

Influence of Turkish Foreign Policy in Albania

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Abstract

This paper inquires into the overall picture of the Turkish foreign policy toward Western Balkans, and especially Albania, on the geopolitical plan. It explores the new Turkish policy principles, Davutoglu's strategic vision, and the extent to which the geopolitics of both Turkey and Albania inform Turkish foreign policy. This paper also delineates the perceptions of Albania towards Turkey's foreign policy and contradictions of the same policy. According to Davutoglu, the architect of Turkish foreign policy, Turkey is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country, can simultaneously exercise influence in all these regions and thus claim a global strategic role, rejecting the perception of Turkey as a bridge between Islam and the West, as this would relegate Turkey to an instrument for the promotion of the strategic interests of other countries. To achieve this, Turkey should capitalise on its soft power potential. Davutoglu argues that Turkey possesses "strategic depth" due to its history and geographic position and lists Turkey among a small group of countries which he calls "central powers". Taking such a role Turkey has also great interest in Albania as it is considered the best state to promote Turkish interests within the Western Balkan region. However, there are several obstacles limiting Turkey's full penetration into the Western Balkans.

Keywords: strategic depth, soft power, proactive foreign policy, geopolitical influence, regional power

Introduction

Turkey's influence on the Western Balkans and particularly Albania is related to their geographical proximity (Cogos, 2013). When the Western Balkans encounters any instability, Turkey is affected politically. That is why promotion of peace and stability in the Balkans region is one of the priorities of the Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has great interest in Albania as it is considered the most appropriate state to promote Turkish interests within the Western Balkan region. Though there are several obstacles limiting Turkey's full penetration into Albania, the transformations are increasing gradually (Baççi and Doganlar, 2009, 14).

The new Turkish foreign policy is built on a holistic apprehension of historical trends and a sense of vigorous action. Turkey has rejected a reactionary foreign policy approach by developing its priorities on international and regional issues with meticulous consideration of its own situation. Most importantly, the country's position is a reflection of its geographical location, historical depth, and great legacy in international affairs. Thus, Turkey designs its policies in line with the historical trends and the apprehension of the country's situation in the larger trajectory of the world history. The country steadily questions and contemplates on its status and makes revisions where necessary. Through this deep-rooted approach to current issues, it is able to constantly handle the challenges of the serious transformations happening in the global system (Ersoy, 2004, 15).

While going through reform processes and domestic transformations, Turkey's major focus is to consolidate ties with its region. The country is devising mechanisms to reconnect with the people in Albania with whom it shares a common history and is deemed to share a common destiny. This objective is useful in shaping the foreign policy priorities of the country. The implication of this objective is that the country should work toward reconciling its differences with the neighbors through soul-searching efforts and going beyond the divisive disputes. The ties are intended to place the country in a better position to act as a responsible state at the global level.

Turkey's foreign policy has provided a basis for the country to adopt different approaches in dealing with the neighboring countries (Cogos, 2013). Turkey was previously an aspiring candidate to the European Union and a close ally to the United States. Currently, the country behaves autonomously and even at times at cross-purposes with the United States.

Currently, there is a severe crisis in the international community. This has resulted in a substantial process of political transition in the countries surrounding Turkey. Turkey's foreign policy is designed in a way that reflects the long-standing historical trends and the country's location in the broader course of the world's history. Turkey has made efforts to help neighboring countries such as Albania to achieve peace and stability, as it considers Balkans a necessary geopolitical area for its own security.

Another asset for Turkey's foreign policy is its reintegration with the neighboring states. While going through domestic reform processes and transformations, Turkey has also moved to consolidate ties with Balkans countries. Thus, a significant strength of Turkey's foreign policy is the continuing process of reconnecting with the people within the region with whom Turkey shares a common history and tend to have a common destiny. In this regard, Turkey is working toward reconciling its differences with neighboring countries and moving beyond such disputes through cooperation. Turkey envisions close ties with neighbors as a gateway to the achievement of its global goals.

