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## **Down to Earth: Retuning Turkish Foreign Policy<sup>1</sup>**

*Abstract: Powered by strong economic growth Turkey started to gain confidence after 2002 and reinvent itself first time after the end of the Cold War. The government gave a new vision of Turkey based on a new understanding of its geopolitical location and establishing the concept of Turkish „soft power“. However, the Arab Spring showed the limits of regional influence. In political rhetoric the Turkish leadership toned down the EU track for other foreign policy gains, in reality it has never left it. The decreasing Turkish influence and growing economic problems forecast that the leadership would retune its foreign policy goals, including the return to the EU accession. External and internal political, economic and social constraints contributed to this latest direction adjustment in Turkish foreign policy. The paper uses neo-classical realism as a framework to analyze the systemic influences and domestic changes on the country's foreign policy. Foreign policy decisions are not made by countries, but by its leaders. External regional and global influences are translated through internal factors, mainly the perceptions of the foreign policy executive influenced by the elite groups' cohesion and internal consensus, the government's vulnerability and the cohesion of the society. There are strong domestic and external pressures that influence Turkish foreign policy back to the reform agenda. Even though, domestic problems and the radical foreign policy steps and statements from Turkish leaders negatively influence the Turkish soft power capabilities, retuning the Turkish foreign policy and the return to the European track is an unequivocal interest of Turkey.*

The early 2000's brought high enthusiasm for EU accession in Turkey and the accession negotiations finally started in October, 2005. Yet, the euphoria has been toned down by reality and Europe – instead of embracing Turkey – started to search for excuses how to slow down any advancements in the accession process. Negotiations started in only about a third of the chapters (fourteen)<sup>2</sup> and only one has been concluded so far<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, in 2006 the EU Council blocked the opening of eight chapters<sup>4</sup> (because Turkey did not accept the Amendment of the Ankara Agreement in its relations with Cyprus and did not open the Turkish ports and airports for ships and planes under the Cypriot flag). Later, President Sarkozy announced that France blocks five more chapters<sup>5</sup>. The last announcement came from Cyprus in 2009 freezing the negotiations in six additional chapters<sup>6</sup>. This caused a serious disappointment for Turkey and a push for building up a new foreign policy course.

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<sup>2</sup> These chapters are: Free Movement of Capital, Company Law, Intellectual Property Law, Information Society & Media, Food Safety, Veterinary & Phytosanitary Policy, Taxation, Statistics, Enterprise & Industrial Policy, Trans-European Networks, Regional Policy & Coordination of Structural Instruments, Science & Research, Environment and Climate Change, Consumer & Health Protection, Financial Control.

<sup>3</sup> Science & Research

<sup>4</sup> Free Movement of Goods, Right of Establishment For Companies & Freedom To Provide Services, Financial Services, Agriculture & Rural Development, Fisheries, Transport Policy, Customs Union, External Relations

<sup>5</sup> Economic & Monetary Policy, Regional Policy & Coordination of Structural Instruments, Financial & Budgetary Provisions, Institutions and put their reservation on the already blocked chapter on Agriculture & Rural Development.

<sup>6</sup> Freedom of Movement For Workers, Energy, Judiciary & Fundamental Rights, Justice, Freedom & Security, Education & Culture, Foreign, Security & Defence Policy

After 2002 a new and energetic Turkey appeared that tries to live up to its ambitions both on regional and global levels. This change became visible especially after the second electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi- AKP) in 2007. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's ambitious foreign policy brought high level of activism. The "zero problems with neighbours"<sup>7</sup> policy's aim was to create a stable environment for Turkish businesses and to boost ties with countries in the regional vicinity. Turkish leaders started to speak openly about Turkey's soft power, the export of the Turkish democratic model and the ambitions to reach regional influence. The booming economy and the absolute political majority provided self-esteem for progressive foreign policy initiatives, such as a visa free zone in the Middle East, free trade agreements or mediating efforts. (Evin, et al 2010, 13) These initiatives signalled that the regional influence of Turkey is becoming a reality. Full of self-esteem, the Turkish government declared that by 2023, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic, Turkey will have entered the elite group of the 10 biggest economies in the world. (Akdeniz 2013, 2; Bayazıt 2013)

Many papers and studies have been published on the transformation in Turkish foreign policy patterns after 2002; scores of articles tried to find the answers why Turkish foreign policy turned towards the East, and whether it was the result of the halt of the accession negotiations. Based on the successes of the Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and the neighbouring regions the attention of the researchers turned towards the Easter dimension. As a result, until recently the research on Turkish EU accession was played down behind the Turkish soft power in the Middle East and its stance in relation to the Arab Spring.<sup>8</sup>

This paper will use a concept from the realist tradition to examine the foreign policy of Turkey. Though it seems odd to use realism for analysing the Turkish-EU relations, this concept can highlight the connections between systemic level pressures and domestic factors in the foreign policy of Turkey. Neo-classical realism<sup>9</sup> is a useful tool to understand the motives of foreign policy decisions and make predictions on future trends. This paper is not the first that uses this theory to examine Turkish foreign policy. Mufti draws up a framework in which he argues that Turkish security policy cannot be explained only by looking at the systemic factors (as explained in the neorealist tradition). He emphasizes that "even if many

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<sup>7</sup> Davutoğlu explained his foreign policy strategy in several articles and his book, *Stratejik Denirlik* (Davutoğlu 2001) even before 2007. The whole concept was developed during the course of his ministerial period in his speeches and scholarly work.

