

## Turkey's role in the Western Balkans

Vračić, Alida

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*Alida Vračić*

## Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans

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Stiftung Wissenschaft  
und Politik  
German Institute  
for International  
and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4  
10719 Berlin  
Germany  
Phone +49 30 880 07-0  
Fax +49 30 880 07-200  
[www.swp-berlin.org](http://www.swp-berlin.org)  
[swp@swp-berlin.org](mailto:swp@swp-berlin.org)

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# Table of Contents

5	<b>Issues and Conclusions</b>
7	<b>Turkey's Comeback in the Balkans</b>
12	<b>Turkey's Economy and Non-state Actors in the Western Balkans</b>
15	<b>Turkish Military in the Balkans</b>
18	<b>Countries of Particular Interest to Turkey</b>
18	Bosnia and Herzegovina
22	Kosovo
24	Macedonia
27	<b>Can Old Animosities Die? Serbia-Turkey Relations</b>
30	<b>Turkey's Activism as Seen from the Balkans</b>
32	<b>Western Balkans – EU's Forgotten Post?</b>
33	<b>Outlook</b>
34	<b>Abbreviations</b>

*Alida Vračić is IPC-Stiftung Mercator Fellow 2015/2016 at SWP*

### Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans

For the past two decades, Turkey has been rediscovering the Balkans. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the subsequent violence were decisive points in Turkish foreign policy. New openings toward southeast Europe and the creation of new states greatly transformed the foreign policy strategies of Turkey, which was aiming for far-reaching political impact. Joining multilateral forces, Turkey took an active role and put greater emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where Muslims had suffered tragically during the Bosnian War (1992–1995). Later on, during the Kosovo War in 1999 and throughout the long-standing dispute between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece over the name "Macedonia," Turkey strived for a mediator's role in the region. While experiencing strong economic growth in early 2000, and with the rise of the newly formed Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Balkans was at the center of Turkey's attention. By abandoning traditional *realpolitik* and applying new approaches such as "zero problems with neighbors" and "win-win" policies under former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's patronage, Turkey found itself particularly well placed to play a major role in the region. With fragments of the Ottoman legacy as well as cultural relations that existed in the region and the identification of "kin" communities, Turks abroad were seen as a genuine asset that would create a favorable milieu for renewed close relations with communities in the Balkans.

Parallel to Turkey's efforts to revive its Ottoman inheritance in the Balkans, the ongoing European Union (EU) accession process that all countries of the Western Balkans have subscribed to reveals substantial slowdowns. A decade after the process began, and despite a remarkable list of activities, the Western Balkans remains far from the explicit goals of the process – namely EU membership. After the initial post-conflict fragility that prompted the EU to move ahead with the EU accession process of the Western Balkans, the low levels of enthusiasm for the enlargement in European capitals – coupled with the global economic crisis – sharply diverted the EU's attention from the Balkans, thereby creating a power vacuum. Using new policy twists – and with the absence of any solid results on the EU's Western Balkans project – Turkey

steadily expanded its efforts to establish concrete structures throughout the region. Networks of Turkish religious and cultural institutions have found fertile ground in many parts of the Western Balkans. Schools and universities sprouted up, reviving demographic and cultural linkages. The *Hizmet* movement – an Islamic religious and social movement led by Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen and his advocates – has flourished in the Balkans for years and has created its own network of NGOs, religious centers, schools, and colleges. Based on an approach that was leaning toward attraction and persuasion rather than pressure, Ankara’s increased presence in the region in the last 20 years has provided enormous visibility. However, it has not been short on controversies.

The influence and impact of Turkey and its motives in the Western Balkans divides opinions in this region as perhaps no other country. There are glaring differences in opinions about Turkey’s role, depending on who the observers are and, more importantly, which ethnicity they belong to. Although it has been contested from the outset by vocal opponents of neo-Ottomanism – mainly Christians – Turkey is simultaneously being worshiped by a majority of Muslims, who regard the Ottoman times as having been a golden age. By nurturing special relations in the predominantly Muslim areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, and Sandžak, Turkey has hindered its influence with the non-Muslim communities there. Describing itself as a “protector” of Muslims that is ready to fulfill a leadership role and place Ottoman values at the heart of its political influence, Turkey has not been able to convince the public of the Western Balkan of its universal approach to the region nor its impartiality. Moreover, Turkey’s careless public diplomacy rhetoric has often deepened longstanding divisions among different ethnic groups there.

The long promised economic prospects that Turkey pledged to the region have also not materialized. Despite the astounding economic growth that initially facilitated a greater commitment to the region and its deeper immersion into social structures, Turkey is still not among the topmost economic partners in the region. With the departure of Prime Minister Davutoğlu in 2016 – the architect of Turkey’s foreign policy in the Balkans – as well as the ongoing domestic crises after the July 2016 military coup attempt, a new course in Turkish foreign policy for the region remains to be seen. The fact that Turkey has increasingly slid into more authoritarian rule and now features non-democratic tendencies – such as the absence of the rule of

law, brutal confrontations with opponents of the establishment, and its growing alienation from the European Union – erodes its prospects of becoming a democratic future role model. Nevertheless, the danger is that the Western Balkans’ political elites, who themselves embrace non-democratic practices, may find Turkey’s way of governance as being just as apt. If more authoritarianism is reinforced in the Western Balkans, fragile democracies in the region might suffer irreversible damage.

How has Turkey’s activism in the Western Balkans evolved since the end of the Cold War? Is Turkey a relevant factor in the region? And how will Turkey’s policies play out in different countries and different contexts? This study provides insights into Turkey’s policies in the Western Balkans region over the past two decades. Given the current status of the Western Balkan states, this paper advocates for more European coherence in the region, assuming that the recognition and trust that the EU has enjoyed in the region as a whole is still there. Issues relating to the economies, employment, and also democracy must be at the heart of the EU’s dialogue with the Western Balkans. Decreasing support for the EU project in the Western Balkans may lead to a strengthening of Ankara in the region, thereby potentially undermining EU efforts.

# Turkey's Comeback in the Balkans

Much of the Balkans was under Ottoman rule, which lasted from the 14th century up until the early 20th century in some territories. Hundreds of thousands of Turks had settled in the Balkans in smaller cities, serving as garrison troops, civil servants, but they also found success as craftsmen and merchants. In the mid-20th century, only a small number of them still remained in Yugoslavia, mainly in Macedonia and Kosovo. With their exodus, everyday human contact with Turks vanished to a great extent – economic and cultural contacts were diminished and a general mutual separation set in.<sup>1</sup>

The length of this rule and the strength of Turkey's links differ throughout the Western Balkans, with the strongest connections being in the areas populated by Muslims. After the Ottomans lost control of the Balkans, large numbers of ethnic Turks and other Muslims migrated. Due to the arrival of so many people of Balkan origin, the Turks have viewed the Balkans as being somewhat part of Turkey's hinterland. Today, many Balkan immigrants and their descendants live in Turkey. One source puts the number of immigrants moving from the Balkans to Turkey between 1923 and 1995 at 1,643,058, a number that constitutes mostly inward immigration in those years.<sup>2</sup> During the period between the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey in 1922 and the year 1980, relations between the Balkans and Turkey were mostly formal and within the constraints of traditional high-level diplomacy, outside the scope of either religion or culture. Immigrants from the Balkans assimilated into the majority culture over time, leaving some groups, such as Bosniaks, to sustain themselves in parts of Turkey (Istanbul, Pendik); however, this was not a typical pattern for other Bosniak communities in

Turkey.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the entire Balkan region was a rather distant territory for Turkey, and its policies were restricted almost exclusively to security matters. In 1953, Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia signed in Ankara an Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation, later called the Balkan Pact. The treaty was perceived to be a fence against Soviet pressures in southeast Europe. From the mid-1950s onward, formal relations started realigning as Yugoslavia began developing policy that was increasingly non-aligned with Soviet policy, whereas Turkey entered the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The turning point for Turkey in the Western Balkans was the region's political (dis)order in the late 1980s. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and new political dynamics in Eastern Europe created pressures for a more multi-directional Turkish foreign policy. International dynamics forced Turkey to reshape its priorities, thereby opening new geopolitical directions – and the Balkans were at the center of it. Moreover, the opportunity to overcome old animosities in its immediate neighborhood was not to be missed.<sup>4</sup>

As the Cold War came to an end, relations started changing profoundly due to the new settings and Turkey's new position within the international community. In the first half of the 1990s, Turkey had already begun to restructure its foreign policy from being “the tail end of Europe into the center of its own newly emerging world.”<sup>5</sup> At first supportive of Yugoslavia's integrity, Turkey embarked on new strategies once it became clear that Yugoslavia could not be kept together.<sup>6</sup>

Turkey's influence in the region emerged more profoundly after the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Doubt, *Through the Window: Kinship and Elopement in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014), 90, <http://bit.ly/2aP27Ec> (accessed 22 August 2015).

<sup>4</sup> *What Does Turkey Think?*, ed. Dimitar Bechev (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2011), [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR35\\_TURKEY\\_AW.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR35_TURKEY_AW.pdf) (accessed 12 August 2016).

<sup>5</sup> The European Geopolitical Forum (EGF), *Transition, Security and Stability in the Wider-Black Sea Region. Transition in Turkey: A Critical Assessment and Current Challenges* (Brussels, 2013), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Birgül Demirtaş, “Turkey and the Balkans: Overcoming Prejudices, Building Bridges and Constructing a Common Future”, *Perceptions* 18, no. 2 (2013): 163–84 (174).

<sup>1</sup> Marija Mitrović Bošković, Dušan Reljić, and Alida Vračić, “Elsewhere in the Neighborhood: Reaching Out to the Western Balkans”, in *Turkey's Public Diplomacy* ed. B. Senem Çevik and Philip Seib (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 99–120 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Esra Bulut, “‘Friends, Balkans, Statesmen Lend Us Your Ears’: The Trans-state and State in Links between Turkey and the Balkans”, *Ethnopolitics* 5, no. 3 (30 November 2006): 309–26.



Instability coming from the Balkans in the 1990s – especially in Bosnia – was closely followed in Turkey. In 1993, Turkey's Ministry of National Defense issued a White Paper that referred to ethnic conflicts, instability, and uncertainty in the regional context.<sup>7</sup> Three years later, the 1996 White Paper drew attention to regional problems again – this time with a special emphasis on Bosnia. Shortly thereafter, media reports revealed clandestine military support to the Muslim faction in Bosnia. Supplying arms to Bosnia under the embargo<sup>8</sup> were Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey.<sup>9</sup> Turkey had also been involved in secret arms activities in 1992, when Iran had opened a smuggling route to Bosnia – a pipeline existed through which arms from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Pakistan were transferred.<sup>10</sup> Turkey was mentioned in relevant conversations as a direct supplier of arms, and in 1994 the US Central Intelligence Agency reported that its satellites had taken photos of the same Iranian aircrafts on Turkish airfields – at the Zagreb International Airport and in other airports in Croatia – showing the arms being unloaded. This new activity did not go unnoticed.

In 1992, *Time* magazine published a piece “the sick man recovers,” in which the following was stated: “No sooner has Germany begun to stretch its muscles across Central Europe than another historical ghost is emerging to the south. Turkey not only boasts a vigorous growing rate; it is now actively intervening in the economies of its sickly neighbors.”<sup>11</sup> At the outset, external interest was declared to be of a humanitarian – and in the case of Bosnia, protective – nature. Yet, unavoidably, external involvement soon shifted to the influence struggle in the countries of the former Yugo-

slavia and, thus, in southeast Europe as well. After the year 2000, violent conflicts mostly subsided, and competition for influence in southeast Europe switched to public diplomacy and “soft power.”<sup>12</sup>

The Kosovo War in 1999 and Priština's subsequent quest for independence – as well as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's (FYROM's) prolonged conflict with Greece over the “name issue”<sup>13</sup> – were opportunities for Turkey to extend its influence in the Western Balkans. To do so, much had to be learned. Decades-long divisions had taken their toll, and in reality little knowledge existed in Turkey about the Balkans. “In 1992 or 1993, the daily newspapers *Sabah* started the promotion of newly independent states and gave flags of newly formed Turkic states in the newspapers. Promotion was attached to presenting new flags mostly of Central Asian new states, like Azerbaijan, but they included a Bosnian flag too, implying Bosnia is ethnically a Turkish state.”<sup>14</sup>

During the initial period of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Turkey changed its previously passive approach and engaged with traditional foreign policy instruments, primarily multilateral ones. Holding some reservations on the actual impact within the EU and United Nations (UN) frameworks, Turkey still decided to actively work within this framework.<sup>15</sup> With an actual rise in interest in the Balkans after the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey began developing new instruments of foreign policy and alternative channels for diplomatic gains. Following this course, Turkey launched different Balkan initiatives for participation in newly established structures.<sup>16</sup> The mastermind behind Turkey's new foreign policy was Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. His famous book, *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*, provided the basis for defining the

<sup>7</sup> Didem Ekinçi, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era: Diplomatic/Political, Economic and Military Relations* (Ankara: Department of International Relations, Bilkent University, Ph.D. dissertation, April 2009), <http://bit.ly/2aDO4yy>; Ministry of National Defense, *The White Paper 96* (Ankara, 1996), 5–6 and 15–16. Three years later, the 1996 White Paper drew attention to regional problems again – this time with special emphasis on Bosnia.

<sup>8</sup> On 25 September 1991, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 713, imposing an arms embargo on all of the former Yugoslav territories.

