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Realism in Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Syrian Refugees

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Abstract: Normatively speaking, a rather disconcerting side of the contemporary refugee issue has been emphasized in this work – a situation which became especially obvious with the recent refugee accord between EU and Turkey. It is explained and elaborated how refugees have been caught in a rather precarious situation ‘between the rock and a hard place’ or in other words how they were exploited in favor of promoting each side’s own state-oriented objectives. In turn, these objectives have been analyzed from realist theoretical outlook – an outlook which was methodologically best corresponding to a set of independent variables on all three levels of analysis. The paper focuses more on the Turkish side and the particular, individual actors, thus intertwining levels of analysis in order to situate the Syrian refugees into a wider scope of political events.

Key words: Turkey, refugees, European Union

On December the 30th 2012, Erdogan stood, dressed in traditional Arab clothing, with his spouse Emine, in the camp inhabited by Syrian refugees near the Turkish-Syrian border crossing of Akcakale, Sanliurfa province. He addressed some hundred thousand refugees who were stationed there after escaping deadly conflicts engulfing Syria in the wake of the civil war. His gestures and tone were indeed the one of a welcoming man extending his wide open arms. Besides these, he even went that extra mile, reassuring people that the victory is close, and imminence of Assad’s fall – promises which, as

time have shown, were not fulfilled. But what peeked my attention was his invitation to refugees to regard Turkey as their 'second home'.

Now this statement comes as a very peculiar one, especially when we compare it with the 2016 events. Thus, in line with recent developments, Erdogan stated the following: 'We do not have the word "idiot" written on our foreheads. We will be patient but we will do what we have to. Do not think that the planes and the buses are there for nothing'¹. Here, planes and buses were an obvious indication pertaining to the readiness of Turkey to deport the refugees. This goes along his claim that Turkey has every right to deport refugees back to European Union. What happened with that friendly, hospitable man from 2012? Why such a sudden shift in Turkey's policy and their treatment of the refugee issue? Why is Turkey so willing to exploit refugees as a tool in achieving their designs under the new EU-Turkey deal if their terms are not fulfilled? Were refugees merely serving as a bargaining chip from the beginning with Turkey waiting only for them to fill the quota and hence create a stronger leverage? Our way of shedding light on this problem, on what is an apparent contradiction, will be through the age-old perspective of realism. We claim that Turkey from the beginning employed a realist-oriented foreign policy laden with *realpolitik* motives and hence this policy *raison d'état* was the main guiding principle. Therefore, the above mentioned ideationalist policy was precisely 'seeming' since what better way to legitimize undercover realism than through the invocation of *ummah* and 'brotherhood of all Muslims'. Now, as far as the methodology is concerned, as we stated above, we will mainly use the realist approach in accordance with analytical analysis corresponding to the 'why' question. The level of analysis will also correspond to realist theoretical framework which is mainly going to be based on intermixture of three levels: individual, state, and international. This being said, I believe that full analysis cannot be reached by utilizing state level solely, and to this end I will have to also introduce individual level analysis which corresponds to classical realism of Morgenthau and furthermore there will also be a word of international units as well. The introduction of individual level variables, for example, is due to the fact that Turkey, not unlike Russia, still does not have sufficiently developed institutions which are in turn subjected to strong, charismatic personalities such as Erdogan's one.

¹ "Turkish president threatens to send millions of Syrian refugees to EU," The Guardian, February 12, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/turkish-president-threatens-to-send-millions-of-syrian-refugees-to-eu> (accessed April 4, 2016).

Background of a Problem

Our paper will be divided in a couple of sections. In the first section to come, we will give a brief overview and background of the problem at hand, while in the second section, there will be word about international theories we will be using and how are they going to be beneficial to the issue at hand. The third section will deal with the geopolitical side of the refugee issue and the Syrian crisis. We will answer how Turkey from the start expected to buy political influence in the Syria especially in the contingency of Assad's downfall. Since this did not materialize, Turkey often took an independent and rash course in the region, especially towards Syria in line with its domestic concerns and national strategic goals, thus isolating itself from all of the regional actors and bringing reproach of the international community on itself. A similar pattern can be noticed during the late 1950s, where Turkey under Menderes led an erratic policy in Middle East, antagonizing all of its Arab neighbors and especially the USSR. Thus, in this part we will also discuss how Turkish policy towards Syria and refugees had also reflected on their internal concerns and how it was planned in a very pragmatic fashion. The fourth part of the paper will largely be dominated by Turkey's long relation with European Union and Turkey's obvious wish of accession to the EU. We will explain how the refugee issue is helping Turkey achieve this and how it could also help them bury the decades old question inhibiting their accession to Europe. The fifth part will deal with concluding remarks and future prospect courses that Turkey might conduct in line with its realpolitik objectives.

When we combine the abovementioned findings with the recent published articles and discoveries of Amnesty International (AI), it makes it even more surprising and not at all easier to understand. Namely, according to AI reports, Turkey, since January 2016, started sending refugees back to the war zone including pregnant women and children², indicating the whole issue might never have been *about* the refugees. Starting with 2014, Turkey declared that crossing the country's borders will be conditional upon the availability of free places in the refugee camps and even since 2012 it started turning its face to European Union asking it to share the financial burden (Ahmadoun, 2014: 2). Hence, the question I want to ask as stated earlier is why Turkey led by

² "Turkey: Illegal Mass Returns of Syrian Refugees Expose Fatal Flaws in EU-Turkey Deal," Amnesty International, April 1, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/04/turkey-illegal-mass-returns-of-syrian-refugees-expose-fatal-flaws-in-eu-turkey-deal/> (accessed April 4, 2016).