<sup>8</sup> Several articles were published about the Turkish soft power, the rising Turkish power in the Middle East (e.g. Oğuzlu 2007; Altunışık 2008, Kalın 2011), several researchers focused on the growing regional role of Turkey in the neighbouring regions and the new principles of the foreign policy of Davutoğlu (Murinson 2006)

<sup>9</sup> The term neo-classical realism was first used by Gideon Rose (1998, 146)

of the pressures confronting Turkey's leaders are externally generated, the manner in which they choose to react would still need to be explained." (Mufti 2009, 2-3). Bank and Karadağ argue that "we need to go beyond this and emphasize the linkage between the domestic dimension, which Turkish elites can influence, and the regional setting, which they cannot influence and where Turkey's power is acknowledged admired and feared." (Bank and Karadağ 2013, 291) Yalvaç focuses on Turkish foreign policy from a critical realist perspective, already taking into account the findings of the post-positivist, realist approaches. (Yalvaç 2014)

In this article I will use neo-classical realist thoughts to make predictions on the Turkish foreign policy decisions regarding the future of the EU accession negotiations. in a regional environment characterized by security challenges\threats and internally by constant pressures and built-in instabilities (e.g. history of coups or consecutive economic crises). My initial prediction is that both the regional and the internal factors will gradually lead Turkey back to the European track. In the political rhetoric the Turkish leadership toned down the EU track for other foreign policy gains, in reality it has never left it. The decreasing Turkish influence in its region and the growing economic problems forecast that the leadership would retune its foreign policy so that will include a gradual process of returning to the EU accession.

## **Theoretical background**

The main schools of international political theories, the realist and the liberal traditions and later the constructivist school left a gap open in explaining states' foreign policy decisions.<sup>10</sup> (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009, 11-12; Schweller 2003, 311-322; Rose 1998, 145-147) They didn't give sufficient explanations on the specific role of the state in foreign policy decisions and the nature of the interactions between the systemic and the unit level variables. Neo-classical realism gives an answer to this discrepancy and provides scholars with an overarching new theoretic tool in foreign policy analysis.<sup>11</sup> The theory works with explicit distinction between state and society and assumes that the state's foreign

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<sup>10</sup> They concentrated on different segments of how the international system works (neorealism), on states' interactions (classical realism and liberal theories) or state's behavioural patterns (constructivism).

<sup>11</sup> Rose argues that neo-classical realists occupy a middle ground between structural theorists and constructivists. The former assumes the existence of a direct linkage between the systemic constraints and the unit-level behaviour, the latter disregards the existence of the systemic level incentives, defining the international level as a socially constructed concept. (Rose 1998, 152-154)

policy responses to international constraints come as a product of state-society interactions. The executive is autonomous from the society (at least to a certain degree), however, they are compelled to bargain with other domestic actors on the policy implementation or resource extraction. (Ripsman 2002) Systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables, primarily the decision-makers' perceptions and the domestic state structure. The decisions are made by actual existing leaders or elite groups, based on their assessment of the international incentives. (Rose 1998, 157-161; Schweller 2003, 332-336)

Schweller posits four unit-level variables to explain states' initial foreign and security policy choices for a change in the external environment. The first domestic factor is elite consensus/ disagreement. This factor concerns the degree of shared intra-elite perception about some facts in the world of a particular nature, the effective policy remedies and the necessary actions in the domestic environment. In a democratic environment costly and dramatic foreign policy choices or shifts can be expected only in a state of elite consensus. (Schweller 2004, 170-173) The second domestic factor is regime's vulnerability. This factor answers the question, whether the governing elite groups face serious non-democratic challenges from the military, opposing parties or other powerful groups in the society. Vulnerable leaders will be more cautious in their foreign policy responses to any major changes in the foreign policy agenda of the country. (Schweller 2004, 173-175) Thirdly, Schweller examines the level of social cohesion, as the reflection of the society's support for the existing institutions and their legitimacy. (Schweller 2004, 175-180) The fourth factor is the cohesion of the elite groups, the degree to which the central leadership is fragmented by internal divisions and to what extent they support the executive in charge (in our case the foreign policy executive). (Schweller 2004, 180-181)

I introduce these four factors in the analysis of the Turkish foreign policy decision-making process. The Turkish leadership has to work through domestic political institutions, mobilize certain parts of the society and maintain the interest of the important stakeholders in their efforts to answer the constraints posed by the regional, global environment. The more autonomy the leadership disposes of, the more difficult decisions it can make in its foreign policy. First, I will review the external influences and incentives in connection with the Turkish-EU accession process and estimate their potential effects on Turkey. Following this estimation I turn to the perceptions of these external effects inside Turkey, how they are translated through the above specified four factors.