<sup>9</sup> Ekinçi, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7). It was reported that the transfers, which arrived from Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, were diplomatic post. Other consignments were from Belgium, Hungary, Uganda, and Argentina.

<sup>10</sup> Ekinçi, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

<sup>11</sup> “The Sick Man Recovers”, *The Times*, 28 January 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Bošković, Reljić, and Vračić, *Elsewhere in the Neighborhood* (see note 1).

<sup>13</sup> Athens accuses Skopje of territorial ambitions by calling the state “Macedonia” because geographically Macedonia encompasses also northern Greece and Western Bulgaria.

<sup>14</sup> Think tank Populari, *A Political Romance: Relations between Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo, 2014), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth] (Ankara, 2001), 321. Davutoğlu perceived the EU and the UN frameworks as platforms that would limit Turkey's influence in solving conflicts in the region and emphasised the need to associate problems with NATO that Turkey is its member.

<sup>16</sup> South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), Peace Implementation Council (PIC), and South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG).

principles and objectives of Turkey's new foreign policy, and ultimately shaped Turkey's approach to the Western Balkans.<sup>17</sup> According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's focus was anchored in Turkey's Ottoman presence and power in the region at all times.<sup>18</sup> Davutoğlu took geography as being the first determinant of foreign policy, and history as the second, particularly stressing the significant number of Turks with Balkan origins and people from Balkan countries living in Turkey.<sup>19</sup> Turkey's Balkan policy was regarded as a natural expression of existing geographical, historical, and cultural links, from the viewpoint of Davutoğlu.<sup>20</sup> In the early stages of involvement, economic aspects did not appear to be a central concern of Davutoğlu's foreign policy approach. Priority has been given to the Ottoman heritage and engaging with Muslim kin communities.<sup>21</sup>

One problem with this was Turkey's miscalculation of the region, its history, and its inhabitants. The majority of Serbs and Croats – both Christians – as well as influential parts of the Albanian intelligentsia deem the Ottoman rule as a period of enslavement and a tragedy that lasted for more than four centuries.<sup>22</sup> Albanians were not allowed to use their own language, and Ottoman policy allowed Albanian Muslims only to attend Turkish schools.<sup>23</sup> Even though they were free to practice their religion, they were degraded as citizens and had their property taken away. There were a range of rules and discriminatory

regulations (*kanuni rayi*) against the non-Muslim population in BiH during the Ottoman rule, for example: a prohibition to ride horses, carry weapons, wear clothes similar to the clothes of Muslims; Christians could also not testify in court, neither could they sue their Muslim neighbors.<sup>24</sup>

Following the “kin”<sup>25</sup> community's ideology, and using the common platform of the EU accession process that both Turkey and the Western Balkans obtained in 2003, Turkey involved itself far more actively in the Balkans. As Davutoğlu himself stated, Turkey started to employ a European-style European Neighborhood Policy<sup>26</sup> and tried to achieve maximum cooperation with all regional countries.<sup>27</sup> Turkey's foreign policy was pro-active and based on new principles such as “zero problems with neighbors” and “win-win” policies.<sup>28</sup> In 2010, even the European Commission noted Turkey's activism in the Balkans in its Progress Report, stating: “Turkey has taken a number of initiatives in the Western Balkans, expressing commitment to promoting peace and stability in the region. Turkey supports integration of all countries in the region both with the EU and at the Euro-Atlantic level.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London, 1996), 66.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh Poulton, “Turkey as Kin-State: Turkish Foreign Policy towards Turkish and Muslim Communities in the Balkans”, in *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, ed. Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki (London: Hurst, 1997), 194–213 (194). There are many definitions of “kin” in Turkish. The neo-Ottoman community argument also links Turkey's involvement in the region to strong domestic concern over residual Turkish communities in the Balkans as well as to those of ethnic kin, for example Albanians, in Turkey. Turkey is, in other words, a kin state for certain communities in the Balkans.

<sup>26</sup> The policy was initiated by the EU to improve its relations with the countries in the neighbouring regions that do not have any chance of being full members in the foreseeable future. For a comprehensive evaluation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, see Bezen Balamir-Coşkun and Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, *Neighborhood Challenge: The European Union and Its Neighbors* (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2009). Also see Sevilay Kahraman, “Turkey and the European Union in the Middle East: Reconciling or Competing with Each Other?”, *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 699–716 (708); Senem Aydın Düzgit and Nathalie Tocci, *Transforming Turkish Foreign Policy: The Quest for Regional Leadership and Europeanisation* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies [CEPS], 12 November 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Birgül Demirtaş, “Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: A Europeanized Foreign Policy in a De-europeanized National Context?”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (2015): 123–40.

<sup>28</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times* (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, September 2006).

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, *Turkey 2010 Progress Report*, COM(2010) 660, <http://bit.ly/1W5hxSJ> (accessed 10 May 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Marija Mitrovic, *Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans*, GeT MA Working Paper Series, no. 10/2014 (Berlin: Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014), 24.

<sup>18</sup> Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (see note 15), cited in Sait Akşit, *An Alternative or Embedded in the Mainstream: Political Economy of Turkey's Involvement in the Balkans*, <http://bit.ly/2av3J3K> (accessed 11 November 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Sylvie Gangloff, *The Impact of the Ottoman Legacy on Turkish Policy in the Balkans (1991–1999)* (Paris: Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, November 2005), 1–20. According to the 1981 census in the former Yugoslavia, there were 101,328 Turks comprising 0.5 per cent of the population.

<sup>20</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2000), 147.

<sup>21</sup> “The transformations in Turkish foreign policy in recent years facilitated its quest to have richer relations with the citizens and kin communities abroad” (Kemal Yurtnaç, *Turkey's New Horizon: Turks Abroad and Related Communities*, SAM Papers 3/2012 [Ankara: SAM, Centre for Strategic Research, October 2012], 3).

<sup>22</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14).

<sup>23</sup> Piro Misha, “Invention of a Nationalism: Myth and Amnesia”, in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (London: Hurst, 2002), 33–48 (38).

For the AKP, resolving disputes with neighbors was perceived as being vital. That, in return, required having more solid leverage that Turkey had to come up with, namely, entering the next stage of activism and introducing the promotion of trade and investment.<sup>30</sup> Apart from becoming a member of the regional initiatives, Turkey's position as a strategic country was enhanced by establishing trilateral consultation mechanisms – Turkey-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia, and Turkey-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Serbia – and assuming a key role as a mediator in the region.<sup>31</sup> Initially envisaged to reassert Turkey's influence in the Balkans – and, in particular, contribute toward creating bonds among the countries in the region – trilateral meetings were never structured to last.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the meetings with Croatian counterparts never led to much, since Croatia has been moving toward the EU. Meetings with Serbia are presented as being much more vital, since most of the talks have been directed toward economic relations and the improvement of cooperation in this field. The actual results, though, appear to be mostly in the domain of politics. As Yasemin Eralp, First Counselor in the Turkish Embassy in BiH, Sarajevo, puts it: “There is no way to measure the impact of trilateral meetings, and their purpose is to bring a good atmosphere and foster dialogue.”<sup>33</sup>

However, some results were evident. The foreign ministers of Turkey, BiH, and Serbia have come together nine times; the foreign ministers of Turkey, BiH, and Croatia have gathered four times since 2009. The highlight of these meetings was a first-ever meeting between Serbian President Boris Tadić and BiH President Haris Silajdžić. Consequently, Bosnia and Herzegovina sent an ambassador to Belgrade following a three-year absence. In 2010 the Serbian parliament adopted a declaration condemning the crimes in Srebrenica. Following the Trilateral Balkan Summit, held in Istanbul in April 2010, an Istanbul Declaration was adopted, but the consultations with Zagreb ceased after Croatia's entry into the EU in July 2013. In this period, a series of political crises and a number of diplomatic incidents had a negative impact on the trilateral meetings. In July 2014, the Turkish

and Bosnian defense ministries planned a naval military exercise in Neum, the only Bosnian sea exit. Although the visit of two Turkish military vessels had been arranged with representatives of the Bosniak/Muslim side, Croatian and Serbian representatives in Bosnia's presidency objected to this and decided not to allow the entry of the Turkish naval ships, which raised tensions in Bosnian political discourse. One of the two ships was named after the famous Turkish Grand Vizier, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha; for the Serbian and Croatian politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this represented a hint at neo-Ottomanism. Already fractured relations between Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić and Bosnian President Bakir Izetbegović deteriorated further in June 2015, when a Bosniak member of the presidency of BiH withdrew the invitation given to the Serbian president to officially visit Sarajevo because of a dispute over war crimes.

Interethnic tensions were additionally raised due to British insistence that the UN Security Council should pass a resolution on Srebrenica – the resolution came to an end by Russian veto in July 2015. To make sure that the resolution did not pass, Belgrade called Moscow to veto the British proposal, which they did.

Improving relations with Serbia through a series of meetings – after democratic parties gained power in October 2000 – was of utmost importance for Ankara.<sup>34</sup> Turkey has increasingly involved itself with Serbia's Sandžak region by opposing the demands of some local activists for autonomy from Serbia, encouraging the region's fractious Bosniak communities to settle their differences, and by opening a Turkish Cultural Center in Novi Pazar. In October 2013, however, much of it was spoiled, as Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić cancelled an announced trilateral meeting in response to then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement in Kosovo: “Kosovo is Turkey and Turkey is Kosovo.” Nikolić called it “an aggression without arms,” and for many it was obvious proof that Turkey is a one-sided actor in the Western Balkans.

The AKP and Davutoğlu's perception of the Western Balkan reached a climax in the autumn of 2009. In his speech at the opening ceremony of a conference on the Ottoman Legacy and Balkan Muslim Communities

<sup>30</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State”, *New Perspectives of Turkey*, no. 40 (2009): 29–57, <http://bit.ly/2awfkNX> (accessed 13 February 2016).

<sup>31</sup> There were seven meetings of foreign ministers from Turkey, BiH, and Serbia, and five foreign ministers from Turkey, BiH, and Croatia.

<sup>32</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> The Serbian president at that time, Boris Tadić, visited Turkey in 2007 and 2010; Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković visited Turkey in 2011. Turkish President Abdullah Gül visited Serbia in 2009; he was the first Turkish president to visit Serbia since 1986. Former Prime Minister Erdoğan made a visit to Serbia in July 2010, when a visa free agreement between the two countries was signed.

Today in Sarajevo in October 2009, Davutoğlu set out that during much of ancient history, Alexandria – then part of the Roman Empire – had a peripheral role. However, “during the Ottoman state, the Balkan region became the center of world politics in the 16th century. This was the Golden Age of the Balkans.”<sup>35</sup> He went on to propose that the Balkan countries could escape the destiny of being on the periphery or a victim of geostrategic competition between great powers by reestablishing the successes of the Ottoman period. In that sense, the Empire is seen as a positive example and as the model for the solution to ethnic and religious conflicts.

Emphasizing the success and shared destinies of Turkey and the Balkans, Davutoğlu claimed that “Serbo-Croat” was the second-most-spoken language at the Sultan’s court in the 16th century. In similar fashion, President Erdoğan articulated his affection toward the region during his post-election speech in Ankara on the night of March 30, 2014:

I wholeheartedly greet our 81 provinces as well as sister and friendly capitals and cities of the world. . . . I first want to express my absolute gratitude to my God for such a victory and a meaningful result. I thank my friends and brothers all over the world who prayed for our victory. I thank my brothers in Palestine who saw our victory as their victory. I thank my brothers in Egypt who are struggling for democracy and who understand our struggle very well. I thank my brothers in the Balkans, in Bosnia, in Macedonia, in Kosovo and in all cities in Europe who celebrate our victory with the same joy we have here.<sup>36</sup>

However, Turkey’s domestic conflicts and its tarnished record regarding human rights and the rule of law – mostly during the second term of the Erdoğan presidency from 2007 to 2013 – diminished its image internationally. The country presently is sacrificing the potential to serve as an example for modernization and development. A number of high-level corruption cases, an authoritarian style of leadership, attacks on the free media, the imprisonment of journalists,

human rights violations, renewed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK),<sup>37</sup> fragile security in the country, and the overall volatile political setting has diminished Turkey’s position as a role model. In July 2016, forces within the Turkish military attempted a coup, which has since dramatically changed the domestic political scene. A state of emergency has been declared and since renewed. Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric who lives in self-exile in Pennsylvania, has been accused by Turkey of orchestrating the failed uprising. Gülen has for years been actively involved in debates concerning the future of the Turkish state – and Islam in the modern world – and his movement is particularly active in the areas of education (with schools in more than 140 countries), media, finance, and health clinics.<sup>38</sup> It is also suggested the movement controls much of Turkey’s police and justice system. In mid-2013 Gülen openly criticized Erdoğan’s handling of Gezi Park<sup>39</sup> demonstrators. Soon after, Erdoğan accused Gülen and his supporters of creating “a state within a state” and announced that educational centers run by the Gülen movement would be shut down. After July 15, 2016, the purge against Gülen sympathizers continued, and hundreds of thousands of people are being fired, jailed, and will be prosecuted. Many intellectuals and scholars have been prohibited from leaving the country, and many of them still face uncertainties. Liberal, pluralist democracy, which had been the flagship of the AKP party only a decade ago, has profoundly changed, and so did its image. The EU currently seems like a very overstretched goal. President Erdoğan’s open distancing of Turkey from the EU has greatly contributed to this. “It is not the apocalypse if they do not let us in the EU,” Erdoğan told reporters during a visit to Budapest this year.<sup>40</sup> “To be a member of EU is not a ‘sine qua non’ for Turkey, it is not a must.”<sup>41</sup> As Turkey’s prospects of joining the EU have deteriorated in the past few years, its relationship with EU member states has too, and the mediating role of Turkey will not be as essential.