conservative, Muslim government of Justice and Development Party would backtrack on its original policy towards refugees and why would Erdogan fail on his promise given to Syrian refugees at Akcakale border crossing. Are they not welcome to view Turkey as their second home any longer? It is rather unusual for the government which based its entire foreign policy on the idea of *stratejik derinlik* developed by Turkish long term Foreign and current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to change its rhetoric this extensively. Namely, according to Davutoglu, Turkey possesses two sources of power: its historic ties and geostrategic location (Davutoglu, 2008: 79). Based on these historic ties, Turkey seemingly utilized foreign policy reliant on an ideational prism, hence often emphasizing common culture and/or especially religion (Islam) in order to achieve status of a country which has the ability of manipulating the soft power without having to rely on Europe or US. The peek of this policy happened at the time when EU accession talks were everything but progressing, and foreign policy with US and Israel was at its lowest ebbs. Hence, one can imagine that domestic public approval of the West was not very high either. Not surprising, in line with this current, the Turkish president has been often compared to a sultan, or even more grandiosely to a caliph³. But the question springs up whether ideationalism and values can be manipulated to bargaining for a 'greater good' in national terms when an opportunity was deemed fitting. In an ideal theoretical type that Davutoglu was advancing (and Erdogan executing) apparently it could, yet only because it was never ideational in essence, but 'realist' in its purest form. Emphasis was put on enhancing Turkish international position and the move from a status of a regional power to a 'central player', even if this meant the exploitation of emotive sentiments within the region. An alternative reading of Davutoglu's 'bow and arrow' simile testifies to this, and in fact identifies Europe as being the ultimate objective of the Turkish state⁴, whilst the Middle East and hence the Muslim civilization merely serving as a stepping stone. Exploitation of refugees also fits perfectly into this theoretical explanation. The 'Zero Problem with Neighbors' policy too, was nothing but fictitious from the very beginning; indeed, just a way of giving support to regional strongmen and hence to the status quo and in turn extracting lucrative economic deals that benefited realpolitik orientation of the Turkish state. As soon as the status quo regimes started collapsing, Turkey found itself revisiting its realist attitudes, now clearly seen in the case of

3 Adam Taylor, 'The caliph is coming, get ready,' pro-Erdogan Turkish politician tweets, The Washington Post, March 19, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/19/the-caliph-is-coming-get-ready-pro-erdogan-turkish-politician-tweets/> (accessed April 8, 2016).

4 Piotr Zalewski, "How Turkey Went From 'Zero Problems' to Zero Friends," Foreign Policy, August 22, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/22/how-turkey-went-from-zero-problems-to-zero-friends/> (accessed April 10, 2016)

refugees. Moreover, ideationalist speech was abandoned in favor of raw power rhetoric when circumstances were ripe. Even if the Turkish administration did employ benign constructivist policies towards refugees in the beginning, which is highly doubtful due to the evidence at hand, the domestic strain took its toll, and thus policies were soon reverted to the ones of national primacy. Moreover, what we are trying to stress is that Turkey used the refugee issue for the Turkish 'national interest' and for achieving an immense leverage over the European Union in particular, and the Western world in general. Finally, the opportunity presented itself in the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, which was not only tied to European monetary assistance, but also to the future of the Turkish accession to the European Union – an age-old goal of Turkish policy makers since Atatürk himself. But the question imposes itself – why would Turkey accept this deal, why such a vehement shift towards Europe all of a sudden after almost decade of frozen relationships? The deal itself was mostly symbolic, and in our opinion, it was lacking in substance. It might not have been the best option for state interests after all. This is precisely where individual variables come into play, about which we will talk about in the following sections. The issue does not end there, since the apparent humanitarian policy directed towards Syrian refugees and support given to Free Syrian Army (opposition forces) gave them much wanted input in Syrian domestic politics based on exploitation of sectarian differences between ruling Arab Alevite minority and Sunni Muslim opposition.

Theoretical Overview

We chose realism as a theoretical perspective that guides the research for one very simple reason – it is the account which most vividly explains and fits into empirical realities at hand. Long over are the days when politics explored what 'ought' to be instead of what 'is'. With Machiavelli, we have a return to Thucydides' elaboration, which in modern age was carried by figures such as Morgenthau, Waltz, Mearsheimer, etc. Another 'beauty' of realism is found in its parsimony, since international relations can be explained through selfish motives of states (domestic units of analysis) coupled with selfish orientations of leaders themselves (individual units). Intermixing these main motives of selfishness and self-preservation on three levels makes us create a better systemic theoretical account of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East

region and other powers with stake in it, as stipulated in the foreword through utilizing the domestic refugee element. Now, classical realists and structural realists might disagree about the sources of this motivation exhibited on the state level. Structural realists like Waltz argue that the main cause for the 'is' analysis of the crude empirical realities found in the world is due to the anarchic nature of the international relation where every state is compelled to live in the Hobbesian international state of nature based on the pragmatic self-help principle (Waltz, 2001: 160). But for the sake of explanatory power, we will have to sideline Waltz's account with all its merits in favor of Morgenthau's classical realist explanatory approach to empirical realities at hand. Namely, we believe it corresponds very well to the psycho-functional status of the Turkish elite, particularly Erdogan. Furthermore, in line with this, we believe that international relations on the third level of analysis are better understood through combination of classical realist motives on individual and state levels with Mearsheimer's offensive realism stemming from these on the international level, which is based on opportunistic expansionist motives, rather than with Waltzian structural realism, which is of defensive nature. In other words, if Turkey is able to, it will do everything in its power to expand its influence by any channel available, which is again dependent on the psychology of its elites and public opinion against which elites usually will not act for the sake of their own interests. When such opportunities are not present, it will play defensively, supporting the status quo. Thus it is also in the interest of the elites to gain favorable public opinion through amassing greater legitimization by persuading others to see issues in the way favorable to them – issues within which religiously charged language helps to a great extent; something which we will talk about in the following lines. Thus, even though the main focus will be on the state level, we will further elaborate how these state motivations expressed through interests defined as power stem from individual-level sources and how as such they reflect on the third and largest unit of analysis which falls within the international realm. A combination of these three levels of analysis will be necessary to shed the light on this problem. Moreover, we would prefer to use Morgenthau's classical realism as an alternative to structural realism in explaining why states act as they do, i.e. in elaborating on their different starting points.

