

## TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS BALKANS: ALBANIA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper investigates Turkish foreign policies towards Balkans in general and Albania in particular. It is clear that there is not a great deal of academic study conducted on this topic.*

*The purpose of this study is to shed light on Turkish foreign policy towards Balkans in general and Albania in particular which has been misunderstood recently. In other words, the paper tries to find answers for these questions, within the Balkan scope: is the Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'new Ottomans'? What has changed in Turkish foreign policy since 2002?*

*It is important to note that this research adapts quantitative and content analyses. However, some data concerning of export-import and foreign aid is quantitative in nature. These data would be collected from official government sources.*

*Initially, the paper starts using a historical narrative in order to establish a clear and meaningful theoretical approach for Turkish foreign policies during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Then it is compares this with the 'new Turkish foreign policy' towards Balkans in 21<sup>st</sup> Century to observe whether any changes have taken place.*

*Secondly, the paper investigates the tools of foreign policy and their contributions to the decision making process of Turkish foreign policy. These include economic developments and foreign aid, export-import regimes as well as cultural relationships with these countries. As a consequence of these, the paper answers the question: what is the Turkish perception concerning foreign policy?*

*Thirdly, the paper tries to bring various discussions on 'new Ottomans' of Turkish foreign policy. Then the research wraps up all these discussions to weigh up their truth values. If there is no truth in them, then why do many people want to continue to keep the matter alive?*

*Finally, the paper concludes its findings and results with discussions and further suggestions.*

**Keyword:** *Foreign policy, New Ottomans, Balkans, Albania, Cultural Relations*

## **Introduction**

This study will shed light on Turkish foreign policy since 2002 towards Balkans in general, particularly in Albania. The reason is that, this new foreign policy of Turkey has been discussed and debated in various platforms and news papers. However, it is difficult to say that the same amount of weight has been lifted by the academic world.

Secondly, it seems that there is a kind of misunderstanding on Turkish foreign policy especially since Davutoğlu became the Foreign Secretary of Turkey. This study tries to clear this misunderstanding and provide evidence about his policy and aims and objectives concerning foreign policy. His initiative was called a 'Zero Problem with neighbouring countries, and other foreign policies that need to be discussed and evaluated. Thus, 'in some respects, the AKP's "zero problems with neighbors" policy is much more in line with the original foreign policy pursued by Atatürk and initially by İnönü than the anti-Soviet and later anti-Hussein policies of their Kemalist successors' (Larison, 2010). Then this paper will do these.

Thirdly, this study will concentrate on more Turkish foreign policy towards Albania with foreign policy tools. It does not mean that the study will not consider Turkey's foreign relations with other Balkan countries. The reason is that, Albania occupies a better position in terms of democratic and economic transition with her neighbours. Further, there is a large Albanian speaking ethnic community living in Turkey. Therefore, the relationship between Albania and Turkey could be seen an example for other Balkan countries.

Fourthly, the study will analyse a term which has been used very often in order to define new Turkish foreign policy towards Balkans which is "New Ottomans". It is obvious that this term and its connotation are problematic when one uses it in international relations. Since the Ottomans ruled the Balkan region for more than four centuries and disappeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now, some people knowingly try to bring this term into usage intentionally not for explaining any part of Turkish foreign policy, but for creating confusion against Turkey in the region.

Finally, a conclusion will be drawn from the study.

