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Turkey and the Western Balkans During the AKP Period

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Abstract

This study examines Turkey's foreign policy towards the Western Balkans during the government of Justice and Development Party (AKP) within the framework of the four guidelines to which the AKP adhered rigorously. These are attempts to aid resolution of the political conflicts between the contentious parties in the region, to contribute to the peace-building missions in the Western Balkans in addition to help Western Balkan states in their quest to integrate with the North Atlantic defense structure, to encourage the Turkish investments in various sectors of the Balkan economies and to ensure the diffusion and expansion of different facets of Turkish soft power to the Western Balkans through education, restoration work and distribution of products of popular culture. Although the Turkish foreign policy recorded some progress with regard to defense cooperation, economic penetration, cultural expansion in the Western Balkans, its success in political mediation was limited and it failed to make any important breakthrough.

Keywords: *Turkey, Western Balkans, political mediation, defense cooperation, economic penetration, cultural expansion.*

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AKP Döneminde Türkiye ve Batı Balkanlar

Öz

Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) hükümetinde Batı Balkanlara yönelik dış politikasını AKP'nin sıkı sıkıya bağlı olduğu dört temel prensip çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Bunlar, bölgedeki ihtilaflı taraflar arasındaki siyasal anlaşmazlıkların çözümüne yardımcı olma denemeleri, Batı Balkanlar'daki barışı kurma misyonlarına katkıda bulunma ayrıca Batı Balkan devletlerinin Kuzey Atlantik savunma yapısına entegre olmalarına yardımcı olma, Balkan ekonomilerindeki çeşitli sektörlerdeki Türk yatırımlarını teşvik etme ve Türk yumuşak gücünün farklı boyutlarının eğitim, restorasyon çalışmaları ve popüler kültür ürünlerinin dağıtım aracılığıyla Batı Balkanlar'a nüfuz etmesinin ve yayılmasının sağlanmasıdır. Türk dış politikası her ne kadar Batı Balkanlar'da savunma işbirliği, ekonomik olarak nüfuz etme ve kültürel yayılma konularında bir miktar gelişme kaydettiyse de siyasi arabuluculuktaki başarısı sınırlı kalmış ve önemli bir ilerleme gerçekleştirmede başarısız olmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Türkiye, Batı Balkanlar, siyasi arabuluculuk, savunma işbirliği, ekonomik olarak nüfuz etme, kültürel yayılma.*

1. Introduction

More than ten years passed since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey which precipitated a wide range of changes in Turkish politics. The most outstanding of these changes was the decreasing power and influence of bureaucracy and military in decision-making processes and on a concurrent basis, growing visibility and impact of elected officials on Turkish political scene. The AKP has left its mark on foreign policy as well although the transformation here is not as sharp and profound as it is experienced in domestic politics. Sustaining its traditional political, economic and security ties with the Western world; Turkey, under the AKP administration, rooted for a more independent and multi-dimensional foreign policy course and took significant steps to improve Turkey's relations with the Balkan, South Caucasian, Central Asian, Middle East and African countries.

The Western Balkans² is one of the regions where the AKP government pursued an active and versatile foreign policy through the utilization of political, security, economic and cultural means. Yet, Turkey's concern and involvement in the Western Balkans predates the AKP administration, its interest in the region had commenced at the beginning of the 1990s just after the end of the Cold War, following the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. Turkey supported the independence and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war that burst out between the Bosniaks and the Bosnian Serbs in the country subsequent to the declaration of the Bosnian Serb Republic on 27 March 1992.³ Turkey advocated multilateral intervention in various forums such as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the United Nations (UN) in order to put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to stop the war. Turkey welcomed the imposition of sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro with the Resolution 757 of the UN Security Council in May 1992 and pushed for the lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims on the grounds of right of self-defense as they were deprived of arms and equipment while the Bosnian Serbs were furnished with former Yugoslav army's heavy weaponry and supplies.⁴ Turkey also participated to the peacekeeping

² The use of Western Balkans in this article is similar to that of the EU's and it encompasses Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

³ Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 232.

⁴ "Address of the Turkish Deputy Permanent Representative in the UN Ambassador Tahsin Burcuoğlu to

operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On 31 March 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 816 which allowed the member countries to implement a no-fly zone by force. Turkey contributed to the NATO operation by sending eighteen Turkish F-16s to Italy. Turkey sent 1,457 troops to Bosnia in June 1994 as part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). They were stationed in Zenica and Kakanj areas, with the task of monitoring the ceasefire between the Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats.⁵ After the end of the war in Bosnia with the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, Turkish military officials took part in the Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilization Force (SFOR) mandates in the country and trained Bosnian officers within the framework of the USA sponsored train and equip program.

