

The legacy of Atatürk:

Turkish political structures and policy-making

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Turkey occupies a singular position in the international arena, both as regards domestic economic policy-making and in the manner in which it defines and pursues its objectives in foreign policy. On the home front, Turkey appears close to earning the melancholy distinction of being the only reasonably well-developed economy to fail to break free from the growth/inflation spiral. Indeed, even if the comparison is confined to members of the emerging market asset class, it is difficult to find other examples where high inflation and recurrent fiscal and monetary crises have become quite such a structural feature of economic life. On the international front, Turkey's position is, if anything, even more paradoxical. It is one of the few democracies in the world still involved in a genuinely antagonistic confrontation with a neighbouring democracy. It appears to switch erratically from the pursuit of European integration to attempts to become a regional Asian power. It is the only Muslim country to initiate something resembling a military understanding with Israel, and at the time of writing it is the only Muslim country which appears actively to be seeking a role in the military response to the Islamist challenge. Over the past few decades, analyses of Turkey have often tended to see the country approaching a turning-point, at which the persistent questions will be answered and the country will set itself firmly on a new path. To date these expectations have been disappointed, with the result that recent studies often seem to be reciting the same questions and expectations as those written a decade before.¹

This article attempts to create a framework for understanding some of the significant complexities of Turkey's current political and economic position in the international arena. It does so first by establishing the basic geographical and historical inputs to the creation of modern Turkey. It then looks at how Turkish political and quasi-political institutions function within the context of the contemporary state. Finally, it attempts to analyse Turkish policy objectives in their

¹ Cf. e. g. C. H. Dodd, *The crisis of Turkish democracy* (Beverly: Eothen, 1983), pp. 80–87; D. A. Rustow, 'Political parties in Turkey: an overview', in M. Heper and J. M. Landau, eds, *Political parties in Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 20–21; and S. E. Cornell, 'Turkey: return to stability?', in S. Kedourie, ed., *Seventy-five years of the Turkish republic* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 230–34.

historical and institutional context. The overall theme of the narrative is that Turkey and Turkish actions are most clearly explicable through an understanding of the nature of the Turkish state and the way in which its institutions interact with Turkish society.

I

It is possible to construct a reasonably simple explanation for many of Turkey's apparent contradictions through an appeal to geography and twentieth-century history. Geographically, Turkey is very much a frontier state, with the bulk of its territory in Asia but a large part of its population on the eastern edge of Europe and in increasingly close contact with the west. The country shares borders with Georgia and Armenia to the east, Iran to the south-east, and Iraq and Syria to the south. Although there has been a pronounced migration to the cities of western Turkey, a large part of the population is ethnically and culturally Asian. On the other hand, European Turkey is directly exposed to and economically engaged with the West, which provides not only the most important export and import markets, but also the workplace for a large expatriate Turkish workforce and the competitors, customers and corporate allies for Turkish industry. Agriculture, spread through the Asian hinterland, still accounts for some 45 per cent of employment, but the population of the sprawling greater urban area of Istanbul, where Western influence is ever-present, is now greater than that of all of neighbouring Greece.

Turkey's position on a geographical and cultural frontier was made all the more singular by the form of modern state created by Atatürk in the interwar period. The modern Turkish republic was not simply an administrative replacement for the failed Ottoman empire, but also an explicit new national identity which sought to define a new vision of 'Turkishness' through the nature of the state. The explicit rejection of the Ottoman model found formal expression in the six basic principles of the 1931 Republican People's Party: nationalism, populism, republicanism, revolutionism, secularism and statism.² These principles laid down more than just the manner in which Turkey was to be governed. Through the explicit rejection of the Muslim religion as a basis for government and the successful creation of a new Turkish language, they placed Turkey in a new position as a national entity. While many cultural and ideological connections with the overlapping Asian and Muslim worlds were severed, and while there was a pronounced Westernizing element in much of what was new, the result was not to create a European state. Atatürk's Turkey was conceived of as a modern state uniquely defined by its own position and people.³ Perhaps the most important aspect of the reality of this vision is that it was underpinned by the creation of a series of institutions, both physical and ideological, explicitly designed to defend it.