## **Background of Turkish Foreign Policy**

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, this new state has adopted a new foreign policy. It is not quite clear what the nature of that policy is. The reason is that, after World War I, not only Turkey, many countries changed their old, traditional foreign policies. It seems that their new policies were not able to prevent them from going into war. Then World War II took place in 1938. During this period, Turkish foreign policy was aimed towards creating and assisting peace within Turkey and its neighbouring countries. The chief political architecture during this period was Atatürk as stated 'Turkish foreign policy between the two world

wars was influenced by Ataturk's vision and his personality' (Gol, 2012, p. 57). Concerning the Balkans, it is claimed that 'Atatürk decided that a Balkan federation was the ultimate aim of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey had signed treaties with all the Balkan States separately' (Gol, 2012, p. 65). It is important to keep in mind that Ataturk concluded how Turkish foreign policy should be during his time as follow:

- (a) The Republic of Turkey was accepted as a part of the European state system,
- (b) Turkey had good relationships with its neighbours and preserved the peace both in the Balkans and the Middle East,
- (c) It was not in the revisionist camp; it chose to protect the status quo between the two world wars.
- (d) It was a faithful adherent of international law (Gol, 2012, p. 70).

Since 1938, Turkish foreign policy slightly changed because Ataturk passed away and Inonu, the second chief, ran the country until he lost the post in a general election in 1950 to Menderes. During his term, any considerable changes in Turkish foreign policy had not been recognized apart from Turkey becoming a member of the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1948.

Menderes' foreign policy was very much American orientated and against the communist bloc. Menderes did not have any independent foreign policy due to those aforementioned memberships as well as huge amount of American foreign aid to Turkey.

After the first military coup d'état in 1960, once again Turkish foreign policy slightly changed, but the main pillar of this policy remained the same which was to keep a close link with the USA and the NATO. This is also considered as 'Turkey started to re-evaluate its Western oriented foreign policy from 1960 onward because of external and domestic factors' (Göktolga, 2012). After 1970, there were some attempts to change the roots of Turkish foreign policy, but the Turkish government could not manage to do so until 1980.

The second military coup d'état in 1980 and Ozal's governments in 1983, 1987 and 1990s, are sufficient to evidence that Turkish foreign policy had a new root in terms of policy priorities and practices. Economic growth and new political stability of Turkey since 1983, led the government to set up new foreign policies which enabled Turkey to improve her relations with neighbours and states in the region alike. When the communist bloc fell down, new independent states in Central Asia become the main focus of Turkey in 1990s. During this term, another important development in Turkish foreign policy was noticed, namely Turkey's aims to join the European Union. Various agreements were signed between Turkey and the EU in order to bring Turkey's legal and economic conditions to the level of EU standards. Since then Turkey is still struggling to continue doing her home works which have been given by the EU.

In 2002, an important change took place in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. Since that date, this party has been in power.

According to experts and academics, Turkey has got a completely new foreign policy which is worth to study and analyse. Therefore, this study will to some extent, evaluate the AKP government's foreign policies towards Balkans in general, particularly towards Albania.

### **Turkish Foreign Policies Towards Balkans**

It is important to make clear what Balkan means? In this study, Balkans, or Balkan countries means, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia ( The U.S. State Department, 2012).

Turkey has never lost interest in this region since its parting from the Ottomans at the beginning of the 20th century. It is also important to understand that this interest has not become one of main foreign policy pillars of Turkey. Turkey watches the regional countries and continues low level of trade activities. Similarly, when one looks at Turkey's visa regime towards these countries, there is not a real visa implementation at all. Another important fact is that there is a considerable population from these countries living in Turkey and still people of these countries are able to communicate in Turkish apart from other significant number of historical remains present in these countries.

The main goal of Turkish foreign policy towards Balkans has changed after the Cold War. These changes have evolved further since the APK has come to power which is still in the power. If one looks at the changes, these can be noticed:

First, the remembrance of history and culture was extremely important in promising a new foreign policy framework in which Turkey could get what it wanted more easily and free itself from the shallowness that made it suffer throughout the 20th century. ... Second, Cem is drawing attention to the reasons why Turkey had broken with its past in the early republican period. It did so, he argues, because it needed to carry on with the revolution that it advanced in the modernization period. Turkey needed to build a nation but what it had at the end of World War I was everything but a nation. ... two main goals for Turkish foreign policy with equal importance: the first is to become a member of the EU; and the second is to become a "decisive centre in a Eurasia that is no longer just a geographical concept but in on the way becoming an economic, social, and political reality (Ozdemir, 2012, p. 28)