## External Factors

Turkey's unique geopolitical position predestines that both regional and global systemic pressures will affect its behaviour. After the Cold War Turkey lost its geostrategic importance and the immediate vicinity of Turkey flamed up<sup>12</sup> threatening with destabilization in Turkey as well. Other types of external shocks also influenced the Turkish politics: e.g. the rejection from the EU<sup>13</sup> or the series of economic crises<sup>14</sup> that washed away Turkish governments. In 2003 the invasion of Iraq meant a serious blow to the American influence in the Middle East and created a power vacuum that called for other regional actors to step in. The AKP government tried to live up to this opportunity and turned its attention to the East, especially after the virtual halt of the EU accession process in 2006. Bank and Karadağ (2013) calls the period between 2007-2011 the "Ankara Moment", the period of successful foreign policy and growing regional and global influence. Turkey became an important regional economic hub and influential actor in its region. (Balogh et al. 2013) This suffered a new external shock in 2011 with the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring seemed to raise the Turkish influence in the Middle East even further. Turkey could use its ongoing regional initiatives to raise its popularity enhanced by the political rhetoric of openly supporting the democratic changes in the Middle East. In the first period of the Arab Spring the Turkish leaders managed to „upgrade” this influence promoting the Turkish model as an example for political development. (Ülgen 2011). These efforts were supported by the West. The timing was advantageous: popularity of the Turkish leaders rose significantly<sup>15</sup>, other regional competitors, like Egypt lost their strength; the circumstances seemingly allowed for Turkish regional political dominance and growing economic influence through „soft” means.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Gulf War, the Yugoslav crisis, the Nagorno-Karabakh question all carried serious destabilizing threats. Especially the war in Iraq threatened with spill over effects caused by the waves of refugees and the strengthening of the Kurdish insurgency.

<sup>13</sup> In 1997 the EU did not include Turkey as a candidate country, which caused disappointment in Turkey, that later proved to be effective in facilitating internal reforms that led to the AKP's victory and the start of the negotiations in 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Turkey was stroke by an international economic crisis in 1994 and a twin crisis hit in in 2000 and 2001. The latter contributed indirectly to the collapse of the coalition government and the electoral success of the AKP. (Öniş 2009)

<sup>15</sup> 69% of the respondents had a positive view of Turkey in the Middle East in 2012. Egypt ranked only the second in with 65%. (Akgün and Gündoğar 2012)

<sup>16</sup> Nye developed the concept of soft power and later smart power in the course of successive books and articles. The main cornerstones were „Bound to Lead. The Changing Nature of American Power” (Nye 1990), „Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics” (Nye 2004) and the „The Future of Power” (Nye 2011)

Arguably, after 2012 Turkey started to lose from its regional influence, the “Ankara Moment” was disrupted by massive external pressures. Joining the NATO’s military intervention in Libya was necessitated by the economic interests of Turkey (Robins 2013, 391-392), which finally questioned the original idea of the zero problems policy and the Turkish image started to deteriorate. (Akgün and Gündoğar 2014, 19-24) The “ZPWN 2.0” (Oğuzlu 2012) or the compass of popular legitimacy (Robins 2013, 397) gave a new basis for the Turkish foreign policy makers to intervene in the region on grounds of legitimacy. However, the conflict in Syria showed that the Turkish capabilities fall far from the expectations: “the longer the Syrian imbroglio has continued, the less plausible has Turkish leadership appeared in the Middle East, let alone further afield.” (Robins 2013, 397). The deterioration of Turkish-Egyptian relations meant not only a blow to Turkey’s prestige in the Middle East but triggered serious economic costs as well. Turkey’s resolute stance on the side of the Muslim Brotherhood brought negative responses and lost opportunities from the Gulf States. Reportedly Turkey lost investments from the Gulf. (Sağlam 2013) The Turkish government’s reaction to the military’s coup in Egypt cemented the impression that foreign policy decisions are based on ideology, not principled positions. Owing to this, Turkey has been steadily losing regional leverage and facing isolation. (Akdeniz 2013, 5). Akdeniz argues that “the challenges posed by what began as the Arab Spring...are impossible to face alone not only for Turkey but also for the EU. Developments have brought about a more difficult foreign policy environment for both in their common neighbourhood.” (Akdeniz 2013, 5) Owing to the change in the regional reputation of Turkey, the deteriorating relations with important regional partners and the deepening general instability in the neighbourhood all hindered the Turkish economy living up to its foreign trade potential. (Sağlam 2013) After 2012, the trade volume between Turkey and the Middle Eastern and Northern African countries dropped.<sup>17</sup> It seems that 2014 will see a rise in trade volumes, nevertheless 2013 showed how instability and certain foreign policy moves can influence the results in Turkish trade.

