

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSATLANTIC UNITY FOR TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

As part of the transatlantic community Turkey is influenced by every aspect of the transatlantic relations. Turkey puts priority on the vitality of cooperation among the transatlantic partners and their institutions. It contributes significant regional insight, connections, and capabilities to the transatlantic community and the EU. Turkey finds itself at the center of a vast geography stretching from Europe to Central Asia, and the broader Middle East. Turkey and the U.S. have been investing in their strategic partnership to keep up with the changing times. The Shared Vision document is a case in point.

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The transatlantic community has developed over the years a habit of perpetually debating its health and founding premises. As David P. Calleo recalls, “the same basic issues run through five decades of discourse about Western interdependence.

Is the transatlantic relationship properly balanced? Are the West European allies treated as genuine partners? Do they carry their proper share? Do European and American basic interests diverge? Who, in fact, is exploiting whom?”¹ The transatlantic debate studies delve in excruciating detail into the differences and the commonalities between the Europeans and the Americans. It has become customary albeit not unanimous to underscore common democratic values, and diverging power and strategic culture. While some protagonists of the debate only seem to accentuate the need to revamp the transatlantic bonds, either through increased European investment in defense assets or a more balanced political relationship and greater European autonomy, at least a few seem to think that Europe and America are no longer compatible. Thus, one hears the argument that Europe and America are on a collision course over key policy issues due to divergence in strategic culture, capabilities, or even interests. Or, that Europe and America are becoming increasingly irrelevant to each other, as Europe takes care of its neighborhood and faces no immediate massive threat to its security, and America increasingly must look elsewhere given the shift in the geopolitical center of the world further away from Europe. Charles Kupchan for one argued that, left to its own devices “the coming clash of civilizations will be not between the West and the rest but within a West divided against itself.”² Joseph Quinlan did not agree, noting the sheer interdependence of transatlantic economies; after all there is more European investment in Texas than all U.S. investment in Japan.³

Such debates are essential to building public consensus behind policy decisions in established democracies. However, I tend to disagree with the underlying premise that the transatlantic alliance is at dire straits.

The fact of the matter is that whatever the differences today, as in the long past, the norm for the Europeans and the Americans is to cooperate. The transatlantic allies cooperate infinitely more than they do not. And the fundamental transatlantic organization, NATO, has been defeating all its skeptics on either side of the Atlantic for decades, and remains a relevant institution in a broad geography. EU and NATO are also cooperating in a strategic institutional partnership.

Foremost, the parties know that the natural stasis for the relationship is cooperation. Failure to strike a consensus creates divisions not only between Europeans and Americans but also within the societies of each, as has been the case regarding Iraq in 2003, arguably the most virulent disagreement in transatlantic relations in recent memory. While the alarm bells were ringing, the UN Security Council Resolution 1546 on Iraq, the G-8 Summit in Sea Island, and

1. David P. Calleo, “Transatlantic Folly: NATO vs. the EU”, *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 20, No.3. (Fall 2003)

2. Charles Kupchan, “The End of the West”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 290, No:4, (November 2002)

3. Joseph P. Quinlan, “Drifting Apart or Growing Together? The Primacy of the Transatlantic Economy”. *Washington D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations*, 2003.

the NATO Istanbul Summit engendered a search for common ground. Europeans and Americans alike have since been cooperating actively on a number of critical issues from the work of the Middle East Quartet to the initiatives regarding Iran's nuclear program. One can debate whether the transatlantic community can do more and better on the range of issues that come within its scope, but it would be simply wrong to suggest either that there is no cooperation across the Atlantic or that it is not valuable, even essential.

Therefore, it is no truism to assert that America needs Europe, and Europe needs America in a still volatile world and neither can go it alone for long. The discussion starts once we agree on that fundamental point. Where, when, and how is another point and is likely to remain a bone of contention. That, in turn, is a healthy debate as long as the bottom line remains that transatlantic bonds deserve every investment whether in material, political, or intellectual sense.

After all, the partnership between Europe and North America remains the staunchest community of likeminded democratic nations. This unique relationship has enabled us to end the Cold War peacefully and with a resounding success for democracy. The seemingly unresolvable challenges in the Balkans were allayed also as a result of transatlantic unity. Transatlantic solidarity will also prevail in the face of existing challenges to our societies.

Despite the setback of the European Constitutional Treaty, European integration including enlargement, will continue as a major historical endeavor. Gone perhaps is the presumption that the goal of strengthening the EU as a foreign and security policy actor should inevitably mean supporting the emergence of a counterweight to the U.S. A stronger EU would produce a more effective partner to the U.S. European integration can only benefit from the emergence of a robust common foreign and security policy of a Union that is attuned to its external environment and looking outward, not just pessimistically inward. In return, an effective partnership between the U.S., NATO and the EU will provide reassurance that the transatlantic community holds together and continues to make a positive impact in the world.

