

Turkey's Hegemonic Legacies and EU Accession Bid

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Abstract: *The current paper focuses on Turkey's EU accession bid in the light of Ahmet Davutoğlu's thoughts for her positioning in the peripheral and the international systems. The importance of analyzing the former Prime Minister's thoughts and methodology is high for anybody to understand Turkey's strategic aims and their consequences for the systemic stability mainly on the regional level. Moreover, the afore-mentioned debate refers to the problematique of the future of the EU, the transformation of its nature and the core issues surrounding the post-war stability in Europe, since Turkey is a candidate country for EU accession. In other words, the nature of Ahmet Davutoğlu's foreign policy priorities and practices is described in parallel with the substance of the cosmotheoretical values having led Europe to a relatively peaceful post-war coexistence of its nations.*

Keywords: *EU politics; Turkey; Ahmet Davutoğlu; IR theory; hegemonism.*

I. Introduction

In the beginning, the analytical and descriptive framework of the paper is worth to be mentioned. On the 28th of August 2014, Ahmet Davutoğlu became the new Prime Minister of Turkey succeeding Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and handing his position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over to Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. Due to the limits of the present paper, there is a brief analysis and test of the hypothesis that Erdoğan's Turkey has emerged as a new challenger for regional hegemony within the last decade and the new heads of Turkey's foreign policy seem to work toward this goal. To put it bluntly, what is argued here is that, in the AKP era, Turkey's foreign policy perceptions are absolutely in line with this remark and, thus, Davutoğlu's theoretical argumentation has found fertile ground on a practical policy-making level (Mazis, 2012). In this regard, Davutoğlu's promotion to Prime Minister seems to have come as a reward for his foreign policy initiatives up until now. After testing the above-mentioned hypothesis – that Turkey is a potential hegemon – the present paper refers to Turkey's bid for EU accession and the contradiction between this fact and Davutoğlu's strategic thought. There is a broad range of questions related to this problematique which are either answered here or giving food for thought for further research. For example, can Davutoğlu's Turkey fit into such an EU? What would such a process tell about the changing nature of the EU? How would the EU be transformed if major actors expressed hegemonic aspirations?

Mainly due to the current economic crisis, the "European dream" is at a crucial crossroads and thus, it is very important that any positive or negative parameters should be revealed. Emphasis is given to the balance of power as the main pillar of the EU structure as well as on the rejection of any phenomena disrupting this balance of power. In that sense, the structure of the current paper is as follows; first, it is answered why Turkey is considered a hegemonic power in the light of Davutoğlu's thought and following this, how the EU accession bid is defined by Turkey; in the second part, the case study of Nabucco is stressed as an indicative example; third, the rationale of the EU anti-hegemonic nature is summarized and consequently, the EU nature is described in comparison with Turkey's strategic choices; and finally, some overall remarks are highlighted.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Ahmet Davutoğlu and Neo-ottomanism

Since 2002 and the rise of the AKP to power, Davutoğlu's spirit has dominated Turkish foreign policy. First, he served as an advisor to Erdoğan between 2002 and 2009 and afterwards as foreign minister from 2009 to 2014. As an academic, he had written *Strategic Depth* (2010) describing his views on Turkey's potentials with regard to the state's regional and world role. His contribution was not identified as a new vision in Turkish foreign policy, but as connected to the old Neo-Ottoman rhetoric. Neo-ottomanism has been identified with the adoption by Turkey of a dynamic and multi-dimensional foreign policy aiming for a leading role both in the Turkic and the Islamic world. In this way, the Kemalist status quo principle as well as its tactic of abolishing the ottoman past is disputed. Neo-ottomanism embodies a more extrovert vision with regard to the Turkish grand strategy, which becomes obvious in Turkey's post-Cold War era revisionist rhetoric and practices (Sözen, 2010: 106-107).

The term "neo-ottomanism" originates from the ideological fermentations of the 19th century and the "ottomanism" from the last decades before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The basic logic behind ottomanism was linked to the idea of construction of a major identity able to incorporate heterogeneous national or regional groups in the empire. In this regard, ottomanism was a tool for the survival of the ottoman state and the legitimization of the Turks' overexpansion into the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and North Africa (Mardin 2000: 14). Modern neo-ottomanism has become known mainly after Turgut Özal's era as that set of thoughts favoring the re-definition of the Turkish grand strategy in terms of power maximization abroad and establishment of inner cohesion. Cengiz Çandar was the first to introduce the term "neo-ottomanism" trying to describe Özal's as well as Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's rhetoric and policies towards assuming a leading role in a vast area "from Adriatic to the Chinese Wall". Thus, neo-ottomans included both Islamic and Turkic populations. For this reason, in the post-Cold War era, neo-ottomanism has been identified with Turkey's revisionist policies concerning its relations with neighbours and its participation in international organizations. In the relevant bibliographical references as well as in the current study, it is worthy to note that neo-ottomanism has come to describe an overall set of practices not necessarily identified with past ottoman territories.