Important transformations occurred in the EU as well. In 2012, the European Commission changed its attitude towards Turkey and started a “positive agenda”. (Akdeniz 2013, 2; Szigetvári 2014, 40; Usul 2014, 283) The outspoken aim of the EU’s agenda was not only to keep the Turkish accession process alive, but to put it back on track. Both the change

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<sup>17</sup> Source of data: website of the Turkish Statistical Institute, <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/>

of the perception of Turkey in the European elite and the domestic political changes influenced these developments.<sup>18</sup>

After the AKP's second victory in 2007 Turkey not only had the potential and capabilities of an influential actor but started to behave like one and started to articulate its regional claims. The growing self-esteem of the Turkish leadership and the diversification of foreign relations caused political repercussions in the EU and the debate started over "who lost Turkey?" (Evin et al 2010, 7). This coincided with the realization from the European side that Turkey became a clear economic and political factor in its neighbourhood that can serve as an important asset for the EU's foreign policy and economic purposes. Turkey could be a credible intermediary of the European interest to its neighbouring regions. (Kirişci, Tocci and Walker 2010, 24-28) "Turkey may represent an asset to the Western alliance precisely because its policies in the neighbourhood are distinct and not simply a replica of American and EU policies in the region." (Evin, et al 2010, 29) Turkey's real potential lies in helping the region to integrate deeper in the global system, thus conduce to the realization of Western interests in the neighbouring areas.

However, Turkey shows proneness to succumb to authoritarian tendencies, especially under the current leadership of the AKP. "Turkey's accession process continues to represent the best guarantee that the country's domestic transformation will proceed towards a higher standards of democracy." (Evin et al. 2010, 32) Cagaptay argues that the Turkish "economic miracle" was driven by a blend of political stability, European money and access to emerging markets and Muslim-majority economies. (Cagaptay 2013, 7) To follow this pattern the continuation of EU integration is still crucial.

"The future of Turkey-EU relations is really about what the EU will decide it wants to be, a decision which Germany and France will be key to determine." (Cagaptay 2013, 16) In 2005, France and Germany were the advocates of an alternative way of the Turkish accession process.<sup>19</sup> This attitude changed after 2009 – President Sarkozy ceased to openly speak about the privileged partnership and President Hollande never took up the negative attitude in the Turkish negotiation process. Furthermore, Hollande gave his permission to lift the French veto on opening the chapter on Regional Policy & Coordination of Structural Instruments. As a result of the new "positive agenda" the warming up process between Turkey and the EU

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<sup>18</sup> In the EU GAEC meeting in December 2012 the Member States used the word "accession" in connection with Turkey first time since 2007. (Akdeniz 2013, 3)

<sup>19</sup> It was president Sarkozy, who proposed a privileged partnership status to Turkey instead of full accession and German Chancellor, Merkel took up the same line of rhetoric.

started from the beginning of 2013.<sup>20</sup> However, the Gezi Park protests, the excessive use of force by the Turkish police against the protestors and later the government's acts curbing the independence of the judiciary postponed the restart of the negotiations until November 2013. Nevertheless, at the end of 2013 – after long negotiations – Turkey signed the readmission agreement on illegal immigrants, and EU Commissioner Cecilia Malström officially opened the Visa Liberalization Dialogue for Turkey.<sup>21</sup> In the framework of the positive agenda, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President of the EU Herman van Rompuy visited Ankara.

### **Internal factors**

After analysing the main external influences, I turn my attention to the internal framework that I specified earlier. For practical purposes I handle Schweller's four internal variables that filter the external incentives in pairs. (Schweller 2004) The first and the last variables of Schweller's, namely elite consensus and elite cohesion will give an answer to how much the elite creates one group and to what extent clashes are expected between the decision makers and the others. Major changes and difficult decisions are only possible in a state of consensus. These factors emphasize that it is not states that make decisions but their leaders. In Turkey, the democratically elected government is the policy executive that defines the foreign policy decisions as well. Traditionally there were different focal points in Turkish foreign policy decisions, not all inside the government. The main influential institutions were the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the government. However, the military leadership intervened primarily through the National Security Council and the incumbent president also influenced foreign policy decisions, while the Kemalist business elite groups also lobbied in different fora. The AKP's era changed this pattern enhancing the power of the Prime Minister in foreign policy making, while radically reducing the role of the military and the Kemalist business groups. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has lost some of its autonomy and has been rather focusing on the implementation of the foreign policy line dictated by the Prime Minister. New elite groups have become influential, especially the Anatolian bourgeoisie that provides the financial background of the AKP government.

One of the major fractures inside the Turkish elite at the moment can be observed in the Kemalist versus Islamist/Muslim angle. As we can see from the elections results (even if a

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<sup>20</sup> after the presidency of Cyprus of the EU

<sup>21</sup> Cecilia Malmström signs the Readmission Agreement and launches the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue with Turkey. Press Release, European Commission, Brussels, 16 December 2013 [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-13-1259\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1259_en.htm) (accessed: 23/07/2014)

high percent of the Turkish society did not vote) other political parties have not even got close to the AKP's position. In 2002 the AKP received 34,28%, in 2007 46,66% and in 2011 49,83% of the votes. Because of the Turkish electoral system the increase in the percentage of the votes did not automatically mean an increase in the number of seats (the number actually decreased), however, it signals a continuous support and strong basis of legitimacy.

The once leading secularist Kemalist political groups, represented mainly by the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) lost their power during the 1980's and 1990's and failed to redefine themselves. After 2002, the CHP became the second biggest party again, but has not been able to question the power of the AKP so far. Neither could other nationalistic and conservative elite groups. The opposition parties – both inside and outside the Turkish parliament - united behind a common candidate for the 2014 presidential elections. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, an academic and diplomat, the former Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation represented a moderate political line that they wanted to be acceptable for both the hesitants with stronger feelings towards Islam and the Kemalists. (Today's Zaman 02/07/2014) The result of the presidential elections proved that this was still not enough, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 51,79% of the votes, thus obviated the need for a run-off.