In 1998, few years after fading away of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, another military conflict in the former Yugoslavia, this time in Kosovo, broke out between the Albanian paramilitary units and the Serbian security forces. When a diplomatic solution could not be reached and the clashes between the parties resulted in killing of Albanian civilians in increasing numbers, NATO took the decision to intervene. Turkey participated in NATO's military operation and provided eleven F-16 fighter jets. After the end of the NATO bombing and following the withdrawal of the Serbian forces from Kosovo, Turkey sent a detachment of one thousand troops to join the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) in July 1999.⁶ They were deployed around the town of Prizren, in Dragas and Mamusa, where a large majority of the Kosovar Turks lived. Turkey also accepted about approximately twenty thousand refugees from Kosovo.⁷ Some of them joined their relatives in Turkey and some of them stayed in the refugee camp in Kırklareli. The Turkish authorities also established refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia.

At the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, Turkey also contributed to peace-keeping and confidence-building operations inaugurated in two other Western Balkan states, in Albania and in Macedonia. In the spring

the UN Human Rights Commission, New York, 3 December 1992", *Turkish Review Quarterly Digest*, Vol. 6, No.29, Autumn 1992, pp.93-96.

⁵ Yüksel Söylemez, "An Overview of Turkish-Croatian Relations", *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, Vol. 3, 1996/1997, p. 111.

⁶ İlhan Uzgel, "The Balkans: Turkey's Stabilizing Role", *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, (Eds.) Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirişçi, Boğaziçi University Press, Istanbul, 2002, pp. 82-83.

⁷ "Turkey Welcomes First Mass Resettlement of Kosovo Refugees", CNN, 06 April 1999.

of 1997, Albania came near a civil war because of the collapse of the pyramid schemes in the country. Turkey became part of the multinational force formed under the leadership of Italy with the aim of restoring law and order in Albania in addition to ensuring the safe distribution of humanitarian aid to the country with 759-man marine battalion task force and twenty officers.⁸ Turkey participated to NATO missions of Operation Essential Harvest, Operation Amber Fox and Operation Allied Harmony in Macedonia in 2001. Following the conclusion of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on 13 August 2001 between the Albanian and Macedonian politicians which ended the brief military conflict between the Macedonian government forces and the Albanian paramilitary units, NATO was invited to the country to disarm the Albanian paramilitary forces and to destroy their weapons and ammunition.⁹ Turkey partook in this multinational brigade with 150 troops.

Turkey's efforts to assist in restoration and preservation of peace and order in the Western Balkans earned the country a good reputation and demonstrated that it had substantial political and military weight in the region. However, Turkey's financial difficulties hindered the further expansion of the Turkish influence in the Western Balkans. Moreover, the European Union (EU)'s decision to offer membership perspective to the Western Balkan states through signing of Stabilization and Association Agreements further relegated Turkey to the background. This situation started to change only at the end of the 2000s when it became clear that the region's integration into the EU would take much longer than anticipated because of the unwillingness of the Union members for another wave of enlargement especially after the economic crisis of 2008 along with the Western Balkan countries' failure in meeting the political and economic criteria of the EU, except Croatia, to be eligible for being awarded with the membership invitation. Turkey, on the other hand, by that time had attained political stability, gathered economic strength and re-equipped with the determination and motivation to get involved in the Western Balkans affairs. All these factors came together and led to the emergence of an active and keen Turkish foreign policy in the region.

This article will examine Turkey's foreign policy concerning the Western Balkan region through the lens of four principles to which the

⁸ United States Central Command, Coalition Countries, Turkey, <http://www.centcom.mil/turkey>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

⁹ Stanler R. Sloan, *NATO, the European Union, and The Atlantic Community: The Transatlantic Bargain Reconsidered*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2003, p.112.

AKP government has been attaching special importance throughout the years. These are political dialogue and conflict mediation, security for all, economic cooperation and interdependence and cultural harmony and co-existence.¹⁰ This paper will analyze the Turkish activities in the Western Balkans within the framework of these four pillars and will strive to find out the extent of their success.

2. The Limited Success in Diplomatic Mediation

One of the most remarkable conflict mediation attempts of Turkey under the direction of the AKP government took place in Bosnia- Herzegovina. Similar to 1990s, Turkey's interest and engagement in preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Bosnian state continued unabated during the AKP period. Following the failure of the Butmir process, a joint USA-EU endeavour to generate consensus between the Bosniak, Croat, Serbian parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina regarding the constitutional reform and apportionment of the state and defense property, Turkey put forth its own resolution plan under the leadership of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu and initiated trilateral mechanisms of Bosnia-Herzegovina-Serbia-Turkey in October 2009 and Bosnia-Herzegovina-Croatia-Turkey in January 2010. The inclusion of Serbia and Croatia to the consultation process in Bosnia-Herzegovina was crucial as these two states had considerable leverage on their ethnic kinsmen in Bosnia.