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International, *State of the World’s Human Rights, 2015–2016*, <http://bit.ly/24paZ7n> (accessed 25 July 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14).

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, *Gezi Park Protests. Brutal Denial of the Right to Peaceful Assembly* (London, October 2013), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Göknil Erbaş, *EU’s Foreign Policy towards the Balkans and Future Prospects of Turkey’s Membership of EU for the Region* (2014), <http://bit.ly/2aDOc13> (accessed 27 May 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Murat Yetkin, “The EU’s Point of No Return with Turkey”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 21 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/2av36aJ> (accessed 23 July 2016).

<sup>35</sup> “Address by H. E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey at the Opening Session of the Alliance of Civilizations’ First South East Europe Ministerial Conference” (14 December 2009), <https://goo.gl/Nkmtzf>.

<sup>36</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s post-election speech delivered from the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) headquarters in Ankara on the night of 30 March 2014.

# Turkey's Economy and Non-state Actors in the Western Balkans

Turkey's economy bounced back from the global crisis with incredible growth of 9 percent in 2010. Gross domestic product per capita (purchasing power parity) has grown to \$14,243 in 2010, from about \$6,000 a decade earlier.<sup>42</sup> The aim to establish and maintain not only cultural but also economic links that would secure its regional role and create a projection of power has occupied Turkish political circles. "Strengthening economic cooperation," "improving economic ties," and "possibilities for increasing Turkish investment in the region" have become common phrases in statements and speeches of Turkish politicians when visiting the Balkans, but the long-promised improvements in the area of the economy have yet to materialize. Until 2004, Turkey's annual foreign direct investment (FDI) outflow to the Balkans was almost exclusively to Bulgaria and Romania. With an acceleration of liberalization in the Western Balkans and bilateral agreements with Turkey, channels have opened up.<sup>43</sup> Turkey's FDI flow of investment into the Balkan countries has been relatively diversified. In 2007, Albania alone received 42.2 percent of total outward FDI from Turkey. This can be attributed to foreign participation in the partial privatization of Albania's public telecommunications company ALBtelecom, which was acquired by a Turkish consortium in 2007.<sup>44</sup> In 2010, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the largest FDI-recipient country in the region, reaching a record level of \$61 million FDI in 2009. This large investment into the country was a reflection of the purchase by Turkish Airlines of 49 percent of BH Airlines of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, this deal was cancelled soon after.

Despite Turkey's increased investments into the region being significant some years, Turkey's FDI outflows were insignificant compared to the investments from other countries.<sup>45</sup> Overall investments by Turkey

abroad increased from €160 million in 2002 to €1.35 billion in 2011, making its investments in the Balkans 10 percent of its total FDI in 2011.<sup>46</sup> The only exception to this is Kosovo, which in 2015 pushed Turkey to second place in the list of top 10 investors, having invested €54.1 million<sup>47</sup> in Kosovo.<sup>48</sup> The distribution of investments across the region is quite unequal but is in line with Davutoğlu's policy of creating close relations with Bosnia, the FYROM, Kosovo, and Albania.<sup>49</sup> In 2015, Turkey increased FDI in the region significantly: €16.5 million<sup>50</sup> in Albania, €32.1 million<sup>51</sup> in Bosnia, €10.1 million<sup>52</sup> in Montenegro, €10.1 million<sup>53</sup> in the FYROM, €14.6 million<sup>54</sup> in Serbia,<sup>55</sup> and a record high €54.1 million<sup>56</sup> in Kosovo.<sup>57</sup> However,

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Investment Country Profiles: Turkey*, UNCTAD/WEB/DIAE/IA/2012/6 (February 2012).

<sup>47</sup> Original Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency data is denominated in dollars. Original figure is \$54.1 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aKhoVN>.

<sup>48</sup> Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency, Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Republic of Kosovo, <http://invest-ks.org/en/foreign-direct-investments-in-kosovo> (accessed 12 August 2106).

<sup>49</sup> Sait Akşit, *An Alternative or Embedded in the Mainstream: Political Economy of Turkey's Involvement in the Balkans* (Izmir: Gediz University, Department of International Relations, 2001), 16.

<sup>50</sup> Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original amount is \$18 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aKhNYf>.

<sup>51</sup> Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original amount is \$35 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aDOrch>.

<sup>52</sup> Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original amount is \$11 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2ajP52e>.

<sup>53</sup> Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original amount is \$11 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2ajP52e>.

<sup>54</sup> Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original amount is \$16 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2ajP52e>.

<sup>55</sup> Turkish Central Bank, Electronic Data Delivery System, <http://evds.tcmb.gov.tr/>.

<sup>56</sup> Original Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency data is denominated in dollars. Original figure is \$54 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aKhoVN>.

<sup>42</sup> *What Does Turkey Think?* (see note 4).

<sup>43</sup> Mehmet Uğur Ekinci, "A Golden Age of Relations: Turkey and the Western Balkans during the AK Party Period", *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 1 (2014): 103–25.

<sup>44</sup> Mustafa Çakır, "An Economic Analysis of the Relationship between Turkey and the Balkan Countries", *Adam Akademi* 4, no. 2 (2014): 77–86.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Turkey's total FDI amounted to €4.8 billion,<sup>58</sup> making its investments in the entire Balkans slightly less than 3 percent of its total FDI in 2015.<sup>59</sup> A number of economic and trade agreements, including free trade agreements,<sup>60</sup> between Turkey and the countries in the region have been signed since 1999, but trade balance – just like investments – has not reached anticipated levels. For Turkey, the Western Balkan markets are not particularly attractive, the population is small, and the purchasing power is generally low. In the areas of external trade – around 60 percent of which is with the EU – capital investment, and banking, the Western Balkans mainly depends on Germany, Italy, Austria, Greece, France, and Hungary. Banks in the Western Balkans are mainly controlled by Italy, Austria, Greece, and France.<sup>61</sup>

The dynamics of economic relations between Turkey and the Western Balkan countries have remained largely unchanged over the last decade, despite emotional promises in political speeches across the Western Balkans. Although Turkey has played an important political role in the region, its economic performance has not outperformed EU countries such as Italy and Germany, which have recorded by far the best results. As in a political forum, in economic terms Turkey projects to a certain extent the image that it supports only Muslims in the region. Rhetorically, the aim is to work holistically with everyone, but in reality Muslim groups receive special attention and benefits. The Yunus Emre Cultural Center has opened three offices in BiH, none of which are located in Republika Srpska. Out of 25 branch offices of the Turkish Ziraat Bank in BiH, only one is located in Republika Srpska, in Banja Luka.<sup>62</sup> And of all the investments into large-scale production, none have been made in Republika Srpska.

<sup>57</sup> Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency, Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Republic of Kosovo, <http://bit.ly/2aP2oqN>.

<sup>58</sup> Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original figure is \$5.24 billion. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2ax500r>.

<sup>59</sup> Turkish Central Bank, Electronic Data Delivery System, <http://evds.tcmb.gov.tr/>.

<sup>60</sup> Turkey has signed free trade agreements with all countries in the region, the first one as early as 1999 with FYROM, which came into force in 2000. Free trade agreements with Bosnia and Albania came into force in 2003 and 2008, respectively, Montenegro and Serbia in 2010, and finally, in 2013, Turkey signed a free trade agreement with Kosovo, too.

<sup>61</sup> Dušan Reljić, *The West Balkans: Accessing the Union*, SWP-Point of View (Berlin: SWP, 28 August 2012), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14).

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has program coordination offices in almost all parts of the region. However, it is mostly active in the areas of the Balkans typically populated by Muslims. TIKA's activity fund concentrates 50 to 70 percent of its resources to restoration. As a result, it has rebuilt or participated in the rebuilding of numerous monuments of Ottoman cultural and historical significance in BiH – be it bridges, fountains, residences, or mosques – over a period of two decades. Yet, exact numbers that systematically testify to their activities are almost impossible to come by, as even TIKA itself does not keep track of significant cultural and historical monuments they assist in rebuilding.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the other 22 major international donors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, TIKA has not yet joined the work of the Donor Coordination Forum, established back in 2005 in order to increase aid-efficiency in BiH and strengthen BiH's leadership in its own development.

The Turkish Cultural Yunus Emre Centers<sup>64</sup> have offices in Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Romania. These centers have been active in spreading the teaching of the Turkish language in public schools. As a result, in Sarajevo in the academic year of 2012/2013, some primary and secondary schools started to offer Turkish as an elective course – 4,863 students have been taking those. Along with the Diyanet (Turkey's "Presidency for Religious Affairs") – which nourishes religious relations, which in turn play a major role in relations between Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans – the Gülen<sup>65</sup> movement has been very active in the Balkans. But the movement has come under investigation in Bosnia, where, in 2016, public action has led to investigations of the way these schools were operating, which is in apparent disregard of domestic education rules and procedures. But no evidence of any breach has been found. The Gülen

<sup>63</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14).

<sup>64</sup> The Yunus Emre Foundation is a public foundation founded under the law dated 5 May 2007 and numbered 5,653 to promote Turkey and its language, history, culture, and art. It makes related information and documents available for use across the world, provides services abroad to people who want education in Turkish language, culture, and art, and it improves relations between Turkey and other countries and increases cultural exchange, <http://www.yee.org.tr>.

<sup>65</sup> The Gülen movement (*Hizmet* in Turkish) is a worldwide civic initiative rooted in the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam and inspired by the ideas and activism of Fethullah Gülen, <http://bit.ly/2azrj1e>.

movement also runs a number of schools in Albania, the FYROM, and Kosovo.

Turkish media are also attempting to establish themselves in the Western Balkans. Turkey's state-run broadcaster TRT now offers Internet news and radio programs in all languages in the Balkans; the Anadolu Agency news service in Bosnia and Herzegovina has gained popularity. Much of these activities have become vehicles for broadcasting Turkey's religious credentials to Muslim audiences, both domestic and foreign. However, the Turkish entertainment industry has had the most success. Turkish soap operas have developed enthusiastic fan bases throughout Eastern Europe.<sup>66</sup> Turkish soap operas are successfully broadcast beyond Turkey, reaching millions of people in more than 50 countries. According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, when the soap operas first entered the world market, they were valued at €25,000–€35,000 per episode. Today, the programs sell for €145,000–€360,000 an episode. Turkish soap operas broadcast daily are very popular in BiH, with 47 covering 2,235 minutes of programming on only one TV channel a week (which is exactly a day and a half every week of soap operas), enhancing Turkey's soft power on the international stage by popularizing Turkish culture. The soap operas have changed perceptions about present-day Turkish society in the Western Balkans. The image of Turks as modern, industrious people has countered the traditional image previously widespread in the region.

<sup>66</sup> Mehmet Huseyin Bilgin, Ender Demir, and Davor Labas, "The Impact of Turkish TV Series on Turkey's Image: Evidence from Eastern Europe", in *Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics*, vol. 1, ed. Mehmet Huseyin Bilgin and Hakan Danis (Cham: Springer, 2016), 565–78.

# Turkish Military in the Balkans

Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey initiated a treaty of friendship and cooperation in Ankara on February 28, 1953: the Balkan Pact. The agreement was meant to provide mutual collaboration between the three countries. In 1954, the treaty was signed in Slovenia (of the former Yugoslavia). It was first and foremost Yugoslavia that aimed to promote increased cooperation because it had become completely isolated after the escalation of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, but the treaty never had its big moment and was rather a “dead letter.”<sup>67</sup> Turkey’s membership in NATO, secured in 1952,<sup>68</sup> defined its defense policies. Having had a long history of insurgency and terrorism in the neighborhood,<sup>69</sup> Turkey has always had noteworthy military capabilities. In 2014, Turkish armed forces ranked 10th globally with more than half a million service personnel – more than the militaries of France and the United Kingdom combined. In the Cold War era, Turkey’s main objective was to be an active player in the western union, to fulfil its obligation as a NATO member.<sup>70</sup> After the 1990s, disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, Turkey’s defense policies were complemented by new goals.<sup>71</sup>

Turkey dedicated significant military efforts to the Western Balkans in the 1990s, from Bosnia to Kosovo,

and participated in peace operations in the region in the context of international organizations. It took part in the South-Eastern Europe Defense Ministerial process, which was initiated in 1996. Vouching cooperation between the countries of the region, Turkey helped initiate the Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe, known as the South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG).<sup>72</sup>

In Bosnia, Turkey actively participated in United Nations Protection Force activities. After the Dayton Agreement was signed in 1995, it increased its military presence to brigade level for the transformed NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), which would become the Stabilization Force (SFOR) in 1996.<sup>73</sup> That same year, Turkey and Bosnia signed two bilateral agreements that established the cooperation between the two countries in the fields of military training, defense industry infrastructure, military technology, scientific research and development, and military medicine.<sup>74</sup> The second agreement had two objectives: bring the Muslim-Croat forces up to equivalence with the Bosnian Serb Forces by the time IFOR leaves the country, and bring the Bosnian Army closer to NATO standards. The agreement implied regular visits by high-level officials and delegations; participation in exercises as observers; training of military personnel; and contributions to the Train and Equip Program.<sup>75</sup> Efforts to train the Bosnian army went hand-in-hand with the security concerns brought up by the United States regarding the presence of foreign fighters in Bosnia. Having the image of an unpredictable country with a weak state apparatus, Bosnia was considered fertile soil for Islamic extremists.<sup>76</sup> Bosnian troops were trained by the Turks with American M60 tanks –

<sup>67</sup> Slobodan Stanković, “Is Yugoslavia’s Military Alliance with Greece and Turkey Still Legally Valid?”, *Open Society Archives*, 30 September 1968, <http://bit.ly/2aTYxKI> (accessed 12 December 2015).

