners of small and medium-sized independent businesses. The new alliance defied traditional party loyalties, winning the support of both secular and Islamist business associations.<sup>20</sup> In 2002, many voters wanted to get rid of the old leadership. One

of the crucial factors was the economic crisis of 2001, causing voters to try out a new party and its promising leadership. Many analysts argue that the AKP came to power by combining the power of democracy with support for an emerging Muslim bourgeoisie based on capital, media, and the discourse of reformist nationalism. It led to the emergence of a new socio-cultural group with influential economic power that reflected back upon traditional, conservative, and religious values.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the AKP is interested in the political empowerment of women. In Turkey, 49 women members of parliament were elected in 2007. Of the 49, 29 are from the AKP, and almost all of them are modern academics, professionals and business-women.<sup>22</sup> This, in general, has contributed to expanding the electoral base of the AKP and has provided it with support and votes since 2002.

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The AKP's leaders became more interested in promoting their experience. One of their objectives is to prove that their moderate party can responsibly and reliably manage a modern state. Gül is determined to fuse Islamic politics with modern life stated. He stated that "A country with a Muslim identity can be democratic, transparent, and can be comfortable in a modern world. We will prove this."<sup>23</sup> The promotion of the AKP's moderation and tolerance will transform it into a pioneer model for countries in the region to emulate. It would be gratifying for the party if other Islamic parties followed their experience, became deeply engaged in politics, and acceded to power in nearby countries. This would allow Turkey to increase its influence in the region.

### **Islamic Parties in the Arab World**

The promotion of democracy serves political Islamic parties, which form the bulk of opposition movements to the current governments in the Arab World. Indeed, the promotion of the Turkish experience in the region could potentially expand political freedom, lift some restrictions imposed on their movements, and provide them with a pragmatic approach to change. Consequently, most of the Arab countries' regimes are cautious of the onset of a real democratic process. The Turkish experience has added a new reason to their fears; especially it introduces an example of how an Islamic or Islamic-rooted party could gradually control the state's bureaucracies and institutions through democratic procedures. Although the AKP's experience has inspired the Islamic parties to be actively involved in the



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democratic process and to be successful under strict conditions, they could not emulate the entire Turkish experience for many reasons. It is obvious that each country in the region has its own particular political and social make-up, which is distinct from Turkey's domestic and regional circumstances. In addition, Islamic parties in the region have their

own considerations that deter them from acting as freely act as the AKP. The following analysis explains these reasons and considerations as well as the main differences.

First, for decades, the Turkish state and society have been accustomed to the democratic process, despite some setbacks and periods of military interventions. In general, it has a multi-party political system, which allows competition in free elections enabling the victor to govern. The political nature and structure of the Arab political systems are dissimilar. Most of the Arab countries are not well versed in democratic processes. Moreover, they would not allow well-organized and popular political parties (as the AKP in the Turkish context) or social movements (as the Gülen movement) to penetrate the state bureaucracies and institutions or even to win in the general elections.

Second, the European factor has positively affected and accelerated the democratization process in Turkey. This is particularly so in recent years since Turkey has been trying to fulfill the European Union requirements to become a full member. In addition, the 'Western factor' in Arab countries does not have the same positive effect. Because of the West's apprehension that any free elections would bring to power an Islamic party in some of these countries, as was already the case in certain countries (ie. Algeria in the early 90s), the West, particularly the United States, is not exerting enough efforts to promote democracy in these countries. It seems that it prefers to deal with the current regimes, as its interests are ensured and maintained. And for their part, the Islamic parties, who form the opposition in these countries, have a more critical attitude toward the West and its interests in the region. Therefore, the ideology and agenda of Islamic parties are not compatible with the current Western policies, especially toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Third, the AKP is working under a strict secular system that constitutionally excludes any role of religion from political life and forbids any religious symbols



in the state's institutions. The Turkish people are used to this system and they believe that no party could avoid this reality. Therefore, they accept that the AKP denies the role of religion in its political program. In most of the Arab countries, Islam is the source or one of the sources

of legislation. Occasionally, the ruling regimes demonstrate that they are more interested in Islam than the Islamic parties are. There is a competition between them to win the hearts of the people by showing their commitment to Islam. However, they differ on the extent of religion's involvement in politics. Unlike the AKP, Islamic parties in the Arab world would not be able to abandon their commitment to implementing Islamic law or denying their objective of Islamization of the society and state. They believe that this approach is one of their main sources of popularity. Usually, 'Islam is the Solution' is the familiar slogan for these parties. Thus, they fear that if they drop the objective of implementing the *Sharia* from their programs, most of their constituency would abandon them. Moreover, their own parties would probably suffer internal strife and division.