² E. J. Zürcher, *Turkey: a modern history* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993), pp. 189–90.

³ A. Mango, *Atatürk* (London: John Murray, 1999), pp. 377–441; Zürcher, *Turkey*, pp. 184–214.

The European/Asian geographical and cultural divide, and the manner in which this was enshrined in the newly created Turkish state, can explain some of the complexities of modern Turkish identity. Similarly, the history of Turkey's late and uncertain arrival in the industrial world has much to contribute to an understanding of the unbalanced state of the economy and the state's apparently palsied involvement in it. Turkey's partial industrial revolution has more in common with the state-sponsored experience of the emerging world in the twentieth century than with the Western experience of private sector initiative in the nineteenth. The Ottoman economy of the pre-1920 era was almost entirely feudal and agricultural, and even Constantinople's position as a centre of commerce was based more on fading advantages of a geographical location at the centre of international trade routes than on any home-grown industrial base. The new Kemalist regime created in the 1920s sought to build up a modern industrial base under explicit state sponsorship. This involved the government directly in the creation of industries rather than simply in the acquisition of existing businesses through nationalization. Turkish policy-makers were influenced by the harsh economic climate of the interwar years, which made it difficult for private entrepreneurs to accumulate sufficient capital to build and develop significant businesses. They were also heavily influenced by developments in the Soviet Union, to the extent of formulating in 1933 their own five-year plan for industrial development, based explicitly on the recommendations of a Soviet delegation which had visited the year before.⁴ Perhaps most importantly, however, the 'statism' which formally encapsulated government economic policy was itself rooted in the overall Kemalist vision of the country and its management.

Two particular features of this vision are of particular significance for understanding the future development of the Turkish economy. In the first instance, Turkish policy-makers sought to lay the groundwork for some form of national economic self-sufficiency in response both to international economic turmoil and to the mixed strands of nationalism and isolationism inherent, and often explicit, in the overall government ideology. This produced a concentration on primary industries, often requiring a heavy capital base and sometimes of questionable economic viability. In the second instance, state-sponsored industrialization was conditioned by the social element of the Kemalist vision, and sought to provide employment and well-being for the populace by spreading investment and plant creation over the country as a whole. This tended to produce fragmentation of industries and choices of location contrary to the dictates of natural resources, transportation or consumer markets. The end result was that much of the late twentieth-century Turkish industrial base had more in common with the communist-era factories of eastern Europe than with those of the Western world. The fact that a large part of this network of underperforming assets remains in place and continues to cripple public finances

⁴ W. Hale, *The political and economic development of modern Turkey* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 55–9; Z. Y. Herschlag, *The contemporary Turkish economy* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 1–22.

is itself witness to the survival of the original Kemalist set of priorities. With notions of state responsibility for the general economic good still entrenched in both the administrative and the popular outlook, the normal tools of privatization, rationalization and closure are not readily deployed.

II

In many ways, the most significant institution in Turkey is Atatürk himself. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find comparable cases of the pervasive institutionalization of image and ideas outside the former communist world. The founder of modern Turkey died in November 1938, but his image is quite literally on every office wall, and there is little evidence to suggest that the influence of his views over the political priorities of the Turkish state has weakened. The image of the man remains a powerful symbol of the enduring principles on which he built the modern republic, particularly the mixture of secularism and nationalism which is at the heart of most of Turkey's major policy preoccupations. The institutions behind the symbol remain very much shaped by it. The Turkish army's identity and objectives remain specifically defined by the original Atatürk agenda.⁵ The same is also true to a certain extent of large parts of the judiciary and the government bureaucracy at large. In the case of political parties, the relationship is a more complex one, but can be seen as a root cause of the poor record of these bodies in domestic administration and economic management.