For the purposes of this paper, there is no need to go back until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If one starts with Turkish foreign policy towards these countries after the collapse of communism, that would serve the purposes. Further, it would be wiser to look at these countries and their relations with Turkey and other regional players since 1990 to understand their relations in 21st century. Finally, the Turkish foreign minister states that:

Our Balkan policy is shaped by the defining principles of regional ownership and all inclusiveness. It is based on four main pillars which can best be summarised as security for all, high-level political dialogue, further economic integration and the preservation of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious social structures in the region (Raxhimi, 2011).

This statement clearly indicates the main pillars of Turkish foreign policy towards Balkans.

### **Turkish Foreign Policies To Albania**

Albania is one of the Balkan countries. It is surrounded by 'Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Greece. Due to its strategic geo-political position, Albania is seen as an interesting and different country of the Balkans' (Progonati, 2011). Since the collapse of communism, Albania transformed her political, economic and social structure quickly. These rapid changes and international intervention in to the region forced Turkey to implement an 'active foreign policy' (Sülkü, 2010, p. 1) in the region. As stated that

main tenets of Turkish foreign policy towards Albania were almost identical to Turkey's overall Balkan policy. Main objective of Turkish Balkan policy was to endure stability and peace in the region. Bearing this main objective in mind Turkey developed its bilateral relations with Albania immediately after the end of Albanian isolationist policies following the death of Enver Hoxha. Turkey until the mid 1990s rapidly increased its political, military and economic ties with Albania (Sülkü, 2010, p. 1).

One thing is for certain which is this closer relationship has increased since 1990. Turkey has used various ways to increase this relationship including economic aid, supporting social and cultural programmes by The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), training police officers and establishing schools. Further, in order to understand Turkish foreign policy towards Albania more broadly, one needs to read what has been written on the homepage of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is stated as

Turkey considers Albania a strategically important country for the establishment of enduring peace and stability in the Balkans and supports its integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions, which, it believes, will strengthen Albania's internal stability Turkey is also supporting Albania, in its efforts at bilateral and multilateral level, for developing its diplomatic relations and international effectiveness.

Cooperation in the field of defense constitutes a comprehensive dimension of Turkish-Albanian bilateral relations. Teams assigned by the Turkish Land, Naval and Air Forces have been training Albanian Armed Forces and supporting them in logistics and modernization aspects, while Albanian soldiers assigned to Afghanistan within NATO framework are serving their mandate within the Turkish troops deployed in this area (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs , 2012).

This statement underlines a general conception of Turkish foreign policy to Albania. It is understood that 'enduring peace and stability in the Balkans' is vital for Turkish foreign policy and 'Albania a strategically important country' in order to protect this peace. There is a visible development that Albania and Turkey are

members of various regional co-operations such as the NATO, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, The Regional Cooperation Council; these memberships help both countries to increase their foreign relationships further.

### **Misunderstood Policies**

The developments in Turkish foreign policy since the end of the Cold War have been misunderstood by various people and states. Their main argument was ‘Turkey tries to create a pax-Ottoman or a neo-Ottoman’ when Turkish foreign policy changed direction and her policy interests were directed towards the sovereign states living on former Ottoman lands.

It is a known fact that Turkey became dependent on the United States from 1945 until 1991, because after the Second World War, ‘the Soviets were powerful and attempted covert operations to subvert both Turkey and Greece’ (Friedman, 2012). After 1991, Turkey did not feel strongly to keep her dependence on the US, because the fear of the Soviet Union has gone. In other words, ‘fading away of the Cold War international relations paradigm, end of bipolar power system has been the main systemic factor of the search for a new foreign policy path. ... In addition to the international factors, socio-political transformations at domestic level have also been influential in the reconstruction of old policy attitudes in foreign policy agenda’ (Aktas, 2010, p. 17). This new condition forced Turkey to adopt a new foreign policy which aimed to increase her relationships with neighbouring countries and change import and export regimes. So, Turkey tries to use economic tools more than political leverage in order to improve her foreign policy.