<sup>68</sup> “Turkey’s Relations with NATO”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/nato.en.mfa> (accessed 24 February 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Turkey has been dealing with the Kurdish organisation PKK within its borders for more than 30 years.

<sup>70</sup> Çiğdem Üstün, *Turkey and European Security Defence Policy, Compatibility and Security Cultures in a Globalised World*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 85 <https://goo.gl/1nDW41> (accessed 3 December 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of National Defence, *White Book, Turkey* (Ankara, 2000), 35–6. The goals were: 1) to contribute to peace and security in the region and to spread it to larger areas, (2) to become a country producing strategy and security that can influence all the strategies concerning its geography and beyond, (3) to become an element of power and balance in its region, and (4) to make use of every opportunity and take initiatives for cooperation, coming closer together, and developing positive relations.

<sup>72</sup> Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

<sup>73</sup> Metehan Demir, “Turkey’s Training of Bosnian Continues as Fate of the Federation Remains Hazy”, *Turkish Daily News*, 30 August 1996, in Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

<sup>74</sup> “Turkey, Bosnia Sign Military Cooperation Accord”, *Turkish Daily News*, 12 August 1995, cited in Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



part of the \$98.4 million worth of US military hardware that was supposed to be shipped to Bosnia under the condition that all Iranian fighters would leave the country. Bosnian President Izetbegović had assured John Kornblum, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State, that Iranians would leave the country.<sup>77</sup>

In line with the recovery made in the region, the number of military staff on the ground was shrinking, but Turkey remained involved. In 2004, the SFOR mission was handed over to the European Union Force, and 243 Turkish soldiers stayed in the country. Two years later, Turkey provided Bosnia with an opportunity to participate as an observer in a Joint Battalion Task Force within NATO's Partnership for Peace agreement.<sup>78</sup> In addition, in August 2006, Turkey and Bosnia signed another cooperation agreement aimed at enabling Bosnia to use a NATO anti-terror training base and to benefit from free access to the NATO-run base.<sup>79</sup>

After the declaration of independence from Yugoslavia, the FYROM was weak, lacked international support and recognition, and was suffering due to an ethnic conflict and security threat from Greece. The country was in need of a strong and committed ally, and Turkey proved to be one: by 1994, Turkey had donated \$1.9 million worth of military aid to the FYROM, including military equipment and ammunition.<sup>80</sup> By 2006, Turkey had donated a total of \$15 million worth of military equipment to the FYROM.<sup>81</sup> The donations aimed to support the FYROM's efforts toward integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures. In addition, Turkey led several operations in the FYROM: Essential Harvest,<sup>82</sup> Amber Fox,<sup>83</sup> Allied Harmony,<sup>84</sup>

Concordia,<sup>85</sup> and Proxima.<sup>86</sup> The main goal of this support had been the development of the defense capacities of the FYROM and its eventual accession into NATO. To achieve this goal, Turkey has remained the biggest non-EU contributor within the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy missions and operations in the FYROM.

Military relations between Turkey and Albania began in the early 1990s. A defense cooperation pact was signed between the two countries in 1992 in Ankara, Turkey. On this occasion – and despite the fact that Albania was not a NATO member – Albanian Defense Minister Safet Zhulali visited top-secret Turkish military facilities that only NATO members were allowed to see. Only a month later, the Turkish naval vessel TCG Mareşal Fevzi Çakmak visited Durres, the biggest Albanian port. This was the first such visit since Ottoman times. Six years after the historic visit to Albania, in 1998, Turkey sent troops to this country at a time when the conflict in Kosovo had escalated, and Kosovo officials sought support in Turkey. NATO launched airstrikes on Serbia and Monte Negro in 1999 and Turkey participated in these NATO airstrikes. Later on, Turkey contributed to the international peacekeeping force stationed in Kosovo, with around 1,000 soldiers being deployed in July 1999. Turkey made its military air facilities available to NATO for the Alliance's attacks, as well as supplied F-16 fighter jets as escorts for the squads of bombers. Turkish officials remained silent about Turkey's direct participation in the NATO airstrikes in Kosovo.<sup>87</sup> Soon after NATO stopped the airstrikes, Kosovo was placed under UN administration. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 authorized the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo and the deployment of the NATO-led Kosovo Force. Turkey wanted an active role in post-war Kosovo through the peacekeeping mission as well as the reconstruction and development of the country.<sup>88</sup> In 2009, Turkey and Kosovo signed the Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement committing

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Mustafa Aksaç, *Turkey's Military Efforts for Peace in the Balkans* (Ankara: Bilkent University, The Department of International Relations, 2003), 115.

<sup>79</sup> "Bosnia, Turkey Sign Military Agreement", *Agence France-Presse*, 14 August 2006, cited in Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Operation Essential Harvest was conducted to disarm the armed forces in the FYROM. Essential Harvest ended on 27 September 2001, and the Turkish Company Team returned to Turkey on 6 October 2001.

<sup>83</sup> NATO formed a new power to support the international observers in Macedonia and started conducting Operation Amber Fox on 27 September 2001. Turkey served as the headquarters for this mission.

<sup>84</sup> Operation Allied Harmony started immediately after the completion of the previous operation and continued under the command of NATO until 31 March 2003. It was supported with staff personnel.

<sup>85</sup> Turkey contributed to the operation, which was taken over and conducted by the EU under the name "Concordia" on 15 December 2003 with personnel support.

<sup>86</sup> Turkey assigned gendarmerie personnel to Proxima Police Power, established by the EU in Macedonia on 15 December 2003, and the personnel accomplished its mission on 15 December 2005.

<sup>87</sup> Sylvie Gangloff, "Turkish Policy towards the Conflict in Kosovo: The Preeminence of National Political Interests", *Balkanologie* 8, no. 1 (June 2004): 105–22.

<sup>88</sup> Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

them to the implementation of joint research, development, production, and modernization of spare parts, tools, instruments, defense materials, military systems, technical displays, and technical equipment, as well as military visits to unit headquarters and institutions.<sup>89</sup> Recently, Turkey has contributed to the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, and its presence was 150 personnel strong in 2011.<sup>90</sup>

In Bosnia, the FYROM, and Kosovo, where ethnic issues were particularly sensitive, Turkey worked closely with the United States.<sup>91</sup> It only signed military agreements with the FYROM and Bosnia after the United States got involved in the settlement of the conflict in Bosnia and recognized the FYROM.<sup>92</sup> To remain an important factor in the decision-making processes, and to promote itself in the Western Balkans, Turkey was led by the United States for most of its decisions and worked hand-in-hand with Washington in the planning of its regional diplomacy. It was only after the United States got involved in the settlement of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994–1995 – and after it recognized the FYROM (Republic of Macedonia) and signed military agreements with the latter – that Turkey itself took the step of signing military agreements with Macedonia (April 1995 and July 1996) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (August 1995 and January 1996). Again in the spring of 1998, when the increasing repression in Kosovo motivated the deepening of military cooperation between Macedonia and NATO, Turkey, too, strengthened its own military cooperation with Skopje. Like the United States, Turkey supported Albania, Macedonia, and the Bosnian-Croat Federation, politically and militarily. Throughout the military engagement in the Western Balkans, Turkey was always forced to integrate its activities into EU and US policies in order to remain a player in the region.

<sup>89</sup> Nuri Sener, *Turkey's Soft Power Assets in Peacekeeping Operations* (Calhoun, June 2015).

<sup>90</sup> *Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations document*, January 2016, <http://docslide.us/documents/csdp-missions-and-operations.html> (accessed 27 May 2016).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

# Countries of Particular Interest to Turkey

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

The legacy of Ottoman rule profoundly marked Bosnia's society and some of its most prominent features – for example, Islam as its religious heritage, Ottoman-influenced art, and 6,878<sup>93</sup> common Turkish words – are some of the reasons why Bosnia (in the words of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu) is the “miniature of the Balkans,” and why Sarajevo especially holds a very special place in the hearts of Turks.<sup>94</sup> According to polls, a majority of the citizens of BiH, as much as 60.2 percent, see Turkey as being a friendly country.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, this fondness is, according to statistics, more pronounced among Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), as 72.5 percent of them like Turkey the most out of all foreign countries and would most want to live there in a hypothetical case of living abroad.<sup>96</sup>

After the early 1990s, Turkey's interest was directed in particular toward BiH. In 1992, during the Bosnian War, Turkey was particularly worried by the Bosnian conflict. A number of parliamentary sessions were dedicated to the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia. The opposition parties criticized Turkey's “inaction” during the war and advocated a unilateral intervention in Bosnia<sup>97</sup> and for Turkey to position itself as an ally of Bosnian Muslims. Even though Ankara was adamant about who the aggressor and who the victims were, the government mostly followed a line of action that was within the NATO framework.<sup>98</sup> It offered diplo-

matic and public support to the authorities in Sarajevo, as it was reluctant to completely sever relations with Serbia.<sup>99</sup> Turkey's political elites acknowledged that it was the Muslims who were being killed on European soil, thus there was a legitimate call for Turkey to defend one of its kin communities. In 1992, President Süleyman Demirel made a powerful speech calling for more assertive action: “I can say a new wave of bloodshed is coming. I stated my worries to world leaders after my return from Bosnia. I continue to voice the drama of our Bosnian brothers at every international forum and bilateral contacts.”<sup>100</sup> In spite of internal instability and the opposition parties' advocating unilateral intervention in Bosnia, at the time, Turkish foreign policy remained in line with its obligations as a NATO member rather than being based solely on sympathies with the suffering of their Muslim brethren or nationalistic identities. Shuttle diplomacy and multilateral initiatives on the international platforms arguing for the necessity of international military measures were the focal points of Turkey's efforts. International conferences, meetings held around the globe, and calls by Turkey for multilateral intervention were its principal tools at the time. After the Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the war in Bosnia in 1995, and throughout the 1996 Priority Reconstruction and Recovery Program, Turkey committed €39.8 million – or about a tenth of the amount committed by the European Community.<sup>101</sup>

In public discourse and with some diplomatic hiccups,<sup>102</sup> both countries have built strong relations.

<sup>93</sup> Abdulah Škaljić, *Turcizmi u srpsko-hrvatskom jeziku* [Turkish expressions in Serbo-Croatian language], 6th issue (Sarajevo, 1989).

<sup>94</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14), 5.

<sup>95</sup> A survey conducted by the Wise Men Center for Strategic Studies (BILGESAM) on how Turkey and Turkish people are perceived in the Balkans. The survey was carried out at different universities in the countries, with respondents including both students and academics, and involved 2,127 face-to-face interviews (June, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Didem Ekinci, “The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992–1995): A Constructivist Approach”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 6, no. 22 (Summer 2009): 37–60.

<sup>98</sup> Think tank Popolari, *A Political Romance* (see note 14). Popolari interview with Kemal Hakkı Kılıç, Head of the Balkans

Department within Diyanet, Ankara, Turkey, 21 October 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Ekinci, “The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates” (see note 97).

<sup>100</sup> Sami Süleyman Gündoğdu Demirel was a Turkish politician and statesman who served as the ninth president of Turkey from 1993 to 2000. He previously served as the prime minister of Turkey five times between 1965 and 1993. He was the leader of the Justice Party (AP) from 1964 to 1980 and the leader of the True Path Party (DYP) from 1987 to 1993.

<sup>101</sup> United States General Accounting Office (GAO), *Bosnia Peace Operation: Progress toward Achieving the Dayton Agreement's Goals* (Washington, D.C., May 1997).

<sup>102</sup> The relations between the two countries were rocky when Bosnia decided to establish diplomatic relations with

Matching and even amplifying Turkish expressions of affection, Bosniak politicians also recognize the importance of nurturing the image of a special connection between the two countries and their peoples. Members of the Bosnian presidential administration agree on a rhetorical level that bilateral relations between Bosnia and Turkey are good, and strong, but refer to Turkey as an older, more experienced brother, as strong and wise. Bosniak officials have embraced Turkey as a role model – unlike their other colleagues<sup>103</sup> – and enjoy direct access to Ankara.<sup>104</sup> Having three presidents that rotate periodically (Serb, Croat, and Bosniak), Bosnia is in a peculiar position, and relations require even more sensitivity than Turkey has shown. A positive sentiment among Muslims in Bosnia, who consider the Ottoman period to be the golden age of Bosnia and see it as the birthplace of their religious identity, Serbs and Croats – both Christian – are not at ease with it. Whereas Bosniaks perceive this as friendly rhetoric, proof of friendship, and brotherhood, Serbs and Croats in Bosnia feel uncomfortable with it, to say the least. As a result, in the words of Milorad Dodik, the President of Republika Srpska, one of the two entities<sup>105</sup> in Bosnia, the “Turkish presence creates more internal divisions.” Its open affiliation with Bosniaks only makes compromise harder than necessary. Bosniak affiliation is based on the memorialization of Alija Izetbegović in Turkey, which honors him with several parks,

the Greek Cypriots in February 2000, but also to impose a visa obligation on Turkish citizens. The Bosnian Ministry of Human Rights decided to do so on the grounds that many Turks had illegally passed through Bosnia to go to other countries in Europe. The Bosnian officials stated that approximately 6,000 Turks were recorded as having passed via Bosnia to European countries. Former Ambassador Ahmet Erozan duly expressed Turkey’s concern by stating that this development would harm relations after the decision to establish diplomatic relations with the Greek Cypriots. Erozan also stated that Turkey would do the same if Bosnia did not alter its decision. By 2005, Turkey included Bosnia along with Macedonia, Tunisia, Iran, Morocco, and Kyrgyzstan in its list of states subject to visas in accordance with the adjustment process with the EU. The European Commission had called upon Turkey to revise its visa regime in its 2004 Regular Report.