Methodology

Purpose and objectives of this paper

This paper focuses on explaining the basic concepts related to Turkish foreign policy in Albania. This is intended by the new principles of Turkish foreign policy and the "strategic depth" doctrine since the AKP came to power. Therefore this study has a special importance because it identifies and analyzes the mechanisms explaining why Turkish policymakers have adopted these concepts during this period. In this regard, there is a special focus on the perception of actors, their discourses and strategic documents. In view of achieving the goal, the objectives in this paper are: analysis of key concepts that explain Turkish foreign policy; analysis of Turkish and Albanian geopolitical elements; analysis of the situation in Turkey, as the sending country, taking into account its position to influence regional and global expansion; and analysis of the situation in Albania, as a receiving country, considering Turkey a strategist partner.

Research questions and hypothesis

Basic research questions are: How are the principles of foreign policy materialized into Turkish influence in Albania? How are the geopolitical concepts materialized into Turkish foreign policy? What is the Turkish geopolitical position for influence in the region and Albania?

The basic hypothesis is: The new perceptive in foreign policy and Davutoglu doctrine have created direct influence in the Balkans, especially Albania.

Given that the main purpose of this paper discusses the current Turkish foreign policy and Turkish geopolitics, the methodology used is based on qualitative approach - analysis of discourse - focused on the operationalization of key concepts. Due to holistic nature of the problem, the methodology used is based on secondary approach. Regarding secondary sources, the author has used some theoretical perspectives of well-known authors in the field of international relations and political science. Regarding the theories used, there is a combination between two perspectives of international relations: realism and liberalism. It is also used the geopolitical orientation, which means that researchers in this area build certain ideas of the country, and these ideas have political influence and reinforce their behavior; these are ideas that influence how we, the people, process our notions of countries and politics (Bryman, 2004, fq. 24).

New principles of Turkish policy

Turkey also enjoys the ability to achieve progress through a peaceful and stable domestic order on which it can create a proactive foreign policy. Recently, Turkey formulated a balance between domestic security and personal freedoms. This enmeshment was inspired by the country's belief that it is not possible to build stability and peace on force alone. From this perspective, the country was convinced that countries that achieve stability and peace usually have tools in place to promote political legitimacy and the respect of freedoms. Despite the fact that Turkey lagged behind in the 1990s in terms of democratization and did not embrace fundamental human rights, the country has gone through a chief domestic restructuring process over the recent years. Turkish official say that Turkey has fixed many of its weaknesses with regard

to its human rights records, but lately there are signs of an authoritarian rule on the part of Erdogan. However, according to Davutoglu (2001), when he outlines the foreign policy principles, “this significant process has been facilitated by several democratization reforms executed in a determined way through strong political authority and visionary leadership” (p. 3). Particularly, the country is avoiding its past incorrect habits of perceiving the society as a possible enemy. When the country stopped worrying about the domestic challenges as a result of its expanded scope of basic freedoms, Turkey developed more self-confidence regarding its international position. This has made the country to be trusted by the international community and its regional neighbors. The formulation of the security-freedom balance has secured Turkey from huge challenges of withstanding pro-democratic transformative signals in the region that would compromise its security (Davutoglu, 2001, 2).

There are various principles that stand out as guidelines for the implementation of Turkey’s foreign policy. The first principle involves pursuing a value-based foreign policy. Turkey has set out objectives that portray it as a wise country in the international community. These values place Turkey in the position of a wise country to carry out such functions as development assistance, conflict resolution, mediation, or conflict prevention. As a wise nation, Turkey aims at enhancing its capability to shape the course of development around it and develop significant contributions to the resolution of international and regional issues.

The second principle of Turkey’s foreign policy is that the country should act confidently in tackling policy issues. Playing the role of a wise country requires Turkey to meet many expectations and adopt numerous tools that may be missing in the country’s conventional foreign policy toolkit. Turkey endeavors to act independently and confidently in pursuing mechanisms that had not been there in the traditional foreign policy. It has also actively participated in new areas such as mediation, peace-making and international development assistance.