The military is an unavoidable segment of the Islamist-Kemalist fraction. The military regards itself the protector of Kemalism and as such the values and existence of the Republic. (Sakallioğlu 1997, 154) On this basis, the military intervened several times in politics, the leadership heavily pressured the civilian political elite changing their decisions and political strategies. This role started to erode from the second half of the 1990's. One of the major objectives of the AKP was to decrease the military's power on politics. Fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria, the AKP started to establish civilian control over the military. The military's role in the previous coups, especially in the so-called postmodern coup in 1997 that heavily influenced the creation of the AKP has taught the lesson for the AKP's leadership. In 2007, the latest round of the presidential elections, the military tried to block the nomination of the AKP'S candidate, Abdullah Gül, and the Constitutional Court almost closed the party. The AKP "attacked" the military on two fronts. On the one hand they reduced the military's role in politics and established civilian control over it. On the other hand the government started to discredit the military leaders. Referring to a civilian-military coup plot, high level officers from the Turkish Armed Forces got detained, including former chiefs of staff. The Ergenekon (in 2008) and the Balyoz (2010) cases wiped out the military leadership making it possible to appoint new, "more cooperative" officers, and also questioned the highly valued

moral stance of the military within the Turkish society. (Egeresi 2013). At a later stage other well-known Kemalist institutions, such as the Council of Higher Education and lately the judicial corpse have come under pressure from the government. This way, the AKP managed to demolish the strongest traditionally Kemalist institutions of the state administration.

The AKP forms a relatively cohesive political elite group, with strong political and economic support from the Muslim bourgeoisie. There are interest-clashes inside the governing political party that was strongly visible during the last year and a half. First, during the Gezi Park protests strong criticism emerged inside the party over how Erdoğan managed the demonstrations (Egeresi 2013b, 4-5). Later in 2013, as the corruption scandal revealed the internal cracks again, Erdoğan restructured his government at a very early phase of the crisis. Nonetheless, these cracks inside the governing elite have not widened up enough to remarkably decrease the cohesion of the government and the governing elite. The presidential election of Erdoğan might have brought differences inside the party (Abdullah Gül is seen as a leader reluctantly opposing Erdoğan's views), but with him the AKP remained the strongest party.

At this point the connection between the AKP and the Hizmet movement is worth mentioning. Fethullah Gülen and his strong religious movement was once a strong ally of the Islamist political groups and the AKP government, however, the relationship started to deteriorate around 2011 behind the scenes and became public during the Gezi Park demonstrations. Hizmet's wide network reached into high positions inside the Turkish state bureaucracy and economy, having strong influence on domestic and foreign policy. However, the dispute between Erdoğan and Gülen reached the point, where the AKP started to accuse the Hizmet of building a parallel or "deep" state that aims at toppling the Turkish government. The "witch-hunt" against the Hizmet has proved to be serious inside the Islamist elite, however, the break between the movement and Erdoğan has not proved to be fatal. (Egeresi 2013b). Based on these, the observation that the Turkish government has room for maneuver and the possibility to conduct foreign policy relatively unconstrained from the inside in the present set up, is well grounded. We cannot precisely rate how much the break with the Hizmet movement decreased the cohesion of the Islamist elite, but it certainly caused inconveniences that contradicted the AKP's foreign policy goals (e.g.: Erdoğan's campaign for the extradition of Gülen from the US, or the closure of the highly evaluated school network run by the Hizmet movement both inside and outside Turkey).

The EU was and still is an important political anchor in Turkish politics. After 2002, the AKP launched the reform process that led to the start of the negotiations. However, the

rejection from some major EU member states curbed the process and Turkey started to retune its foreign policy goals. The rise to regional or global influence always had a second meaning. Europe's rejection (again) hit Turkey's pride. Turkey wants to show Europe that they have become a meaningful regional factor. The AKP has never lost its pro accession stance, only toned it down after 2006. The AKP leadership has always followed the European reaction to the Turkish internal and external policies, was sensitive about it. Even if Turkish politicians occasionally threaten that Turkey will leave the accession process, or join other structures of integration, these are based rather on tactical than strategic considerations. Consequently, it was not surprising that the AKP responded positively to the new agenda of the EU. Although the Gezi Park events temporarily disrupted the approach, the new chapter was open by the end of 2013 and the AKP initiated the necessary reforms for the Visa Liberalization Dialogue. At the beginning of the year Erdoğan spoke about their intention to speed up the rapprochement with the EU in 2014. (Today's Zaman 01/01/2014) However, not much has been done yet; the internal political scandals and the campaign periods for local and presidential elections disrupted the process. In the run up to the presidential election the AKP initiated a new reform package that included elements aiming at Kurdish reconciliation. Their main goal was unquestionably to boost popular support, but the reforms also contribute to the EU accession process as well.