**103** Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

**104** “Erdoğan Uses Atatürk’s Yacht for First Time to Host Bosnian Leader”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 4 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/17USluQ> (accessed 26 August 2015).

**105** Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska.

mosques, streets, and even boulevards in major Turkish cities. To add further reservation, Muzaffer Çilek, an Honorary Consul of Bosnia to Bursa and the CEO of a furniture company, was appointed a senior advisor to Bakir Izetbegović, a Bosniak Member of the Presidency of Bosnia.<sup>106</sup> In Bosnia, Çilek founded the foundation BİGMEV (Development center of cultural, economic and scientific relations between countries associated with Bosnia and Herzegovina)<sup>107</sup> in order to establish and vitalize historical relations between Turkey and BiH by maintaining established links and enhancing economic relations and trade.<sup>108</sup> Çilek’s close links with Turkey’s ruling AKP party intensified relations in the country’s political forum. As part of Erdoğan’s presidential campaign, Izetbegović took part in a teleconference with Erdoğan, during which he stated that if Erdoğan were elected president, he would not only act as president of Turkey but also as president of Bosnia, president of all Muslims. “You have restored the pride, the dignity of the Islamic nation. Therefore, here we all stand before you, out of respect for the first-class Muslim leader. Therefore, raise the flag high for our leader, for our Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan. He carries our flag, he carries our pride, [and] he carries the flag the late Izetbegović carried in the Bosnian bloody war,” Izetbegović said in his address.<sup>109</sup>

The public in the square and AKP supporters cheered his statements, but at home in Bosnia, Izetbegović was met with harsh criticism within many circles, including his own party, the Party of Democratic Action. Reciprocity came shortly after, when the AKP and Erdoğan himself threw their full support<sup>110</sup> behind Izetbego-

**106** “Turkish Businessman Appointed as Advisor to the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Daily Sabah*, 30 April 2015, <https://goo.gl/exdLR2> (accessed 12 August 2016).

**107** BİGMEV (Bosna Hersek ile İlişkileri Geliştirme Merkezi Vakfı) was established in 2010 and has a vision to “reviv[e] [...] old relations between [BiH] and Turkey” through an increase in investments and trade. It offers different services in support of linking BiH with Turkish businessmen and vice versa. The president of BİGMEV’s Managing Board is Muzaffer Çilek, a prominent Turkish businessman, whose ancestors came to Turkey from BiH. Aside from the central office in Istanbul, BİGMEV also has offices in Bursa and Sarajevo.

**108** Ibid.

**109** At the promotion of a book titled *Recep Tayyip Erdogan – the Birth of a Leader* in Visoko, Izetbegović addressed Erdoğan (who was speaking at an election rally in central Turkey) by way of video link.

**110** Hamdi Fırat Büyük, “Turkey’s ‘Soft Power’ Risks Backfiring in Balkans”, *Balkan Insight*, 26 February 2016, <http://goo.gl/eH8Qne> (accessed 14 April 2016).

vić's incumbent second-term run for the Bosniak seat of Bosnia's Presidency, a move that greatly helped him retain the post. Just before the Bosnian general elections of 2014, the Bosnian branch of Turkey's state-owned Ziraat Bank granted the state of Bosnia a loan of \$50 million, and Izetbegović was there to receive the new line of credit with all the spectacle that could be expected to accompany such a transaction. Moreover, the Balkan service of Turkey's state-owned Anadolu Agency offered its full support to Izetbegović during his presidential campaign.<sup>111</sup>

Turkey's efforts to bring Bosnia closer to NATO culminated when Foreign Minister Davutoğlu held talks with Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Secretary General of NATO and EU term president; Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos; and then President of BiH Silajdžić to help Bosnia's participation in the Membership Action Plan (MAP).<sup>112</sup> The Turkish embassy served as a NATO contact for Bosnia while also acting as a mentor in the process. Although this role is usually assumed by a NATO member for a duration of one year, Turkey has – based on its explicit expression of strong interest – been able to keep it for two consecutive years. NATO foreign ministers had assured Bosnia that the country would be included in the MAP if they made the necessary reforms. Having no influence over Republika Srpska – a Serb-majority populated area and an entity of Bosnia – Turkey<sup>113</sup> was left with no leverage in further negotiations between the two entities to deliver reforms. A compromise has not been reached, and Bosnia to date has not taken part in the MAP.

Turkey also considered itself as a bridge between Bosnia and the international community. Its fierce lobbying for Bosnia to gain membership in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe was one way to demonstrate that.<sup>114</sup> Being outside the EU,

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> The Membership Action Plan (MAP) is a NATO programme of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of countries wishing to join the Alliance. Participation in the MAP does not prejudice any decision by the Alliance on future membership.

<sup>113</sup> İnan Rüma, "Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: Overestimated Change within Underestimated Continuity?", in *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy*, ed. Özden Zeynep Oktav (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 135–57.

<sup>114</sup> Şule Kut, "Turkish Diplomatic Initiatives for Bosnia-Herzegovina", in *Balkans: A Mirror of the New International Order*, ed. Günay Gökse Özdoğan and Kemali Saybaşı (Istanbul: Eren, 1995), cited in Dilek Barlas, "Turkey and the Balkans: Cooperation in the Interwar and Post-Cold War Periods", *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies* (Foundation for Middle East and

Turkey's involvement often came from the "back doors." Represented through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)<sup>115</sup> and the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC)<sup>116</sup> in the 2009 debate on the future of the international governing body, the Office of the High Representative (OHR),<sup>117</sup> and its closure,<sup>118</sup> Turkey's stance effectively blocked Bosnia's EU membership bid<sup>119</sup> and the EU fast track. The closure of the OHR is a sensitive issue in Bosnia. Although Bosniak politicians propagate the continuation of the office – associating its presence with the overall security and stability of Bosnia – Bosnian Serbs believe it is an institution that effectively blocks the country, both domestically and internationally, and that it is being run by foreigners from the outside. Admitting that Bosnia represents a complicated situation for Ankara, Turkey argued that conditions have not yet matured enough to end the mission of the international institution. Having voted against the closure of the OHR, Ankara augmented its influence with Bosniaks, as they have continually sought a strong protector. To this date, Bosnia is not a fully sovereign state as, nominally, the UN retains decisive prerogatives.

Balkan Studies), 4 (Annual 1989/99): 65–80 (74, note 4).

<sup>115</sup> According to the official website of the OIC (formerly the Organization of the Islamic Conference), it is the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the United Nations and has membership of 57 states spread over four continents. The organisation is the collective voice of the Muslim world, ensuring to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world. The organisation was established upon a decision of the historical summit, which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, on 25 September 1969. Since 1994, Bosnia is an observing rather than a member state, whereas Turkey is a full member of the OIC since 1969.

<sup>116</sup> The PIC comprises of 55 countries and agencies that support the Bosnia peace process. Its Steering Board specifically is mandated with overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and providing political guidance to the High Representative. It has 11 members, one of which is the OIC, which is represented by Turkey.

<sup>117</sup> The Office of the High Representative is an ad hoc international institution responsible for overseeing the implementation of civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, <http://www.ohr.int> (accessed 16 June 2016).

<sup>118</sup> European Stability Initiative, *Bosnia Herzegovina and the EU* (Berlin, 2014).

<sup>119</sup> Goran Tirak, *The Bosnian Hiatus: A Story of Misinterpretations*, CEPS Policy Brief, no. 219 (Brussels: CEPS, November 2010), <http://bit.ly/2aQ7nry> (accessed 16 June 2016).

By the time most international donors were leaving Bosnia, Turkey had increased its TIKA budget, but almost 95 percent of project applications submitted to TIKA came from the part of the country with a Muslim majority – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One parliament representative, Dušana Majkić, an ethnic Serb, said that there are no hard facts that speak in favor of Turkey showing interest in the economy of Republika Srpska. “Politically speaking, Turkey hasn’t shown readiness to understand the other two sides [Serbs and Croats]. Rather, it is exclusively supporting the Bosniaks [Bosnian Muslims].” Yunus Emre and the Diyanet, Turkey’s Presidency for Religious Affairs, are also heavily involved in Bosnia, with projects ranging from language courses<sup>120</sup> to modernizations of religious schools. With several universities and more than 2,000 registered nationals, Turks comprise around a quarter of all foreigners with temporary residence in Bosnia. Under the slogan “Parade of little Sultans” connecting Turkey and BiH, the Sarajevo-based NGO Istanbul Educational and Cultural Center and the Eskişehir Turkish World Culture Capital Agency for several years now have been organizing public ceremonies for the circumcision of young boys. This kind of state-supported ceremony raised questions about considerably different preferences toward practicing Islamic culture and tradition, even among Muslims who practice the ritual, exposing considerable differences concerning a Turkish presence among the Bosnian public.

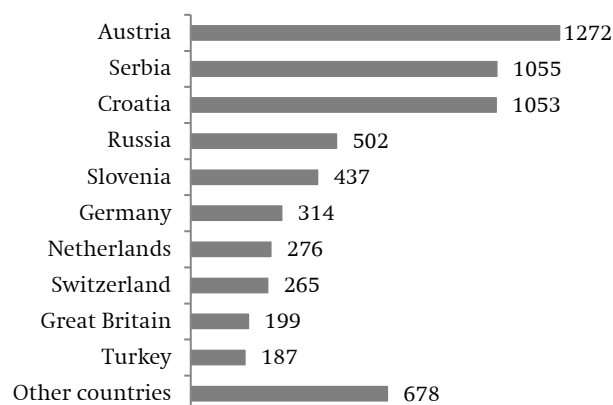
On the economic front, Turkey has not been among the top investing countries in Bosnia, contrary to rhetoric from Turkey’s and Bosnia’s political elites. The following graph shows the countries that invested the most in Bosnia over the last decade.<sup>121</sup>

According to the data from BiH’s Central Bank on total investments from 1994 to December 2015, the country that has invested the most is the Republic of Austria (€1.3 billion). It is followed by Serbia and Croatia with €1.1 million each and Russia (€502 million). Overall, the total investment over the period was €6.2 billion.

<sup>120</sup> Anadoly Agency, “Turski jezik izborni predmet i u škola Unsko-sanskog kantona” [Turkish Language Optional Language in Una Sana Canton Schools], *faktor.ba*, 12 November 2015, <https://goo.gl/tzQf18> (accessed 16 June 2016). Turkish language has become an optional foreign language in some Bosnian public schools.

<sup>121</sup> Central Bank of Bosnia, <http://www.cbbh.ba/?lang=en> (accessed 30 May 2016).

#### Top investor countries in BiH, May 1994 – December 2015 (in mil. €)



Source: Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Looking at trade, the Chamber of Commerce of Bosnia reported that 2015 exports to Turkey increased by 51.26 percent when compared to 2014 and amounted to €181.3 million.<sup>122</sup> The total volume of foreign trade with Turkey amounted to €459.3 million.<sup>123</sup> Still, the EU and countries in the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) remain the most important trade partners for Bosnia. In 2015, as in previous years, Turkey was Bosnia’s ninth largest trade partner after Germany, Italy, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria, China, and the Russian Federation.<sup>124</sup> Turkey attempted to upend this ranking by signing in April 2006 the Joint Action Plan between the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey and the Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was supposed to train Bosnians within the framework of the Turkey Chamber Development Programme but it did not yield significant results.

In Bosnia and its contemporary setting – where the constitutional framework defines three different constituent peoples; where the burden of dividing everything by three is an inevitability; and where political leaders have deep disagreements about the future, and even the benefits, of Bosnia’s very existence – any impression that an external actor, in this case Turkey, is

<sup>122</sup> “Smanjen vanjskotrgovinski deficit BiH: Izvoz u Tursku povećan za više od 50 posto” [External Trade Deficit Decreased: Export to Turkey Increased for over 50 Percent], *Faktor magazine*, 10 February 2016, <https://goo.gl/QQH28j> (accessed 30 May 2016).

<sup>123</sup> Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina, <http://komorabih.ba/en/> (accessed 30 May 2016).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

favoring one ethnic group increases tensions. In the words of Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik, Bosniaks keep on calling for a leader and a Muslim headquarters. Certainly this is not acceptable for Serbs or Croats.

