



situation can only be evaluated as a severe violation of the democracy principle in the Copenhagen criteria for membership of the EU.

As it is stated in the negotiation framework of September 2005, progress in accession negotiations will depend on progress in political reform in Turkey: the EU simply cannot ignore what is happening in Turkey. The European Commission will have to give a severe warning to Turkey in its next Progress Report that a continuation or even confirmation of this democratic defect will have negative consequences on negotiations. It is impossible to think of EU membership for a country with a socio-cultural and political structure that does

not categorically prevent the possibility of a military coup or other form of undemocratic interference in the political process.

Following the upcoming elections, it is up to the Turkish political class to effectively show that such fears are unsubstantiated. A declaration that the general staff is under the surveillance of the prime ministry may not be enough. Much will depend on the outcome of parliamentary elections and on the following presidential election. However, even a satisfactory development of affairs in Turkey may not change the French President's attitude, who seems committed to destroying EU-Turkey relations for some time to come.

## Turkey, Northern Iraq and Kirkuk

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Following the US intervention in Iraq, Turkey's Iraq policy has shifted from the fear induced Northern Iraq-dependent policy, dominant in the 1990s, to a totally new approach that encompasses the whole of Iraq. Turkish foreign policy makers have proven that they could contribute by bringing together Iraq's neighbours more frequently than ever and becoming actively involved in the efforts to persuade Iraq's Sunni groups to take part in political processes. Indeed, such strategies vis-à-vis Iraq have resulted in Turkey's recent appearance as an accredited partner by other Middle Eastern countries. In fact, Turkey has been recently invited to meetings of the Arab League - the most influential regional institution in the Arab world - despite the fact

that the country is often seen as the enemy of the Arabs within the US-Israel axis.

Despite Turkey's regional profile improving, the conflict in Northern Iraq still looms large, directly affecting the country's Middle East policy and indirectly affecting Turkey's relations with the US and the EU. Much as it is a foreign policy issue, it is important to emphasize the fact that Northern Iraq has also become a domestic issue. Although Turkey is extending its perspective on Iraq, why does the Northern Iraq question pose a challenge for Turkish foreign policy? Another important question is, despite Turkey's expanding horizon, brought about by the political, economic and legal reforms encouraged by the EU accession process, how can issues in Northern Iraq still play an important role in domestic politics? A thorough answer to these two questions, considering both foreign and domestic politics as well as their transitivity, will help us better understand the Turkey, Northern Iraq and Kirkuk balance.

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## DOMESTIC POLITICS

Domestic politics can be considered part of the equation in two different contexts. The first axis consists of the focus directed at Northern Iraq, the possibility of a Kurdish state in the region and the negative implications of such a scenario would have for Turkey's security and PKK's subsistence. The second axis revolves around concerns with the current situation and the future of the Turkomans in Northern Iraq, especially in Kirkuk. It would not be wrong to claim that these two separate issues are regarded as two parts of the same problem due to the internal policy making ways of the government, political leaders' attitudes and the approach of the security elite.

The government and the security elite have been inclined to disregard the Kurdish regional government that has come into existence with the federal structure in Iraq; and much like in the 1990s, they have the tendency to perceive the two most influential parties in this structure - the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) - as tribal formations and thus their leaders as tribal leaders. On the other hand, political leaders have been more complex in their comments. Whereas rightwing parties, along with the new Democrat Party leader Mehmet Ağar, have been able to voice analytical proposals that differ from traditional solutions, they have also sided with the government and the security elite on issues relating to the PUK, KDP and Kurdish regional government. The main opposition party however has taken a firmer stance, defending plans for military intervention or the idea to establish a security region in Northern Iraq. If rumours are to be believed, then President Ahmet Necdet Sezer knowingly refuses to talk with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. All of these actors therefore have been clear in their belief that a Kurdish formation in Northern Iraq will negatively affect the Kurdish problem in Turkey. The attacks by the terrorist organization PKK, and the martyrs killed in these terrorist attacks, have resulted in political elites, and the public, holding the Kurdish regional government, not the PKK, responsible for the recent turmoil. Northern Iraq has therefore become a central part of Turkey's currently intense domestic politics, where the security elite continue to struggle with the political elite.