This overview had its purpose in expounding the starting points for the theoretical framework. Namely, the image of the world today is not because of international relations *per se*, but due to the negative, flawed image of human beings. Politics is a realm independent from any other, and as such,

has roots in human nature and human rationality, which is power hungry, and expresses interests solely as power (Morgenthau, 2005: 1, 2, 3). This means that from the outset, politics through human rationality imposes limits on objectivity of itself which gives it a theoretical, scientific and predictable character, whether on domestic or individual levels. For this reason we shall not go about claiming that international anarchy compelled Turkish statesmen to behave in the way they did and develop policies towards refugees and towards region in the manner in which they did; it rather arose out of pre-set rational constraints and calculations. As Morgenthau says, this does not mean that Turkish policy makers are not moral men in their personal lives; what it means is that when one analyzes the situation through realist lenses, one cannot conflate moral intentions of a nation state or individual political figures with the ones of universal morality (Morgenthau, 2005: 11). Politicians are able and willing more often than not to wrap their pragmatic intentions in the robes of the universal divine will and order. This behavioral pattern is noticable in Erdogan himself as well. Not only is it a well-established fact that he is a Muslim conservative political figure who often invokes religious sentiments into his governing style, but he also does not shy away from pretending to know divine will and connect it to his own governance⁵. For if we agree on the starting premises that either interests are defined through terms of power due to objective policy agendas found in the constraints of human rationality, or that international political systems constrain leaders, then we will soon discover that invocations of divine figures are nothing other than search for domestic and, not rarely, international legitimacy⁶. But proclamations of universalism such as these are very dangerous since as Carl Schmitt noted through Proudhon: ‘Whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat’ (Schmitt, 2007: 54). Not only that, but if one party is on the side of the divine, on the side of the truth, on the side of humanity, than that gives it an exclusive right to the dehumanization and thus to the annihilation of everyone who is not. If we employ classical realism in the line following Morgenthau’s train of thoughts, then we must necessarily see through this charade of ‘empty words’ and ‘post-factuality’, and focus on what it really is – political rationality and interests defined in the terms of power.

5 Robert Spencer, “Erdogan invokes Allah, demands that protests end immediately,” Jihad Watch, June 8, 2013, 2016, from <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2013/06/erdogan-invokes-allah-demands-that-protests-end-immediately> (accessed April 9, 2016).

6 Erdoğan: We annihilate all terrorists with God’s permission,” Milliyet Haber, March 18, 2016, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-we-annihilate-all-en-2211695/en.htm> (accessed April 9, 2016).

Turkish Policy on Syria

We can perceive two long-term realist policies of Turkish state on the domestic level, pertaining to two different contingencies in the case of series of uprisings known as the Arab Spring and Syria in particular. Expounding on this will be crucial for understanding why Turkey changed its policy towards refugees in the recent period and hence why it re-embarked on its century old European quest. Moreover, both of these policies have starting points in Turkish new thinking of *stratejik derinlik* and the search for the new and independent alignments as well as for discretion in policy-making far away from the US umbrella. Now, as we previously mentioned, the Turkish establishment made many overtures and claims to the imminence of Assad's fall. Not only were those claims of moral character, but it seemed that their substance was also taken quite seriously and various actions were undertaken to hasten this. Turkey provided the Free Syrian Army and its various offshoots with logistic help, military and financial aid, as well as training, which was often in coordination with the United States of America⁷. A rather telling fact of the Turkish support for the Syrian opposition is the number of leaders of the FSA given refuge and bases of operation in the Turkish territory (Holiday, 2012: 39). In 2012, there were thus 9 high ranking officers of the FSA residing in Turkey, including no rank below the one of Captain and highest being General (Mustafa Ahmed al-Sheikh). In the case that Assad should fall, Turkey would thus have a strong presence and influence in the most organized governmental structure of the fledgling post-civil war state – the military. Furthermore, the wide acceptance of refugees would have boosted Turkey's appeal in the eyes of the Syrian public as well, and thus give Syria's Northern neighbor a dosage of influence over their policy making and even, we dare say, the formation of a new constitution and government. In this vein, Mearsheimer claimed that the desire of every state is power after power and domination over its counterparts is a mean to gain this and to retain it at the same time (Mearsheimer, 2001: 2). The idea he proposed was one of 'offensive realism', or that a goal of every state is to expand as much as it can in the terms of military capabilities and gain preponderance over other states until finally reaching status of hegemon

7 Islamic State: Training of moderate Syrian rebels 'allowed in Turkey,'" BBC, October 13, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29591916> (accessed April 11, 2016)