We cannot accept the values promoted by Erdogan and trust his impartiality when he is trying to suggest to the Muslims to live with Serbs and Croats, while in fact he wants a dominant position for the Muslims here and wants BiH for them only. . . . For us, who see this on a regular basis, President Izetbegović's subservient desire to invite some strong Muslim leader from the outside who would always be on the side of the Muslims in BiH, should not be a surprise.<sup>125</sup>

Unlike Turkey's effectiveness in employing cultural transformation and the overall visibility of using soft power in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is not the case with economics. In a persistently poor economic environment, with unemployment rates rising to 60 percent among the youth, Turkey plays no leading role and rates worse than countries that claim no special cultural, historical, or religious bonds to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Kosovo

After years of strained relations with Serbia, during the conflict in Kosovo in 1999 and in February 2008, when Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia, Turkey decided to pursue a lower diplomatic profile than it had during the Bosnian War. Turkey was cautious of any parallels being drawn to its own Kurdish problem.<sup>126</sup> Following after the proclamation of independence, Turkish diplomats made their position clear. Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan stated that Turkey welcomed the independence of Kosovo, while underscoring the importance of improving regional and bilateral relations between Turkey and Serbia.<sup>127</sup> Turkey recognized Kosovo a day after

the declaration of independence in 2008, on February 19, 2008.

As in Bosnia, there are different views on how Turkey's influence plays out in Kosovo. One side views Turkey as a friendly country that brings in cultural and economic values and perspectives, the other side views Turkey as being predominantly active in Kosovo's political life and openly making political demands of the government in Kosovo.

In the economic arena, Turkey signed the Agreement on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments in April 2006. That same year, a holding company, Özer Konveyör Bant, opened a Scotch Tape factory in Kosovo. With the signing of a free trade agreement, the €73 million trade volume was expected to grow rapidly. Turkish Airlines flies to Kosovo three or four times a week, facilitating trade activities, and Turkey is one of a handful of countries Kosovans can visit without a visa.

Turkey's political and cultural presence and influence in Kosovo has been accompanied by lively economic relations between the two countries. Turkey, however, was not among the top five countries investing in Kosovo.<sup>128</sup>

Of the six countries in the Western Balkans, Kosovo has attracted the highest level of FDI from Turkey over last five years. Only in 2015 did Kosovo attract €316.3 million in FDI.<sup>129</sup> Turkey placed second, with an FDI share of €54.1 million, immediately behind Switzerland, which invested €70.3 million the same year.<sup>130</sup> There are 62 Turkish-owned businesses in Kosovo's dynamic business environment of almost 4,000 registered investors.<sup>131</sup>

In terms of investments, and according to the Central Bank of Kosovo, Turkey invested €86.8 million in 2013 alone. From 2004 to 2014 investments amounted to €360 million – 12 percent of total foreign investments. Similarly, as with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey has signed a free trade agreement as well as a number of different agreements eliminating double taxation. Kosovo's main trade partners as of December 2015 were CEFTA countries, which had a 35.4 percent share of overall Kosovo exports and a 24.6 percent share of imports; and the EU, which had a 20 percent

<sup>125</sup> "Izetbegović Calls for Turkish Involvement", *Serbian Press Agency*, 10 August 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Nick Danforth, "Turkey's 'Kurdish Problem' – Then and Now", *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (Philadelphia, PA), 5 January 2016.

<sup>127</sup> "Statement of H. E. Ali Babacan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Regarding the Recognition of Kosovo by Turkey", 18 February 2008.

<sup>128</sup> Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency, Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Republic of Kosovo, *Foreign Direct Investments in Kosovo*, <http://bit.ly/2aw1qeX> (accessed 22 May 2106).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

export share and a 43 percent import share.<sup>132</sup> With its 4.3 percent share of Kosovo exports, Turkey places ninth after India, Albania, Serbia, the FYROM, Germany, and Switzerland.<sup>133</sup> When it comes to import figures, the situation is slightly different. Turkey's share of Kosovo imports is 12 percent, placing them immediately after Serbia, which imports 12.7 percent.<sup>134</sup> Allegations are that millions of euros are flowing from Turkey to Kosovo "through illegal routes, bypassing banks."<sup>135</sup> Dozens of new mosques in Kosovo, as well as the rebuilding of all the mosques from the period of the Ottoman occupation, are financed through one sole donor, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. In the absence of official data on how much money is being invested, the Central Bank of Kosovo shows TIKa invested less than €3 million in Kosovo from 2009 until 2014 – of that, €1.2 million was invested in the Sinan Pasha mosque in Prizren alone.

Even though Turkey plays a role in the economic development of the country, the trade balance and amount of FDI are not at the levels that both governments had hoped for. Capital investments in infrastructure, such as a new terminal in the Priština Adem Jashari International Airport, primarily served political purposes. The airport terminal was officially opened in October 2013, when then Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Priština and turned the ceremony into a political rally.<sup>136</sup> Soon after, the company that owned the airports in Skopje, Priština, and Tirana was sold to a French company.<sup>137</sup> Although the investments, donations, and development aid are welcome in impoverished Kosovo, where 50 percent of the workforce is unemployed, these do not come for free. The first Turkish envoy to Kosovo<sup>138</sup> told local media that Kos-

ovans and Albanians ought to revise their views of the Ottoman period, since "the Ottoman conquest was no invasion." The same year, Rame Buja, the Minister of Education in Kosovo, reported that Turkey's education minister requested that schoolbooks and other historical accounts revise their interpretations of the Ottoman period to show the Empire in a less negative light. After similar requests from other high-level Turkish officials, Kosovo's education minister tasked a commission in 2011 to review the presentation of Ottoman and Turkish history and culture in textbooks.

What started as a request soon turned into a whitewashing of the historical records of the Ottoman Empire in schoolbooks. At Turkey's request, Kosovo education officials were making changes to history textbooks to tone down the language describing the Ottoman Empire. Revisions captured a conciliatory note toward the Balkans' former imperial master of 450 years. Where eighth-graders in the year prior had learned how "at the end of the 19th century, Albanians were still subject to a cruel Ottoman rule," from that year onward the pupils would learn that "at the end of the 19th century, Albanians were still under Ottoman rule." One "cruel and shrewd" sultan became "strict and shrewd" in the new version of an 11th grade textbook. Twelfth-graders used to read that the Ottomans dissolved the League of Prizren – a movement for Albanian autonomy within the Empire – and "inflicted previously unseen terror." The terror reference was replaced by a much milder "political repression." Other revisions included the deletion of sentences such as "Ottomans killed many Albanians," whereas statements such as "They applied strict measures against non-Muslim people" were replaced with more pliable "All subjects in the countries conquered by the Ottoman Empire were equal before the law in everyday life."<sup>139</sup>

These changes were delivered in time for the 2012 school year and incited public debate and polarized Kosovo citizens. When rumors surfaced in Albania that Turkey had made similar requests regarding that country's textbooks, the Albanian-language press published a letter signed by 127 intellectuals from Kosovo and Albania. "The proposed changes to history textbooks represent a form of cultural aggression against the essence of our nation," the letter said.

Kosovo's Ministry of Education and some historians defended these alterations, saying that Kosovo should strive for more European standards, combating the

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Grey Carter, "Resurrecting the Ottoman Empire: Erdogan Lauanders Millions by Building Mosques in Kosovo", *theremust-bejustice.wordpress.com*, 29 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/2aBY76K> (accessed 14 July 2016).

<sup>136</sup> Nedim Emin, "Erdoğan's Visit to Kosovo with a Focus on Local and Regional Politics", *SETA*, 1 November 2013, <https://goo.gl/YNKgYE> (accessed 22 March 2016).

<sup>137</sup> Pristina International Airport "Adem Jashari" is being managed and operated by a consortium Limak and Aeroports de Lyon. The consortium Limak and Aeroports de Lyon took the management and operation of the airport after a public private partnership agreement signed in 12 August 2010.

<sup>138</sup> Uffe Andersen, "Kosovo's New Golden Age?", *TOL*, 6 December 2013, <http://bit.ly/2awcybx> (accessed 6 June 2016).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



prevalent tendency in the Balkans to use textbooks to whip up nationalism and to stoke resentment of historical enemies. “It’s very important to understand that the empire wasn’t Turkish, but Ottoman,”<sup>140</sup> said Shkelzen Raca, the chairman of a commission that recommended changes to the history texts of primary and secondary schools in 2016. This argument did not fail as a remind that Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Kosovo following its unilateral split from Serbia in 2008.

## Macedonia

The second-largest city in Macedonia, Bitola, a place where Atatürk – the founding father of modern Turkey – lived and studied, is almost an inevitable stop on the journey for many Turks.<sup>141</sup> Estimates say that six million people living in Turkey today have ancestors who live in Macedonia.

In the 1990s, when Macedonia declared independence from the former Yugoslav republic in 1991, the two nations embarked on much closer relations. Joint animosity toward Greece made this cooperation even stronger. With a provisional name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in order to become a member of the UN, Macedonia tightened relations with Turkey, which earned the unwavering loyalty of many Macedonians after Ankara became the second country – Bulgaria was first – to publicly support Skopje’s declaration of independence and use of the name Macedonia in 1991.<sup>142</sup>

Especially positive about the relations of the two countries was former Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov. He saw Turkey as one of the key states that would shape peace in the Balkans and described the recognition of Macedonia by Turkey as a very positive step. His affirmative approach toward Turkey and his style in foreign policy had been particularly important in maintaining the fragile domestic peace in the coun-

try.<sup>143</sup> Turkey had extended help in the winter of 1992, which has not been forgotten by the Macedonians, when the country faced the Greek embargo.<sup>144</sup>

As a state that had just declared its independence in September 1991, Macedonia had to face an amalgam of economic, political, and military weakness. It could not receive aid or borrow on the financial markets, as it was not officially recognized. Therefore, Turkey’s provision of oil and humanitarian aid in this period proved vital for Macedonia. Former Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin’s landmark visit to Macedonia in late 1993 brought certain projects to life, such as the East-West Motorway passing through Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Turkey. By 1995, approximately 30 agreements were signed between the two states, all an indication of growing relations.<sup>145</sup>

In early 2000, a serious diplomatic crisis between Macedonia and Turkey broke out due to Macedonia’s preparedness to recognize the Republic of Cyprus. Relations between Greece and Macedonia began to soften after Macedonia changed its flag.<sup>146</sup> Ankara asked Macedonia to suspend the recognition until a final solution for Cyprus had been reached. Fazıl Keşmir, Turkey’s ambassador to Skopje, had stated on a Macedonian TV channel that diplomatic relations would be cut off and the embassy would be closed if Macedonia recognized the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>147</sup> The Macedonian media strongly warned the government that relations with Turkey would deteriorate. As one commenter in the Macedonian paper *Dnevnik* wrote: “The closest friend” would be lost if Macedonia recognized Cyprus.<sup>148</sup> In March 2000, the members of parliament in the Interparliamentary Friendship Groups initiated “letter diplomacy,” by way of which it was recalled that Turkey was the first state to open an embassy in Macedonia. Diplomatic relations between the two states were established in 2000.

Unlike the 1990s, when Macedonia managed to avoid an armed conflict, unlike Bosnia, the year 2001

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Atatürk was born in Thessaloniki (now in Greece) in 1881 and attended military school in Bitola from 1896 to 1899. His father was born in the village of Kodzadzik in western Macedonia. He went on to become an army officer during the First World War and president of the newly founded Republic of Turkey in 1924.

<sup>142</sup> Darko Duridanski, “Macedonia-Turkey: The Ties That Bind”, *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network*, 14 February 2011, <http://bit.ly/2aSqHp9> (accessed 21 February 2016).

<sup>143</sup> Ekinçi, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7), 29.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation (1995), Agreement on the Prevention of Double Taxation (1995), Agreement on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments (1995), Agreement on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments (1995), Free Trade Agreement (1999), and Memorandum of Understanding (2003).

<sup>146</sup> Ekinçi, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

was a time of insurgency. Ethnic Albanian rebels calling themselves the National Liberation Army launched attacks on Macedonian security forces, which in turn started a counter-insurgency campaign. With US and European diplomatic intervention, the parties signed a framework agreement on August 13 amidst the deadliest violence to date. Turkey played an important role by providing military aid to Macedonia. Macedonian officials said they did not want military support from Turkey, yet added that they would like Turkey to assume a more effective role in NATO.<sup>149</sup> Erdoğan was quoted to have said that Albanian people have the right to self-determination and the creation of a Great Albanian State,<sup>150</sup> that the Kosovo Liberation Army is not a revolutionary terrorist organization but expresses the will of the Albanians to defend their lands; and that Turkish troops are on standby to help liberate occupied Albanian lands. In 1912, Albania became the last Balkan country to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire. But Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Greece were left outside the new state, giving rise to the dream of a united Albanian nation.<sup>151</sup> After Kosovo gained independence in 2008, the movement “Vetëvendosja” (“Self-determination”) gained significant influence. During Ottoman rule, many Albanians were left living outside the new Albanian state, most within the borders of what would later become Yugoslavia – Kosovo, Macedonia, southern Serbia, and Montenegro – and for some, that dream of living within the Albanian border once again causes frictions among the different ethnic groups in the area, particularly in Macedonia and southern Serbia.<sup>152</sup>

In 2006, Turkey committed its continued support to Macedonia’s NATO membership bid. However, tensions erupted again in 2007 when Skopje changed the name of its international airport to Alexander the Great, prompting Athens to oppose Macedonia’s NATO

bid. NATO’s invitation to Macedonia was blocked by Greece at the 2008 Bucharest Summit.<sup>153</sup>

In March 2010, Davutoğlu, the Turkish foreign minister, met his Macedonian counterpart, Antonio Milososki, in Skopje and fully expressed his nations support in one sentence: “The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, wherever they are in the world can, if they need help, call the embassies of Turkey. They will get help, as they are Turkish citizens.” Davutoğlu did not fail to convey a message of support on similar occasions: “Turkey gives great attention to the political stability and prosperity of Macedonia because it is the heart of the Balkans. That is why Ankara was one of the first countries that recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name. I believe that the path of Macedonia towards the EU should be opened and the Turkish support for NATO membership for Macedonia will continue.”<sup>154</sup> During the past two decades, Turkey has been one of the most fervent supporters of Macedonia’s accession to NATO.<sup>155</sup> Over the years, Turkey has donated military equipment and provided Macedonia with numerous trainings and courses for officers and non-commissioned officers. On December 24, 2010, the ministers of defense of Turkey and Macedonia signed an agreement on military-financial cooperation. Reportedly, more Macedonian generals from the Macedonian Army speak Turkish than English. Turkey’s development aid is focused on repairing and refurbishing schools as well as on agricultural development projects (TIKA). In Macedonia there are the Yahya Kemal primary and secondary schools and colleges, and the International Balkan University. Turkey’s state-owned Anadolu Agency opened a bilingual Macedonian and Albanian desk in Skopje, expanding its operations further into the Balkan region. The close relationship between the two countries is reflected in their economic and trade relations. In 2008, the Turkish company TAV won the 20-year contract to operate Macedonia’s two airports, in Skopje and Ohrid, and to build another in the town of Štip in the next 10 years.