Turkey had worked with Croatia back in 1993 while trying to broker a peace between Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks who were at war with each other at that time. Moreover, the relations between Ankara and Zagreb were on a smooth basis while both of the countries were trying hard to become full-fledged members of the EU. What was novel and challenging was the persuasion of Serbia with whom Turkey had frosty relations emanating from the Bosnian war in 1990s and Turkey's recognition of the independence of Kosovo in 2008 to participate in the process. Turkey put in a good deal of diplomatic and economic instruments to convince Serbia to come to the table. On 26-27 October 2009, a few weeks after Turkey's declaration of trilateral mechanism, a Turkish President, Abdullah Gül, visited Belgrade after a twenty-three year hiatus and was received by his Serbian counterpart Boris Tadic. While Gül defined Serbia as a key country for the maintenance of stability in the Balkans and added that despite the lack of common borders,

¹⁰ Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbours, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

Turkey saw Serbia as a neighbour due to common history and culture, Tadic stated that no peace could be achieved anywhere in the world without establishing peace with Turkey.¹¹ The two presidents put down their signatures on an economic cooperation agreement which aimed to boost technical and technological collaboration between the two countries.¹² The agreement also anticipated the establishment of a Joint Economic Committee to accomplish the objectives of the agreement. A few months back, in June 2009, Turkey had also signed a free trade agreement with Serbia.¹³

The rapprochement between Serbia and Turkey had immediate positive reflections on the relations between Bosnia and Serbia. On 10 February 2010, Bosnian Foreign Ministry declared that after a series of trilateral meetings between Bosnia, Serbia and Turkey, Belgrade decided to accept an ambassador from Bosnia after a three-year interlude.¹⁴ On 31 March 2010, the National Assembly of Serbia issued a declaration which condemned the crime committed against the Bosniak population in Srebrenica in July 1995.¹⁵ On 24 April 2010 Gül, Tadic and the Chairman of the Bosnia Herzegovina Presidential Council Haris Siljadic came together in Istanbul for the first Trilateral Summit and expressed their commitment to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and the legal personality of Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁶ The parties also decided to institutionalize their meetings at the level of Heads of State three times in two years. Furthermore, Tadic pledged to visit with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Bosnia-Herzegovina to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre which he did on 11 July 2010. The second Sum-

¹¹ "Gül Attends the Meeting of Economic Development of Sancak", Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 27 October 2012, <http://www.tccb.gov.tr/news/397/48362/gul-attends-the-meeting-of-economic-development-of-sancak.html>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹² Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on Economic Cooperation, 26 October 2009, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/main.aspx?home=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/02/20100213.htm&main=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/02/20100213.htm>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹³ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Sırbistan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Serbest Ticaret Anlaşması, 01 Haziran 2009, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/main.aspx?home=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/07/20100703m1.htm&main=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/07/20100703m1.htm>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹⁴ Sabina Niksic, "Serbia Finally Accepts Bosnian Ambassador", *Balkan Insight*, 10 February 2010, http://old.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/25713/?tpl=299&ST1=Text&ST_T1=Article&ST_AS1=1&ST_max=. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹⁵ Declaration of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia Condemning the Crime in Srebrenica, 31 March 2010, National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/national-assembly.468.html?SearchText=srebrenica+declaration>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹⁶ 24 April Istanbul Trilateral Summit Declaration, Istanbul, 24 April 2010, <http://www.seecp-turkey.org/icerik.php?no=60>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

mit was convened on 26 April 2011 in Karadjordjevo, Serbia with the participation of Gül, Tadic and three members of the Bosnian Presidency, Nebojsa Radmanovic, Bakir Izetbegovic and Zeljko Komsic.¹⁷ The most important outcome of the Summit was the assurance given by Tadic that Serbia would never support a referendum that would lead to the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina or bring into question the country's territorial integrity¹⁸ which could be taken as a response to the referendum plan of Milorad Dodik, the President of the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina to secede Republika Srpska from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The third Summit hosted by Turkish President Abdullah Gül took place in Ankara on 14-15 May 2013 with the participation of Chairman of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidential Council Nebojsa Radmanovic, the council members, Zeljko Komsic and Bakir Izetbegovic, and Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic.¹⁹