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Kurdish politics in Turkey has to be assessed from such a perspective. The systematic elements on which Kurdish politics are based also define the vicious circle that constrains this movement's progress. The extreme nationalistic and ideological attitude that marks the issue means that any need or desire to find solutions or show interest in it is, at best, irrelevant. War, violence, bloodshed, disappearances and immigration, used as tools of legitimization in Kurdish politics, are also the instruments used to rip the parties apart. Kurdish politics should have its own respondents and it should address a definite audience; no importance should be given to those organizations or formations that have been involved in corruption, bloodshed or violence both domestic and abroad. In a century defined by the war on terror, legitimate contact with a terrorist group is impossible. Progress in the areas of democratization and the extension of rights and freedoms may be able to help decrease support and display the outmodedness of Kurdish politics. However, when considering the current situation, Kurdish politics seems to prolong the future of certain groups and support for them. Remarks made by leading figures in Kurdish politics enabling communication between Northern Iraq and Southeastern Turkey cause the abovementioned actors to evaluate the domestic Kurdish issue in terms of security.

In the 1990s, the Turcoman problem in Northern Iraq, which Turkey was particularly interested in, reemerged in 2003 over the status of Kirkuk. The preservation of the rights of Turcomans has become a foreign policy priority and the close relationship procured with the Iraqi Turcoman Front has signaled that the Turcomans are under the auspices of the Turkish government. However, the electoral process and the preparation of the Iraqi constitution have revealed the variety of Turcoman opinion and how distant some Turcomans feel from Turkey. After a period characterized by little activity, the status of Kirkuk has now become very much of interest. The referendum that will determine Kirkuk's future will be held in November 2007. However, bearing in mind the current situation, these elections may



well be postponed. The recent nationalistic attitudes from both rightwing and leftwing parties in Turkey view the policies favoring the Turcomans in Kirkuk as sine qua non of any Iraqi policy. It is also possible to state that the Turkish public is deeply sensitive of groups at the center of Turcoman politics. Many expect Kirkuk to remain independent in order to guarantee the Turcomans' future as well as to hinder the building of a completely autonomous Kurdish state and to prevent the Kurds from obtaining the rights to Kirkuk's oil.

#### FOREIGN POLICY AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Although Turkey has decent relations with the central region in Iraq, where a majority of Sunnis live, and the southern part, where many Shiis live, it cannot save itself from the vicious circle that relations with the North have become. The tense atmosphere may result in Turkey losing the advantages it has accrued in Iraq over the recent years. Turkey's Northern Iraq policy is going through a rather ambiguous phase due to the possibility of military intervention, various threats, putting forth all stakes from both sides, and the atmosphere of constant tension. This tense atmosphere, that has become an integral part of Turkey-Northern Iraq relations, has also started to affect Turkey's relations with the central Iraqi administration.

The most important barrier to military intervention in Northern Iraq is seen as American presence in the region. The comparison with the Syria case - that is to say the process that ended with Syria deporting the head of the terrorist organization - is not very accurate, since it overlooks certain differences between Syria's situation at the time and Iraq's present situation. Besides America's presence in Iraq, two other dynamic processes in Northern Iraq have to be taken into consideration. As state and nation building continues in Northern Iraq, Kurdish leaders are unlikely to be willing to cooperate in the elimination of a Kurdish group, including the PKK. The PKK, which is a stranger to Hafiz Asad, no matter how problematic it is, is a part of Kurdish politics. Apart from the excuses to not to destabilize Northern Iraq, choosing to avoid action against the PKK is of symbolic significance.