The exports and imports of goods usually go to countries where they have socio-economic ties and cultural similarities on consumption. For example, Turkey’s exports to Germany have been increasing because; the Turkish population in Germany has been increasing. Similarly, since 1990, Turkey’s imports to Balkan countries have increased because of the cultural similarities. This does not mean that Turkey tries to create a neo-Ottoman pact. Therefore, these developments and similar trends towards Balkan countries in general, particularly Albania will go further. For example, over the last two years, many Albanian TV screens have begun to show Turkish soap operas which have great impacts on Albanian society. One describes this as ‘Turkey returns to the Balkans, nearly 100 years after the Ottoman Empire was forced to leave the region and the scene of history’ (Tartari(2), 2012). The Ottoman has not returned back to Balkans, only Turkey is in Balkans with its exports and goods including soap operas.

Tartari reported that Berisha told ‘the Turkish investments in Albania increased nine times starting from 2005, but this could have been 19 times, and this is an objective for the future’ (Tartari, 2012). This is an ambition which needs to be fulfilled on the one hand. On the other, the opposition of Berisha creates more doubt about Turkey’s intentions to Albania, some of which have been stated by Tartari as follows:

Kiço Blushi, a writer and analyst, used the term Ballkanadoll (a word made by two, Balkan and Anadoll-Anatolia) that is born with the new engagement of Turkey in the Balkans. According to him, the neo-othoman policy and culture represented by Turkey is dominating in front of neo-Bysantium represented by Greece-Serbia coalition.

Historian Ferit Duka, professor in the University of Tirana says in an interview that “I have the impression that “neo-ottomanism” does not represent a stream, a spirit, or a concern that is related to Albanian environment”.

Professor Fatos Tarifa, a former Albanian diplomat, replying to Mr. Duka sees Turkey policies toward Albania as a problem, in a time when Albanians still have problems with their identity. “...(it) is known the traditional pragmatism of ethnic Albanians, who, in difficult historical circumstances have been able to survive by adapting precisely those circumstances, being converted (most of them), centuries ago, into Islam religion of the invading Ottoman, and today (a part of them) in the official religion of Greek neighbors, a small, even by "changing" their nationality (national "identity") to "Greek" or "epiriot". This phenomenon, gives us the reason that, when we speak of Albanian national identity, not to consider it as a given quantum once forever and unchanged” Mr.Tarifa writes.

Piro Misha, writer and analyst, says in an article for a weekly magazine that “The problem is that in the Western Balkans this project (neo-othomanism) has to compete more openly with another project, that of the EU, which for years considers this part of Europe as its territory”.

All these clearly show that Turkish foreign policy towards Albania has not been properly understood since ‘the declarations of Turkey’s Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu in Sarajevo, Bosnia, about the “old spirit of the Ottomans’ (Tartari(2), 2012). Turkey needs to explain her intentions and her actions in Albania in a detailed and wider way. The reason is that ‘the declaration is not understood properly or maybe misinterpreted’ (Tartari(2), 2012). He may ‘tell the Balkan countries that they should find the spirit of living together’ (Tartari(2), 2012) as it used to be during the era of the Ottomans.

### **The Tools of Foreign Policy**

There are usually three tools of foreign policy, namely political, economic and military instruments. Sometimes, these are grouped as multilateral diplomacy, negotiations, public diplomacy, international law and organisation, alliances, foreign aid, economic sanctions, trade restrictions, trade policy, persuasive use of force, military force and war fighting (Deibel, 2002). In general, Turkey uses these tools according to the situation and requirements. For example, Turkish foreign policy towards Balkans is more economic and cultural than other tools used, or it can be said to be ‘multi-dimensional’. Thus, ‘Turkey has also signed Free Trade Agreements with Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, Albania and Montenegro’ (Aktas, 2010, p. 83). This statement clearly provides enough evidence in this concern.

