
REPORT

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AHMED DAVUTOGLU'S GEOPOLITICAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CYPRUS

Professor Ahmet Davutoglu's principle academic work can be found in his book entitled *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu*,¹ meaning "Strategic depth: Turkey's foreign policy", which analyses Turkey's position in the international arena and advocates a strategy which would put Turkey's Ottoman past in the priority of the Turkish foreign policy and outlined perceptions.

It also epitomizes his geopolitical vision of the current strategic decisions in Turkish foreign policy. In fact, his academic work indicates the way that he perceives the world, as he has described how "the feeling of flow in history is what excites him most and accordingly, losing that feeling is what he fears most."² He has also stated that what he desires most in a superpower is an innate ability to stop warring parties.³ His life philosophy is that there is no virtue without modesty, and no honor without self confidence and greatness. He is of the belief that if we have the ability to realize a problem, then we have the ability to solve it as well.

One of the basic guidelines of Davutoglu's foreign policy is the strong effort to deepen Turkey's relations with the Middle East which, according to the Turkish Foreign Minister, is linked to a shared disappointment alongside the leadership of the ruling Justice and Development Party with the EU decision to accept Cyprus into membership in 2004. Davutoglu is extremely critical of the EU on the basis of that decision. He strongly believes that the accession of Cyprus is an obstacle which is used by EU leaders that are reluctant to admit Turkey as a member.

¹ A. Davutoglu, *Stratejik derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu*, (Küre Yayınları, 2001)

² Hurriyet Daily News, March 18th

³ Ibid.

The purpose of this discussion is to firstly analyze the ongoing transition of the Turkish foreign policy from Europeanization to Euroasianism, and secondly to address Davutoglu's geopolitical perceptions about Cyprus in the context of the "strategic depth."

Upon analysis, it can be seen that Turkey's foreign policy in the post-Cold War period was merely conceptualized in three distinct phases. Firstly, an initial wave of foreign policy activism in the post-Cold War context. Secondly, a new, or second, wave of foreign policy arguments during the Justice and Development Party governance with a strong emphasis on Europeanization. And thirdly, the current tension between Europeanization and Euroasianism.

Here it is necessary to make a point for the purpose of clarity. The terms Europeanization and Euroasianism will be used throughout. However, these have been borrowed from a distinct Turkish academic Professor. He was the first to use these terms. Although I disagree with the term Euroasianism, I use it to describe neo-Ottomanism. These terms have gained wide use amongst the academic community in the last few months, since Davutoglu was appointed as the foreign minister, and so I will follow the path of the wider academic community on international relations.

The route of the second wave of activism can in fact be traced to the pre-AKP era, to the crucial Council of Helsinki's decision of 1999 on Turkey's EU candidacy, and the reforms undertaken by the coalition government of 1999-2002, particularly in the aftermath of the deep financial crisis of 2001. However, the ruling party, that being the Justice and Development Party, has not been homogeneous in terms of foreign policy.

The central contention of this work is that there is no considerable continuity in terms of foreign policy activism, and a multi-lateral approach to policy making during the AKP era. At the same time a certain discontinuity or corruption may be identified towards the middle of the first AKP government, signifying shifts from a commitment to deep Europeanization to a loose Europeanization, and then a parallel shift to what may be classified as soft Euroasianism. The American academic in strategy portrayed Euroasia as a grand chess board where all the regional and global actors compete anxiously to enhance their geostrategic and economic interests.⁴

Turkey, according to Davutoglu, is clearly a pivotal country and not a regional one, and here lies one of the most fundamental principles that Davutoglu raised on the political agenda of the Turkish foreign policy. Turkey is not a regional country; it is a central country which tries to reconcile its long lasting European orientation with a countervailing trend towards Euroasianism.

There are, however, significant tensions on the domestic front when trying to balance different components of its identity such as cultural, historical, geographical and strategic factors. This must be done in addition to instructing to consolidate democracy, whilst preserving sanctuaries within a predominantly Muslim society. The critical equilibrium which emerges on both fronts in the interaction between these domestic and international factors will also ultimately determine the path of the new wave of activism in Turkish foreign policy.

This multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy was, as highlighted previously, very much influenced by Davutoglu's strategic depth perspective. Foreign policy is no longer perceived as

a series of bi-lateral relations of policy moves, but as a series of mutually reinforcing and interlocking processes.

