

# Turkish Foreign Policy:

## Current Challenges

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### Brief Analysis

Of fifty-four Muslim-majority states in the world, only Turkey has a secular, multi-party, free-market oriented government. Pursuant to this policy, Turkey is committed to developing strong ties with the United States and Europe, with which it shares values. Whatever government is in power, there is basic continuity in Turkey's foreign policy.

The foreign ministry is the arm of the government legally and in practice charged with defining Turkish foreign policy. Other ministers are occasionally charged with responsibility for some aspects of foreign relations to ease the heavy burden on the foreign ministry, however. Minister of State Abdullah Gül of Prime Minister Erbakan's Refah party has responsibility for Turkey's bilateral economic relations with Northern Cyprus and the Central Asian states, for example. In a coalition government, one must allow for and respect individual differences. But the statements of Foreign Minister Tansu Çiller and the foreign ministry are the official policy of Turkey; on all fronts these policies remain consistent with Turkey's pro-Western traditions.

### Turkish-European Relations

Relations with Europe are now "a priority." Post Cold War Europe questions Turkey's geostrategic relevance. However, Turkey remains essential to stability in an area where conflict, including among former Soviet states, has replaced the "dangerous peace" of the Cold War.

Turkey, a loyal NATO ally, has not been accepted to full membership in the European Union (EU) or its security arm, the Western European Union (WEU). This is a very sensitive matter in Turkish public opinion. As a result, the Turkish parliament has not ratified Ankara's 1994 WEU association agreement, which denies Turkey full membership. Furthermore, the EU's inaction on Turkey's 1987 application for full membership counters the spirit of a 1963 association agreement that establishes membership as "an ultimate goal." Meanwhile, both the EU and NATO are preparing to grant former Warsaw Pact states full membership. With Turkey excluded even from this "EU candidates club," it is—in practice—being left out of Europe.

Turkey is not making its admission to the EU a condition for supporting NATO enlargement. Turkey has long supported NATO enlargement. But NATO member-states' parliaments will have to ratify enlargement, so Ankara wants its friends to be aware of Turkish popular sensitivities and their effect on its parliament. This should not be considered a threat of "vetoing or blackmailing."

Turkey feels that it is being judged by different criteria than other countries. It is concerned that the "Iron Curtain" that once divided Europe is being replaced by a "cultural/religious iron curtain." In contrast, EU membership would anchor Turkey to the West, ending talk of "other alternatives" or "new orientations" in Turkish society and foreign policy.

On a positive note, at a recent meeting in Rome, foreign ministers from Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain agreed that Turkey should be treated equally with all other EU applicants. Turkey hopes that this will become

official EU policy. Ankara does not insist on being the first applicant accepted; it merely wants not to be "discriminated against" or "excluded from Europe after so many years of common destiny."

### Regional Cooperation and Important Bilateral Relations

Turkey is deeply engaged in regional cooperative efforts both to enhance important bilateral relations and to ensure regional stability and security. Turkey led efforts to form the Black Sea Cooperation Council, initiating close cooperation among the countries in the Black Sea region, and, it hopes, eventually a free-trade region. Also, Turkey is working with the United States on pipe-line projects to receive oil from Iraq (in implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 986, the "oil-for-food" deal) and from Azerbaijan. Among key bilateral relationships:

- United States—U.S.-Turkish relations are "excellent," and Turkey is "totally satisfied" with U.S. policy toward Turkey's integration into Europe. Turkish-U.S. diplomatic coordination has also been effective regarding northern Iraq, Bosnia, the Caucasus, and implementation of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty.
- Israel—Democratic values, common interests, and Turkey's Jewish population are binding elements in bilateral ties. Bilateral trade of over \$400 million annually, heavy Israeli tourism to Turkey (almost 400,000 Israelis annually), and various recent agreements—on free trade, a military training program, and Israeli modernization of Turkish F-4 aircraft—are important elements of Turkish-Israeli "intensive cooperation." Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy will visit Turkey soon.
- Russia—Turkey respects Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while supporting positive political and economic reform. Among Russia's citizens are some 20 million Turkish-speakers, Turkey's "kinsmen." But Turkey does not want to use them as a "political tool"; it wants only cultural ties and supports their human rights.
- Greece/Cyprus —Turkey desires friendly relations with Greece. In particular, Ankara is eager for dialogue with Athens, but Greece so far refuses. Turkey also favors resumption of UN-sponsored talks, suspended for two years, between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities.
- Central Asian Republics—Turkey shares cultural and religious affinities with these countries, naturally inspiring close bilateral and multilateral regional relations. Turkey encourages positive democratic, pro-Western, and secular development in these states, e.g., through almost 10,000 scholarships and over \$5 billion in investment. After their independence, Turkey urged these states to join the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

### 'Rogue' Neighbors

Turkey has good relations with all regional states and seeks to improve them, provided those states do not support terrorism or violence. Three states bordering Turkey—Iran, Iraq, and Syria—are on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

- Libya—Even though Turkey objects to Qadhafi's statements, it cannot ignore economic ties with Libya. There are more than 100 Turkish companies in Libya with billions of dollars invested. These companies complain about Libyan failure to pay debts. That's why Prime Minister Erbakan visited Libya, as former Prime Minister Iller had one year earlier.
- Iran—Despite differing regimes, Turkey must pursue economic ties with Iran, particularly regarding natural gas, for which Turkey has a tremendous need. Turkey does not consider itself in violation of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, since it is not "investing" in Iran. In addition, Turkey has "cultural ties" with the "nearly one-half" of Iranians who speak Turkish. Iran is also a transit route for "tens of thousands" of Turkish trucks bound for Central Asia. There are no plans for defense cooperation with Iran. Turkey is "not shy" regarding Iran: Ankara consistently urges Tehran to fight terrorism more effectively and informs Iran of PKK camp sites on Iranian territory.
- Syria—Damascus hosts the leader of the terrorist PKK, which has killed more than 8,000 Turkish citizens—half civilian, half military—since 1984. Ankara tells Syria not to use terrorism as a policy tool against "Turkey, Israel,

Jordan or others." Ankara "can't tolerate this." Despite its complaints, Syria has no water shortage; it has more than it can consume. Turkey pledged to provide 500 cm from the Euphrates; last year it provided more than 700 cm. Turkey is ready for talks on water, based on regional needs, potential, and irrigation methods, but Syria is not interested in serious talks. It cares about claiming rights over Turkish water, not about water itself.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Greg Saiontz.

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