Turkey's reconciliation endeavour in Bosnia-Herzegovina might come to an impasse despite its initial success due to the recent change of hands in the Serbian presidency. The new President of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolic, who beat Boris Tadic in the presidential election that was held in May 2012, continues to give mixed signals regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although he apologized for the crimes committed in Srebrenica, he still underlined that there was no genocide²⁰ and added that he would not attend to the annual commemoration of Srebrenica victims. Furthermore, in an interview he gave to a Macedonian TV, Nikolic said that Bosnia-Herzegovina did not function as a state and was slowly disappearing.²¹ Nikolic's statements taken together with Dodik's continuous attempts to undermine the Bosnian state²² does not presage well for the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Another mediation initiative of Turkey in the Western Balkans was its attempt to resolve the disagreement between the two Islamic groups in

¹⁷ Relations between Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-bosnia-and-herzegovina.en.mfa>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹⁸ "Leaders of Serbia, Bosnia, Turkey Discuss Cooperation in Karadjordjevo", *Dailyportal.hr*, 26 April 2011, <http://daily.portal.hr/124532/Leaders-of-Serbia-Bosnia-Turkey-discuss-cooperation-in-Karadjordjevo.html>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

¹⁹ "Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia Trilateral Summit", Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-bosnia-and-herzegovina-and-serbia-trilateral-summit.en.mfa>. Accessed: 19.5.2013.

²⁰ "Serbia President Denies Srebrenica Genocide", *Euronews*, 02 June 2012, <http://www.euronews.com/2012/06/02/serbia-president-denies-srebrenica-genocide>. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

²¹ Biljana Pekusic and Drazen Remikovic, "Nikolic's Rhetoric Could Damage Regional Relations, Analysts Say", *Southeast European Times*, 06 November 2012, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/11/06/feature-01. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

²² In October 2012, Dodik proposed that Bosnia-Herzegovina's unified armed forces be abolished.

Serbia, one based in Belgrade and headed by Adem Zulkic and the other located in Novi Pazar and led by Muamer Zukorlic. Turkey's reconciliation plan advised stepping down of Zulkic and Zukorlic from office and the formation of a single Islamic community in Serbia under the leadership of a new figure who was not tarnished with politics.²³ The transition process would be supervised by a six-member commission that would be composed of intellectuals specialized in Islam and that were distant from political influence. However, the plan was shelved due to Serbian opposition to the five possible members of the commission who Serbian authorities claimed that were close to Zukorlic.²⁴

Despite the failure of the reconciliation initiative in Serbia, Turkey's positive attitude and genuine efforts towards the resolution of the dispute secured its inclusion to another consultation mechanism, this time in Montenegro. With a protocol signed on 13 March 2012 between the Islamic Union of Montenegro and the Montenegrin government, it was decided that in cases of disagreement between the members of the Islamic community in the country, the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate would mediate and submit its decision to the Montenegrin administration.²⁵

3. Cooperation in Defense Sector

Turkey's security policy in the Western Balkans during the AKP government continued to have two main legs similar to previous periods. First of all, Turkey kept on attending to the EU and NATO led peacekeeping missions in the Western Balkans and provided firm support to the regional countries in their endeavour to become part of NATO. Secondly, Turkey strove to develop its bilateral military ties with the Western Balkan states through defense cooperation agreements, donation of military equipment and training of officers in Turkish military academies.

Turkey contributes to the European Union Force Althea which replaced the NATO-led SFOR in Bosnia Herzegovina on 2 December 2004 with one infantry company, one gendarmerie company and eight liaison teams, in total 292 personnel²⁶, to the European Union Rule of Law Mis-

²³ "Turkey Does not Allow Zukorlic Deal with Politics", *BH News*, 17 October 2011, http://www.bh-news.com/en/vijest/4543/turkey_does_not_allow_zukorlic_deal_with_politics.html. Accessed: 3.2.2013.

²⁴ "Islamic Communities Unification Plan Falls Through", *BLIC*, 01 November 2011.

²⁵ Ali Aslan Kılıç, "Muslims in Montenegro Content with Government Policy", *Today's Zaman*, 16 March 2012.

²⁶ Contributions of Turkish Armed Forces to Peace Support Operations, http://www.tsk.tr/ing/4_international_relations/4_1_contribution_of_turkish_armed_forces_to_peace_support_operations/contribu

sion in Kosovo (EULEX), with 91 people²⁷ and to the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) with 350 personnel.²⁸ After the EU's taking over of Operation Allied Harmony in Macedonia under the name of Operation Concordia on 31 March 2013, Turkey took part in this new mission with two liaison teams until 15 December 2013. Afterwards, Turkey assigned four gendarmerie personnel to PROXIMA Police Force established by the EU and a staff officer to NATO Headquarters in Skopje.²⁹ PROXIMA Police Mission ended on 15 December 2005.

Turkey backed up Albania and Croatia's admission to NATO in 2009, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro's participation to the Membership Action Plan (MAP) which was the last stage before full membership to NATO. Turkey lobbied staunchly for NATO's inclusion of Bosnia to MAP in April 2010 and underlined in every platform that the name issue between Macedonia and Greece³⁰ should not prevent Macedonia to be accepted to the NATO.