The establishment of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq will upset the regional status quo and will be perceived as a development towards the abovementioned security problems. PKK terror will become a problem that needs to be solved

immediately and without further turmoil. The abovementioned domestic tension within Turkey may result in radical policies, including a possible military intervention. On the other hand, in the era of the war on terror, it is assumed that an intervention's legitimacy will be questioned less by the international community. The discussions about the necessity of an intervention should be put aside and attention should be directed to how the internal and external dynamics will change or how the regional administration will change in case of an intervention.

I believe serious lessons should be drawn from the Kosovo process in 1999 when Germany deployed troops. The time frame, starting with the prohibition to station troops in Central and Eastern Europe, the bad memories from the two world wars and the deployment of combatant troops in Kosovo, should be carefully analyzed. The question of the presence of Turkish troops in Northern Iraq and what they will trigger within the broader regional context should also be kept in mind. The troops sent to Lebanon will help to normalize the Turkish presence in the region but the long term procurement of this normalization is a must.

Another issue is to ensure that the Kurdish regional government understands the costs of constructing its future alongside the PKK. The threat-tension spiral that worked in the case of Syria can be implemented in this case if and only if Northern Iraq is fully aware of the mentioned cost. However, it would be too optimistic to expect Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq to fight the PKK. The point causing discomfort within the administration is the fear that military intervention would target them. If this fear is eliminated, an intervention may be acceptable for all parties, and an agreement achieved between Turkey and Northern Iraq will place the US outside such a context. Good relations with the US in both the Balkans and the Caucasus are in fact in the state of high tension in Northern Iraq. However, taking Turkey's potentially constructive role into consideration such doubts could be eliminated.

The step that will take the Kirkuk issue out of the picture is decoupling the Kirkuk and PKK issues. By its nature, the Kirkuk issue should be dealt within a different perspective, through multitrack diplomacy and by considering the international and regional concerns as well. The Kirkuk problem is

part of the whole Iraq issue and those who frame it with the PKK issue should be prevented.

Finally, this process has to be dealt with in harmony by both the political and security elites. On the eve of Presidential and Parliamentary elections and as the Northern Iraq problem has become an area of domestic political gain, questions are emerging about the management of the intervention process. The problem has gone beyond an issue of simple permission; it has actually become the question of building mutual trust in an era where power struggles are a common occurrence.

#### CONCLUSION

The discussions about Turkey, Northern Iraq and Kirkuk are placed in the center of Turkey's domestic

and foreign politics. On the one hand it is perceived by politicians as a vote and ratings winner within the electoral process, and on the other hand it has become a tool for the security elite to interrogate external political orientations and even longer term alliances. More recently domestic politics has become a determining factor in Turkey's foreign policy. On the eve of an intervention in Northern Iraq, I believe that it is really important to evaluate the risks of such an intervention with extreme care.

Compromising national security should not be even considered. However, among all the other factors I have touched upon, it is the only way to manage the process successfully and ensure the least damage.

## The Beginning of the End of an Era – or Light at the End of the Tunnel?: The Changing Political Landscape of Trans-Atlantic Relations

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The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been bad for trans-Atlantic relations. The past seven years have been among the worst since World War II. Yet, there are now signs that this time of troubles may be drawing to a close. The wheels of history and political change are turning in a number of key countries, producing new leaders and a potential fresh start. Are we witnessing the opening of a new window of opportunity which could bring the US and Europe closer together?

What has changed? The first and most obvious is the changing of the guard taking place in several key West European countries. The key European leaders involved in the Iraq debacle are now all gone. The first to depart was

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. It is hard to find anyone who really misses him. While the former Chancellor enjoys his lucrative lobbyist salary from a Gazprom subsidiary, Chancellor Merkel and her diplomats are still contending with the consequences of his policies.

But now she is no longer alone in trying to rebuild bridges across the Atlantic. Nicolas Sarkozy's electoral victory portends a fresh start for both Europe and the trans-Atlantic relationship. For the first time in decades, we have a French President who has a non-ideological and normal view of the United States. Sarkozy's decision to appoint Bernard Kouchner – perhaps the closest thing in France

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*\* The views presented here are his own, and do not necessarily represent those of the GMF*