Turkey's armed services defy easy categorization within the normal models of military involvement and intervention in the internal affairs of a state.⁶ In the second half of the twentieth century, the Turkish military brought down no fewer than four elected governments, two (in 1960 and 1980) through coups, and two (in 1971 and 1997) effectively through the threat of such action. In both of the coups it took full control of government, banned legally constituted political parties, placed elected leaders in detention and seriously infringed the liberties of many of their followers. In the first coup it also ultimately executed the prime minister and two of his cabinet ministers. During the two less overt exercises in military coercion, its influence has been sufficiently persuasive to force governments to resign without even the overt threat of action. In many countries this would be seen as an extremely dangerous history of illegal interventionism, and it would be difficult to conceive of a situation in which the eventual restoration of civilian power would not lead to a curbing of the military's power to act again. In Turkey, however, the army has returned to its barracks on each occasion without widespread calls for its reform, and the military has actually retained its position as the most respected and admired

⁵ M. A. Birand, *Shirts of steel: an anatomy of the Turkish armed forces* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991) pp. 52–67.

⁶ The literature on the Turkish military and the state is extensive. For an incisive recent analysis see G. Jenkins, *Context and circumstance: the Turkish military and politics* (Oxford: International Institute for Strategic Studies/Oxford University Press, 2001); for a more extensive study of developments up to the early 1990s see W. Hale, *Turkish politics and the military* (London: Routledge, 1994). Birand, *Shirts of steel*, gives a fascinating insight into the army's view of itself.

institution in the country. Even in its most recent intervention in 1997, when it caused the resignation of a coalition led by the Islamic Welfare Party, there was widespread domestic acceptance of its initiative, and no significant or prolonged protest, even from the supporters of the deposed Welfare prime minister Necmettin Erbakan.⁷ While it would be a gross simplification to portray Turkey as living under persistent threat of another coup, many Turks are prepared to accept that there are circumstances in which the army might and even should intervene again. The Turkish historian Feroz Ahmed wrote in 1993 that 'the possibility of another coup is always present so long as the Turkish army perceives itself as the guardian of the republic and its Kemalist legacy'.⁸ His observation still has real relevance eight years later.

Before concluding this brief analysis of the Turkish military, it is important to stress one further point. While the Turkish officer corps might be classified as a small and closed elite that deliberately distances itself from many aspects of civilian life, the military itself is very much a popular institution and a core constituent of society. The current full-time strength of the Turkish armed services is roughly 600,000, with a maximum strength, including reservists and the paramilitary gendarmerie, of double that.⁹ This large force is maintained through conscription, with the result that a large proportion of the male population still performs military service. This is significant not only because it exposes young males to indoctrination in the established view of the state, but also because it tends to perpetuate bonds between the armed services and the population at large.

The largely unstained reputation of the armed services stands in stark contrast to that of Turkey's political parties, which are widely perceived to be corrupt and ineffective. Compared to most of their Western equivalents, Turkish political parties are fragmented and lack a clear sense of identity. It is indicative of their weakness as institutions that none of those represented in parliament today have existed legally in their current form for more than 20 years. While there are identifiable ideological and policy groupings, these generally take weak institutional form and are subject to profound changes of emphasis. There is a decided tendency for parties to identify themselves very closely with their leaders, many of whom are survivors of decades of political volatility.¹⁰ As might be expected, given Turkey's demographic dynamism and the parties' own poor record of success in tackling economic problems, elections have tended to produce significant swings in representation. Of the five major parties in parliament today, the two smallest were comfortably the two largest in 1991. The

⁷ Jenkins, *Context and circumstance*, pp. 61–4; Cornell, 'Turkey: return to stability?', pp. 210–20.

⁸ F. Ahmed, *The making of modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 213.

⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2000–2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 78–9.

¹⁰ Dodd, *The crisis of Turkish democracy*, pp. 33–41; U. C. Sakallıoğlu, 'Liberalism, democracy and the Turkish centre-right: the identity crisis of the True Path party', in S. Kedourie, ed., *Turkey: identity, democracy, politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 142–61. For party-by-party analysis up to the early 1990s see the essays in Heper and Landau, eds, *Political parties in Turkey*.

largest party in autumn 2001, holding 136 of the 550 available seats, occupied only seven seats in 1991, while the second largest did not run as an independent entity in the election of that year. Only once in the three elections of the past decade did any party attract marginally more than 25 per cent of the vote, and as a result the country was never governed by anything other than a coalition or minority government.¹¹ This political framework has tended to make those within it nervous of initiatives likely to damage their popular support. This has been a particular problem in the economic sphere, where any permanent amelioration of the country's chronic fiscal and monetary difficulties would require the overhaul of the large and inefficient public sector in which a large part of the electorate has a direct or indirect stake.