In this respect, Davutoglu argues that in order to formulate a long lasting strategic perspective one needs to take into account the historical depth which provides a sound assessment of the links between the past, present and future, as well as a geographical depth, penetrating into the integral dynamics of relations between domestic, regional and global factors. This is something new that appears in Turkish foreign policy. The geo-culture, the geopolitical and geo-economic factors that constitute the strategic depth of a country would only be generally interbred with the intersection of these historical and geographic paradigms. Moreover, making an analogy of a bow and arrow, Davutoglu argues that if Turkey strains its bow further in Asia, the arrow will extend with more distance and precision into Europe. Therefore, if Turkey does not have a solid stance in Asia, it will have very limited chances within the European Union.

The major premise of this argument is that Turkey is a central country, which is strategically located in the goal of the Euroasian landmass. Hence Turkey has multiple regional identities, and cannot be reduced to one unified character or a single region, exacerbating the need for it to extend its influence over Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Black Sea, Central Asia, the Caspian and the Mediterranean.

As such, it also needs to go beyond a parochial approach to national security. It will become a security and stability provider for its neighboring regions. Here, another important issue is raised which differentiates Davutoglu's views from traditional academics perceptions about security. Consequently, Turkey's engagements from Central Asia to Africa, from the EU to the organization of the Islamic profiles - and this is a very critical point - as well as its UN Security Council membership and quest for becoming a key player in the regional energy politics are all part of the new foreign policy vision, whilst somehow maintaining Turkey's traditional Western orientation.

In the context of this much more proactive approach towards the Middle East and Asia, an attempt is made to develop friendly relations with the Arab world. A major move with regard to this motive is the participation in the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation.

Nowadays this is the most interesting parameter of Davutoglu's foreign policy, taking into account the overall developments vis-à-vis the efforts made by Turkey to strengthen relations with the Arab world, and the worsening of the Israeli and Turkish troubles. The AKP's Islamist roots in this context are to be seen as an asset. The crucial decision, made on 1st March, not to allow US troops through Turkish territory during the March 2003 invasion of Iraq and Turkey's EU membership drive generate considerable interest in the Arab world. This has developed closeness between Turkey and the Arab world as I have said before.

There has also been a strong, but at the same time a more pragmatic drive to develop diplomatic and economic relations with Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union. This is another critical step that Davutoglu has advocated. There have been significant efforts to revive the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Project,⁵ as this is something that is ongoing, and I think that it will enhance tremendously the Turkish abilities to develop a new diplomacy in the Black Sea.

⁵ Initiated by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) which was created in June 1992

Relations with Russia are vital especially since Putin became President. The role of Turkey as an important energy corridor is being developed further, and a number of concrete steps are being taken in this direction in order to build upon the achievements of the previous decade.

On the one hand, Turkey has a substantial dependency on Russian natural gas for its domestic consumption leading to cooperation and major joint energy projects. On the other hand, the push towards turning Turkey into a main dual energy hub and a transit country has increased competition with Russia over energy issues as is clearly revealed by the Russian opposition to the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project which was strongly backed by the US.

I would now like to address the point that I raised previously about the loss of momentum of the Europeanization drive, and how the concept of Euroasianism gathered momentum in Turkish foreign policy.

When analyzing Turkey-EU relations during the AKP era we may identify two distinct sub-phases. The first phase which spans from the end of 2002 to roughly the end of 2005 corresponds to the golden age of the Europeanization of Turkey. During this period the AKP government built on the foundations laid down by the previous coalition government, and pushed solely for Turkey's full membership and the associated state of economic and demobilization reforms.

There appears to be a significant degree of continuity with respect to foreign policy activism during the post 2005 era. The second sub-phase, however, corresponds to a certain loss of enthusiasm and commitment by the government to what was previously the focal point of Turkish foreign policy efforts, namely joining the EU as a full member.

Indeed, one may proceed further and argue that the foreign policy stance for the AKP government in the post 2005 era deviated from the an all-encompassing Europeanization drive to a possible retreat to what can be described as a type of loose Europeanization or a Euroasianism strategy.

Now, Euroasianism, or soft Euroasianism, in this context does not refer simply to a shift of foreign policy orientation in the direction of imposing more on the former Soviet space in the Middle East. Instead it means that foreign policy activism is pursued in respect to neighboring regions, but with no firm EU axis as was previously the case.