Turkey’s direct investment in Macedonia is led by the construction and banking sectors and the airport

**149** “Üsküp’e Savunma Yardımı” [Skopje Defense Help], *Cumhuriyet*, 18 March 2001, and “Turkey Condemns Violence, Refugee Inflow Continues”, *Turkish Daily News*, 22 March 2001, in Ekinci, *Turkey and the Balkans in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 7).

**150** Dušan Reljić, *The “Albanian Question” after the Turn in Tirana*, SWP-Point of View (Berlin: SWP, 23 July 2013).

**151** Vilma Filaj-Ballvora and Zoran Arbutina, “Dream of ‘Greater Albania’ Alive at Centennial”, *Deutsche Welle*, 28 November 2012, <http://www.dw.com/en/dream-of-greater-albania-alive-at-centennial/a-16409739> (accessed 27 May 2016).

**152** Ibid.

**153** Duridanski, “Macedonia-Turkey” (see note 142).

**154** Ibid.

**155** Turkey has participated in all three NATO operations in Macedonia, Essential Harvest (2001), Amber Fox (2001–2003) and Allied Harmony (2002–2003). When the NATO mission was substituted with the Concordia crisis management operation under EU authority, Turkey also contributed with personnel and members of the gendarme units, which also participated in the EU’s Proxima Police Force mission in Macedonia.

operations. From 2010 to 2014 the FYROM received €74.1 million<sup>156</sup> worth of FDI from Turkey.<sup>157</sup> This, however, represents only 5.5 percent of the FYROM's FDI total for the period.<sup>158</sup>

According to statistical data for 2014, the most important countries of origin and the largest annual FDI inflows into the FYROM originated from Switzerland, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Germany, and only then Turkey.<sup>159</sup>

The data on foreign trade does not differ much from the data patterns of other countries in the region. The main trade partners and destinations for FYROM exports in 2014 were: Germany, Bulgaria, Italy, Serbia, Greece, Belgium, Croatia, and other countries.<sup>160</sup> Germany is the number one export destination, with more than €1.6 billion<sup>161</sup> or 41.43 percent of total exports.<sup>162</sup> In 2014, the FYROM was mostly importing from Great Britain, Germany, Greece, Serbia, Italy, China, Bulgaria, and Turkey.<sup>163</sup> Turkey imported €308.1 million<sup>164</sup> – or 5.14 percent – of goods in the FYROM.<sup>165</sup> The numbers show that Turkey's foreign policy as a negotiating tool remained limited in the spheres of political and cultural cooperation. The self-proclaimed attorney of Macedonia, as the Greek press called Turkey, gained substantial credit in Macedonia – among political leaders as well as the population – for its early and constant support of its independence and the recognition of the country under its constitutional name. Contrary to mainstream thought, Turks are often more accepted among Macedonians than Albanians, who recall the Ottoman times when their identities were eliminated and they were unimportant citizens. Turkey's desire to improve relations in the country may well be paused if the lack of trust among ethnic groups toward Turkey carries on. In the long

run, Ankara's plan is to be seen not only as a mediator but preferably as an agenda-setter. In order to improve its chances, it must legitimate its goals across ethnic groups; but given its credentials so far, that is not as realistic.

**156** Original Turkish Central Bank data is denominated in dollars. Original figure is \$90 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aUkcT1>.

**157** Ibid.

**158** Ibid.

**159** Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE), *Macedonia – Economic Report 2014* (Skopje, 2015).

**160** Ibid.

**161** Original data is denominated in dollars. Original figure is \$2 billion. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aDOrch>.

**162** Ibid.

**163** S-GE, *Macedonia – Economic Report* (see note 159).

**164** Original data is denominated in dollars. Original figure is \$374.07 million. The currency is converted by historic rates at <http://bit.ly/2aDOrch>.

**165** Ibid.

# Can Old Animosity Die?

## Serbia-Turkey Relations

The greatest strategic shift in Turkey's policy in the Balkans is evident in its relations with Serbia. The ups and downs in this long relationship throughout history have evolved from open animosity to "strategic partnership." Serbia, like many other areas in the region, was part of the Ottoman Empire, which has left traces both culturally and in memory. Unlike with the majority of the Muslim kin communities in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania, Serbs recall this era as a period of slavery under the Turks. It is a period remembered as a time of huge tax burdens and unpunished crimes.<sup>166</sup>

Terms such as "Turkish oppression," "Turkish servitude," and the "Turkish yoke" have become standard in relations between Turkey and Serbia. At the same time, Turkey's reflections on the same period look rather different. In the words of former Prime Minister Davutoğlu: "If there was no Ottoman state, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha – Ottoman Grand Vezir who was taken from one Serbian family – would be a poor Serbian man who lived just to have a small farm."<sup>167</sup> In today's Serbia, attitudes have changed to some extent, and the relations between Serbia and Turkey are purely pragmatically driven.

As an ally of Bosnian Muslims during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, and having gained a privileged position among Muslim communities, Ankara's relations with Serbia were destined to be problematic. Even though Turkey has tried to avoid creating sharp divisions in its relations with Serbia, in 1992, together with the United States, it pushed for the adoption of a resolution that clearly defined Serbs as aggressors and BiH Muslims as the victims.<sup>168</sup> The official Serbian and Turkish positions appeared unbridgeable, until 2000. After the downfall of the Slobodan Milošević regime – and with joining the EU being

at the top of the agenda for the entire Balkans – Turkey embarked on a new approach. Ankara's New Balkan initiative, which consisted of the establishment of a trilateral mechanism among Serbia, BiH, and Turkey, set the grounds for closer cooperation, stressing the fact that durable peace and stability in the region are not possible without Serbia.

Turkey's main endeavor was to assume the role of a regional mediator and emphasize regional cooperation, which – in the case of the Western Balkans – was of utmost importance.

The regional cooperation that was already in place was originally conceived by Germany, having established the Stability Pact for South and Eastern Europe. The Stability Pact had limited success, as pointed out in the report by the European Stability Initiative, because there was a mismatch between the expectations and resources given to the pact initially.<sup>169</sup> Later on, in 2008, it was replaced with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), as regional cooperation has been a policy priority for the EU, and also a specific requirement under the stabilization and association agreements. Although it was structurally solid and relatively well-resourced, the RCC's track record was not the most impressive. Bilateral issues kept on resurfacing in the region, and the overall lack of political collaboration was not being tackled. Free from bureaucratic and often inadequate mechanisms, and assuming its new role in the region, Ankara approached the regional cooperation project outside of the usual framework, initiating bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral peace initiatives. The trilateral meetings with Serbia were presented as being most vital, since most of the talks had been directed toward economic relations and the improvement of cooperation in this field.<sup>170</sup>

Effects of the Turkey-initiated dialogue mechanism became apparent after the appointment of a Bosnian ambassador to Belgrade in 2010. This transpired after

<sup>166</sup> Gordana Andric, "Turkey Breathes New Life into Serbia's Ottoman Relics", *Balkan Insight*, 17 December 2010, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/turkey-breathes-new-life-into-serbia-s-ottoman-relics/2027/5> (accessed 29 May 2016).

<sup>167</sup> Erhan Türbedar, "Turkey's New Activism in the Western Balkans: Ambitions and Obstacles", *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 3 (2011), 139–58 (147).

<sup>168</sup> Ekinci, "The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates" (see note 97).

<sup>169</sup> European Stability Initiative, *Democracy, Security and the Future of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe* (Berlin, 4 April 2001), 2.

<sup>170</sup> The Ankara Summit Declaration adopted at the Third Trilateral Summit of the Presidents of Turkey, BiH, and Serbia, held in Ankara, on 14–15 May 2013.

heated political disputes, which were due to the 1990s war and the almost three years during which BiH had had no diplomatic representative in its neighboring country. An apology given later by former Serbian President Tadić in the Serbian parliament with regard to Srebrenica has been seen as a direct consequence of the trilateral meetings. Ultimately, the absolute triumph for Turkey was to bring together Serbian President Tadić and BiH President Silajdžić for the first time. Tadić, who led progressive forces in Serbia, had an overwhelming task to prove that the new Serbia could lend a hand to the Muslims in the region. It had to show to the EU and the West that it had a vested interest in showing more concretely regional cooperation and reconciliation with its neighbors. At the same time, long-serving politician from Bosnia, Silajdžić, known for his hard stances against Serbia and Republika Srpska in BiH, risked becoming completely isolated from the high-level discussions of the international community, and trilateral discussions provided the needed space to regain some influence. Previously, Silajdžić had qualified Serbia as being a country that damages regional relations. Only 10 days after that statement, he shook hands with Tadić, sending a message of friendship. Turkey's interest in such an initiative was to demonstrate its full power as an actor that could bring the region together, and to demonstrate its diplomatic supremacy over the West by bringing former warring parties – Muslims and Serbs – to the same table. No less important: For Turkey this was a clear message that it could deliver results on its own.

A period of turbulence for the two countries came right after the independence of Kosovo in 2008. Turkey was second to recognize it, and it jeopardized its relations with Serbia, which considers Kosovo as part of its own territory. Careless rhetoric of former Prime Minister Erdoğan in October 2013 led to angry reactions that required Foreign Minister Davutoğlu to visit Belgrade to soften the situation. In December 2015 Serbia and Turkey signed a strategic partnership to pursue advanced trade via the establishment of institutional mechanisms and biannual cabinet meetings. This moment marked a peak in Turkey-Serbia relations. Putting aside disagreements and working on constructive new approaches promoted Turkey's role in a new fashion, one that went beyond the usual kin community narrative. However, Turkey's successes as

mediator are only helpful to the EU as long as the countries in question are on an EU path.<sup>171</sup>

In spite of partially successful results with news initiatives, Ankara has managed to strike a balance between the natural anchoring of its foreign policy with Muslim populations that look toward Turkey for leadership, and a policy of engaging all sides diplomatically.<sup>172</sup> The common message coming from Turkey is that Serbia is a key partner in creating a new era of relations in the Balkans. Turkey and Serbia have shown an enviable dose of political pragmatism, as they are aware of the limitations and risks. This has led to a variety of possibilities for cooperation – with investments foremost.

Outside the political spectrum, increasing economic relations and trade volume led to more interaction. The Turkish practice of taking businesspeople on foreign trips with key decision-makers – a practice used everywhere in the region – was heavily used in Serbia, too. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić has stated that Serbia will pay “special” attention to Turkish investors. In October 2014, the Turkish textile company Jeanci signed an agreement with the Serbian government to open a new textile factory that will employ more than 600 people. Turkish car parts manufacturer Teklas opened a new plant in the southern Serbian town of Vladičin Han as part of the plan to invest €11.35 million (\$12.9 million) in the country. The state-owned Turkish bank Halkbank acquired 76 percent of Serbia's Čačanska Bank in March 2015, and Halkbank opened its first branch in Belgrade last October. In December 2015, Davutoğlu paid a visit to Serbia, stressing the growing multidimensionality of the countries' bilateral ties, despite the remaining differences over the Kosovo issue and differing views on the recent Turkish-Russian crisis.<sup>173</sup>

Since 2011 Turkey has also developed a new scholarship program for students from Serbia. There were 45,000 applications from 160 countries for scholar-

**171** Žarko Petrović and Dušan Reljić, “Turkish Interests and Involvement in Western Balkans: A Score-Card”, *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 3 (2011), 159–72 (163).

**172** “Surveying Turkish Influence in the Western Balkans”, *Stratfor*, 1 September 2010.

**173** Birgül Demirtaş, “Turkey-Serbia: The Improvement of Multidimensional Ties Despite Differences”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 5 January 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-serbia-the-improvement-of-multidimensional-ties-despite-differences.aspx?pageID=449&nID=93410&NewsCatID=396> (accessed 8 June 2016).

ships that the Turkish state offered in 2012: 1,600 of which were from the Balkan countries.<sup>174</sup>

Serbia is near the center of every major political discussion regarding developments in the Western Balkans. Serbia's favorable geographical position and its overarching, historically dominant political influence on other countries in the region make it strategically indispensable for Turkey. On the other hand, Serbia's despair over the lack of economic investment and its aim to become more economically confident provide a framework for future relations based on convenience, at least until the conditions for those developments materialize. However, the durability of this alliance will not last unless there is long-term mutual interest.