Interestingly, the approach of the main opposition Kemalist elite, once the guardian of the "European path" turned into a rather critical stance towards the EU. The CHP has been going through a process of search for a new self-definition. Feeling the loss of political power, the Kemalist elite focused all their efforts on criticizing the "Islamist threat" and emphasizing secularism. With the successful reform process of the AKP, perceiving the EU's welcome towards the new governing party the CHP further strengthened its criticism. The military, the guardian of Atatürk's legacy became less enthusiastic about the accession after losing power and prerogatives as an effect of the EU reform process.

The interests of the business elite heavily influence Turkish foreign policy decisions as well. Kirişci argues that Turkish foreign policy activism is strongly interrelated with the interests of the main Turkish business associations and business groups. The "zero problems with the neighbours" policy reflects these interest of a stable external environment, where Turkish companies can build up trade relations and lower the risk of their investments. According to Kirişci the main decisive factor behind the paradigm change in the Turkish foreign policy towards the East was motivated and supported by these business elite groups,

especially the Anatolian bourgeoisie. (Kirişci 2009) <sup>22</sup> Besides the original Kemalist, exclusive business elite that was concentrated in Istanbul and the main cities, from the end of the 1970's a new group of businessmen started to emerge, different in its character. The "Muslim entrepreneurs" from Anatolian cities and towns started to become influential factors and used their informal networks of Islamic solidarity for their interests. (ESI 2005) Family values and religion became sufficient to support the success of these communities, even though the compatibility of Islam and business life was seriously questioned. (Tuğal 2002; 99- 106) Islamic solidarity was a strong motif behind securing a growing market share in Muslim regions. In contrast to the old business elite, the so-called "Anatolian Tigers" (Acar, Demir and Toprak 2004) projected an East-looking strategy, building up relations in the neighboring Middle Eastern regions and even looking to the Muslim countries of the fast growing Southeast Asia. Parallel with their emergence, the patterns of Turkish external economic relations were transformed. New trading partners from the East became important and previously neglected regions such as the Middle East and North Africa were (re)discovered. Trade volumes and Turkish investments started to grow only after the AKP came to power, especially as the East became target of political efforts as well. Lots of originally small companies grew strong and diversified their trade relations. Their main interest is and was a stable environment for economic growth and government support for expansion abroad. The AKP provided the necessary background for the emergence of Turkish companies in the neighboring and even farther regions in the third world.

The interests of the Kemalist businessmen lie rather in the Western economic orientation, though political stability and liberal economic policies are the most important factors. Even during the period of the "Ankara Moment" (Bank and Karadağ 2013) after 2007 the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği, TÜSİAD) emphasized the need to return to the EU track. According to their views, Turkey cannot accelerate its growth and competitiveness without intensifying its cooperation with countries more developed than Turkey. Their efforts are aimed at the EU accession and strengthened external and trade relations. (Buğra 1998, 528)

Events after 2011-2012, however, destroyed the Turkish efforts of creating a stable regional setting for political and business purposes. The Syrian civil war and its spillover, the deteriorating connections of Turkey with some influential regional players, the disintegration of Iraq, especially after ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) established their caliphate,

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<sup>22</sup> on the emergence of the Anatolian bourgeoisie see also: (Acar, Demir and Toprak 2004; ESI 2005)

have all added to the changes of the board where Turkish businessmen have to “play”. It is not surprising, therefore, that the gradual restart of the EU accession negotiations is welcomed by both the old and the new business elite. The EU is still the main economic partner of Turkey (at least 40%) providing a stable and enormous market for Turkish goods and at the same time a stable source of investments (Akdeniz 2013, 1). The instabilities in the Middle East coinciding with a positive campaign from the EU’s side can result in a turn back to the more stable market. The Kemalist business elite has been supporting this idea for a long time (HDN 14/09/2013), and now a possible push from the new bourgeoisie can give a strong impetus to speed up the return to the EU track.

After examining the first two factors from Schweller’s theory, I turn my attention to the questions of social cohesion, and the government’s vulnerability. At first sight, one can observe at least a steady or even growing popularity of the AKP government. The consecutive successes in local and parliamentary elections suppose unquestionable legitimacy of the governing elite. Even after the heavy-handed crackdown on the Gezi Park demonstrations and the corruption scandals at the end of 2013, the AKP received almost 40 % of the votes at the 2014 local elections and Erdoğan won in the first round of the presidential elections. However, the picture is way more complex, social differences and distress lie in the background. Even if the government has managed to build strong popular support, the government policies resulted in the polarization of the society.

Foreign policy and economic successes of the AKP era eased or covered up serious problems in the society. The first AKP government handled the economic crisis, the reform packages and the promise of EU integration gave answers to certain social claims or at least a promise that problems will be taken care of at a certain point. The fast growing economy and the rising level of living standards provided serious support for the AKP, especially in the countryside. Even if they did not find a solution to the Kurdish issue, the signs of efforts boosted political support also from the Kurdish populated areas.<sup>23</sup>

The new political successes in the regional vicinity of Turkey, the diplomatic and economic expansion hid the polarization inside the Turkish social structures. Kemalists have always been suspicious of the AKP; nevertheless, they also lacked any unifying force or a political party that can channel in their anxieties. The suppressed tensions inside the society were revealed exactly when the light of the “Turkish star” started to fade away in the Middle East in 2012. The first demonstrations started in the summer of 2012 against the new