(Mearsheimer, 2001: 5). Nonetheless, due to some later developments, he concluded that hegemony over the whole world is not so effortless to obtain due to several factors and that currently, there is only have one regional hegemon which is USA (with Russia trying to enter the play as well). Be that as it may, what we am arguing here is the revision of a sort; namely that preponderance and domination over other states within the paradigm of offensive realism does not have to solely consist of military/offensive character, but that the expansion can occur through different channels. One of the reasons it differs from the liberal paradigm is in the abovementioned starting points, even though both theories put state-level to the fore (Keohane, Martin, 1995: 39). Yet another reason lies in the zero-sum attitude. Some of these alternative channel advances could be how Turkey played its cards. Buying influence through support of different factions, soft power penetration, ideologically charged language, quest for legitimacy and threats of military involvements are all types of channels that Turkey utilized in its plan to rise above and make Syria see issues the way Turks see them. It was also an opportunity to get rid of Assad family, where both father and son were a thorn in the Turkish side for so long over many issues pertaining to domestic and foreign relations and security. Be that as it may, the Syrian state after the war was bound to be weakened militarily and economically, and therefore it was in the Turkish interest to prolong the conflict domestically at first by supporting their own faction against others, through mechanisms which Mearsheimer called 'bait and bleed' (Mearsheimer, 2001: 153). Turkey, as a central player, due to a plethora of international constraints and due to its own lack of capabilities, did not have capacities for an all-out war even if it often used another mechanism of blackmail against Assad (Mearsheimer, 2001: 152). And if protracted conflict meant more refugees for leverage against the EU, then all the more reason to follow such a policy. Furthermore, in line with the stratejik derinlik policy and the project of becoming a 'central player', a dose of independence and rashness can be noticed in the Turkish stance towards Syria, where various jihadi factions were backed as a possible check against Kurds in the region. Designs of the international community were completely sidelined. For this purpose, elites used inflammatory nationalistic language often supported by religious rhetoric to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Now if we agreed on the starting points that political rationality (domestic and international) constrains behaviors of political figures on the individual level of analysis, this then necessarily must translate to certain dynamics on the international level as well. Erdogan, during the heydays of the Syrian uprising, played the

role of a strong Prime Minister. As mentioned, he legitimized his role through obeying the utilitarian calculus which implied giving to the greatest number of people what they want. This was precisely the politics of the right spectrum veiled in religious rhetoric. A good example of this can be seen during the 2003 US intervention in Iraq, where Turkey, despite having parliamentary support to deploy troops to Iraq in support of USA, rescinded it, and did nothing due to the strong public outcry (Kosebalaban, 2011: 176). If the invasion proceeded as planned, it would have dearly costed the Prime Minister in the subsequent elections. It would not be so farfetched for one to argue that the entire stratejik derinlik and multilateral foreign policy of Turkey was established upon a similar public outcry and dissatisfactions against USA and universalist values expounded by it, which the Turkish public harbored for a very long time, perhaps since the Cyprus issue was revisited in 1960s and 1970s. Erdogan and Davutoglu knew how to exploit these public sentiments. That would certainly explain the strained relations with the USA during Bush's and Obama's two term in office, ultimately culminating in a total Turkish reorientation towards the European Union. The European Union, regardless of its position in Western discourse, was seen as a long-term Turkish objective worthy of pursuing, while the USA was never seen in a similar light, except during the time of the Cold War, when the US's military superiority was welcome against the geopolitically ambitious USSR. Even if viewed in purely economic terms, trade with Europe takes the biggest portion of Turkish trade overall, while trade with USA is negligible⁸. Therefore, domestic variables shape individual decision making processes and vice versa, which reflects on the third level unit of international relations. So Erdogan and AKP were simply exploiting the left-right (secular-Islamist) division in Turkish politics which was in existence since 1960s, coupled with his strong, charismatic personality (Toros, 2013: 1016). Needless to say that the leftist current was never democratically salient in Turkey due to the fact that later, with Ecevit, it got embodied in the elitist CHP, which further took away from its popular appeal. Also, arguably, one can also claim that Islam (and thus traditionalism) always had an uneasy relationship with leftism of any sort. Be that as it may, domestic dissatisfactions with the West forwarded by Washington got translated into realist motives of the individual level, which is how to gain and retain power and became a quest for unilateral involvement in Syria for the sake of changing political realities there in line with Turkish national interests (suppressing Kurds, installing Turkish-friendly regime) breaking

⁸ Turkey, European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/turkey/> (accessed April 12, 2016).

free from America's intentions by disregarding their considerations. But this in turn involves us with the third level of analysis that we need to talk about, where Turkey, in order to fulfill its objectives in Syria, necessarily has to interact with other state units in the region. At any rate, these interactions were not the most fruitful ones. What it only remained was how to project the reality of international failures to a domestic audience in order to rouse up national sentiments and gain short-term legitimization that individuals in Turkish elite can further exploit in domestic political dynamics. In other words, 'barbarian non-believing Russian, ignorant Shias and murderous Assad' terminology will always find fertile ground in Turkish state that political elite in turn will find a way of exploiting⁹. All three of units need to be contextually viewed in interplay here.

Unlike what Davutoglu claimed in his 2007 thought experiment, Turkey, during the years of Syrian revolt, did not utilize 'careful' diplomacy, which in turn isolated it from the rest of the region. After all, how could it, since a destabilized Iraq and Syria provided no opportunity to diplomatically counter Kurdish element? Or, perhaps, with this approach, there was never any possibility of leading cautious diplomacy in the first place. In all honesty, the Turkish 'central player' project is very reminiscent of Menderes' erratic policy towards Arab countries under the Soviet security umbrella, which was probably one of the many factors leading to his downfall. Ziya Onis also claims that Turkish multilateral foreign policy might have been damaging to country's long term objectives (Onis, 2011: 49). 'A related criticism of recent Turkish foreign policy concerns its overconfidence and over-assertiveness without taking into account the trade-offs and the possible long-term negative ramifications of decisions made in the current international environment' (Onis, 2011: 49). This may be why Ankara's relations with Washington went sour anew recently. Or perhaps this is just a side effect of Turkey trying to become the central player (Onis, 2011: 88). Again, with the outbreak of the Syrian war, Turkish and US policies diverged further as a continuation of the 2003 process, where Turkey even supported jihadists (Ahrar al-Sham), which went against the main US principle of building consolidated Muslim democracies in the region. In turn, the USA supported PYD and Kurdish organizations which Turkey sees as threat. Yet what substantially undermined their relationship was Turkey shooting down the Russian jet ,which showed that Turkey under AKP leadership can be just as erratic as