The third principle is that Turkey’s foreign policy is to be implemented in an autonomous manner. Turkey is moving away from the psychological sense of inferiority where other powers used to design regional politics and the country only performed the roles assigned to it. This perception of inferiority is said to be deeply-rooted in many dimensions of the Turkish society, and among political elites. The country’s new foreign policy is designed in relation to national priorities, irrespective of whether they will fail or succeed. The policy aims at putting off instructions from other powers and avoiding the grand schemes of others. Particularly, Turkey’s foreign policy is designed in a way that puts into account the country’s own situation.

The fourth principle is to seek a vision-oriented foreign policy. Turkey, as a wise country, requires a proper balance between vision management and crisis management. Currently, the world is experiencing significant global economic crisis while Turkey’s neighbors are going through a difficult political transformation. Turkey is playing an active role in these transformations by applying its crisis management mechanisms and multi-dimensional diplomacy. As the country struggles to tackle the conjectural challenges in Europe, Caucasus, Balkans, and the Middle East, it seeks to maintain the wider trends and the country’s holistic approach. This principle is in line with the long-standing vision of Turkey (Sulu, 176).

Ahmet Davutoglu doctrine "Strategic Depth"

The Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP is attributed to Ahmet Davutoglu, who was the chief advisor of Prime Minister Recep during the period 2002-2009, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs during 2009 – 2014, and afterwards Prime Minister (2014 – 2016). Davutoglu (2009) envisions Turkey as a central state which should play a proactive economic, political and diplomatic role. Davutoglu argues that Turkey’s new geopolitical status should be viewed “as a means of gradually opening up to the world and transforming regional influence.” The “strategic depth” concept lies on two major elements: geographic and historic depth (Cogos, 2013).

Even though the earlier publications of Davutoglu were derived from rather old-fashioned geopolitical approaches, his vision went through substantial modifications between the late 1990s and the early 2000s (Sayari, 2000, 143). This was not an ordinary approach for the typical AKP leadership. While geopolitics was the major framework of Davutoglu’s strategic thinking, he supplemented it with liberal aspects such as encouragement of “win-win” solutions, conflict resolution, and soft power. Davutoglu (2001) points out that Turkey’s strategic history and geographical position places it among the world’s central powers. Thus, Turkey should go beyond its regional role, and expand throughout the entire international community (Sayari, 2000, 144).

According to Davutoglu, Turkey should establish a proactive policy in line with its geographic and historic depth that is strengthened by its Ottoman heritage. The achievement of this objective requires Turkey to utilize its soft power potential. The soft power is drawn from the historic and cultural connections that Turkey has with all regions to which it belongs, its thriving market economy, and democratic institutions. This implies that the country has to do away with the militaristic image that a military tutelage history and its strong military have portrayed to the society. Rather, Turkey should focus on the promotion of dispute resolution and economic cooperation that is capable of obviating the need for regional intervention by great powers (Yavuz 17).

Departing from his earlier arguments, Davutoglu establishes two requirements that must be met for Turkey's foreign policy to effectively influence surrounding regions such as the Western Balkans. First, Turkey needs to resolve its domestic politics. The domestic conflicts have also been manifested in the conflicts between the secularist and Islamist elements of the Turkish society. From an international perspective, Turkey needs to settle all bilateral conflicts that have hindered the country's relations with its neighbors (Kaddorah, 2010). The Turkish government, under Prime Minister Recep has followed an "idealistic" foreign policy referred to as "zero problems with neighbors" as an important aspect of its "strategic depth" advance to Turkey's foreign policy. Thus it has enhanced relations with almost all its neighbors, including Albania. It is worth noting that "zero problems with neighbors" has worked with Albania, but lately Turkey's involvement in the Middle East crises has undermined this policy – for many reasons.

In a general sense, Turkey has close geo-political ties with several states in the Western Balkans, which play a noteworthy role in Turkey's entry to continental Europe. Turkey has significantly focused on creating an environment of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence with the Western Balkans through trade relations (Turbedar, n. d.). This is because the stability and peace in the region are perceived as the basis for Turkey's geo-political prosperity.