In many senses, the brooding presence of Turkey's army at the back of the political stage, and the weakness and fragile popularity of the country's political parties are two sides of the same coin—a coin spinning on the axis provided by Atatürk's vision of the Turkish state. The roots of what from the outside might seem an extraordinary acceptance of the principle of military intervention are actually to be found in law. Turkey's constitution overtly defines the country as an indivisible entity constituted and governed on the lines introduced by Atatürk. Turkish law explicitly charges the armed services with protecting that entity from both external and internal threat.¹² This has tended to mean not only that the armed forces have seen it as their duty to defend the secular republic against a variety of internal threats, but also that many Turks believe that it has the right to do so. The military has fostered its role as the accepted internal defender of the state by generally staying clear of intervention in issues that do not, according to their perspective, directly threaten the actual fabric of the state.¹³ This means, for example, that the armed services have generally remained quiet on the management of the economy, however disastrous that has been. The coup of 1980 was a reaction to a severe rise in public disorder and rampant politically inspired violence. The less overt intervention of 1997 was triggered neither by the apparent incompetence of a series of unstable coalition governments nor by the serious corruption allegations being levelled against most political leaders; the ultimately irresistible pressure that the military brought to bear on the Erbakan government was exerted because the coalition he led was believed to be undermining the secular republic through a policy of creeping Islamicization.

Given the highly charged international situation that has emerged as a result of the revival of militant Islam, it is hardly surprising that a fair portion

¹¹ The share of votes for the major parties in the last three general elections were as follows: Democratic Left Party (DSP) – 1991 10.4%, 1995 14.6%, 1997 22.2%; Nationalist Action Party (MHP) – 0% (it did not run separately in the 1991 election), 8.2%, 18.0%; Welfare/Virtue Party (Refah/Fazilet) – 16.4%, 21.4%, 15.4%; Motherland Party (Anap) – 23.3%, 19.7%, 13.2%; True Path Party (DYP) – 26.2%, 19.2%, 12.0%; Republican People's Party (CHP) – 20.1%, 10.7%, 8.7%.

¹² M. Y. Geyikdagı, *Political parties in Turkey: the role of Islam* (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 143–9; Jenkins, *Context and circumstance*, pp. 42–6.

¹³ Birand, *Shirts of steel*, pp. 83–96.

of both internal and external analysis of Turkish politics has concentrated on the perceived Islamic challenge to the secular state. The tension here is very real, and is a salient feature of the policy environment. It is important, however, not to take it out of its very individual Turkish context.¹⁴ Although the Turkish population is overwhelmingly Muslim, only a relatively small proportion of it is actually Islamic in political outlook. Election results in the middle and late 1990s suggest that perhaps 20–25 per cent of Turks support some form of movement from a secular to an Islamic state. Much of the upswing in support for the Welfare Party (Refah) and its successor the Virtue Party (Fazilet), however, arose from disenchantment with the centre-right parties held responsible for the mismanagement of the economy in the first half of the decade. Refah and Fazilet have also attracted support because of their more impressive performance at local government level, particularly in the civic administration in the largest urban areas, where a significant proportion of the electorate has arrived relatively recently from the conservative countryside. There is general agreement that only 10–15 per cent of the Turkish population actually supports an Islamic political agenda.¹⁵ Even this figure might over-represent the scale of the Islamic challenge, as the relative docility with which supporters have reacted to legal moves to ban their parties suggests that support for the religious parties is often modified by some level of residual respect for the established institutions of the state.

