

## TURKEY'S POLICY: TOWARDS THE BALKANS AFTER THE COLD WAR

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### **Abstract**

*After the cold war, the civil war broke out in Balkans and intervention of USA/NATO ended the war with world public opinion's influence. Turkey was not indifferent to the war in Balkans because of its security and national interest perception. After the war, Turkey had an active foreign policy in security and stability studies and it played a role by sending soldiers to 'peace corps' leagued to provide consistency in reconstruction*

**Keywords:** *Balkans and stability, Kosovo problem, Bosnia Herzegovina problem, Turkish Foreign Policy and Balkans*

### **Introduction**

Turkey has started to carry out a multidimensional and an active foreign policy by reconsidering geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic values in new conjuncture consisted of collapse of Soviet

Block in the late 1980. In this context, it became important how Turkey takes part in poignant events happened in Balkans especially in first half of 1990 rather than whether Turkey takes part in that or not. Turkey has not been indifferent to developments by force of active Turkish foreign policy in Balkans especially after 1992 and it has strained every nerve in order to establish permanent peace in this region by improving its diplomacy internationally.

Balkans are important for Ankara which has historical and cultural relationships with this region and has strong relation because of the fact that there is Turkish and Muslim population in Balkans and Balkan-origin population in Turkey. When it is considered that Turkey's economic and trade relation with countries in the region was developed well and the region is a door which is opened to Europe for Turkey, it is well understood that achievement of peace and stability are important for Turkey.

However, economical problems and impairment of energy transmission lines safety pass over Turkey may arise from refugee flow to Turkey, increasing of transnational

crime enterprise, disconnection of only land connection between Turkey and EU and the biggest trading partner of Turkey when the region gets into depression.

The aim of this study is to explain Turkey's policies related to Balkans after cold war. Besides of historical and cultural relations, the region's safety and stability is very important for Turkish foreign policy. Events have a place in Turkey's national interest after collapse of Yugoslavia. The study consists of two parts. In first part of the study, after the cold war, collapse process of Yugoslavia has been tried to explain. In the last part of the study, manner of Turkey in relation to crisis in Balkans has been tried to explain with reasons.

### **Developments in Balkans From End of the Cold War Until Today**

Balkans have been important region for different societies since time immemorial because it is near to Europe and it has easy transition between Europe and Africa. Balkan Peninsula was under the sway of Hellene civilization, Rome and Byzantine Empire and Ottoman Empire for 500 years in chronological order.<sup>1</sup> Axis powers were defeated at the end of the Second World War. Thus, the region was brought under control by Soviet. End of the cold war has started painful transition period from communism to capitalism.

Collapse of socialist regimes in East Europe in late 1989 affects Balkans countries which adopt these regimes. While Bulgaria, Romania and Albania changed their system as liberal system harshly and sometimes smoothly, change of regime in Yugoslavia differs from them because of unique structure of Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> Yugoslavia's ethnicity and federal system which based on important balance has entered in process of dispersion with chance of regime.

Popular front in the leadership of Marshall Joseph Broz Tito, struggled against German occupation and became legendary, won elections in 1945 and 'Democratic Federal republic of Yugoslavia' which consists of six states (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro) and which is changed as Yugoslavia Federal Republic was established by preparing a federal constitution in accordance with Soviet model.

There were no national unity and solidarity among these six republics and there are Hungarian, Turk, Bulgarian Italian, Rumania, Czechoslovakian and German minority. Slovenes and Croats were impressed with German culture because they kept to Austro-Hungarian Empire and other regions were impressed with Turk-Muslim culture. The most important element was Marshall Tito who is held these

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1 Mark Mazower, *The Balkans From The End of Byzantium to The Present Day*, Phoenix, 2000, pp.44-46

2 Ramet, Sabrina Petra, "War in the Balkans", *Foreign Affairs*, issue 71, 1993, pp.79-98

communities together and after he died, Yugoslavia entered a period consisting of economical problems and waxing nationalist tendency. <sup>3</sup>After 1980s, republics which constitute federation have started to decide freely in economical and political field and Serbian, Slovene and Croat nationalists have started to obtain separatist qualification.