Turkey is part and parcel of the transatlantic bargain, and every aspect of the transatlantic relations and institutional developments directly influence the country. On the one hand, as a member of NATO since 1952, Turkey has made invaluable contributions to the Alliance and continues to be one of its most prominent proponents. Foremost, Turkey is a security provider in a volatile region. Not only is Turkey a stable, secular, pluralist democracy governed by the rule of law, but in its external relations, Turkey weighs in favor of regional cooperation and peaceful neighborly conduct. Turkey maintains the largest armed forces among the European Allies in NATO. It is the second biggest contributor after the U.S. to land forces, fighters, reconnaissance and cargo aircraft contributions to NATO forces. One of every ten NATO fighter jets and one of every five reconnaissance and cargo aircraft belong to Turkish Armed Forces. Some 1100 Turkish troops participate in NATO or NATO-led operations. Turkey has assumed the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan twice, not to mention Turkey's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, including the latest in Lebanon. In addition to military forces, Turkish police has also been among the leading participants in constabulary missions in a diversity of regions afflicted by conflict.

On the other hand, Turkey also supports and promotes the EU's common foreign and security policy and its security and defense identity as an essential dimension of the Euro-Atlantic security structure. Therefore, Turkey has contributed to all EU operations to which it was invited, including EUFOR Althea (EU Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina), where Turkey is the largest non-EU contributor and the sixth biggest participant overall. Within the EU force in Congo, Turkey remains the only non-EU force contributor. The EU's Headline Goal for 2010 will benefit from a brigade size Turkish unit, reinforced by nine vessels and two squadrons of F-16 fighter aircraft. Turkey also contributes significantly to the civilian crisis management capabilities of the European Union. The list of Turkish contributions is long and there is significant potential for more.

The long and winding road towards EU membership continues for Turkey. Actual negotiations for accession have started and one of the overall 35 chapters to be negotiated has been concluded. As Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci have pointed out, Turkey has the potential to enhance the credibility of EU policies toward the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Mediterranean regions; they indicate that Turkish membership to the EU would affect the credibility of the EU as a foreign policy actor.⁴ The European Commission has also concluded that because of the combined impact of Turkey's population, size, geographical location, economic, security and military potential, as well as cultural and religious characteristics, Turkey is endowed with "the capacity to contribute to regional and international stability. Expectations regarding EU policies towards these regions will grow as well, taking into account Turkey's existing political and economic links to her neighbors."⁵ Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül was thus on the mark when he declared that "a European Union that includes Turkey will be a Union that is better equipped across the board."⁶

Bringing two tracks together, Turks have been ardent supporters of the need for transatlantic unity. Vocal disagreements between their European and U.S. allies have only been disturbing for Turkey. Turkish officials caution that a political gap between Europe and the United States would make things more difficult for Turkey. Thus, in the summer of 2003, Minister Gül was warning that "as part of the Euro-Atlantic world, we in Turkey have been following the transatlantic tensions with concern".⁷ Şadi Ergüvenç, a notable observer of strategic affairs, also stated that "[Turkey's] strategic location, at times, creates sensitivities and puts Turkey under stress between competing pressures."⁸ Transatlantic unity facilitates Turkey's contributions and thus Turkey puts priority on the vitality of cooperation among the transatlantic partners and their institutions. In return, Turkey contributes significant regional insight, connections, and capabilities to the transatlantic community and the EU.

4. Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci - Center for European Policy Studies-, "Turkey as a Bridgehead and Spearhead: Integrating EU and Turkish Foreign Policy" *EU-Turkey Working Papers No:1*, (August 2004), p.8.

5. Commission of the European Communities, "Issues Arising from Turkey's Membership Perspective," *Commission Staff Working Document*, Brussels, Sec(2004)1202, Com(2004) 656 Final, (10 June, 2004) p.4.

6. Abdullah Gül, "Turkish Perspectives towards a New Environment in the European Union and the Middle East" Address to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 3 July 2003.

7. Abdullah Gül, "Turkey's Vision for the Transatlantic Partnership", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol.2. no.2 (Summer 2003).

8. Şadi Ergüvenç, "The New Security Environment and Turkey's Contribution to European Security," *Contemporary Issues in International Politics: Essays in Honour of Seyfi Taşhan*, ed. Foreign Policy Institute [Ankara: Dış Politika Enstitüsü], (2004), p.150.

There is already useful transatlantic cooperation in the Balkans, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasus and the broader Middle East including the Mediterranean, as well as Central Asia, all which take place in Turkey's close vicinity. Turkey is a sought after partner in that broad, diverse, and equally crucial geography. Turkey offers increasingly vigorous foreign and security policy capabilities in tandem with its economic and political soft power, strengthened by its active regional policies in a multitude of geo-strategic basins.

A case in point is Turkey's growing role as an energy hub in East-West and North-South vectors. The country is "of strategic importance for the security of energy supplies to the EU, lying at the crossroads of various existing and future pipelines carrying both oil and gas from many core producer regions, namely Russia, the Caspian Sea, the Middle East and Northern Africa."⁹ As such Turkey is rapidly evolving into the fourth main artery for the supply of hydrocarbons to Europe due to some 18 oil and natural gas pipelines that will pass through Turkey in East-West and North-South directions. Altogether close to 7 percent of the global energy supply will be transported through Turkey once all these pipelines are complete.