174 Demirtaş, "Turkey and the Balkans" (see note 6): 177.

# Turkey's Activism as Seen from the Balkans

Major drivers of Turkey's new foreign policy have been centered on the nation's history, culture, and geopolitical position. Politically, Turkey puts the Balkans at the center of five intersecting regions, including the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Providing more access to the region is seen as a matter of domestic national priority, as Turkey is considered by many Turks to be a partially Balkan country – not solely by virtue of location, but also for its well-preserved culture, cuisine, and customs in terms of food and social life. During a campaign speech in 2013, President Erdoğan sparked a diplomatic row, stating that parts of the Balkans belong to Turkey. This statement created lots of tension in the countries, in which territorial disputes persist to this day.<sup>175</sup> The neo-Ottoman nostalgia that has been featured in Turkish public discourse has, over time, become a prevalent narrative in Turkish society within political and intellectual forums. The notion that Turkey should care for its former Ottoman citizens – many of whom come from the Balkans – is virtually uncontested. Forging close ties based on Ottoman nostalgia has become a matter of national unity, and Turkey's presence in the Balkans has been solidified over time and across the political spectrum. Moreover, immigration, which is responsible for large parts of the population on both sides, has cultivated connections for centuries. For Turkey, the Balkans is the prime foreign policy venue and an indispensable site for power parades. Although it is false to believe this will ever be a unified territory again, much of the romanticism of the Balkans has been preserved.

A clear separation of sentiments toward Turkey is much more visible in the Western Balkans. Whereas the political elites in the Western Balkans unanimously display almost divine devotion to the Turkish political establishment and nurture good relations, citizens with more liberal views dread the possibility of Turkey becoming more influential in the region, especially in light of the more assertive autocratic nature of President Erdoğan's regime. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the

popularity of Turkey – driven through political speeches and campaigns – has become a tenet of Bosniak politics, and stories of the good life under the Turks are overwhelmingly a part of the state politics. An urban anecdote of the former president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović, talks about leaving Bosnia on a death bed to President Erdoğan as an *emanet* – an inheritance to be taken care of.<sup>176</sup> It has become a mainstream anecdote that Bosniak political elites have empowered Turkey and given them unprecedented opportunities for realizing their foreign policy ambitions. Ever since, this has been used by political elites, the media, and some scholars as widespread folklore for more political gains. The demand for a greater Turkish presence – not only economically but also in everyday life – by the establishments in parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina similarly shapes the perception that Turkey offers an alternative for the Balkans, one that is different from the European Union. In his speech in Sarajevo in October 2009, Davutoğlu proposed that the Balkan countries could escape the destiny of being on the periphery or the victim of geo-strategic competition of great powers by reestablishing the successes from the Ottoman period. In that sense, the Empire's model is seen as a positive example and the solution to ethnic and religious conflicts. "As the Republic of Turkey, we would like to construct a new Balkan region based on political dialogue, economic interdependence, cooperation and integration, as well as cultural harmony and tolerance. These were the Ottoman Balkans, and hopefully we will reestablish the spirit of these Balkans."<sup>177</sup> Responding in similar fashion at the conference in Istanbul, in 2011, then President of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bakir Izetbegović openly predicted Turkey's future as being at the center of attraction and magnetism – of the Orient,

<sup>176</sup> Definition: Person or thing entrusted to another's safekeeping, a trust; checkroom for baggage; entrusted to (someone's safekeeping); source: "Emanet (Ottoman government)", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (online), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/emanet>.

<sup>177</sup> "Address of H. E. Prof. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey, at the conference: The Ottoman Legacy and the Balkans' Muslim community today" (Sarajevo, 16–18 October 2009).

<sup>175</sup> Zorana Brozović, *Territorial and Border Demarcation Disputes in the Western Balkans*, Policy Paper 3 (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, December 2011).

not Europe. This complementarity of outlooks and symbolism in public spaces – with Balkan leaders often referring to Turkey in intimate, personal, and even family-oriented terms – reveals a profound contrast in the power dynamics between Turkey and the Western Balkans: one a former colonist and the other a former victim. Centuries later, this relation has changed; countries have gained independence, but the political language often echoes the past. In the aftermath of the military coup in July 2016, leaders from the Balkans greeted President Erdoğan's restoration of control in Turkey. "Happy for the brotherly Turkish people and our valuable friend, President Erdoğan, for going out – with full success – from a very difficult night," Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama wrote on twitter.<sup>178</sup> President Izetbegović went one step further, cementing bonds between the two countries: "My message to my brother Erdoğan is that he has strong support here, amongst us in Bosnia."<sup>179</sup> An unreserved political friendship spreading across some parts of the region equals the aloof reception of Turkey in others. Even among Muslims in the Balkans, Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, there is no unified approach toward Turkey, and even more so to its policies and open interference in the region. Concessions given to Turkey in exchange for the desperately needed economic projects are not welcomed by all. In 2015, Turkey demanded closure of *Hizmet* schools in Albania, which sparked a fierce reaction from the Albanian chief of the socialist ruling party in Albania: "The Turkish president visited us and wanted us to close schools. How did he say that? As a brother? As a friend? No. He said that as he is our father. If we Albanians have our father, it should be Skender-beg, Ismail Kemal. We [Albanians], have no father outside of Albania. This request put before us is unacceptable, we [Albanians], are not a Turkish colony."<sup>180</sup> During Ottoman times, the Balkan states enjoyed the status of vassal states paying tribute to the colonists. This vassal-based<sup>181</sup> relationship is still problematic for

many Muslims in the region, and the scholarly elite throughout the region reject this notion strongly. Although a significant number of ethnic Turks living in the Balkans undeniably feel a strong religious and cultural affinity with Turkey, the citizens of the Western Balkan region are more likely to see themselves as part of the larger European Union. A large majority (39 percent) still consider membership within the European Union to be a good thing and consider EU membership as the paramount goal of their domestic transformation.

**178** "Balkan Leaders Praise Erdogan for Defeating Coup", *Balkan Insight*, 16 July 2016, <https://goo.gl/AWAKdd> (accessed 22 September 2016).

**179** Ibid.

**180** "Albanski parlament Erdoanu: 'Mi nismo turska kolonija i nemamo oca izvan zemlje!'" [Albanian Parliament to Erdoğan: "We are not a Turkish colony and we have no father outside Albania"], *Dnevni Avaz newspapers*, 19 May 2015, <https://goo.gl/ND7ONF> (accessed 14 August 2016).

**181** Definition of "vassal": "(in the feudal system) a person granted the use of land, in return for rendering homage, fealty, and usually military service or its equivalent to a lord

or other superior; feudal tenant"; source: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vassal> (accessed 3 December 2015).



## Western Balkans – EU’s Forgotten Post?

The promise from the June 2003 EU-Western Balkans summit, which resulted in the Thessaloniki Declaration affirming explicitly that “the future of the Balkans is within the European Union,” is long overdue. The European Union conditionality toolbox that worked well in previous enlargements has lost its power. With the exception of Croatia, all of the countries that began the process of joining in 2013 – after 10 years of negotiations – are far from full EU membership. A series of demands from the European side toward the Western Balkan countries were often lacking in consistency. The credibility of the EU was further eroded by arbitrarily applying conditions to the Western Balkans. Croatia, for example, signed its Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) as early as 2001 and became a candidate for EU membership in June 2004. At that time, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia gave its opinion that Zagreb’s cooperation was a positive element, despite the fact that indicted Croatian General, Ante Gotovina, had not been handed over. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SAA negotiating process largely depended on compliance with the police reform conditions set by the Office of the High Representative – conditions that had never existed for any other country. No country had ever been asked to implement such reforms, neither as a prelude to an association agreement nor for EU membership.

The transformation process that was originally designed to serve as an impetus that leads to full political and economic stability did not yield results. The change of leadership in the European Commission in 2014; the “five year freeze”<sup>182</sup> on enlargement; the

rise of “illiberalism” in the EU; and the EU’s inability to counterbalance negative views on enlargement in the member states resulted in an almost complete power vacuum in the Western Balkan countries. To counter negative trends and launch more durable prospects for the region, the German government launched the “Berlin Process” in 2014 following a series of high-level visits to the region,<sup>183</sup> restating the importance of supporting the region’s bid for membership in the EU. Forgotten commitments have been reinvigorated by a new roadmap, whose main focus is on the economy, connectivity, civil society, and youth. A target date for the accession of Serbia is 2022–2025, provided that other bilateral issues do not create more stumbling stones. Lasting stability and economic development serve as the major rationale for providing support, but a weak state of democracy in the region plays a significant role, too.

**182** Jean-Claude Juncker, Candidate for President of the European Commission, “A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session”, Strasbourg, 15 July 2014 (p. 11): “When it comes to enlargement, [...] this has been an historic success [...]. However, the Union and our citizens now need to digest the addition of 13 Member States in the past ten years. The EU needs to take a break from enlargement so that we can consolidate what has been achieved among the 28. This is why, under my Presidency of the Commission, ongoing negotiations will continue, and notably the Western Balkans will need to keep a European perspective, but no further enlargement will take place

over the next five years.” <https://goo.gl/jnnmRf> (accessed 3 December 2016).

**183** The Berlin Process, a five-year process launched by Germany in order to underline the commitment to EU-enlargement towards the Western Balkans region. The focus of the initiative is on those countries of the Western Balkans that are not yet EU members: Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

# Outlook

The EU and Turkey have different approaches to the Western Balkans. To a great extent, this is a matter of different priorities – and even a different geographical neighborhood – but also a matter of very different capabilities at their disposal. For the European Union, the focus is largely on the security of the Western Balkans, which, if challenged, may have unwanted consequences, as seen in the 1990s. For Turkey, it is more about projecting its own political power due to its considerable clout in the region, particularly with respect to Muslims. However, different views do not have to be barriers, but should rather be translated into a variety of possibilities for collaboration.

The strong EU anchor that is missing in the Western Balkans and the uncertain future of Turkey's foreign policy direction will progressively deepen the necessity to synchronize approaches in the Western Balkans. The region's economic prospects are rather bleak due to high unemployment and social discontent. Although the EU holds instruments to bring the Western Balkans region closer to the EU and ultimately improve the situation on the ground, a number of pressing issues – such as the prevailing financial crisis in the EU, the refugee inflow, terrorism, the Middle East crisis, and, finally, Brexit<sup>184</sup> – have shifted the Union's priorities from the Western Balkans. On the other hand, Turkey's current domestic political dynamics will complicate relations with the region later. If Turkey returns to economic growth, pluralism, democracy, and closer ties with the EU, its influence in the region can broaden. If Turkey verges toward more authoritarian rule, Islamism, and anti-Western feelings, it will improve its standing with politicians from the region, who regard the present form of rule in Turkey to be adequate.

Given the continued considerable attractiveness of the European Union in the Western Balkans, the EU must reinforce its role on a very practical level, show more flexibility in foreign policy mechanisms, and improve economic governance beyond the Berlin Process agenda. Advancing the existing structures, the challenge for the EU is in managing previous expecta-

tations, namely EU membership. Equally important is to highlight the necessity for the EU to look for correspondingly sophisticated policy tools to be introduced in the region that will deepen the European context and reaffirm a European future for the citizens of the region. In a time when people in the Western Balkans feel profoundly disconnected from their political leaders, this might be the key push factor.

In order to understand why Turkish influence has grown in the Western Balkans, the EU must make an effort and pursue further knowledge about Turkey's "soft policies" and its competitive powers in the region. Knowing the conditionality limitations in the Balkans, applying only EU solutions to specific national issues does not always bear results. Instead of looking at Turkey as a competitor, the EU should include Turkey as soon as possible into multilateral activities in the Western Balkans (e.g., through the Berlin Process). An alienated and authoritarian Turkey could bring increasing levels of uncertainties to the region. Throughout the 1990s, Turkey proved to be a trustworthy partner in multilateral activities. Its participation in military and civilian missions contributed to fostering stability in the region. In the last decade, Turkey has shown a noteworthy level of political pragmatism, its interest in the region is evident, and it may well be a valuable partner in the process. If the EU and Turkey share some interests in the Western Balkans, there should be a way to accommodate different approaches. The point would be to seek an objective dialogue and initiate cooperation in fields where shared interests exist.

Turkey's own lack of progress on its path toward EU membership is often associated with the Western Balkans, making the Western Balkans an example of the failed policies of the EU. Europe's comparative advantage lies within its diversified approach and its unique ability to build networks within societies – for the region as a whole. More committed EU assistance can reassure the public in the Western Balkans and compensate for shortcomings while long-term strategic goals are pushed.

Finally, the countries of the region should formulate their own foreign policy priorities and relations – both with Turkey and the EU – which would be based

<sup>184</sup> Brexit was the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

on pragmatic interests as well as the development of economic and political relations. A strong liberal push from within must take place to strengthen democratic institutions that can ensure the rule of law and deep reforms. In a best-case scenario, no country in the Western Balkans will join the EU before 2020, and much of the progress to be made will take place in the Western Balkans itself.

## Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party / Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
BİGMEV	Development center of cultural, economic and scientific relations between countries associated with Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies (Brussels)
EU	European Union (since 1993)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
IFOR	Implementation Force
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PIC	Peace Implementation Council
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SEEBRIG	South-Eastern Europe Brigade
SFOR	Stabilization Force
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
UN	United Nations