Conceptualizing the strategic framework towards regional hegemony, Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth* places neo-ottomanism at the core of his analysis. Therefore, the derived analysis is in conflict with Kemalist principles of status quo preservation, which were in harmony with the post-1923 nation-state logic and not with the old imperial practice. Davutoğlu criticized Kemalists accusing them of neglecting to assume 'a strong position in the international system'. In contrast, they implemented "a strategy for preserving the borders of the National Pact (Misak-ı Milli)". Furthermore, instead of seeking 'a status of an alternative or a competitive actor to the west', modern Turkey's 'simple participation in it was preferred' (Davutoğlu, 2010: 123). According to Davutoğlu, Turkey has to respect its historical 'khalīfah' and imperial role and increase its power acquiring – in John Mearsheimer's words (2001: xii-xiii) – the status of the regional hegemon and establishing, in this way, its own sphere of influence.

Of course, such neo-ottoman perceptions have not been new. According to Alexander Murinson (2006: 947), in the aftermath of the Cold War, many alternative neo-ottoman

versions, such as Turgut Özal's maximalist and Necmettin Erbakan's multi-dimensional foreign policy have become known and Davutoğlu's strategic depth analysis is not an exception. They are all based on the same logic; the rise of Turkey to a status of great power with its own sphere of influence in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and as far as the so-called Turkic world in Central Asia. Nevertheless, what distinguishes Davutoğlu's work from Özal or Erbakan is the recommended – let's say – methodological framework for achieving an already-existing set of strategic aims. Basically, Davutoğlu outlines the scope of strategic aims, adds soft power as a strategic tool, rejects the panacea of cooperation with Israel and EU membership orientation, encourages the use of economy as a foreign policy tool towards Turkey's empowerment and in general, he underlines Turkey's need of obtaining an extrovert strategic vision far from the Kemalist principle of "peace in the country, peace in the world". With this prospect, while being minister of foreign affairs, Davutoğlu stated that he is not "a minister of a nation state only" (2010: 9).

Furthermore, Davutoğlu – according to Aydinli and Mathews (2008: 704-705) – opposes "most practices in the modernizing world" ignoring the past, because the foundations of extrovert strategic vision – such as geography, population, democratic system and economy – constitute historical values used as tools in the modern era. In accordance with neo-ottomanism, he claims that the identity aspects of the ottoman legacy can be used to the benefit of Turkey's strategic aims. Consequently, the "strategic depth" is, at the same time, geographical, historical, linguistic, cultural, economic depth. Therefore, Davutoğlu evolves his thought on the basis of the historical, anthropological and religious substance of the east without ignoring, at the same time, theoretical tools of international relations analysis and strategic thinking of the west, such as geopolitics (Mazis, 2012). In the interior, such parallel processes have, also, characterized the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) era. Significant emphasis has been put on Islamic identity as an aspect of individual and cultural identification (Bilgin, 2008: 415). Despite their Islamic roots, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the party leadership have not islamised Turkey and consequently, they have not distanced themselves from Atatürk's legacy. Perhaps this is justified by the past experience with Necmettin Erbakan's pro-Islamist parties which could not maintain power on an anti-secular platform (Çelik and Naqvi, 2007: 1). According to Erdoğan (2004), "Turkish society desires to adopt a concept of modernity that does not reject tradition, a belief in universalism that accepts localism, an understanding of rationalism that does not disregard the spiritual meaning of life, and a choice for change that is not fundamentalist". However, in the sphere of the country's foreign relations, Islam became a main ideological and legitimizing pillar of Ankara's power maximization ambitions beyond Turkism. In other words, Islamic rhetoric has been integrated perfectly into Turkey's quiver of elements of power towards power upgrade and regional hegemony (Mazis, 2013).