The global political message of the Turkish democracy is also important. Its initiative to host a joint forum between the EU and the Organization for the Islamic Conference promptly after the September 11 terrorist atrocities, its co-sponsorship of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue in the context of the G-8's Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative, and its leadership together with Spain of the UN initiative on the Alliance of Civilizations are a few examples pointing to Turkey's proficiency in articulating this message.

Regardless of disagreements, to the Turkish eye the two shores of the Atlantic are in fact bound together. Turkey's own foreign policy is therefore essentially Turkish, but also European and Transatlantic in orientation. This fundamental fact transcends circumstantial fluctuations in public perceptions about specific partners. As long as Turkey continues to move along its European integration track and maintains its strategic partnership with the U.S., and of course to the extent Turkey's interests are respected by its partners, its identification with the transatlantic community can only be further strengthened.

Turkey and the United States have been investing in their strategic partnership to keep up with the changing times. Turkey finds itself at the center of a vast geography stretching from Europe to Central Asia, not to mention the broader Middle East. Rather than standing by as a passive observer, Turkish diplomacy is credited for an active engagement based on good neighborliness but also on principled standing. As such, the Council on Foreign Relations report authored by Steven Cook and Elisabeth Sherwood-Randall in June 2006 has rightly indicated that in fact Turkish-American partnership is more important than ever.¹⁰

Undoubtedly, one important factor in the Turkish mind was and remains occupation with and weariness from the PKK terrorism issue. The fact that the PKK terror organization is based in

9. The European Commission, Annex to the Green Paper: A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy What is at stake - *Background document*, COM(2006) 105 final, p. 37.

10. Steven A. Cook and Elisabeth D. Sherwood-Randall, Generating Momentum for a new Era in US-Turkish Relations, *Council Special Report No.15.*, 21 June 2006

northern Iraq and attacks Turkey from its bases in Iraq aggravates Turkish sensitivities. Turkey has adamantly called on the United States and the Iraqi government to take action against PKK terrorists in Iraq. In Summer 2006, the U.S. appointed General Ralston to coordinate the U.S. effort against the PKK as a recognition of the importance of this issue. While cautioning that actions will speak louder than words, Turkey responded favorably to the U.S. initiative by appointing General Başer as the Turkish envoy.

Not unlike other European countries, Turkey's relations with the United States rest upon a firm foundation of shared democratic values. The challenge is to maximize the potential of this valuable partnership and both countries have been rising up to the task by taking determined steps. A recent case in point was the document entitled "Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership" announced by Foreign Minister Gül and Secretary of State Rice in Washington on 5 July 5 2006.

The fundamental starting point of the document is the fact that Turkey and the United States share the same set of contemporary values and ideals in their regional and global objectives, which are defined by promotion of peace, stability, and prosperity.

The Shared Vision document enumerated a wide ranging agenda for bilateral consultation and cooperation. The document stated: "Turkey and the United States pledge themselves to work together on all issues of common concern, including promoting peace and stability in the broader Middle East through democracy; supporting international efforts towards a permanent settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution; fostering stability, democracy and prosperity in a unified Iraq; supporting diplomatic efforts on Iran's nuclear program, including the recent P5+1 initiative; contributing to stability, democracy and prosperity in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan; supporting the achievement of a just and lasting, comprehensive and mutually-acceptable settlement of the Cyprus question under the auspices of the UN and in this context ending the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots; enhancing energy security through diversification of routes and sources, including from the Caspian basin; strengthening transatlantic relations and the transformation of NATO; countering terrorism, including the fight against the PKK and its affiliates; preventing WMD proliferation; combating illegal trafficking of persons, drugs and weapons; increasing understanding, respect and tolerance between and among religions and cultures; and promoting together effective multilateral action to find solutions to international challenges and crises of common concern.

The document also placed emphasis on broadening the dialogue beyond civilian and military officials to business groups, media, civil society, scientists and engineers, academicians, think tanks, and students, as well as legislators. As such, the document marked an investment in the next generation of Americans and Turks.

The task at hand is to fulfill the full promise of the shared vision set out in the document. A careful examination of the reasons for the ups and downs in recent history of our time honored partnership may help pursue this objective in the time ahead. Such an evaluation should take into account the changes in the geopolitical landscape since the end of the Cold War and Turkey's new position at the centre and confluence of a diverse geography.

The U.S.-Turkey relationship is carefully attended to by mutual attention and political will. At the same time the objective is to advance Turkey's membership process in the EU. While, Turkey and the European Union have launched accession talks with the shared objective of Turkey's EU membership, there are challenges ahead. These challenges can be overcome by statesmanship and effective public relations not only by the Turkish side but perhaps even more so by the EU side.

As the nation that hosted the successful NATO Istanbul Summit in 2004, Turkey remains committed to this fundamental alliance and the transatlantic bonds that bind a great family of democracies. Turkey is the bridge builder and an indispensable partner.