9 "US unlikely to support 'killer' Assad, says Erdogan," Anadolu Ajans, Mart 20, 2015, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/us-unlikely-to-support-killer-assad-says-erdogan/65036> (accessed April 16, 2016)

the one under the Democratic Party. This happened at the time when the USA and the Western nations were coming to an agreement with Russia over Syria, therefore Turkish actions could be considered as an intentional undermining of this endeavor¹⁰. Kosebalaban notes: ‘Today many of the same protestors defend strict adherence to American orientation and criticize the Erdogan government of not doing so. At present, there is no major Turkish group that sees Russia as a primary threat to the national security, whereas the fear of Russian expansionism influenced Ottoman and Turkish foreign policy for many decades’ (Kosebalaban, 2011: XII). This might not have been the case in the pre-Syrian conflict time of writing of Kosebalaban’s book, but the situation has been changed significantly in the meantime. Russia’s entrance into the fray shifted Turkish public opinion against itself. For instance, Turkey relentlessly emphasized the negative role of Russians in Syria, especially pertaining to treatment of the Turkmen minority in line with the inflammatory language serving elitist interested stipulated above¹¹. This, coupled with the shooting of Russian jet, effectively removed Russia from any possibility of establishing peace in Syria with Turkish mediation. It was also the last nail in the coffin of the Turkish-American partnership in the region – not only are the two sides supporting different factions, but because of Turkey’s self-alienation and unpredictability, the States turned their face towards Kurds, rather than Turks. Strong similarities with the 2003 Iraq invasion can be seen, but this time, consequences might be much harder to mend. Moreover, this incident made Turkish-American relations colder, and in order to break away from isolation, Turkey orientated itself towards Israel and the European Union – a point we will talk about in the following section. What is important to note here is how all three units of analysis need to be analyzed not independently of each other, but in a reinforcing fashion, in order to shed the light on events which lead towards the orientation towards Europe yet again after the long pause of almost 11 years.

10 David J. Galbreath, “Will the downing of Russian jet over Turkey lead to a wider war?,” *Independent*, November 24, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/will-the-downing-of-russian-jet-over-turkey-lead-to-a-wider-war-a6746856.html> (accessed April 15, 2016).

11 Laura Pitel, “Syria air strikes: Russia accused of ethnic cleansing of Turkmen,” *Independent*, December 1, 2015, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-accused-of-ethnic-cleansing-of-turkmen-in-syria-air-strikes-a6755186.html> (accessed April 16, 2016).

The Turkey-EU Deal

In order to better understand the Turkey-EU deal and its repercussions, giving a brief overview of Turkey-EU relations through 20th and 21st century is in order. Since the earliest formations of the Turkish Republic, their pretensions towards Europe and European values were obvious. The earliest attempts to enter the European camp could be seen in Turkish commitments to common defense against Germany and Italy before the outset of World War 2 during 1930s (Millman, 1995: 483). Europe at that time in the eyes of Turkish policymakers meant Britain and France which Millman rightly calls Ataturkism vs. Enverism (Millman, 1995: 490). After Ataturk's death, despite some flirtations with Nazis and fascists, Turkey did not commit itself to them until the very last moments of war when it pragmatically chose the winning side. During the 1950s, Turkey was ruled by the Democratic Party of Adnan Menderes which was solely concerned with gaining the blessing of the USA and entering into their defensive project entitled NATO. Europe was also in shambles due to the World War II devastation, and it was preoccupied with its own recovery. Before the 1950s, one major breakthrough did happen. In 1949, Turkey joined the Council of Europe, which was seen as a huge progress, reminiscent of the Treaty of Paris in 1856, where the Ottoman Empire was accepted into the European family of nations (Hale, 2013: 84). This was, nevertheless, purely symbolic, since the Council of Europe does not have any binding power and it only serves to unite policies of states on issues such as human rights. Nevertheless, its power of recommendation should not be underestimated. In 1963, Turkey, for the first time, started making tangible progress by adhering to the Association Agreement between Turkey and the European Economic Community only to submit request for full membership in 1987, which was subsequently refused due to human rights violations. Another breakthrough happened in 1996, when the Customs Union was proclaimed, but nevertheless it did not lead to full membership, since standards were not yet met. In 1999, via the Helsinki Accords, Turkey gained candidate status, but not accession status, for which it needed to solve several outstanding issues, including the Cyprus problem. Also known as the Copenhagen Criteria, they 'dangled' in front of Turkey's 'nose', where the Copenhagen Council of Europe had right to deem Turkey ready to start accession talks which it did in 2005, but by that time it lost its momentum, and by 2014, it was all but frozen due

to multiple vetoes by France, Cyprus and the European council. The recent authoritarian tendencies by Erdogan further retarded this process. To sum up, Turkey has always been baited with a possibility of an accession to EU, which was nonetheless not a forthcoming one. The deal between Turkey and the European Union has been concluded very recently, on 18 March 2016. According to the European Commission Fact Sheet, the deal consists out of 9 points with the ultimate intention being the repression of irregular and uncontrolled flows of Syrian refugees from Turkey to Greece via sea routes. The deal also stipulates that after March 20th, any refugee found on the territory of Greece would be immediately returned to Turkey, and in return, one Syrian refugee from Turkey would be granted asylum in Europe. Those refugees that sought asylum in Greece would have a very hard time getting asylum due to the Articles 35 and 38 of the Asylum Procedures Directive. This opens up the possibility for blanket returns of asylum seekers without taking into considerations safeguards, human rights and safety of refugees upon the re-return – points over which UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi expressed his concerns.