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<sup>23</sup> The candidates of AKP won high percentage of the Kurdish majority areas in the latest parliamentary and local elections

restrictive amendments in the abortion law, but these movements stayed relatively peaceful. May 2013 brought a major appearance of the discontent in the Gezi Park. It was triggered by the government's plan to build a shopping mall resembling a military building from the Ottoman era in the heart of Istanbul and a new law banning the vending of alcohol after 10 pm in convenience stores. (Egeresi 2013b, 2-3) These symbolic issues represented the dissatisfaction of the young secular generations with the AKP government. The protests escalated, the violent clashes between demonstrators and the police left several dead and wounded. The Gezi Park events brought serious criticism from the EU causing the postponement of the restart of the accession negotiations until November. (Akdeniz 2013, 8)

The Gezi Park protests ended approximately a month later, nevertheless, the social tensions did not decrease. In order to control the opposing ideas, the AKP initiated radical and undemocratic actions. The banning of Twitter and Youtube or pressuring media outlets to lay off journalists drew serious internal and external criticism. (HDN 02/04/2014; Rettman 2014) After the corruption scandals broke out in December 2013 the government took even more radical actions pulling the police under stricter control and restricting the independence of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (Hâkimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu, HSYK). Even if the controversial law that strongly decreased the judicial independence was abolished by the Constitutional Court in April, it signaled the government's intention of enhancing state control. (Today's Zaman 11/04/2014) A second round of arrests against police officers started in the summer 2014. The AKP have been blaming the scandal and the economic difficulties on an international conspiracy by a parallel society, a deep state inside Turkey that was planning a coup against the present government. These groups from the parallel society are financed from abroad, and the Hizmet movement became a primary suspect. Taking actions against the previously mentioned Hizmet movement and its institutions harmed Turkey's international prestige and alienated the numerous followers of Fetullah Gülen in Turkey. (Egeresi 2013b)

The polarization of the Turkish society has become obvious by now, and the tensions are constantly growing. In the absence of a unified opposition group there is no political alternative to the AKP on any side of the political spectrum. The results of the local elections in 2014 showed that even if the discontent is growing inside the society, a big proportion of the population supports the government. Nevertheless, the immediate actions (making new laws regarding the police, appointing new prosecutors, banning social media sites) can only tackle or repress the problems for a short period of time. The government has to return back to the track of reforms that will coincide with the demands from the EU.

The domestic problems have negative effects on the foreign relations and the Turkish economy as well. One of the main pillars behind both the dynamic economic growth and the growing regional political influence was political stability and predictability. The democratic deficit of Turkey demolished the credibility of the Turkish support of democratic changes, the instability and the government's heavy-handed reactions harmed the picture that Turkey had tried to communicate earlier. The economy was hit also by the domestic instabilities; their result was immediately visible at the Turkish stock exchange (10% drop) and the depreciation of the YTL in the first days of the crisis (Akdeniz 2013, 8). The Turkish economy is highly dependent on the continuous inflows of foreign investments, which finances the high current account deficit. The key to high investments and the access to cheap loans would be the stability of the political sphere. The economic problems and the lack of stability have been raised by different business groups, research institutes and members from the civil sector.<sup>24</sup> Their unanimous conclusion was that the return to the reform agenda, easing the social tensions and stopping the polarization of the society are unavoidable.

Nevertheless, the EU criticized Turkey heavily in 2014 due to developments with regard to allegations of high level corruption, the removal of the prosecutors and police officers in charge of the original investigations and the ban of internet sites. The results of the local elections enhanced the confidence and the power of the Turkish leadership, thus the possible influence of the EU criticism. The spokeswoman of the European Commission said "Following the overall worrying developments which have taken place over the past three months, Turkey ... now urgently needs to re-engage fully in reforms in line with European standards." The first half of 2014 was not predicted to be an easy year for the Turkish EU accession. Erdoğan's harsh speeches against Israel<sup>25</sup> during the Gaza crisis also drew negative attention from the West. However, the EU is not likely to step beyond criticism, the approach is to remain as constructively engaged as possible, even if no progress on membership is made. (Baker 2014). In the current geopolitical situation (civil war in Syria, crisis in Ukraine) it is not in the EU's interest to deteriorate the relations with Turkey. The Turkish positive attitude is also unavoidable in the peace process of Cyprus and the European business community would also disapprove such a move.

Social cohesion can be perceived, in the meaning that the government still enjoys high support from the society gives space to maneuver to make its own foreign policy decisions.