Similarly, the secularist reaction to the religious challenge is complex and cannot be classified as simply anti-Muslim. Active religious observation in Turkey is high by Western standards, there are conservative religious elements within all political parties, and there is no real support for an overtly anti-religious movement. Opposition arises only on the perception of a threat to the established nature of the state. In this context, it is important to remember that the army itself has in the past been the prime mover in the promotion of Islamic education. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, when the greatest threat to the republic was perceived to be radical socialism, the military government actually made the teaching of Islam in schools compulsory in an attempt to shore up ideological resistance to the communist message.¹⁶ The shift of policy on this front has come about only as a reaction to a change in the perception of threat. The army, and the conservative political establishment at large, is motivated first and foremost by the desire to protect the state in its current form, and not, *ab initio*, by opposition to the Muslim faith. It is also important to realize that anti-Islamic policy is not the sole preserve of the armed forces. The legal campaign against the religious parties has actually been initiated by the judiciary, a portion of which is, if anything, more zealous in its pursuit of the established constitutional order than the uniformed elite. The military might be the most distinctive defender of the secular state, but it is not the only one. Indeed, it

¹⁴ I. Turan, 'Religion and popular culture in Turkey', in R. Tapper, ed., *Islam in modern Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 31–55; Geyikdagi, *Political parties in Turkey*, *passim*.

¹⁵ Cornell, 'Turkey: return to stability?', p. 225.

¹⁶ Ahmed, *The making of modern Turkey*, p. 214; Geyikdagi, *Political parties in Turkey*, pp. 141–2.

derives much of its political effectiveness from the fact that it works within the larger framework of institutions and ideas that underpin the established order.

III

When one considers the implications of institutional structure for policy formation, one cannot help but be struck by the contrast between domestic and foreign affairs. On the domestic front, Turkey has staggered unconvincingly and erratically along one path for most of the last decade. Each successive government has declared itself committed to tackling the huge economic imbalances that have kept the country locked in a high-inflation/boom–bust spiral, but no consensus has emerged sufficiently strong to allow for firm or effective action. On the international front, on the other hand, the country appears to have experienced several profound policy swings, but has changed course on each occasion with every semblance of strong consensual backing. On both fronts, however, there is a common thread of connection to Atatürk's enduring policy legacy, and this provides some explanation for the lack of effectiveness in the home arena and the apparent absence of consistency on the foreign front.

Turkey has had some form of privatization programme in place for two decades and, under intense pressure from international monetary bodies (which have come repeatedly to its rescue in times of financial crisis), has launched numerous initiatives to effect a general restructuring of the state sector. These policies have occasionally given temporary relief to the battered Turkish lira, but have failed to make a lasting impact on the underlying structural problem, with the result that Turkey remains mired in an inflationary crisis of a duration greater than that of any other emerging economy. Many of the causes of this ineffectiveness can be found within the structure of party politics, which has tended to produce weak and unstable coalition governments. Each of Turkey's major parties has had at least one chance to put its stamp on economic reform in the last decade, and each has failed to produce a significant change in direction or success.¹⁷ There is, however, a common problem that has tended to vitiate economic policy regardless of its point of origin on the political spectrum.

As has already been explained, the state, conditioned by Kemalist views of social and economic responsibility, played a key role in the creation of modern Turkish industry. While a large private sector developed in the second half of the twentieth century, the state retained responsibility for a large part of the economy, particularly in extractive and basic manufacturing industries. Through the very size of the public sector, and the statist principles that underpinned its management, the government also conditioned the manner in which the private sector evolved. Turkish enterprise was influenced by a combination of tariff protection and a weak domestic competitive environment. Its capital investment

¹⁷ For an admittedly rather optimistic analysis of the current state of economic reform see International Monetary Fund, *Turkey: eighth review under the stand-by arrangement*, Country Report no. 01/137 (Washington DC: IMF, Aug. 2001).

choices were often distorted by the high short-term financial returns available from funding the government's increasing deficits. This gave even the private sector a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo, and although the tariff barriers are now gone, many Turkish industries remain in at least semi-monopolistic positions, and inflationary expectations still tend to be something of a self-fulfilling prophesy in decision-making.¹⁸