After Yugoslavia Socialist Federal Republic collapsed in 1991, Struggle with Catholic Slovene and Croats and also Muslim Bosnians in order to achieve 'Great Serbia' ideal has turned into a civil war and battue. Croats declared its independence in June, 1991 as a result of struggle with Serbian. After Bosnia Herzegovina proclaimed its independence in 1992, battles were started in Sarajevo. Serbians believed that Bosnian- Herzegovina who consist of 43% Muslim of 4.5 million people, 32% Serbian of them and 17% Croats of them was not a natural republic and they have started ethnic cleansing because they asserted that Bosnian were not a particular nation.<sup>4</sup>

Taking part of UN in Yugoslavia crisis firstly started with judgment numbered 713 of Security Council in September 25, 1991. According to this judgment, required precautions were brought into force in order to stop weapon, arming sending to Yugoslavia and cooperation with European Community was provided in order to solve this problem. In 1992. United Nations Peace Force under the name of UNPROFOR was deployed to institute safety zones and protect them.<sup>5</sup>

Territorial integrity of Bosnia Herzegovina was guaranteed as a independent and dominant state by means of Dayton Agreement signed with led by USA in 1995 and it was decided that 51% of territorial integrity and 49% of it are under control by Bosnian- Croat Federation and Bosnian Serbs respectively. After NATO was assigned for application of Dayton Peace Agreement, NATO Implementation Force IFOR was allocated. IFOR gave place to NATO Stabilization force SFOR after it achieved its mission. SFOR delegated to EU force EUFOR in December 2, 2004.

Kosovo is another country which was faced with a crisis after Bosnia. Serbians attacked and did a systematic ethnic cleansing in 1998 in order to get under control Kosovo which was one of the autonomous territorial of former Yugoslavia Republic like Voivodina. When Serbians did not want to compromise, NATO started to coventrize without decision of UN Security Council in March 24, 1999. Serbians accepted plan offered by USA at the end and an international force called as KFOR (Kosovo Force) was sited in Kosovo in order to bring about peace and

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3 Lendvai, Paul, "Yugoslavia Without Yugoslavs: the Roots of the Crisis", International Affairs, issue. 67, 1 (Jun 1991), s. 14-27

4 Smith, C. J. "Conflict in the Balkans and the Possibility of a European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy", International Relations 13, no.2 (1996): 1-21

5 Smith, Martin A. "NATO: West is Best ?", in Uncertain Europe: Building a New European Security Order? Edited by Martin A. Smith and Graham Timmins. New York: Routledge, 2001

later NATO joined in this force. Kosovo proclaimed its independence in 2008 and independence of Kosovo was approved by International Court of Justice.

Serbia and Montenegro which were two parts of former Yugoslavia had been continued to carry its existence as Yugoslavia Federal Republic. However, it was named as Serbia- Montenegro in 2003 because this description was not accepted by international community. Montenegro proclaimed its independence in because of Montenegro community'desire for independence in plebiscite held in Kosovo in 2006.

### **Turkey's Stance Relation to Crisi Experienced in Balkans**

Turkey's attitude in relation to Balkan problems has been shaped with regard to The Ottoman heritage perception. Foreign policy perspective is to not have problems with neighboring countries because of existence of Turks in Balkans. Thus, Turkey plays an active role for Balkan problems.

Turkish community has not remained insensitive for crisis experienced in both Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo because of common historical awareness. After the cold war, Turkey has started to play an active role on foreign policy in Balkans experienced in ethnics conflicts. In this period, Ankara swiftly recognized countries which were proclaimed their independence in Balkans. In addition to economic relations with these countries, Turkey has preferred to keep company with international community in relation to development in this region.<sup>6</sup> In this remodeling period in Balkans, Turkey-Serbia relations was low level and they sometimes experienced important rise and fall. For example, Serbia recalled its ambassador during Bosnia Herzegovina crisis. Turkey recognized Bosnia Herzegovina in February 6, 1992 and it was involved in international peace force during ethnic conflicts in this region. It also participated in military mission (United Nations Protection Force-UNPROFOR) situated in Bosnia Herzegovina and it participated in NATO's operations (The Stabilisation Force Mission-SFOR).