Davutoglu's Doctrine has been instrumental in strengthening Albania's role in the Western Balkans (Cogos, 2013). Though Davutoglu's opponents have made attempts to destroy his policy with connotations of colonialism, there are significant positive influences of the policy on the Balkan countries, mainly Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Albania and other states in the Western Balkans are considered as a "central place in modern Turks' Neo-Ottomanic self-perception of identity" and therefore, it is "of key importance for shaping of the Neo-Ottomanic concept and policy". Turkey's foreign policy with the Western Balkans revolves around exploitation of prevailing instabilities in the bid to redefine its status in the new world order following the end of the Cold War (Tase, 10).

There are some analysts who feel that Davutoglu's foreign policy with the Western Balkans has not caused much influence than the previous policy (Kucukkeles (2012). Ozal's administration also made similar attempts at ideological renewal of the foreign policy. Similarly, Ismail Cem, who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the DSP administration between 1997 and 2002, had criticized the absence of cultural and historical components in Turkish foreign policy. He also emphasized the importance of systematically and vigorously adding a historical element on bilateral relations with states that share a common Ottoman past. In this regard, Davutoglu's visions go in line with the policy and intellectual efforts of previous regimes (Pawel, 2010).

Through its foreign policy, Turkey has directly influenced the Western Balkans using regional cooperation (Turbedar, n. d.). However, Turkish Balkan policy became a matter of dispute. The Albania – Bosnia-Herzegovina initiative brought up the question of whether Turkey was introducing "Neo-Ottomanism". Critics have accused Turkey of promoting inclinations similar to the Ottoman state. Conversely, the Turkish government is using all possible opportunities to prove that it has no intentions other than contributing to the consolidation of peace and stability in the Western Balkans (Turbedar, n. d.). Currently, the Western Balkans are poorest compared to the rest of Europe. Moreover, there is a significant diversity within the region, with Albania and Kosovo being considerably poorer than others. This is somehow attributed to the fact that the two countries are not integrated in the European Union (Grigoriadis, 2010: 44).

The influence of Turkey's foreign policy on Albania is founded on the belief that Albania is a strategic country for Turkey's penetration into the Western Balkans. Both Turkey and Albania are NATO members and candidate members to European Union. There are 1.3 million people of Albanian origin in Turkey, and most still feel a connection to Albania. Furthermore, there is a well-built Turkish minority in Kosovo, a state which is mainly Albanian. The bond between Albania and Turkey emanates from historical setting of the Ottoman Empire. Albania was the last state in southeast Europe to gain independence from the Ottoman regime. To date, the two countries enjoy a stable relationship (Pawel, 2010: 66).

The recent diplomatic initiatives by Turkey are aimed at strengthening its good relations with traditional Western Balkan partners, making openings to states that Turkey has problematic relations, and playing the role of a mediator and leading multilateral projects in the bid to promote regional stability. Cooperation in the defense sector involves a well-built dimension of Turkish-Albanian bilateral relations. Teams assigned by the Turkish Air, Naval and Land Forces have been training Albanian Armed Forces and helping them in modernization and logistic elements, while Albanian soldiers dispensed to Afghanistan under the NATO framework have been serving their function under the Turkish troops deployed in this region (Pawel, 2010).

Turkish geopolitics

Apart from Russia, Turkey is the only country that has territories in both Asia and Europe. This implies that the country is affected by and affects international politics in the east of the Mediterranean, the south-east of Europe, the south of the former Soviet Union, Transcaucasia, and the north of the Middle East. From a historical perspective, the most important strategic asset for Turkey has been the country's control of the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Russia had depended on these straits for express maritime way into the Mediterranean. This was also the route on which France, Britain, and the United States challenged Russia in the Black Sea in the First World War. The geographical position of Turkey makes it a point of intersection for various great powers. This has made Turkey's policy makers to apply flexibility in dealing with states such as Albania that are vulnerable to domination by a single great power (Hale, 2001: 56).

Turkey rose to a regional power in the Balkan region during the Post-Cold war period. In this regard, Turkey aimed at building reliable ties in the Balkan region for the enhancement of its position against Greece. The rivalry between Greece and Turkey compelled Turkey to obtain the support of Balkan states. Albania, on the other hand, was attempting to gain the support of a great power to tackle its international and domestic affairs.