Turkey's cooperation with Albania in the defense sector dates back to 1992, the signing of a military cooperation agreement between the two countries on 29 July 1992.³¹ Throughout these years Turkey donated military equipment and vehicles to the Albanian army, undertook the medical treatment of the military personnel of the Armed Forces of Albania and their families at Gülhane Military Medical Academy, helped the reconstruction and modernization of the naval base in Pashaliman and trained 2,400 Albanian students in military schools.³² A squad of Albanian soldiers serves under Turkish command in Afghanistan within the framework of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Turkey continues to lend its assistance to Albania for the reconstruction and modernization of Kuçova Airport in the country.³³

tion_of_turkish_armed_forces_to_peace_support_operations.htm. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

²⁷ Turkey's Contribution to NATO and EU Operations and Missions, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iv_-european-security-and-defence-identity_policy-_esdi_p_.en.mfa. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ United States Central Command, Coalition Countries, Turkey, at <http://www.centcom.mil/turkey>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

³⁰ Greece does not recognize the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name, claiming that it was an indication of Macedonia's irredentist aspirations for Greece's own region with the same name.

³¹ Uzgel, p.74.

³² Minister Imami Met the Defence Minister of Turkey, Ismet Yilmaz, Republic of Albania Ministry of Defence, http://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2039:minister-imami-met-the-defence-minister-of-turkey-ismet-yilmaz&catid=87&Itemid=465. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

³³ Ibid.

Turkey and Macedonia conduct bilateral military cooperation within the context of the security protocol hammered out in 1992. Turkey is one of the biggest donors of the Macedonian army. Turkey has up to now provided aid worth USD eighteen millions to Macedonia in the form of military vehicles, equipment and ammunition. Since 1998 eight hundred Macedonian officers and non-commissioned officers have been trained in Turkish military education institutions.³⁴

Similar to Albania and Macedonia, Turkey lent assistance to Bosnia-Herzegovina for the strengthening of its military establishment through granting of military equipment and materials as well as training Bosnian military professionals in Turkish military schools. More than three thousand military officers and Defense Ministry officials who were trained in Turkey now serve in Bosnian army and the Ministry of Defense.³⁵

Turkey's cooperation with Montenegro in the security area remained in meager proportions compared to its security collaboration with the other two MAP signatories, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. Turkey provided naval military aid to Montenegro and negotiations are continuing for the signing of a defense cooperation agreement between the two countries which will regulate and facilitate cooperation in defense sector and will also enable exchange of military personnel for training purposes.³⁶

3. Comeback through Economic Channels

Sound and steady economic performance has been the key factor in AKP's election success in Turkey up to this period. Under the AKP administration Turkish economy grew at an annual rate of 5.2% and the GDP increased from USD 231 billion in 2002 to 772 billion at the end of 2011.³⁷ The GDP per capita is on the rise as well, it reached to USD 10,444 in 2011 by recording nearly two-fold growth in a decade. Turkey is currently the 16th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest one compared to the

³⁴ "The Republic of Macedonia Remains an Important NATO Partner", Visit by Minister Besimi to the Republic of Turkey, 19 December 2012, The Republic of Macedonia Ministry for Defence, <http://www.morm.gov.mk/content/?ID=0636CD4552DA1466B28C943A757860B9C517A712>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

³⁵ Turkey, Bosnian Federation Sign Agreement on 2003 Military Cooperation, 14 March 2003, http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-22700402_ITM. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

³⁶ Zarko Petrovic and Dusan Reljic, "Turkish Interests and Involvement in the Western Balkans: A Score-Card", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2011, pp. 167-168.

³⁷ Economic Outlook, Invest in Turkey, <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/investmentguide/investorsguide/Pages/MacroEconomicIndicators.aspx> Accessed: 17.2.2013.

EU states.³⁸ The Western Balkan countries had their share of this Turkish economic boom. Turkey's trade with the region quadrupled in ten years and reached to USD 2.4 billion in 2012.³⁹ The trade balance is clearly in favor of Turkey, Turkish exports to the Western Balkans came at USD 1.6 billion whereas imports remained at USD 756 million.⁴⁰ However, despite the progress in the trade figures, the Western Balkans made up less than 1% of Turkey's total trade in 2012, owing to the fact that these countries are sparsely populated and economically poor compared to Turkey's European, Asian and Middle Eastern trade partners. Nevertheless, Turkish companies continue to invest in the region as they benefit from tax reductions, lower employee wages and incentives from the host countries. Turkish government's signing of free-trade, prevention of double-taxation, cooperation in infrastructure and visa-exemption treaties with the Western Balkan countries is another motivating factor for the Turkish businessmen to direct their investments to the region.