According to Carkoglu's findings, in recent polls concerning Turkey's membership in European Union, around 50% of the population remains in favor of entry (Kalaycioglu and Carkoglu, 2009: 122). One can conclude that EU membership is still a factor that strongly orientates the Turkish decision making processes both in domestic and foreign realms alike. It has been a Turkish 'dream' since the time of Ataturk to be recognized as an integral part of Europe, and no Turkish politician currently has the luxury to steer this policy in a different direction. This is reinforced by the fact that the AKP government was a continuation of Ozal's liberalist current, and therefore opening towards forces of globalization, especially in the economic realm, was regarded as a must (Kosebalaban, 2011: 147). It helps to mention that with globalization, social mobility becomes a potent force and creates an inclusive sphere of shareholders which benefit from these policies contra the exclusive nationalist line of thinking. In turn, government benefits from their support, which is much larger than the one enjoyed by elitist Kemalist intelligentsia (CHP) or nationalist forces backed by isolationist sentiments (MHP). Here, one should recall the utilitarian factor we mentioned previously. Orientation towards Europe still remains a strong guiding factor that Turkish politicians cannot dispense with. Hence, besides the ideological side advanced primarily by Ataturk, there are many other reasons why Turkey should have incentive to join the European Union. Stability, security, economic development,

uninhibited flow of goods and services, open access to the new and prospective markets are only some of them. The sentiments of Turkish re-orientation towards Europe became particularly salient with recent developments in Middle East, especially in relations with the USA. With the USA turning its face towards Iran, as well as Kurds and marginalizing Turkey and other Sunni-Arab powers famous for their unilateral actions, Turkey in contrasts turned towards the EU. After all, Europe can turn a blind eye to Turkish securitization policies and cross-border conflicts with various Kurdish factions if their interests align and hence if the possibility for a deal regarding the refugee issue should prove to be tenable. The United States of America, on the other hand, cannot. This being said, it is not that the European Union does not have any benefits from accepting Turkey's membership either (Modebadze, Sayin, 2015: 2-6). But the greatest benefit Europe can thus reap is of a geostrategic nature by having Turkey serve as a gatekeeper. This being said, it is obvious that Turkey's orientation towards the European Union is dominated by two pragmatist concerns: one on the level of state elites, and the other being strictly pragmatist principles of their policies' *raison d'état*; two principles which reinforce each other and go back and forth either way. To protect its core values and stability, the European Union was always skeptical towards the idea of allowing Turkey in its midst, as exemplified by Copenhagen Criteria (Emerson, 2004: 1). Up until 2005, Turkey was simply not demonstrating that it was committed to regional stability and democracy, and therefore its progress after 2005 was taken with a grain of salt. Perhaps there was some merit in this European skepticism since with its second term in office AKP started passing domestic religious policies in a unilateral fashion, while in the third term, the AKP has taken a hardline on certain issues, sacrificing democracy for security – a trend which only continued with their fourth term in office in 2015¹². Needless to say that European attitudes are also contextual, since, with the recent waves of refugees conflated with terror threats stemming from destabilized Middle East (ISIS), rightist and center-right parties have been witnessing a trend of increasing electoral support in European countries and the European Parliament alike, which might increase Turkish leverage.¹³ Turkey had to persuade Europe that it needed it, rather than the other way around, by playing on this 'irrational' fear, for lack of other words. When one looks at the 2007 writings from, at the time, the Turkish Foreign Minister

12 Turkey, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/turkey> (accessed April 13, 2016).

13 Thilo Janssen, "Far Right-Wing Parties in the European Parliament," Transform! European Network for Alternative Thinking and Political Dialogue, 2015, <http://www.transform-network.net/journal/yearbook-2015/news/detail/Journal/far-right-wing-parties-in-the-european-parliament.html> (accessed April 13, 2016).

Ahmet Davutoglu, it is noticeable how Turkey was indeed committed to accession to the European Union via the path of democratization, since despite everything, Turkey still needed the EU anchoring for domestic economic stability, legitimacy of the ruling party against secularist and militaristic currents, and overall attempts not to isolate Westernist forces within the society, which looked favorably upon Europe (Davutoglu, 2008: 92-93). These works can be discarded as wishful scholarly thinking far devoid of the actual governmental policies, which back then served to appease the massively religiously inclined populace partially, not completely, sidelining EU accession process due to its unilateral and non-constitutional nature; in other words, sacrificing long-term stability for short-term sentiments. Or, they can be approached as purely pragmatic calculations, whereas the 2007 policies served to maintain the ruling government in power, presenting those governmental actions as paragons of democracy against an intolerant Europe, but still keeping accession process in mind due to aforementioned reasons. Thus, from 2015 onwards, Turkey started vying for full accession towards Europe, while still retaining its religiously charged rhetoric, coupled with unilateralism and strong manipulations of country's highest laws, but this time using the Middle East and regional instabilities as a pivot in case that everything else fails, to which Davutoglu's 'bow and arrow' simile would certainly attest. One can argue, as Ziya Onis did, that, if Turkey had not re-orientated towards full Europeanization as a main axis of its politics soon after 2007, it would have led it to three instances: authoritarianism, unsatisfactory relations with neighbors, and the loss of balance in the EU-Turkey-US triangle (Onis, Yilmaz, 2009: 21-22). These consequences indeed did come to pass, yet the refugee issue presented new possibilities to a unilateral leadership style. Our explanation is more in line with the latter possibility. Due to the recent domestic and international challenges (prolonged Syrian conflict, huge influx of Syrian refugees, destabilized Iraq, threats from ISIS, resumed violence with PKK), Turkey changed this apparent democratic, peaceful policy significantly, sidelining Davutoglu's *first operational principle*¹⁴ and hence sacrificing democracy for security. By resuming the trend of violence against the PKK, and thus by marginalizing and sidelining rising democratic Kurdish opposition embodied within HDP (which itself got conflated with terrorism in the eyes of the public), Erdogan committed himself to the elimination of this militant organization directly, and all the effective democratic opposition (HDP), indirectly rather than reconciling, since it was a more successful policy in a