In the entire Balkan region, Albania was the least developed country. It was extremely necessary for Albania to get external aid in order to sustain its democratic domestic political order and to recover its economy. Consequently, Albania established relations with the European countries and the United States. The support of the United States was important for Albania because Albania intended to balance the influences of Greece and Italy (Yel, 37).

Turkey's interest in Albania is greatly amplified by its rivalry with Greece. Both Greece and Turkey claimed a leading role in the Balkans. These countries have always been considering each other's actions and policies towards the Balkan region in a suspicious and accusing manner. The hostility of Greece towards some Balkan countries has been based on the perception that Greeks are the only indigenous race with the region and that they are the only ones with the capacity of integrating the whole of Balkan Peninsula. Greece has also pointed accusations on Turkey for establishing an Islamic arc and pursuing a strategy of protecting the Muslims in the region. Turkey has strong connections with Albania and Bosnia, countries that have majority of Muslim populations but with secular systems. At the same time, Turkey is closely linked to countries such as Bulgaria and Macedonia whose population majority is the Orthodox Christian. As a result of Turkey's closeness to Albania, the immigration of Albanians to Greece in search of labor increasingly caused tensions between Greece and Albania.

Albanian geopolitics

The human factor plays in important role in drawing Turkey into the Balkans (Turbedar, n. d.). An approximated nine million people in the Balkans are Muslims and they form majorities of populations in Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Oktem, 2010). Turkey has been enabled by the region's Ottoman legacy to use its Muslim populations as securities for its proactive involvement (Poulain & Sakellariou, 2011). Until the AKP administration assumed power in 2002, Turkey's presence in the Western Balkans was restrained by the secular aspect of the Kemalist philosophy. However, it is worth noting that following centuries of migrations, unbreakable relations have been created between Turkey and the Muslim communities from the Balkans. Accordingly, Turkey remains to be the major ambassador of the Muslim part of the Balkans, the Albanian and Bosniak one, through publicizing of their interests and advocacy (Tanaskovic, 2010: 106).

Whether through political necessity or coincidence, the military and political cooperation of Turkey with Albania was the same as that of the United States in the 1990s. As a matter of fact, Turkey did not have to rely on the United States to push

for such cooperation because it already had cordial relations with Tirana. However, the fact that Turkey's and United States' interests were similar was a boost for Turkey to promote its military ties with Albania (Ulutas, 123).

There are numerous military agreements and high-level visits between the Turkey and Albania. In fact, many Turkish troops were dispatched to Albania. The 1991 visit by Turkey's chief of general staff to Tirana was the start of such contacts. The visit opened the way to the signing of a military cooperation accord. This was followed by a Turkish warship visit to the city of Durres. This event was considered a very significant one that marked the commitment of Turkey to Albania's security and it received a warm welcome from the Albanian public. In addition, Albania and Turkey conducted joint naval exercises off the shores of Albania to indicate their cooperation (Rubin and Kirisci, 2001: 55).

Turkey promoted the creation of a strong democratic state system for the proper protection of the borders of Albania. These moves are in line with Turkey's principles of peace and stability under its foreign policy. But one of the most significant Turkish foreign policy in the Balkan region is to prevent the dominance of any other super powers over the Balkans (Ozcan, 2009: 78).

Due to a century of shifting of borders, the ethnic Albanians were left scattered across Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo (Aydum and Progonati, 2011). The strategic geo-political position of Albania is considered an appealing and unique country of the Balkans. One reason for this is Albania's constant attempts to attain unity among its population divided by three separate religions, and a historical path filled with typical Balkan disputes. The drastic political changes within the Eastern European countries as well as in Albania in the late 1980s led to the attraction of the international attention towards the Balkans. The disputes that arose from the Balkan Peninsula hindered the European Union's steps to further its enlargement (Hale, 2001: 7).