It is important to keep in mind that ‘Turkey shows its presence in all important political and economic decisions in the Balkans’ (Tartari(2), 2012) currently. When Turkey faces with political problems in the region, any or many of multilateral diplomacy, negotiations, public diplomacy international law and organisation and alliances tools are used. That is the reason why Turkey’s role in the region is seen to be a ‘modernising force’ (Author(None), 2012) by some local politicians. Further, it is clear that

Turkey’s geography forces him to establish a web of foreign relations, in which just one link has a potential to break all political order in its region. This situation leaves no chance for Turkey to be immune from the international politics in this region. This also makes him obliged to define a strong foreign policy vision. Turkey’s new vision pursues regional peace by means of gaining democratic legitimacy in international relations and stabilizing democracy in domestic politics (Aktas, 2010, p. 85).

All these require Turkey to have an internally more democratic political system and externally to be able to use foreign policy instruments effectively in order to maintain the regional peace and to protect the countries’ vital interests.

### **Foreign Aid to Albania: TIKA**

For example, ‘in Albania, TIKA established a kilim (traditional woven Turkish rugs) weaving course in cooperation with an Albanian NGO to assist Albanian women in developing skills that would help support their families. During the course, women are educated about domestic violence, women’s rights, ethics, and illiteracy’ (et.al, 2012). According to TIKA’s 2010 annual report, ‘32.88 % of its resources were spent in the Balkan region’ only 3.28% of this amount was spent in Albania (Others, 2011, pp. 8, 118).

### **Export-Import**

There is an increasing trend in the trade activities among Albania and Turkey. For example, the trade volume ‘between the two countries had been risen from US \$120m (90.8 m euro) in 2008 to \$210m (158.9m euro) in 2009’ (Hamidi, 2012). The new figures are higher than these. In April 2012, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that ‘Albania is Turkey’s strategic ally in the Balkans. Currently trade between the two countries is valued at \$400 million... and we intend to boost Turkish investments that have already surpassed one billion dollars’ (Likmeta, 2012).

### **New Ottomans: Turkish Foreign Policy**

It is quite clear whether Turkish foreign policy towards Balkans is ‘new Ottoman’ or not. This is a highly debated topic and will be debated more in the future. The reason is that Turkey has become more stable politically and is an economically growing country. These developments give Turkey a unique position in the region

that might be perceived as a kind of threat to other interested parties in the region. They know that public diplomacy is very important to increase international gain. For this reason, some use the term 'new Ottoman' in order to create public fear against Turkey which is not Ottoman in anyway.

The following paragraphs have been chosen from Davutoğlu's (Raxhimi, 2011) reply to some questions being asked:

**Q: What place does the Balkans occupy with regard to Turkish foreign policy?**

A: Due to its geographical, historical and cultural heritage Turkey is a Balkan country itself. Therefore, the Balkans is neither a bridge with the EU nor a Turkish 'backyard'. We have very strong historical, social, cultural and human ties with all the countries in the region.

There are millions of Turkish citizens that have their origins in the Balkans. Turkey aims at lasting peace and stability in the Balkans. We share and actively support the Euro-Atlantic vision of the Balkan countries. We believe all the Balkan countries should be sheltered under the umbrella of EU and NATO, in a not too distant future.

Our Balkan policy is shaped by the defining principles of regional ownership and all inclusiveness. It is based on four main pillars which can best be summarised as security for all, high-level political dialogue, further economic integration and the preservation of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious social structures in the region.

Our perspective on the Balkans envisages a zone of prosperity and welfare, instead of a region beset by conflicts and tension. We want the Balkans not to be considered as at the periphery of Europe, but as an integral part of it.