14 Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's Zero - Problems Foreign Policy," Foreign Policy, May 20, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/turkeys-zero-problems-foreign-policy/> (accessed April 13, 2016).

divided society, which promised him and his party greater share of votes at the subsequent elections, and with it, a greater chance to change the constitution in favor of the presidential system¹⁵. Again, interests defined in terms of power connect psycho-functional and policy dynamics under the constraint of the “political” on both levels of analysis. The question that leading Turkish statesmen kept asking themselves was how they could continue satisfying domestic constituents (and therefore keep extracting individual electoral benefits in the process) by combining two seemingly irreconcilable policies: globalization and securitization. Be that as it may, this explains Turkey’s rising authoritarianism from the perspective of domestic electoral dynamic. After all, individual elite’s interests can be reconciled with said policies and presented as such, which in turn become the main guiding principle, as obedience to some abstract liberal criteria cannot be a ‘light in the dark’ for the Turkish state. What the AKP did was to persuade the public that if they are not elected, then none of the liberal goals would be achieved either, despite its increasing authoritarianism. Bargaining was at play. By understanding these points, one proverb comes to mind, one that says that problems and tribulations can always be converted into opportunities. Turkish statesmen realized this, especially pertaining to the relations with the European Union, and concluded that they can ‘swat two flies with one swing’. In other words, it was possible for Erdogan to gain positive feedbacks internationally and domestically from his attitudes towards accession and yet continue his policy of securitization, domestic unilateralism and national primacy, whilst sacrificing everything else by exploiting long embedded Turkish fears, better known as Sevres syndrome. Positive feedback from international communities and other sovereign states is exactly what authoritarian leaders strive for in the quest for the much needed international legitimization. For this to work, a strong bargaining chip was needed, which was found precisely in the phenomenon of the Syrian refugee crisis.

By analyzing the restarted political brinkmanship towards the European Union from the individual-level unit of analysis, and further connecting these findings to the remaining two units, it is important to notice the difference between the two of the most prominent figures at the time dominating Turkish politics: Erdogan and Davutoglu. In order to do this we must know their individual intentions. Erdogan, in the light of the recent events, certainly seems as a power-hungry politician with increasing authoritarian tendencies. Even

15 Mustafa Akyol, “Who killed Turkey-PKK peace process?,” Al Monitor, August 4, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/turkey-syria-iraq-pkk-peace-process-who-killed-kurds.html#> (accessed April 20, 2016).

domestically, he is doing everything in his power to change the Constitution and thus make Turkey adopt the presidential system fully¹⁶. Davutoglu, in turn, seems as the only balancing element in play here. We mentioned previously that from the domestic level, Turkey can ‘swat both flies with one hit’, meaning that it can continue being authoritarian and still make rapprochement with the EU. Nevertheless, this needs to be analyzed to a greater extent from the approach towards individual elites. It is indeed in the benefit of Turkey as a whole to enter the Union, but this attempt can be exploited from respective individual sides to further their own credibility. Hence, the role of the mediator between Turkey and the European Union as well as the technicalities of the process have been left solely to Davutoglu, without much interference from Erdogan, except for an occasional inflammatory speech, exemplified by the one from the beginning of this paper. But why is this so? Is it not in Erdogan’s interest to gain all the ‘glory’ from such an amazing project? Perhaps not as much, because the deal itself carries many of the difficulties as well. Financial aid of three billion euros that Turkey is gaining from this deal can be seen as nothing more than a token. Furthermore, the alleviation of the visa regime pertaining to Turkish citizens can prove to be a drawn-out, cumbersome and protracted process. In addition, if accession talks should be revisited, perhaps one or few chapters would be opened only, with no guarantee for any substantial progress. From this it follows that Davutoglu’s image both domestically and internationally would be tarnished. Domestically, he would suffer because he brought few or no results, and the refugee issue would continue to be all but solved. The Sevres syndrome might be reawaken in the eyes of the public, and sentiment of losing domestic sovereignty to Europe might appear, which will make Davutoglu an easy target for picking. It is obvious that European help so far was only symbolic, and that a more tangible commitment would be needed. Davutoglu, who took this project upon himself, would have to have demanded more aid as time progresses, and as such would not have been favored among European circles to say the least – therefore his international standing would have sunk. Europe, after all, does not need the Turkish Prime Minister, but rather an indispensable Turkish President. Erdogan would gain from these dynamics, where his role as a “presidential president” would persist, and he would appear domestically unscathed from the failures of the government, while on the other hand, he would still enjoy international legitimacy, since it is obvious that European countries need him personally for this deal to work, and will do their best not to antagonize him further, hence ignoring his

16 “Erdogan wants ‘completely new constitution’ for Turkey,” Al Jazeera and agencies, November 4, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/aide-erdogan-push-constitutional-change-151104165401294.html> (accessed April 13, 2016).

increasing authoritarian trends.