After long years of isolationist policy, Albania has made efforts to establish a democratic country and develop multilateral and bilateral relations with international organizations and other countries (Aydum and Progonati, 2011). Albania's geographic position as a Balkan country has made it to design its policy in a way that harmonizes the different nationalisms that have become more influential in the peninsula. This is being achieved through the preservation of the various religions and cultures while strengthening the efforts of becoming the EU member. The integration Albania to the European Union is not only a political requirement but also a moral responsibility following the whole of Albania's national interest. However, the European Union recently has conditioned Albania's interest to open negotiations on grounds that the country has to reform the judicial system. The country is undergoing a slow democratic transformation because the shift from isolationism and underdevelopment has to take time and resources. The western mentors seem nowadays interested in assisting Albania following the European path - significant developments as well as democratic progress in the country.

Kosovo solely relies on Albania for support in the international arena. This implies that Kosovo's government is usually affected directly by the developments or underdevelopments of Albania. Turkey views Kosovo as an inseparable part of its culture and history due to the five-century coexistence of Balkan aspects under the Ottoman Empire. Many Ottoman Albanians became Muslims and were quickly integrated into the Ottoman society with no discrimination (Oktem, 2010, 17). Presently, there are many Turks with Albanian origins and relatives within the Balkans. In particular, Kosovo contains a strong Turkish minority that has been left behind since the Ottoman regime. Thus, this is a good political ground for Turkey to strengthen its effect on the domestic affairs of the Balkan region (Abazi, 2008: 4).

The major challenge facing the Balkans is the different ethnicities (Aydum and Progonati, 2011). With regard to this problem, Balkan countries need to work towards achieving regional security without international community intervention. Amongst all Balkan countries, Albania seems to be in the in the hardest position to make progress in all these transformation processes due to its previous isolationist policy. Nevertheless, Albania is endowed with the structure of a non-expansionist state. Thus, the struggles of Albanians are focused on tangible objectives such as stability, self-governance, and national freedom. The foreign policy of Albania focuses on reinforcing its stance in the Southern Balkans and the Southern Europe by establishing effective systems for fostering peace, prosperity, and democracy in the region.

Albania is the second country, after Turkey, with the largest Muslim majority population in the Balkan region. An estimated 6.5 million Albanians live in the Balkan region, though only about three million reside in Albania. There are many Albanians living in Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. Albanians who reside in Turkey regard themselves as Turks rather than Albanians. Albanians who live in Macedonia and Kosovo are considered a significant element that might affect the unity and stability of Macedonia. Albanians form about thirty percent of Macedonia's population.

Due to the fact that Kosovo's Albanian population is ninety percent, Turkey by extension to its interests in Albania, has tried to favor Kosovo's territorial integrity. Turkey had to help in solving regional issues before claiming the position of a regional power. The fact that Turkey's foreign policy considers Albania its close friend and ally in the Balkan region has made Turkey to actively support the stability of Kosovar Albanians (Kaddorah, 2010: 5).

The "Davutoglu's Doctrine" plays a very instrumental role in the proper application of AKP's principles. With regard to the Western Balkans, the most important short-term and medium-term goals of Turkish foreign policy include the need to reinforce Albania and Bosnia, and to set up a global legal structure that might place the minorities of Turkish origin under the protection of Turkey. In line with the global legal system, Turkey aims at ensuring that there is a basis for the country's involvement in matters related to the Muslim minorities in Albania. To facilitate Turkish foreign policy's interests, Davutoglu proposes a guideline which involves the utilization of intra-and-extra-regional balances that aim at preventing the formation of a Balkan coalition. In the recognition of the three historical fields of influence – the Ottoman Empire, the Orthodox-Slavic heritage and the German Nation – he suggests that the United States will opt for supporting the Turkish influence in the region than allowing the growth of the influence of Russia or Germany (Christianna, 2013).

Despite Turkey's indicative interests in Albania and Kosovo, between 1991 and 1999, Turkey refrained from unilateral involvements with these countries (Abazi, 2008: 58). In fact, the country pursued policies related to international community. Turkey facilitated the participation of Albania in international and regional organizations as a way of promoting peace and security (Huseyin and Doganlar 16).

NATO has constantly requested the Turkish government to assist Albania. This indicates that NATO perceives the military cooperation between a peculiarly significant country and one of NATO's members as an important aspect for stability within the volatile region. Turkey played an important role in supporting the membership of Albania both in NATO and other organizations.