Transport corridors and energy pipelines must go through the Balkans and trade, financial transactions and cultural interaction should grow. Historical centres like Sarajevo, Belgrade, Skopje, Plovdiv, Mostar and Dubrovnik must prosper along with Thessaloniki and İstanbul.

The people of the Balkans should make best use of the energy created by the common cultural and historical heritage they share, and convey it as a valuable asset for a common future to their next generations.

**Q: Following your 2009 Sarajevo speech, you have been accused by some of promoting an anti-European Union agenda and a return to 'neo-Ottoman' nationalism. How do you respond to this?**

My speech during a visit to Sarajevo in 2009 on contemporary Turkish foreign policy has been misinterpreted as advocating a policy of neo-Ottomanism. I am not a neo-Ottoman. Actually there is no such policy. We have a common history and cultural depth with the Balkan countries, which nobody can deny.

We cannot act as if the Ottomans never existed in this region. My perception of history in the Balkans is that we have to focus on the positive aspects of our common past. We cannot create a better future by building on a negative view of history.

We need to build a better future for the next generations that is based on common history, shared values and a joint vision. To this end, we wholeheartedly support the Euro-Atlantic orientation of all Balkan countries. We believe in the importance of securing the entire region under the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

**Q: Many commentators in the Balkans view you as an apologist for the role the Ottoman Empire played in the Balkans. They believe Ottoman rule is the root of the region's poor economic development and internecine conflicts. Don't they have a point?**

I guess I already answered the question. However, as a matter of fact, the Balkans had its golden age of peace during the Ottoman reign. This is a historical fact. Those who blame the Ottoman period for the region's economic backwardness and internecine fights are under the influence of historical prejudices and stereotypes.

It will be enough to travel only a few hundred kilometres to identify the patrimony created during the Ottoman rule. Therefore, we do not want to be part of this blame game. As I told you before we have to focus on the good. To start with, we have to take a clear and realistic picture of the history. Those who do not know history cannot make history.

Despite the positive developments taking place in the region recently and the rapprochement efforts of local leaders, which we welcome wholeheartedly, the Balkans remains to be the fragile part of Europe and the test case for lasting peace and stability in the continent. Important challenges are yet to be overcome.

We must admit that wounds are fresh and need constant attention to be completely healed. We must deal with the legacy of the conflict - from organised crime to refugees and displaced persons; from war crimes to shattered economies and infrastructure, carefully and with a visionary approach while leaving behind the misgivings without delay.

These responses provide enough evidence for people who want to understand which way the Turkish foreign policy is going. However, if some people try to interpret it in any other way, that is their choice. In short, it seems that there is no room for new-Ottoman and there are no real works towards this way too.

## **Conclusion**

Turkey's foreign policy towards Balkans in general and particularly Albania is not unique. In other words, Turkey tries to implement her foreign policy; whereby 'multi-dimensionality envisages increase of influence in all of its neighboring regions and improving its relations with all international actors, rather than just depending on relations with the European Union and the United States' (Aktas, 2010, p. 85).

Secondly, Turkey wants to increase economic relationships with its neighbouring countries including the Balkans. This is important because, in this global world, economic strength leads countries to a stronger position than a military one.

Thirdly, Turkey pays more attention to tools of foreign policies namely, cultural and economic perspective and ‘political-strategic perspective, integrating to European values, putting the individual rights and liberties forward, having a strong, democratic, consolidated the political system and establishing an undisputable political stability’ (Aktas, 2010, p. 89). In order to achieve all of this, Turkey needs also time and work with other countries and statesmen.

Finally, Turkey’s foreign policy towards Albania is exceptionally getting better. Hence, there is cooperation between two counties on diplomatic and political relations. More investors of Turkey are coming to Albania and trade between the two countries is increasing. Lastly, schools and universities which are run by Turkish entrepreneurs help Albanian education and academia which would have a lasting impact on the future of the countries.

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