By realizing all of this, the question poses itself whether Turkey would even consider this particular deal. While Europe has the luxury of 'playing the waiting game' in its relations with Turkey, Turkey does not. Europe can always benefit from having Turkey as its gatekeeper in the Middle Eastern region, while Turkey, under the present government, seems to be thinking, unsurprisingly, more in short-term goals, perhaps for the sake of domestic legitimacy. Erdogan, as an increasingly authoritarian leader, needs deals like these, or at least their pending character, in order to divert international attention away from himself. It is quite obvious that Germany did not criticize Erdogan's actions in the recent period because they did not want to push Turkey away from signing it. Shortly after the deal was signed, Germany order prosecution of a comedian that made fun of Erdogan in one of his videos¹⁷. Prosecution was, unsurprisingly, demanded by Erdogan himself, and Germany relented. This in fact demonstrates how much Europe needs Erdogan. Thus the biggest 'loser' in all of this seems to be Davutoglu, who was caught 'between the rock and a hard place'.

International units of analysis also inform individual/domestic levels and vice versa. Turkey's leadership exploited the long term national goal of joining the EU in its own way, which was in turn compelled by developments in the international arena, where Turkey recently got further away from USA, and the need presented itself for a new ally and revisited anchoring towards Europe. But this begs the question of whether is truly possible to create real and lasting alliances by pushing other states into it. To reiterate, on an individual level, Erdogan needs Europe in order to continue his authoritarian trend, with the ultimate goal of changing the constitution and the entire state system into a presidential one. On an international level of analysis, Turkey needs Europe to patch a 'hole' left by the US marginalization of regional Sunni states in favor of Iran. And last but not least, on a state level, Turkey always needed Europe due to the plethora of benefits that come with rapprochement which are mostly of economic nature, but ideological side and domestic institutional consolidation cannot be disregarded either. But in this most recent deal, we would claim that the individual variable was the most potent one. Perhaps Erdogan never intended for Turkey to orientate itself seriously towards accession. This is obvious from his recent attitude to visa liberalization, where he did not want

17 Philip Oltermann, "Merkel lets comedian face prosecution for Erdoğan poem," Guardian, April 15, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/15/angela-merkel-agrees-prosecution-comedian-erdogan-poem> (accessed April 18, 2016).

to bargain domestic oppressive terrorist laws for rapprochement¹⁸. The whole process of accession, initiated by Ahmet Davutoglu, served Erdogan's interest. By signing the deal, he compelled Angela Merkel and other European leaders to forget about his flagitious human rights account and authoritarian trends. If Europe wants to continue having Turkey as its gatekeeper, it will have to do what Erdogan insists upon. Reducing the criteria for Turkish accession may be one of the issues Erdogan is aiming for. By stronghanded the European Union, Erdogan achieved domestic legitimacy, while at the same time, international legitimacy was assured anyway, due to his personal and indispensable character. When all the cards were at the table, it was possible for him to finally dispense with Davutoglu and remove him from the party hierarchy, and thus premiership¹⁹. His last obstacle towards the goal of the presidential system was hence effectively removed. Using this deal, and playing both Davutoglu and European Union, Erdogan fully asserted himself as the ultimate shot-caller, a real 'presidential president'. It became obvious that whoever inherited Davutoglu's position would not be anything more than a figurehead and a puppet for an incumbent Turkish president, which turned out to be true in the figure of Binali Yildirim. Like with any other project of this magnitude, one only needs to see who benefits (*cui bono?*) the most in order to conclude that the grand ideationalist rhetoric towards refugees from 2011-2012 was purely instrumental, and not at all freed of interest. Indeed, there is always more than meets the eye.

Conclusion

With all being said and done, we do not have bright predictions for Turkey at the moment. Expelling Davutoglu from the party can be considered as the last nail in the coffin of Turkish democracy. This is the act which made the AKP into Erdogan's personal vessel towards presidentialism and new constitution. But what Erdogan does not realize, or what he does not want to realize, is that this kind of arrangement is unstable. By monopolizing all of the AKP's potential, Erdogan greatly reduced the party's legitimacy and

18 Tattersal, Sezer, "Turkey's Erdogan rebuffs EU on terrorism law; 'we're going our way, you go yours,'" Reuters, May 6, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-eu-turkey-erdogan-idUSKCN0XX18K> (accessed May 7, 2016).

19 Jared Malsin, "Why Turkey's Prime Minister Had No Choice But to Resign," Time, May 5, 2016, <http://time.com/4320036/turkey-prime-minister-ahmet-davutoglu-resign/> (accessed May 7, 2016).

ideological hegemony. Nothing remains of the AKP's original coordination. Now there is only Erdogan and his megalomania, slowly destabilizing Turkey in the domestic and international spheres. Turkey is becoming the very thing which the AKP was so quick to denounce at the beginning of 2000s - an authoritarian Middle Eastern country with Islamic discourse abound, perhaps anew the 'sick man of Europe'. In the beginning, the party's program was in line with conservative liberal rhetorics of the center-right, which proved as the most potent vote-getting current in Turkish politics. We have witnessed this from the days of Menderes all the way to the 2000s. In this case, history can teach a lot. In present experiences, there always emerged a single party which took monopoly of the dominant center-right discourse, which in turn made it authoritarian. Before, military and secular currents served as a balancing element, but since these have been removed during the later years of the AKP, this mechanism of checks and balances ceased to function. Our tentative prediction is that, in the period to come, the AKP will get marginalized, and in its place, many new offshoot parties will appear, propagating the same political orientation. Nonetheless, for the time being at least, these parties will not be able to garner enough popular support. Therefore the government will be placed in the hands of weak coalitional governments, which are going to leave their imprint on the economic picture of the country, and not in a positive light (especially in the international community). All of this will come to pass if Erdogan ultimately fails in his presidential pretensions. If he succeeds, then it will really not matter very much.

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