Serbia is Turkey's major trade partner in the Western Balkans. Turkish investments in the country mostly concentrate on infrastructure and textile sectors. Turkish construction companies Kolin, Yüksel and Makyol will construct the part of the highway stretching between Belgrade and the Montenegrin city Bar.⁴¹ Turkish government donated Euro ten millions to Serbia for the renovation of the Morava airport in the southern city of Kraljevo.⁴² Turkish clothing company Jeanci will expand its Serbian operation with a Euro six million factory which will be completed in Leskovac in 2014⁴³ whereas another Turkish textile company İlteks will open a new plant in Novi Pazar which is expected to present job opportunities for the local population.⁴⁴ Serbia also ranks first among the Western Balkan countries in terms of the tourists visited Turkey. Turkey is the second most

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Ülke Gruplarına Göre Dış Ticaret, 1996-2012, http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=12. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Janusz Bugajski, "Turkey's Impact in the Western Balkans", *Atlantic Council*, February 2012, p.4.

⁴² "Turkey Donates for Serbian Civil Airport", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 30 April 2012.

⁴³ Misha Savic, "Turkey's Jeanci to Open Textile Plant in Serbia", *Bloomberg*, 14 August 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-08-14/turkey-s-jeanci-to-open-textile-plant-in-serbia-beta-reports.html>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁴⁴ "Turkish Ambassador to Serbia Visits Novi Pazar", *Tanjug*, 28 December 2012, <http://www.tanjug.rs/news/71280/turkish-ambassador-to-serbia-visits-novi-pazar.htm>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

popular destination for Serbian tourists after Greece⁴⁵ and nearly 158,000 Serbian citizens came to Turkey in 2012.⁴⁶

Macedonia is the country that draws most of the Turkish capital in the region especially in infrastructure, banking, food, retail, real estate and medical equipment industries. In 2008 TAV won the tender to operate Macedonia's two airports Skopje and Ohrid for twenty years.⁴⁷ Turkish Halkbank opened its corporate branch in Skopje in 2012.⁴⁸ Turkish dairy firm Süttaş acquired the Macedonian dairy Swedmilk in 2012.⁴⁹ Turkey's biggest conglomerate Koç Holding entered the Macedonian market in 2005 with its retail investment and it currently has six supermarkets in the cities of Skopje and Tetovo.⁵⁰ Limak and Cevahir will both build large commercial and residential complexes in Skopje.⁵¹ Turkish medical equipment firm Matek Medical will establish a factory in Skopje.⁵² People-to-people ties are also developing between Turkey and Macedonia. The country came second after Serbia in 2012 in terms of the tourists preferred Turkey for their vacations.⁵³

Complex bureaucratic procedures along with the difficulties emanating from the serious political divisions in the country restrained the Turkish investments in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Still, Turkey is among the top five

⁴⁵ "Turkey and Serbia to Continue Cooperation after Change in Power in Serbia", *Today's Zaman*, 17 July 2012.

⁴⁶ Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Tourism Statistics, Number of Arriving-Departing Foreigners and Citizens, <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN,36568/number-of-arriving-departing-foreigners-and-citizens.html>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁴⁷ Darko Duridanski, "Macedonia-Turkey: The Ties that Bind", *Balkan Insight*, 10 February 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-turkey-the-ties-that-bind>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁴⁸ "Halkbank Opened New Corporate Branch in Skopje", 02 November 2012, <http://www.halkbank.com.mk/default-en.asp?ItemID=8C88118DD635DD488A67C16B0A6ACEB2>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁴⁹ "Turkish Company Sutas Buys Dairy Plant Swedmilk", *MINA*, 03 April 2012, <http://macedoniaonline.eu/content/view/20725/2>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁵⁰ Valentina Dimitrievska, "Turkey's Ramstore Opens Sixth Supermarket in Macedonia", *SeeNews*, 23 November 2012, <http://wire.seenews.com/news/turkeys-ramstore-opens-sixth-supermarket-in-macedonia-media-318181>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁵¹ Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Turks to Build Underground Boulevard in Skopje", *Balkan Insight*, 13 March 2012, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/turks-to-build-skopje-s-underground-street>. and Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonia's Tallest Towers Arise in Skopje", *Balkan Insight*, 17 July 2012, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/construction-starts-of-macedonia-s-tallest-towers>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁵² "Macedonia Says Turkey's Matek Medical Will Build 15 Million Euro Factory Near Skopje", *SeeNews*, 10 January 2013, <http://wire.seenews.com/news/macedonia-says-turkey-s-matek-medical-will-build-15-mln-euro-factory-near-skopje-327204>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁵³ 137,579 Macedonian tourists visited Turkey in 2012. See Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Tourism Statistics, Number of Arriving-Departing Foreigners and Citizens, <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN,36568/number-of-arriving-departing-foreigners-and-citizens.html>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

investors in Bosnia coming after Serbia, Luxembourg, Holland, and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴ Natron Hayat kraft factory in Maglaj, Şişecam soda plant in Lukovac, Ziraat Bank in Sarajevo and Viyenat's investment in the mining sector can be counted as the most significant Turkish businesses in the country.⁵⁵