Developing his concept in line with the long neo-ottoman tradition and the ideal of a strong and self-sufficient Turkey having acquired a hegemonic position in its greater region, Davutoğlu gives special emphasis on Turkey's actual or potential participation in international institutions and subsequently, the EU. Referring to that, on the one hand, he states (2009: 13) that "I want to make it clear: Membership in the EU is Turkey's strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era". On the other hand, he refers to the EU as not the exclusive option for Turkey, while he is inclined to believe that approaching Asia is much more beneficial than joining the EU (2010: 756). Under this prospect, he regards Turkey's EU accession bid as a practice of increasing

diplomatic leverage especially with regard to the relatively weak states of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East, which Ankara tries to lead. Essentially, Davutoğlu produces a policy recommendation, which combines the rise of Turkey to a hegemonic status with its accession to the EU. In general, the AKP government analyzes the international system and Turkey's participation in international regimes in a very different way. Turkey's activities as a great power manipulating regimes' functions are regarded as a basic principle. In other words, international regimes are not regarded as fora for cooperation, but as means for implementing hegemonic inclinations. In this regard, the state's behavior is in conflict with the ideal of multilateral cooperation with the prospect of establishing a balance of interests, since self-centered actions and self-assessment as a great power are adopted.

Thus, it is reasonable to say that the accession to the EU is, also, defined as a means towards power maximization and acquiring a "hegemon status", in contrast to the spirit of the European institutions, which is outlined later in the current paper. To achieve regional hegemony, Turkey needs to mobilize external resources, since it first needs to increase its diplomatic leverage vis à vis the countries of the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East or even Central Asia and to attract necessary funding in order to become the unquestioned political-economic bridge between the east and the west. This necessity becomes more urgent if Turkey's disadvantage compared to regional competitors, such as Russia, is kept in mind. Especially in the post-Cold War era, the undisputed chasm of power between Turkey and Russia has urged the first to adopt external balancing, meaning to establish alliances with relatively powerful patrons without excluding other proximate regions of interest such as the Middle East. Besides, it is symptomatic that any changes regarding the EU-Turkey relations have directly affected Ankara's efforts to increase its strategic leverage in regions such as the Caucasus or the Balkans (Aydin, 2007: 6). This is why Davutoğlu expressed the idea that Turkey's one-dimensional pro-EU policies can be regarded as major mistakes (2010: 727). To put it bluntly, the EU accession is one more strategic choice adopted by Turkey as far as it serves the main strategic aim of regional hegemony.

III. Discussion

3.1 The Nabucco Project as a Special Case Study

A characteristic example of the hegemonic lenses through which the AKP government in Turkey sees the EU accession prospect and which has been a concern in the EU-Turkey negotiations is the implementation of the Nabucco pipeline. Nabucco is a potential gas pipeline linking the Caspian region and particularly Azeri gas fields to Austria and, therewith, Central Europe. Up to now, it has not been implemented mainly due to Turkish ambitions described below. Without depreciating the US and the EU support for the project, a series of problems has postponed its implementation. It would carry more than 23 bcm (billion cubic meters) of natural gas, while it was estimated that it could become the main pillar of the Turkish pipeline system and render it a significant artery for the EU energy imports by 2030 (Bilgin, 2011: 411).

Turkey, trying to strengthen its position, dismissed the *acquis communautaire* pressing the European Commission to unfreeze the "energy" chapter 15 of the accession negotiations. In specific, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that his government would "review our position" on the Nabucco pipeline, if its bid to join the EU were impaired (Deutsche Welle, 2009).

Moreover, Turkey asked for keeping 15% of the gas along with the right to re-sell it at prices defined by itself (Kardas, 2011: 62-63). In other words, Turkey wanted to behave like a producer while being just a transit country. According to the Minister of Energy Hilmi Güler, we are entering into the European Union with pipelines” (Bacik, 2006: 304). Obviously, such claims are not compatible with the EU market rules and, thus, a problem has arisen over Turkey’s compliance with the EU conditionality.