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<sup>24</sup> Erdoğan compared Israel's actions during the operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip to Nazism and publicly called it genocide. Today's Zaman 24/07/2014;

<sup>25</sup> Lately several articles and statements emerged urging the government to return to the reform agenda. e.g.: Today's Zaman 25/06/2014; Today's Zaman 24/06/2014

High ratios of the AKP voters are from the Anatolian rural population and are concerned rather by the domestic politics and not the foreign policies. However, the different scandals and the Gezi Park protests show growing vulnerability of the government that the AKP controlled with undemocratic measures that harmed the AKP's own foreign policy and economic goals. At this point the domestic political environment contradicts the AKP's foreign policy ambitions. Returning to the reform agenda and returning to the EU negotiations' track could seriously decrease the criticism from different social actors, a way for Turkey to regain its internal stability. This is the only possible way to achieve the AKP's ambitious plans, such as to rise among the 10 biggest economies in the world by 2023. Even if this goal might be virtually impossible to achieve, to keep up the steady economic growth Turkey needs stabilizing factors that secure the inflows of foreign investments. The Customs Union which was the main element of integration has become a source of friction in the last period as well. Turkey should unconditionally accept and adapt any EU trade agreement on customs with third countries, while Turkey is not allowed to make decisions that are not in harmony with the EU regulations. According to the CU agreement, the countries signing a free trade agreement with the EU automatically gain access to Turkish markets. The EU started to conclude agreements with stronger economies, such as South Korea, Mexico and the US that would be disadvantageous for Turkey. (Szigetvári 2014, 41-42) Turkish ministers threatened that Turkey would need to review the membership now that it "creates unfair treatment in trade with the union." (Today's Zaman 25/03/2013)

## **Conclusion**

The rapidly changing regional setting around Turkey created an unstable security environment. The only few years ago "rising star" of the Middle East, with ambitions of regional soft power misperceived its regional position and did not make the necessary reforms in its foreign policy. After the escalation of the crisis in Syria and later in Egypt, the Turkish reaction caused credibility loss that led to losing important trading partners. The scale of the changes of the Arab spring created a need to find a new common ground for a Turkish-EU rapprochement. At the same time the fear of losing Turkey in the regional turmoil grew in Europe. The political changes in certain countries made a turn possible in the EU's attitude towards Turkey. From the end of 2012 the positive agenda was initiated, and Europe, out of pragmatic considerations started to show a more welcoming face towards Turkey.

In my paper I used Randall Schweller's neo-classical realist theory to examine the question of the Turkish EU accession from a new angle. The external, systemic influences

inevitably influence the Turkish foreign policy steps. These external influences are filtered through a set of domestic factors before translated into certain decisions of the foreign policy executive. After 2002 one can observe a unique process that provided a relatively flexible environment for the AKP's foreign policy vision. The gradual emergence of a new Muslim conservative elite, the growing power of the religious constituency and the demise of the old elite group(s) led to the victory of the AKP. Powered by the interests of the new electoral voter basis and the new religious economic elite, the AKP started to pursue a new foreign policy trying to build influence in the neighbouring regions. The economic and foreign policy successes of the "Ankara Moment" fortified the power of the current government, but at the same time suppressed serious domestic tensions and pressures. The strong popular support of the government gives legitimacy and the demise of the opposing elite groups made it impossible to counterbalance the AKP. Nevertheless, this does not mean an unanimous support for the government's policies. After almost 10 years of social polarization and the alienation of the Kemalist groups, the domestic dissatisfaction could not be covered up anymore by the reinvigorated glory of Turkey. The Gezi Park demonstrations reflected the deep polarization of the domestic environment, the contradiction between the Turkish government's rhetoric and the reality. And at this point the Turkish domestic politics started to contradict and hinder the foreign policy ambitions.

By late 2004 the credibility of the EU conditionality in Turkey's accession process had decreased dramatically. However, Yilmaz pointed out that there are certain domestic drivers of the Europeanization process. These drivers, such as the significant (yet still relatively weak) civil society, business groups, political parties and the media inherently influence the reform process and call for further democratization. (Yilmaz 2014) At the same time the Turkish elite has never abandoned the aim of the Turkish accession. A stronger Turkey has emerged with diversified foreign policy goals and means of a middle power. Nonetheless, one of the main sources of this power still is the strong relations between the EU and Turkey. Oğuzlu argues that "the fact that Turkey's rising regional and international profile in recent years ... has been to a significant degree informed by the continuation of the accession process." (Oğuzlu 2012, 240)

EU-Turkish relations are traditionally characterized by ups and downs, in certain periods Turkey shove off from the EU but eventually turned back to the accession track. 2013 brought a positive agenda from the EU that triggered a positive response from the Turkish side. However, after the local elections and especially during the campaign of the presidential elections European criticism has grown again. During the campaign period the AKP and the

prime minister himself tried to show the picture of a strong leader. The exaggerated criticism of the Gaza war can be also understood in this context. Predictably, after the election campaign this political rhetoric will be toned down. However, we still have to see the effects of the reconstruction of the Turkish government after Edoğan's take off.

There are strong domestic and the external pressures that influence Turkish foreign policy back to the reform agenda. The EU does not provide a clear perspective for the accession, thus the Turkish government is not willing to make the necessary and painful reforms. At the same time, the reform process goes forward slowly for domestic purposes, and sooner or later the normalization of the EU-Turkish relations have to come. This is an obvious interest of the Turkish government as well. "The consolidation of political reforms and economic progress at home would re-boost Turkey's potential to inspire others. This is most likely if Turkey demonstrates a firm commitment to full membership to the EU." (Akdeniz 2013, 6) The domestic problems and the radical foreign policy steps and statements from Turkish leaders negatively influence Turkish soft power capabilities, retune Turkish foreign policy and present the return to the European track as an unequivocal interest of Turkey.

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