The promotion of political integration and diplomacy as a way of resolving problems has helped in raising Turkey's soft power profile. In the bid to promote her active diplomacy efforts, Turkey's presence has become increasingly significant in diplomatic mediation of various conflicts in regions extending from the Balkans and the Middle East to Southeast Asia and the Caucasus. Factors that promote Turkish influence on Albania include: common history, geographical proximity, Turkey's growing economical influence and a foreign policy which focuses on securing allies in Turkey's integration to the European Union through the creation of friendly relations with the Western Balkans. Turkish and Albanian people are familiar with each other and this secures an ample basis for regional cooperation. Turkish prime Minister stated that "Albania is Turkey's strategic ally in the Balkans" (Likmeta, 2012: 1).

Albania's new perspective with Turkey considering Turkey a strategic partner

According to Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish government is ready to side with Albanians in their self-determination and establishment of a greater Albanian nation (TESEV Foreign Policy Programme). Albanians greatly welcomed the president's assertions, though Serbia and Greek criticized them. However, in 2012, Albanian-Turkish relations went low following the Albanian vote for the motion which gave Palestine a non-member observer state position. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's attempts to persuade Albania to abandon the plans failed. Erdogan was surprised by this and he said that the world "heavily consisted of cowards" in reference to Albania and that Albania's move would upset their bilateral relations.

In line with Turkey's foreign policy towards Albania, Albanians also view national security, stability, and peace as the first priority objectives before any other policy objectives such as cultural enrichment, national honor, or prosperity. The complicated security situation in the Balkan region makes Turkey a very crucial player in helping Albania attain stability and peace.

On the official website of the Prime Minister's Office of the Republic of Albania, it is emphasized that Albanian new government, as soon as it came to power in 2013, welcomes Turkey as a strategic partner of Albania:

"Prime Minister Edi Rama... thanked Minister Davutoglu for the continuous support that Turkey has given to Albania. During their meeting, Rama stressed that the strategic partnership between the two countries will further strengthen the cooperation in the future... Prime Minister Rama and Foreign Minister Davutoglu also discussed the development of joint

meetings of the two governments, and welcomes Turkish advisors in the fields of energy, economy, health and public order, which would assist in the respective sectors. ”

In line with Turkey's foreign policy towards Albania, Albanian officials see an Albania which is guaranteed national security, stability and peace - as priority targets. Complicated security situation in the Balkans makes Turkey a very decisive player for helping Albania to achieve stability and peace. Despite these declarations, Albania itself, since becoming a NATO member, has not faced security problems. Therefore, referring the above statement, issued by the Prime Ministry, Albania is more interested in economic assistance rather than achieving stability. On the other hand, Turkey continues to implement the doctrine of “strategic depth”. It seems like a “win-win situation” - only that Albanians have a short-term plan - to overcome the economic crisis, while Turks want to ensure long-term influence in this strategic area of Europe.

Conclusion

The principles of Turkey's foreign policy aim at portraying Turkey as a friendly, though powerful country that prioritizes its cooperation with neighboring countries. In addition, because these principles were specifically intended for Turkey's neighboring countries, the country was trying to change its image from an Ottoman empire to a soft power country.

Through its foreign policy, Turkey has invested a lot of time and resources in its neighboring regions, particularly the Western Balkans (Poulain & Sakellariou, 2011, 67). The influence has been greatly based on Turkey's emphasis of its positive historical ties to the region. Since Albania is considered the strategic center for Turkey's involvement with the Western Balkans, Turkey has developed a great geopolitical influence over the country.

The steadily changing and significantly inter-related global realities have made predictions of future developments to be extremely difficult (Kaddorah, 2010). However, analysts indicate that the New Turkish policy has two contradicting trends. First, Turkey is growing extremely fast, with high development rates, as it takes advantage of the economic wealth in the neighboring countries such as Albania to support its implementation of the strategically planned, well-structured, and well-thought foreign policy. On the other hand, there are several geopolitically inconveniencing issues both internally and externally that have not been resolved, and they keep being replaced by others. As far as the foreign policy can enable Turkey to reap short-term benefits, the long-term achievement of Turkey's strategic goals is under a serious risk if the major issues are not resolved.

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