Apart from the state’s key geographical position on the East-West energy corridor, Turkey seemed to exploit the EU need for diversification of energy routes and the relevant decrease of its “over-dependence” from Russia. In this sense, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Gordon Brown indicated that “I will also be pressing European leaders to increase funding for a project to allow us to source energy from the Caspian Sea, reducing our dependence on Russia. I will encourage European partners to use our collective bargaining power rather than seek separate energy deals with Russia” (De Waal, 2010: 185-186). The afore-mentioned declaration resulted, also, from Moscow’s tactic to negotiate and make agreements separately with each one of the EU member-states *locking in* their energy demand. For instance, this happened in the cases of Austria, Germany, Italy and France, while in the cases of many Eastern European member-states, such as Bulgaria, Slovakia or the Czech Republic, Russian gas almost completely dominated internal markets (Cohen, 2007: 3-4). It is due to all these anomalies with regard to the EU principle of market economy that the 2006 Green Paper of the Commission of the European Communities called for “an energy mix” and “more secure energy supply” in the light of cooperation with multiple energy producers (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). In addition, on the margins of the conclusion of the Nabucco summit on the 27th of January 2009 in Budapest, it was highlighted that “the diversification of hydrocarbon sources, markets and routes of delivery based on the principles of market economy, transparency, reliability, predictability, free competition and mutual benefits, as well as to the uninterrupted and secure supply of natural gas for the domestic markets of all countries at competitive prices and conditions” is deemed necessary (Council of the European Union, 2009).

Therefore, it is concluded here that such Turkish policies opposed the *acquis communautaire* regarding the chapter 15 of the accession negotiations as well as the unification process of the European community for the sake of hegemonic ambitions. What is more intriguing is that this set of policies was implemented even under the threat of a potential denial of accession the EU. In the 2007 European Commission’s screening report, it was stressed that Turkey “has not yet ratified the ECT (Energy Charter Treaty) Trade Amendment” and, thus, many questions related with the country’s compatibility with EU legislation arose (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). Under this lens, ambitions with regard to increase of strategic influence affected Ankara’s relations with the EU. As it has been mentioned already, Turkey used the EU accession as a tool displaying a tendency to manipulate certain processes, which affect the core of the European interstate system and the balance of interests sustaining the EU structure.

3.2 The EU Nature

The nature of the EU structure and the relevant institutionalization can be defined as the absolute opposite of hegemonic legacies. As it is stressed in the current paper, the post-war integration of Europe has been implemented on an anti-hegemonic basis in the sense that the previous jigsaw puzzle of potential hegemonies and imperialist powers ceded its position to a

stable balance of power and interests. In Robert Schuman's words in 1950 (European Union, 2015), "world peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it" and consequently, Europe will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. In general, the EU nature is characterized by the peaceful coexistence of inter-governmental and supra-national institutions aiming to retain the European balance of power. Thus, hegemonic legacies are positioned absolutely at the antipode of stabilization and peace materialized via balance of interests and power.

In fact, stability and peace are achieved by a balance of power, since states seek balance in order to survive. In case this principle is not accepted and violence increases, counter-balancing alliances are created and deter any potential hegemon (Waltz, 1979: 243). It is exactly this logic which has protected the European balance of power in the post-war era, since examples such as Napoleon's France or Adolf Hitler's Germany go to show. The notion of balance of power is identified mainly with uneven growth as the major cause of war. Distribution of power, either on a European level or in the world, has been affecting systemic stability, while those states not favored in terms of power feel fear and make efforts to reverse such trends. To put it clearly, the cause of fear is found in the threats to national interests and particularly to that of survival, since uneven growth causes changes with regard to elements of power, namely the means of achieving survival or even power maximization.

It is worth to be mentioned that Thucydides, in his acclaimed book on the *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1951: ch.1, §24) was the first to introduce the idea of uneven growth as an important cause of war and antagonisms. He stressed characteristically that "the real cause I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable". Under the same lens, Lowes Dickinson tries to analyze the causes of the Second World War at the systemic level. In particular, he concludes that the world could not escape the evolutions leading to the Second World War "since the causes of this war, and of all wars, lie so deep in the whole international system, they cannot be permanently removed by the 'punishment' or the 'crushing' or any other drastic treatment of any power, let that power be as guilty as you please". In addition, according to Dickinson (2008: 67-68), "the war arose from the rivalry of states in the pursuit of power and wealth".

In the light of the above-mentioned theoretical assumptions, the post-war European balance of power is explained. This balance of power, as it has been mentioned already, represented the main pillar of the institutionalization and the establishment of the European Community of Coal and Steel (ECSC) in 1951, the European Community of Atomic Energy (EAEC or EURATOM) and the European Economic Community in 1957 as well as the further European integration in the following decades. The balance of interests and power and the crucial abolition of hegemonism as a conception have been exemplified historically in a series of functions within these institutions. The right to veto can be regarded as a parameter indicative of the harmonic inter-state organization of the European Communities (EC) and, afterwards, the European Union (EU). The right to veto has permitted relatively small member-states to counter decision-making, which they considered to be against their vital interests. Intergovernmentalism is, also, a function for the protection of the right of democratically elected governments to express their views within an inter-state partnership without being supplanted by supra-national non-elected commissioners. In this regard, the European Great Powers – i.e. Germany, France and the UK – have not been allowed

historically to turn the “European dream” into a strategy with spheres of influence and particularly, exploitation of smaller states.