Finally, the relationship with Israel is another major difference. The AKP itself did not initiate strategic relations with Israel. It has inherited this relationship, as Turkey recognized Israel in 1949 and established a strategic relationship with it in the 1990s. Therefore, the AKP, as an Islamic-rooted party, is not required, in this context, to justify or deny its relation with Israel. However, the Turkish-Israeli relationship has soured since the AKP came to power. The Islamic parties' position toward Israel is different than that of AKP's governments. In general, most Islamic Parties in the region condemn the establishment of relations with Israel and do not recognize it.

Under these circumstances and fundamental differences, the majority of Islamic parties in the Middle East cannot entirely follow the Turkish model, even if they accept and welcome its message and role. Although they cannot follow the AKP's formal ideology or program, they remain interested in showing that an Islamic party can have a successful governing experience. It is also evident that Islamic parties can be reliable and bring a country stability if they accede to power. Regionally, they believe that Turkey under the AKP would be helpful in achieving certain objectives that are of mutual interest. They look to Turkey's latest tension with Israel with satisfaction. And they compare the current troubled Turkish-Israeli relations with the strong strategic relationship that Turkey and Israel had in the 1990s. Most Middle Eastern countries are suspicious of Iran's rising power,

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especially after its recent interventions in Iraq. Although, many of Islamic parties agree with Iran on many issues, they realize that the Middle East needs a regional Muslim power to counterbalance Iran's power. Turkey, under the AKP, would be a suitable candidate for this role.

Indeed, there are some differences between Islamists' opinions in the Arab World regarding the AKP's experience. They agree, to a large extent, on the suitability of this experience for Turkish society and its political system. However, they differ on the applicability of the model for their respective countries. Rashid Ghannoushi, the leader of the Al-Nahda movement in Tunisia, said "The success of the Turkish experience provides moral support for democratic forces,"<sup>24</sup> but the "experiences, in general, could not be repeated because each country has its own situation."<sup>25</sup> Ali Bayanouni, the head of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, referred to some similarities between programs of the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood in general. According to him, the latter announced their acceptance of pluralism and political participation as well as their respect for election outcomes. He considered the imitation of the essence of the Turkish experience is possible and fruitful, but there are many conditions such as democratic culture, traditions, and respect for the rule of law, which are presently not available in Arab countries. He also agrees and understands the AKP's practices and rhetoric to adjust to the secular system in Turkey. And he did not find a reason not to qualify the AKP as an Islamic party.<sup>26</sup> Abu-Ela Madi, the founder of the Al-Wasat Party in Egypt, currently being established, considers that the AKP "presents a real model of Islam without blatant slogans...but that experience has its own specific situation and it cannot be generalized."<sup>27</sup>

However, there are many Islamists who maintain that any imitation of that experience is worthless. Yasir Zaatreh, a writer from Jordan on Islamists' issues, says that the AKP's economic and social policies, its alliance with the West, and good relations with Israel confirms that 'it is not an Islamic party,' as Erdoğan himself said. He wonders whether Islamists in the Arab World would emulate these policies to get acceptance from their regimes or the West. Any concessions made by the Islamic movements in the Arab world to the West or any attempt to follow the AKP's experience will not bring them to power.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, the consequences of the AKP's phenomena have exceeded the expectations of both Middle Eastern States and Islamic parties. Because it has affected

the Muslim populations as a whole and the supporters of these parties as well. This means that the popularity of the AKP in the streets of Arab and Muslim countries has the potential to create a new generation or movements that might adopt its approach in general.

### The West

The West, particularly the United States, also welcomes the Turkish model. The West is interested in encouraging this model since Turkey, a major Muslim country, has significant relations with Western countries and alliances with its organizations. The AKP involvement in strategic cooperation with the West sends a strong message to Muslim countries and Islamic parties that the West can be a friend rather than an enemy.