Turkey is an important investor in Albanian economy as well and comes third after Italy and Greece. Çalık Holding acquired the majority shares of BKT, one of the biggest two banks in Albania in 2006 and Albanian national telecommunication company Albtelecom in 2007.⁵⁶ Turkey's construction giant Enka, with its American partner Bechtel completed the construction of Rreshen - Kalimash motorway in 2010 which connected Albanian port Dures with Kosovo.⁵⁷

Kosovo and Montenegro, the smallest and youngest countries in the Western Balkans have also attracted some Turkish investors in the recent years. Turkey is the third largest investor in Kosovo following Germany and United Kingdom. Turkey mostly invested in the infrastructure projects in the country. Limak was granted to run the Prishtina International airport for twenty years, Limak-Çalık won the tender for electricity distribution⁵⁸ and Enka signed the contract for the construction of first highway of Kosovo between Morine to Prishtina in 2010.⁵⁹

In Montenegro Gintaş owns the largest shopping mall, a business hotel and a green bazaar in Podgorica whereas Tosyalı Holding took over the Montenegrin steel mill in Niksic.⁶⁰ Turkey provided aid to Montenegro's healthcare sector via Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) as well. The organization helped the establishment of an ultrasound unit at the health center of the Montenegro Police Department,

⁵⁴ "Turkey Top Five Investors in Bosnia", *Dünya*, 31 August 2012.

⁵⁵ "Türkiye-Bosna Hersek Ekonomik İlişkileri", *Haber Boşnak*, <http://www.haberbosnak.com/balkanlar/01/01/2013/turkiye-bosna-hersek-ekonomik-iliskileri>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁵⁶ Tamás Szigetvári, "Turkey Is Back: Turkish Interest on the Balkans", *EU Frontier Study*, No. 9, November 2012, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁷ Rreshen - Kalimash Motorway, Albania, ENKA, <http://www.enka.com/Enka.aspx?MainID=67&ContentID=274&SubID=103&ReferenceID=197>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁵⁸ İbrahim Ekinci, "Kosova'nın Altyapısını Türk Şirketleri Kuruyor", *Dünya*, 16 January 2013.

⁵⁹ ENKA Is Building Highway of Nation, ENKA, <http://www.enka.com/Enka.aspx?MainID=254&ContentID=356>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁶⁰ Menekşe Tokyay, "Montenegro Seeks More Turkish Investments", *Southeast European Times*, 10 May 2012, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/05/10/feature-04. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

a dialysis center in Plav and an energy unit at the state hospital of Plevlya. TİKA also assisted to the restoration of the blood transfusion center of Montenegro and provided medical equipment to the Byelo Polye health center.⁶¹

4. Expansion of Socio-Cultural Influence

Turkey has expanded the reach of its soft power in the Western Balkans to a considerable extent during the AKP government through building of education institutions and cultural centers, providing scholarship opportunities to the local populations, restoring the monuments inherited from the Ottoman era and disseminating the Turkish TV series and programs to the region.

Two universities, International Burch University in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Epoka University in Albania were established along with cultural centers in Serbia, Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia. More than 1,600 Western Balkan students receive high education in various universities in Turkey.⁶² These efforts in the education sphere yielded some encouraging results for Turkey. Responding to the requests coming from the Turkish officials, Kosovo's Ministry of Education decided to tone down the criticisms directed to Ottoman Empire in the high school textbooks.⁶³

Another noteworthy activity of the AKP government in the Western Balkans has been the serious allocation of financial resources to renovate and reconstruct the physical remnants of the Ottoman Empire. With the support of the TİKA, Mehmet Pasha Sokolovic Bridge and Ottoman-era baths in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, Muslim cemeteries in Serbia and Montenegro, Ottoman mosques in Kosovo and an Ottoman fortress in Serbia were restored.⁶⁴ Turkey also funded the construction of two memorial houses, one in Serbia for the memory of the Ottoman soldiers, the

⁶¹ "TİKA Services Received with Appreciation in Montenegro and Albania", *AA*, 01 October 2012, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/news/86452--t>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁶² "Üniversitelerdeki 'yabancılar'", *Milliyet*, 04 October 2011.