What makes it distinct from hard Euroasianism is that the Western orientation in the system of Turkish foreign policy continues, but in a looser and more flexible form. There was a loss of enthusiasm for the EU membership project of Turkey, both on the part of the government and the public at large within a short space of time, which represents a wide paradox and deserves an explanation. There was, however, no single turning point, but instead several interrelated turning points, and a number of factors in place in order to bring about this dramatic change of mood, both on the part of the AKP elite, as well as throughout the general public. At this point I will come to some conclusions before continuing to the next point that I would like to analyze.

The new wave of foreign policy activism during the Justice and Development Party era had started out with a strong emphasis on Europeanization. However, the AKP era itself has displaced elements of continuity and change in terms of foreign policy behavior. The center of

this presentation is that it emphasizes the significance in terms of the multi-lateral approach to policy making. One is able to detect a certain rupture in the early years of the AKP government. This continuity is marked by a shift from a commitment to deep Europeanization to loose Europeanization, and then a final shift to Euroasianism.

What we increasingly observe in the current era is the emergence of an implicit broad and mutually reinforcing coalition of special partnership, which seems to be deeply rooted both in the European and Turkish context. This could lead to significant danger when looking at Turkey's full membership prospects. The opponents of Turkish membership, both at home and abroad, tend to be increasingly less vocal and enthusiastic compared to their Euro-skeptic counterparts.

The retreat of Euroasianism certainly does not signify the abandonment of the Europeanization project altogether. What it does mean, however, is that the EU will no longer take the center stage for Turkey's external operations and foreign policy efforts. This in turn is likely to have dramatic repercussions for the depth and intensity of the political reforms process in Turkey, especially in key areas such as a complete re-adjustment of the military/civilian relations, an extension of minority rights and an operative solution to Turkey's "Kurdish problem".

There is no doubt that there are key elements within the Turkish state and Turkish society, which would be quite content with the loose Europeanization given the perceived threats posed by a combination of deep Europeanization and deep de-modernization for natural sovereignty and political stability in Turkey. The fears of deep Europeanization are not simply confined to the defensive national scope. There also exists considerable conservatism even in the much more globally orientated AKP circles when it comes to the deep Europeanization agenda.

A final question that should be raised in this context is whether the retreat to loose Europeanization and to Euroasianism is likely to be reversed. The likelihood of a major reversal in the immediate future, however, appears to be very low.

For some Turkish analysts there are developments, however, which could leave room for optimism. For instance, Turkish analysts have suggested that the change of government in the Republic of Cyprus, followed by the decision taken on the part of the leaders of both communities to start negotiations in the direction of re-unification, suggest that there is a possibility of a peaceful solution of the Cyprus conflict. Such progress may help to clear away perhaps the major hurdle in the path of Turkey's EU membership. Moreover, from a longer term perspective to possibly mutually reinforcing developments may facilitate a renewed impetus to the deep Europeanization agenda. The first element of such a scenario would be a new enlargement wave in Europe which would incorporate the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The Turkish analysts believe that, as Turkey is a country which has already reached a point of accession negotiations, it will be immune to such a process. This is a view that is shared by Davutoglu.

This, therefore, brings us to the second point of how, within this context of Euroasianism and the ongoing process of the Turkish foreign policy, Ahmed Davutoglu perceives Cyprus.

This analysis, in part, relies on the classical approach to geopolitics. When the term geopolitics is used in this context, it means the practice of using political power over the given territory.

In his book *Strategic Depth*, Davutoglu does not leave even the slightest doubt in the way he perceives Cyprus in geostrategic terms. He begins with the point that both Greek and Cypriot plans over the bi-communal, bi-zonal federation as a solution to the problem are nothing but hot air.

For Davutoglu, Ankara has already defined a serious, coherent and strategically semantic policy over Cyprus, as Cyprus is an indispensable accessory of the Turkish geo-strategy. Within Davutoglu's book there is a chapter entitled "Cyprus: The Gordian knot of the Turkish foreign policy".

Within this chapter he writes that Cyprus is situated in a central position in the global continent. Cyprus lies in equal distance from Europe, Asia and Africa, and along with Crete, it is situated in a line that intersects the route of sea separation and transportation. Cyprus holds a position between, from one side, the Straits that separate Europe and Asia, and on the other side the canal that separates Asia and Africa. At the same time, Cyprus' geopolitical position is a strong base and an aircraft carrier.