It can be said that intergovernmentalism in the EU is identified with state-centric analysis in international relations, since they are both in accordance with the traditional paradigm; meaning the analysis of international relations without neglecting the importance and on the basis of international anarchy as well as states’ will and right for self-determination in the margins of it (Lijphart, 1974: 42). To put it differently, intergovernmentalism contributes decisively to securing the state-centric substance of the European sub-system. For instance, with regard to major decisions, the votes of Cyprus, Luxembourg, France and Germany have the same leverage. In terms of EU treaties’ provisions, the independence and self-determination of each member-state is secured and subsequently, no major actor can impose its will on others. If this changes profoundly due to hegemonic inclinations of one or more partners, then balance of power and of course, the EU itself will be weakened. As it has been mentioned already, history has taught us that no nation-state and no society is ready to surrender its right to independence. “Victims” form counter-balancing alliances against potential hegemons that is the state or the states trying to implement their strategies outside the balance of power. In this respect, any hegemonic inclinations of EU member-states would be catastrophic, since competitions on the basis of military power would return.

IV. Conclusion

From this specific series of assumptions, we arrive at a certain conclusion. Referring to Ahmet Davutoğlu’s recommendations and policy-making, it is indicated that the utmost strategic aim lies in hegemony and, consequently, the creation of a sphere of influence incorporating countries without granting – by definition – equal rights. Under this lens, Ankara’s efforts towards EU accession must be regarded as a means towards the implementation of the afore-mentioned strategic aim, namely as a way towards promoting state interests far from the European concepts of solidarity and cohesion on the basis of equals. In order to clarify this argumentation, the case study of Nabucco has been described and analyzed indicating that Turkey’s hegemonic strategy affects a crucial issue of the EU member-states’ prosperity, i.e. that of energy security. Historically, European states have quitted such practices as far as they have respected a certain balance of power, which is beneficial in a relatively well-balanced way. In this respect, the EU structure has been implemented in an anti-hegemonic basis, meaning that the essence of coexistence is the abolition of hegemonic inclinations. Therefore, the crux of the matter discussed in this paper refers to the incompatibility of Ahmet Davutoğlu’s and generally the AKP’s view of Turkey with the EU nature. Besides, it could argued drawing from historical examples that whenever hegemonism has risen in Europe, any structures securing the balance of power were ruined. The most profound example is related to the First World War and the end of the previous decades’ balance of power, especially in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War between 19 July 1870 and 10 May 1871.

Thus, on the one hand, it must be concluded that hegemonism is a destabilizing variable with regard to the balance of power, which is the main pillar of the EU structure. As a significant cause of war, hegemonism depicts states’ inclination to control as much resources as possible outside their borders, trying to create spheres of influence. Of course, this search

for additional means of power takes place at the expense of other actors. In this regard, such a practice can lead to the demise of the balance of power as well as the undermining of the institutionalization derived from it. Thus, hegemonic inclinations stand in contrast to the EU, which is an anti-hegemonic organization and keeps any internationalist functions dependent from its central intergovernmental structure. This means that dependency of the states from the treaty principle of supra-national institutions and the fact that no singular part can manipulate it represents a main factor contributing to the EU survival. Besides, as it has been mentioned already, the EU super-state institutions are subject to the inter-state European Council, which checks and balances their activities (Ifestos, 2009: 251-252).

On the other hand, Turkey has proved to implement a hegemonic strategy in a way not compatible with the EU conditionality. For this reason, accession of a hegemonic Turkey or any other rise of hegemonic inclination can be identified with a return to imperialist practice from the past. The European balance of power, which has been the main pillar of the European integration process and the peace derived from it, will end, if causes of war or, to put it more mildly, causes of destabilization come up. In the current paper, hegemonism in the light of the Turkish case study has been examined. However, there are still several causes of war or destabilization, which can disrupt the so valuable European balance of power. Further research could focus on other destabilizing variables of the EU structure. For instance, uneven growth, which is a significant cause of war as described above, can be seen in current policy-making among the EU member-states or particularly, the Eurozone member-states.

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