⁶³ Jeton Musliu, "Kosovo Textbooks Soften Line on Ottoman Rule", *Balkan Insight*, 22 January 2013, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-textbooks-soften-line-on-ottoman>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁶⁴ Minhac Celik, "TİKA Projects Seek to Preserve Ottoman Cultural Heritage in Balkans", *Today's Zaman*, 16 May 2009; "Kosovo's Fatih Mosque, Re-Constructed by Turkey Opened", *World Bulletin*, 05 November 2010, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=65973>; 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>; "Turkey Restored Historic Mosque Reopens in Kosovo", *AA*, 01 August 2011, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=76914>. Accessed: 17.2.2013 and "Projects for the Restoration of Five Monuments of Cultural Heritage of Kosovo are Presented", Republic of Kosovo Ministry of Culture, *Youth and Sport Newsletter*, July/August 2012, p.11.

other in Macedonia for the memory of Ali Rıza Bey, the father of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey.⁶⁵

Turkey permeated into the Western Balkans via media outlets as well. Turkish state-run television TRT Avaz commenced to broadcast in Albanian and Bosnian in 2010, Turkey's state-run Anatolia News Agency started to publish in Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian through a new bureau in Sarajevo in 2012.⁶⁶ The most significant medium of Turkish cultural outreach to the Western Balkans however, has been the TV series. These programs won the hearts and minds of the local populations and enflamed curiosity and interest in Turkish language and culture which in turn contributed to a great extent to the growth in number of the tourists coming from the Western Balkans.⁶⁷

5. Conclusion

The Western Balkans had first come into the agenda of Turkish foreign policy makers in the 1990s following the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia and the eruption of violent conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Turkey's engagement with the region continued with a renewed interest and zeal after AKP came to power in 2002. Similar to its mediation attempts in the Middle East and the South Caucasus, the AKP government tried to play the role of honest broker in the Western Balkans as well and gathered the conflicting parties together under its leadership. However, Turkish attempts could not bring out any concrete results towards the resolution of the impasse in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sandzak. The only silver lining during the whole process was Turkey's reconciliation with Serbia which had been impossible during the 1990s due to the opposite positions the two countries took up regarding the Bosnia and Kosovo issues.

Turkey has improved its military ties with the Western Balkan countries of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia considerably in the recent years. While Albania succeeded in becoming member of the NATO,

⁶⁵ "TİKA to Erect Memorial House for Atatürk's Father in Macedonia", *AA*, 13 November 2012, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/99830--tika-to-erect-memorial-house-for-ataturks-father-in-macedonia>. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁶⁶ Menekşe Tokyay, "Turkish Media Expands Presence into Balkans", *Southeast European Times*, 29 May 2012, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/articles/2012/05/29/reportage-01. Accessed: 17.2.2013.

⁶⁷ The number of the Western Balkan tourists visiting Turkey demonstrated a 43% increase in ten years. See Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Tourism Statistics, Number of Arriving-Departing Foreigners and Citizens, <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN,36568/number-of-arriving-departing-foreigners-and-citizens.html> [17 February 2013]

there still exists a long and bumpy path toward Bosnia and Macedonia's eventual membership to the North Atlantic organization despite the steady and intense support of Turkey for their achievement of the goal. Bosnia-Herzegovina's acceptance to NATO is conditioned on the resolution of the immovable defense property whereas Macedonia needs to come to an understanding with Greece pertaining to the name dispute. These are serious obstacles about which Turkey does not have any solution recipe.

The AKP government performed better in the economic and cultural dimensions. In the economic sphere, the competition with the EU simmered down due to the economic crisis that broke out in the fall of 2008 which resulted in the chafing of the EU economies substantially. Turkey utilized this window of opportunity and penetrated into the region with its infrastructure projects, financial aid and investments in diverse sectors of the Western Balkan countries.

The cultural opening of Turkey to the Western Balkans is another significant move of the AKP government for the consolidation of ties with the states of the region. While Turkey demonstrated that it cherished the Ottoman period through restoration and reconstruction of the monuments that dated from the era, education institutions and TV shows acquainted the Western Balkan people with the modern Turkey whose people experienced similar lives with that of their own. The Turkish TV series especially were helpful in setting aside some of the prejudices and negative views of the Western Balkan people with respect to Turkey mostly emanating from the memories of the Ottoman past.

Turkey will continue to play a role in the Western Balkans in the future thanks to its political, economic, historical, cultural and religious bonds with the region. However, the extent of this role will be dependent on the realization of the EU's plans to incorporate the Western Balkans. The final aim of the states of the region is to become full-fledged members to the European club. As long as the process is delayed, Turkey will have more opportunity to permeate into the region through political, economic and socio-cultural means. However, once these states became members of the EU, Turkey's possibility to become an influential player in the Western Balkans will be limited mostly due to the fact that its own journey towards membership in the EU will take much longer and more difficult than expected.

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