Overt opposition to privatization has tended to weaken in the face of repeated crises, and most political parties are now officially committed to reducing the burden of state ownership. Their pursuit of specific privatization programmes, however, continues to be weakened by residual adherence to the creed of the original constitution. On a practical level, many of the elements of state ownership are defined and protected by law. Parts of the Turkish judiciary are, if anything, even more strongly influenced than the military by the desire to protect the Atatürk model of government. Many privatization initiatives have been held up or overturned in the courts without prompting from any other interested parties. In a less tangible fashion, political leaders pursuing rather nervous populist agendas have been all the more reluctant to dismantle structures and responsibilities which may be viewed as embedded in the very nature of the state. It is, in short, difficult to sell an asset if its beneficiaries can argue not only that the state has an obligation to own it, but that the act of selling constitutes a breach of the constitutional pact on which the existence of the state is predicated. The problem can easily become even more emotionally charged if the prospect of foreign ownership is involved. If Turkish political parties have one common feature it is their adherence to a populist brand of nationalism that continues to have a strong appeal for the electorate at large. This makes all Turkish policy-makers sensitive to accusations that they will damage national interests and/or domestic prosperity through privatization. As a result of all these pressures, there is a noticeable tendency for Turkish governments to shy away from radical solutions to the country's economic ills, even when so doing puts at risk the international fiscal support packages upon which they have come increasingly to depend.

In contrast to domestic economic policy, Turkish foreign policy is normally based on a broad consensus and produces considerably less internal disagreement. With nationalism still very much a strong force, both within the agendas of the major political parties and in the country as a whole, the pursuit of foreign policy can appear quite aggressive. Many of the policy objectives themselves, however, are defensive and can be comprehended within the same framework of defending the populist vision of the Turkish Republic as key elements of domestic security policy. As a result of the shared concern with the defence of the Republic, and the often volatile nature of the regions on Turkey's borders, much of the country's foreign policy is defined within a relatively narrow regional context. In two key areas, the country's relationship

¹⁸ Herschlag, *The contemporary Turkish economy*, pp. 98–108; European Commission, *2000 regular report from the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession*, Nov. 2000, pp. 24–31.

with the European Union and its membership of NATO, the focus is wider, although, even here, policy derives much of its impetus from regional concerns.¹⁹

The development of international security policy within the wider context of foreign relations is an area in which the influence of the military is as strong as it is in more vaguely defined domestic security issues. Indeed, the formal mechanisms for placing military concerns on the civilian agenda, the military-dominated National Security Council and the National Security Policy Document (which effectively defines the risk-control priorities of the state), are the same for both arenas.²⁰ The key difference is that there is significantly less debate on the international side of the picture. There is a natural tendency for the military view to produce assessments of external and internal threats that mirror each other. Thus, in the Cold War era the perceived external threat from the Soviet bloc went hand in hand with prioritization of communism as the greatest internal threat to the Republic. In more recent times this pairing has been replaced by matched concerns over Turkey's Muslim neighbours and the internal Islamic challenge to secularism. Military-influenced policy was slow to adjust to the change, with the result that as late as the mid-1980s Turkey's military leadership was promoting the Islamic influences that it is now seeking to curb.

The basically defensive nature of Turkish foreign policy is manifest in two key areas: its approach to NATO membership and its relationships with its immediate neighbours. It is also arguably central to understanding its complex and often troubled interaction with the European Union. Turkey maintained a sometimes precarious neutrality during the Second World War, in part as an extension of Atatürk's cautious policy of limiting international contact during the years when the Republic was being created. Its movement into the world of international alliances began in earnest with its enthusiastic participation in the American-led UN intervention in the Korean War. Since joining NATO, this level of commitment has generally been maintained, Turkey often proving more willing to participate in joint intervention initiatives than some west European countries. Turkey's position as a front-line state in the confrontation with communism played an important role in the development of its position within NATO. The belief that communism was the greatest threat to the Republic both externally and internally produced a real desire to seek the security of an international framework of alliance. To a somewhat reduced extent, the same frontier state metaphor has held firm as the Islamic world has replaced the communist one as the greatest perceived threat. Throughout, however, another element has remained common to support for active participation in NATO. Turkey's slightly precarious position on the edge of two worlds has,

¹⁹ P. Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs/Pinter, 1991), pp. 3–16, 114–17; M. Aydin, 'Determinants of Turkish foreign policy: historical framework and traditional inputs', in Kedourie, ed., *Seventy-five years of the Turkish republic*, pp. 152–86; Zürcher, *Turkey*, pp. 312–20; M. M. Gunter, *The Kurds in Turkey: a political dilemma* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990), pp. 53, 54, 123; K. Kirisci and G. M. Winrow, *The Kurdish question and Turkey: an example of a trans-state ethnic conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 171–9.