The United States President Barak Obama chose the Turkish Parliament (where the AKP's representatives are the majority), to deliver his first overseas speech. He sent an obvious message that the United States and Turkey could be model for the world. He stated "Turkey and the United States can build a model partnership ... which I think is extraordinarily important."<sup>29</sup> Former U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen clarified this message. He said Turkey sends "a very important signal to the rest of the Muslim world that the United States is not anti-Muslim as so many have thought we have been, but rather here is a very strong Muslim nation that is working hand in hand with the United States."<sup>30</sup>

Also, Turkey realizes the importance of the United States and its influence as a superpower. It believes that both Turkey and the United States need to cooperate regionally if they wish to achieve their mutual objectives.<sup>31</sup> It also emphasizes its own importance for Europe. The Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated "The EU recognizes the growing influence of Turkey in the Middle East... Turkey's foreign policy in the region is a source of strength for Europe... Our possible EU membership could give benefits to the EU expansion in the Middle East."<sup>32</sup> This demonstrates how Turkey is working on marketing itself as an ally of the West as well as sending a message to the West about its crucial importance as a Western-Muslim-Middle Eastern regional power.

Some believe that the role model Turkey represents merely serves the United States and Israel's interests and both of them have been actively encouraging it to adopt that role.<sup>33</sup> In the troubled Middle East, no Western power has the same freedom to maneuver as Turkey. The West, especially the United States, encourage Turkey's soft influence in stabilizing the Middle East. Davutoğlu argued "Turkey

and its diplomatic means have proven to be the strongest and most reliable channels between states, communities, and non-state actors.”<sup>34</sup> Turkey’s relations with Israel, the Palestinians, and Syria made it an important partner for the United States and Europe in the search for the Middle East peace.<sup>35</sup> Turkey’s mediation efforts have garnered the admiration of regional actors. As it sponsored five rounds of indirect negotiations between Israel and Syria, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stated, “Under Turkish mediation, Israel and Syria have come closer than ever before to a peace agreement.”<sup>36</sup> But talks were suspended over the Israeli attack on Gaza. Turkey can also contribute to stability in Iraq because it has opened channels with all Iraqi actors and factions while the United States still cannot make contact many actors in Iraq. In addition, Turkey is attempting to play a proactive role of mediator and facilitator between the West and Iran, as it has strategic relations with both of them.

For Israel, the relationship with Turkey is important because the latter has a historical responsibility to Palestine and Jerusalem. The Turkish model presents an example of a normalized relationship between Israel and a large Muslim country. Turkey’s relationship with Israel under the AKP is important also to the Westerns and Israelis themselves because it provides a precedent for other Islamic parties, particularly Hamas who won the Palestinian elections in 2006. Indeed, many international and regional players have attempted to pressure Hamas to soften its stance towards Israel and to accept the demands of the international Quartet. Under the AKP rule, the Turkish relationship with Israel sends a message to other Islamic parties that this party has already broken the taboo of having direct contact with Israel. The West hopes that the AKP can influence Hamas, so it will follow a more realistic approach, since Hamas trusts the AKP. The current Turkish-Israeli tension over Israel’s attack on the international aid flotilla led by a Turkish vessel en route to Gaza Strip can affect Turkey’s position in the Middle East vis-à-vis Israel. It may also increase Turkish-Israeli competition in the region. But, more importantly, Turkey can pursue its role as a mediator in the region since it presents itself as a promoter of peace.

For Europe, Turkey also represents concerns and interests. The European Union has expressed misgivings on how compatible Turkey’s membership is with Europe. Because of its Muslim character and large population, it could flood Europe with even more migrant workers. The EU states concern over Turkey’s economic or political impact on the EU itself. In addition, it is nervous about importing the strategic problems created by Turkey’s borders with unstable neighbors, such as Iran, Iraq, and its neighbors in the Caucasus.<sup>37</sup> Some of these concerns

have been exacerbated in the post-11 September environment, as the EU feels increasingly exposed by the threats coming from the region where Turkey is situated. Another important issue is the integration of Muslims living in Europe. Another viewpoint is that Turkey's membership would mean that there could be peace between civilizations. This realization has positively affected Turkey's soft power.<sup>38</sup> Ruprecht Polenz, chairman of the German Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs, has said Turkey's full membership in the European Union will be a model to a world in which there is still a debate over the clash of cultures. "If Turkey joins the EU, the European peace model will also be a model for conflicts of the 21st century because we'll have a challenge to overcome growing tensions between the countries with Muslim [majority] populations and the West. And the message is that Europe does not want a clash of cultures because we are able to incorporate countries like Turkey."<sup>39</sup>