This is how he explains the importance of Cyprus within the context of the Euroasianism. On page 176 he raises a rhetorical question, but then proceeds to answer it. What happens if a country ignores Cyprus? He then goes on to write that "a country that ignores Cyprus can never be active in the international and regional policies. It can never be active in the international arena since that small island has a geographical position that may affect directly the strategic connections between Asia and Africa, Europe and Africa and Europe and Asia." He continues to state that "also a country that ignores Cyprus can never be active in regional policies since Cyprus lies with her Eastern nose like an arrow turning to the Middle East, whereas her West back forms the foundation stone of the strategic balances that exist in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Balkans and Northern Africa."

On page 178 Davutoglu states that Cyprus should remain out of the so-called Greek/Turkish strategic equation. Indirectly he describes his vision for the solution of the problem. He writes that because of Cyprus's geostrategic position, "Turkey is affected by a variety of balances and that is why it is obliged to evaluate her Cypriot policy by separating the island from the Greek/Turkish equilibrium. Cyprus is becoming an issue of Euroasia and the Middle East from one side and the Balkans from the other side with the fast track. Turkey's Cypriot policy has to be placed in a new strategic context so that it can apply to the new strategic context."

He continues by describing how the importance of Cyprus, from the Turkish perspective, can be defined by two axes. The first one is that it is orientated towards strengthening the security of the Muslim-Turkish community of Cyprus as a matter of the historical responsibility of Turkey. He continues explaining the importance of maintaining the security of the Muslim-Turkish community by giving examples of geo-strategic behavior that Turkey must adopt. "The possible weakness of Turkey to protect the Turkish community of Cyprus may spread like a giant wave towards Western France and Bulgaria, and even more in Azerbaijan and Austria. The second important axis of the Turkish policy in Cyprus is the importance of the island in religious terms." He writes that, "even if there had not been any Muslim Turkish in Cyprus, Turkey should have been obliged to invent the Cyprus issue. No country can remain mindless to such an island that lies in the heart of its living space."

So, geo-strategically, once Davutoglu has explained about the Turkish territories, he goes on to address why these territories are important. This is a classical geopolitical approach based on a

classical analysis of how the living space should be perceived. He continues explaining the dimensions of the geostrategic importance of the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), and the Greek part in the South. He writes on page 179 that this geostrategic importance has two dimensions. The first is the geostrategic importance that is in the balance between Turkey and Greece. That is between the TRNC and the Greek part of the island in the Eastern Mediterranean. The second dimension of this geostrategic importance is of wide significance, and is to do with the position of the island in relation to international and regional policies.

Finally, Davutoglu comes to his conclusions which are very appropriate in light of his post as a foreign minister. On page 180 of his book he writes that “Cyprus must not be ignored by any regional or international power that forms a strategic policy in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Gulf.” He compressed his perceptions about Cyprus in the last paragraph of this chapter and said that “Cyprus lies in such a distance from all the above regions that it carries the ability to affect each one directly. Turkey has acquired a strategic advantage over Cyprus since 1974, and over this parameter. Turkey must exploit these, not just as an element of defensive Cypriot policy, aimed only at safeguarding current status-quo, but as a fundamental foothold of a new diplomacy based on strategy.”

In order to conclude this discussion it is necessary to briefly analyze the paragraph which I have just referred to above. This perception that Davutoglu introduced to the agenda of Turkey’s foreign policy is the concept called international relations in transgenic adaptation. Here we can see two different models. The model of aquasative adaptation adopted after 1974 by the Greek side, and the model of intransigent adaptation adopted by Turkey. The aquasative adaptation starts from the point that we lost a war, and strategically we have some disadvantages. We cannot change the whole situation, so what we have to do is negotiate to find a solution and we have to compromise. Through that process we may not be the winners, but we may not be the losers, since we have to make some compromises.

The second model is based on the way that the Turkish foreign policy perceived its political advantages from the war of 1974. What Davutoglu explains very explicitly, is that Turkey must exploit these, not necessarily as a defensive Cypriot policy aiming at safeguarding the current status quo, but as a fundamental foothold of a new diplomacy. According to this perception Turkish diplomacy starts from the point that the negotiations are a zero sum game, and Cyprus is an integral part of our living space. Since the process is a zero sum game we are the winners, and we have to continue to be winners in this case. So, in order to offer a very personal view, there are negotiations in Cyprus based on this perception, and the refugee problem is very important as is the property problem. The territorial problem is also an important one in the negotiations, but the most important is the security issue. Without a new security system being built within these negotiations, the solution will be detrimental for the Greek Cypriot side.

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