²⁰ Jenkins, *Context and circumstance*, pp. 46–9.

together with the slight siege mentality inherent in the Turkish views of the state, produced a need for security and recognition.²¹ In some senses, Turkey's continual reaffirmation of its active participation in NATO can be seen to originate from a need to underline its position as an independent and responsible member of the international community.

On the more specific regional level, there is a genuine and fluctuating polarization of policy that in many ways reflects the European/Asian dichotomy in Turkish identity. This tendency has become more profound as a result of the more or less simultaneous disintegration of the Soviet bloc, destabilization of much of the territory on Turkey's eastern and southern boundaries, and acceleration of the trend towards European economic union. The end of communism has removed one of the old unifying elements of foreign policy. Asian destabilization has created a number of ethnically aligned states over which Turkey might seek to assert regional influence, but has also increased the Islamic challenge to the secular republic. The gathering pace of the move to a single European market has sharpened debate over whether Turkey should seek inclusion.

In practice, Turkey's courtship with the European Union and Turkish policy towards its Asian neighbours represent opposing views of the country's transregional alignment, and prioritization of one is often a product of lack of progress with the other. The relationship with the EU is of paramount importance from an economic point of view. Western Europe represents a far more important market for Turkish goods and a far more significant source of imports than either the Asian or the Arab world. With the EU accounting for just over 50 per cent of trade in both directions, Turkey really cannot afford exclusion. This imperative lay behind the progressive dismantling of Turkish tariff barriers in the 1990s and it continues to underpin what had hitherto been a faltering commitment to the concept of open markets. Turkish-EU relations, however, have been bedevilled by the intrusion of the human rights issue into the discussion. The low point of developments in the last few years was Turkey's failure to gain recognition as a candidate for membership at the Luxembourg summit of December 1997. The Turkish reaction to this rejection, and particularly to the terms in which it was couched, was profound and emotional, but it did not lead to a permanent change in policy. The government's 1999 success in overturning the earlier decision and gaining recognition as a second-tier candidate for full membership marked a critical step forward and should help keep Turkey on the pro-European path in the medium term. There remains, however, significant potential for setbacks, not least because Turkey is unlikely to meet even a relaxed set of convergence targets without a complete overhaul of its economy, and will not readily compromise on human rights requirements where national security is perceived to be at risk.²²

In the aftermath of the 1997 Luxembourg decision, Turkish foreign policy appeared to take a sharp pro-Asian turn. Politicians' statements were coloured

²¹ Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish question*, pp. 209–10; Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, pp. 13–14.

²² European Commission, *2000 regular report from the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession*, pp. 72–4.

by an emotional mix of condemnation of European attitudes and reassertion of Turkey's Asian identity, and talk of establishing leadership of a regional Asian confederation of interests was backed up by a series of diplomatic and trade initiatives.²³ Some of these have had long-term consequences, but despite strong ethnic and linguistic ties it seems doubtful that there is really a sustainable interest in establishing real political influence in the region, or a sufficiently strong economic imperative to counterbalance dependence on trade with the west. The non-European world is nonetheless important as a stage on which Turkey can assert its separate regional identity. This is the context within which moves such as the establishment of a pseudo-military relationship with Israel can be understood. The basic tenets of Turkish foreign policy remain pro-Western, but Turkey's position at the edge of the Western world requires it to maintain a separate identity with a definable role in Central Asia and the Middle East. The demands of further integration with Europe are likely to place strains on Turkey, both on the economic front and in the far more emotive area of domestic security policy. As another apparent eastwards lurch in foreign policy at the beginning of 2001 demonstrates, these strains are likely to result in a reassertion of non-European identity.²⁴