In addition, many Europeans have also increasingly observed that Turkey has been acting as a European country in the Middle East rather than as a Middle Eastern country in Europe. Just as the EU has contributed to peace and stability in the Central and Eastern part of Europe through its enlargement process, Turkey tries to contribute to regional stability in the Middle East by helping project the European norms of international relation onto the area. The fact that Turkey and the majority of the EU members share similar interests regarding some critical issues in the Middle East has also increased Turkey's power of attraction in European eyes.<sup>40</sup>

Although the United States is interested in promoting the Turkish model as a moderate Muslim regional player, an ally of the West and to keep it as an important partner to Israel, it is also realized that there are limits to this vision.. It is concerned, similarly to the Turkish traditional secular elite, that this moderation is only the first stage in a hidden agenda where the AKP attempts to benefit from the available opportunities. This theme of a so-called hidden agenda often haunts the AKP. The idea is that the AKP is in fact more committed to Islam and would increase the Islamic orientation of the country once it obtains sufficient power. Furthermore, the West fears that AKP's growing would strengthen the opposition and Islamic movements in the neighboring region, which have anti-Western sentiments and agendas.

The United States has doubts concerning such a scenario. However, its view of Turkey is more complex. The US sees all the dimensions, which Turkey represents. The US sees Turkey as a large country, a bridge between East and West, adjacent to Europe, and as a powerful Middle Eastern country that has a historical regional

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heritage in proximity to critical American interests in the region. In addition, it realizes that, at present, the AKP or moderate Islamists are the mainstream political actor in Turkey and they are the popular democratic choice. Therefore, the US is wisely managing this actor and

strengthening their association to maintain its vital interests in the region. The US may even consider that the continuation of its strategic relationship with Turkey, under the AKP, would impede any chance that the AKP adopt a hard-line anti-Western rhetoric or anti-Israel policies.

The alternative would be to counter the rise of this popular party by interfering with its policies and undermining its accomplishments, covertly or overtly, at the domestic, regional, and international levels. However, a 'positive' outcome would not be guaranteed. If such a policy were to succeed, it may bring about chaos in Turkey. In turn, this could have worse consequences in the already troubled area of the Middle East for the United States. The failure of the AKP could lead to the loss of a potentially great regional power for the Middle East as well as a strong moderate and well-organized Islamic-rooted party. Instead of working in tandem and cooperatively with the West, it could develop 'unfriendly' policies towards it. Thus, the West's best option is to support the new Turkish model, and ensure a friendly engagement in the region.

### **Conclusion**

Turkey's recent experience of reform has been seen as a source of inspiration, especially for those who advocate reform in the region. The evolution of political Islam in Turkey in the AKP's accession to power represents important developments for Turkey's soft power. The AKP ability to govern effectively is also an asset for the Turkish model.<sup>41</sup>

The Turkish model is the subject of much debate. Regional and international players are now experiencing both the positive and negative fall-out of this model. Since 2002 this model is admired because of Turkey's substantial economic growth, its pro-active diplomacy, and its political moderation. The West is apparently supportive of such a model of tolerance, friendship, and cooperation. However, it does have concerns over certain policies and is apprehensive that Turkey might increase its involvement in the Islamic world and further develop its Muslim orientation at the expense of the West. Also, the West appears to hesitate in

promoting real democratic processes elsewhere in the region since the outcomes may not be so favorable. For now, the Turkish model remains solely Turkish and tied to its unique experience and environment. The imitation of such model is complicated because each neighboring state or non-state actor has their own respective circumstances as well as different regional and international concerns. Instead of imitating the model, each state or non-state actor holds their own possibilities and features to initiate their own positive model.

## Endnotes

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