Turkey's attitude in relation to crisis experienced was to contribute to solution of problems in terms of diplomacy instead of force entry. Turkish public opinion and decision makers showed an interest in Bosnia herzegovina War and Turkish Republic had an active foreign policy in order to stop the war. It has also made an attempt on preparing of a proposal which accords 'self defence right 'for Bosnia herzegovina with the frame of Clause 51 of UN Agreement and by participating countries which send soldiers within UN.

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<sup>6</sup> Sayari Sabri," Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era: The challenges of multi-regionalism" Journal of International Affairs; Fall 2000; 54, 1

Although it was anticipated that Kosovo problem was solved within frame of territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, Turkey has started to have same decision with Kosovar Albanians after conflicts reached an increasing level. Turkey allowed NATO's aircrafts to use its airfield and also it contributed to KFOR with unit consisted of thousand.

In addition to these contributions, Turkey had an active role on establishment of Southeast European Cooperation Process in 1996. Active support of Turkey has continued in cooperation process which aims at integration of Balkans with EU and NATO. Turkey which was preside of European Cooperation Process for a period of two year between 1998-1999 and 2009-2010 has recently started successful diplomatic attempt and it has made very important contributions to establish permanent peace in this region.<sup>7</sup>

Development of neighborhood which is very important for peace and stability in the region is one of most important practices Turkey carried into with slogan of 'from shared past to common future' when it was term president. The best example for this practice is that Turkey has made tripartite meeting between Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatian and Turkey; Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey.

Tripartite meetings between Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey picked up steam with Istanbul Declaration in 2010 and this process has continued by reaching the level of presidency. In addition, the main objects of Cooperation Process which are civil rights, democracy, strengthening of democratic security, intensification of economical activities and enhancement of collaboration has been achieved by Turkey during its term president and Turkey has given support to Montenegro Republic which was term president after Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

Turkey has contributed to integration of countries in the region with EU and NATO as well as it has been instrumental in playing an active role on institutionalization of stability environment desired by European Union and NATO and activities of international bodies. Continuity of peace and stability in the region is very important for Turkey because if peace and stability continues in the region, Turkey will accomplish energy project which was developed recently in order to transport Western countries and Turkey's trade activities with EU countries will not be interrupted. Turkey has tried to carry out all of Turkey's policies such as geocultural, geopolitics and geoeconomic which provide peace and stability in the region because Turkey believes that 'Common future' is merely possible when all parties live together in peace and on easy street.

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7 <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/guneydogu-avrupa-isbirligi-sureci.tr.mfa>

8 <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-bosna-hersek-siyasi-iliskileri-.tr.mfa>

## Conclusion

Turkey, which desires to provide stability in the region has remained in the forefront of international attempts related to analysis of Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo problem. Turkey has taken the initiative in order to start important attempts such as Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and Multinational Peace Force of South Eastern Europe (MPFSEE) / South Eastern European Brigade (SEEBRIG) with this framework and Turkey supported Southeast European Stability Pact and Southeast Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI). Also, Turkey entered as term president in Southeast Europe Defence Ministry Coordination Committee (SEDM-CC) and Political Military Steering Committee- Multinational Peace Force of South Eastern Europe (PMSC-MPFSEE) for a period of two year.

Turkey attended KFOR and United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), SFOR and European Union Police Mission (UNPM) in Bosnia Herzegovina and Police Mission led by EU 'Proxima'. Also, Turkey has supported integration of West Balkans countries to European organizations in order to be provided permanent peace and stability in the region.

After Balkans proclaimed their independences, their target was to be member of European- Atlantic organizations. Generally, it is concluded that Turkey's stance for Balkan policies is to have same approach with Western countries and to find a middle course in relation to expectations of allied in Balkans and Turkey's public opinion

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