Two specific issues continue to complicate the larger picture: Turkey's relationship with its European neighbour Greece, and the intrusion of domestic security issues into the international scene. The antagonism between Greece and Turkey has long historical roots, and the mutual identification of the other as the national enemy is still stamped deeply on each national psyche. The formal Turkish security policy agenda still identifies Greece as the most likely external threat. Relations between the two countries, however, have improved significantly over the last two years, with the Aegean earthquakes of 1999 proving something of a catalyst in opening channels for cooperation and understanding. It seems likely that the general trend will remain positive, with a younger generation of electors being less inclined to pursue historical antipathies, particularly if they cut across a shared desire to become more fully integrated with western Europe. Cyprus remains a major obstacle to a permanent *rapprochement*, and neither parent country is likely to feel itself able to back down from a well-entrenched position without some impetus from Cyprus itself. In a sense, the problem is a common one, and the solution is most likely to come through some form of accord between the ethnic communities on the island. The geography of the Aegean, with Greece owning islands in sight of Turkey's western coast, is also a continual source of irritation over sovereignty and does produce a series of minor incidents. Turkish policy towards Greece, however, is inherently defensive and a revision of the territorial status quo does not figure on any implicit or explicit agenda. With Greece now less likely to be seen as an internal obstacle to Turkish progress towards a closer understanding with the EU, one of the major sources of tension is fading away.

²³ Cornell, 'Turkey: return to stability?', pp. 223–4.

²⁴ Jenkins, *Context and circumstance*, pp. 84–5.

Human rights is the area in which Turkish foreign and domestic policies have most frequently become entangled. Negative western European perceptions of Turkey's human rights record stretch back into the military rule period of the early 1980s but were kept alive through the 1990s by the internal war against Kurdish insurgency and the PKK guerrilla army. The latter conflict represents a classic case of conflicting interpretations, with one nation's definition of an internal political challenge as a military threat, requiring a military response, being seen by outsiders as simply a suppression of civil liberties. The Turkish reaction both to the Kurdish challenge and to criticism of Turkey's handling of it was particularly emotional because the threat was perceived as one to the indivisible fabric of the state as enshrined in the constitution. Turkish policy-makers were prepared to disregard damage to the country's international position simply because dealing with the perceived internal threat was believed to be far more important. The near-extinction of the PKK threat has allowed the current Turkish government to take a more relaxed view, and the decision to postpone any death sentence passed on the captured PKK leader Ocalan was a strong indication of heightened sensitivity towards Western sensibilities. It would be dangerous, however, to assume that Turkey is moving progressively towards a Western definition of human rights. The current Turkish government actually owes a part of its electoral success to popular approval of its triumph over the PKK. Any resurgence of armed Kurdish protest, or indeed of any other challenge to the 'indivisible unity of the Turkish state',²⁵ is still likely to see domestic security policy given priority over external diplomacy, even if the latter suffers as a result.

IV

Western perceptions of Turkey still tend to be coloured by preconceived notions on the nature of the Turkish state. External analysis tends to underestimate the residual power of Atatürk's original view of the republic he created. Turkish policy on both the home and the international fronts, and the institutions that define and execute these policy agendas, are underpinned by a view of the nature of the state that still commands the allegiance of the larger part of the Turkish population. As long as the basic vision continues to be shared, the preconceptions and the priorities are likely to remain unchanged. The most likely stimulus for long-term change will probably not be found on the international horizon, where Turkey is currently asserting an increased independence from Western priorities, or in the religious challenge, which the secular state continues to resist. The Achilles' heel of the Turkish establishment is its handling of the economy, an area in which the legacy of Atatürk is the source of confusion and poor performance. The closing sentence of a seminal study of the interface between politics and economics, written 20 years ago,

²⁵ The quote is from the preamble to the Turkish constitution.

concluded: 'It seemed, in fact, that Turkey's most serious economic problem was actually political and that it would remain with her for many years to come.'²⁶ If the Turkish political metaphor is to change, it is most likely to do so because the country cannot afford to carry its economic imbalances much further down the road.

²⁶ Hale, *The political and economic development of modern Turkey*, p. 261.