

TURKEY AND THE WORLD: NEW POLITICAL REALITIES

As the title suggests, there are some new political realities emerging. Yet, there are also facts that remain unchanged. These two factors, new realities and unchanged facts, are shaping the environment surrounding Turkey. As such, they are key to understand contemporary Turkish foreign policy, and Turkey's place in the world.

Let me start with facts.

- Turkey, a member of the G20, has a globally scaled economy.

- A founding member of most European institutions, Turkey is also a candidate country for EU membership, a strategic objective for my country.

- Turkey is a member of NATO for the last 66 years.

We assume key responsibilities within NATO. Turkey is among the top five contributors to NATO's operations and eighth largest contributor in financial terms. Turkish armed forces are the second largest in NATO after the United States.

- Turkey follows an enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy to achieve and sustain peace, security and stability in our region and beyond. We take action with humanitarian motives in mind; because all policies are for the people. We also pursue opportunities for enhancing cooperation.

Let me now turn to the new realities:

Since the beginning of this decade, the regions that surround Turkey are undergoing a dynamic transformation.

A vast geography, spanning from Ukraine, running all the way down to the Middle East and North Africa and then turning east to South Asia is faced with different levels of conflict and instability.

In the Balkans, continued support for the achievement of Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the countries of the region is an indispensable element of our efforts that aim to secure sustainable peace and stability in this region.

In the Middle East, sectarianism, terrorism, economic underdevelopment, poor governance, geopolitical big-power proxy wars create cycles of conflict and human misery.

By virtue of our geo-strategic position, Turkey, unlike some more fortunate European partners, is directly faced with all of these complex set of challenges, particularly terrorism and irregular migration.

We directly bear the brunt, yet continue to tackle them with resolve.

We continue to fight multiple terrorist groups, including FETO, PKK-PYD/YPG, DAESH and DHKP-C.

Turkey is confronted with a “new generation” of terrorist organization called FETO. They targeted our constitutional order and the democratically elected government. They tried to overtake the government from within by infiltrating the state structure. It particularly targeted our military, law enforcement, education, and health institutions. It also operates in almost 160 countries worldwide, running an integrated crime network under the disguise of schools, companies, media

outlets and NGOs. FETO is a serious threat not only for Turkey, but also for all these countries.

We are grateful to those partners that immediately reacted to the July 2016 coup attempt and condemned it. Nevertheless, not all of our friends were so forthcoming. Some still drag their feet even today. Now, the remnants of FETÖ in Europe and the US continue their smear campaign against Turkey, to slander Turkey and to drive a wedge between us and our Allies and friends. Hence, Turkey expects full solidarity in its effort to bring the perpetrators of the failed coup attempt that claimed over 250 lives to justice. The leader and members of this terror group should not be allowed safe havens anywhere. We expect full solidarity and cooperation from our Allies and friends in this regard.

Terrorist groups that find shelter in Syria stage attacks against Turkey, using their safe havens in this neighboring country. Against this backdrop, finding a just and sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict, in line with the aspirations of Syrian people, as well as elimination of terrorist threat in this country, first and foremost, is a matter of national security for Turkey.

In this vein, the Turkish armed forces have successfully completed "the Euphrates Shield Operation" in Syria last year, which pioneered the ouster of DAESH from the region, liberated an area of 2.015 km² and established a safe haven free of terror, enabling the displaced Syrians to return.

Whereas DAESH is mostly defeated in Syria, on the border regions with Turkey, it has been replaced by yet another terrorist organization (YPG/PYD: Syrian branch of PKK) – which is threatening not only the unity and territorial integrity of the country, but also conducting terror attacks in Turkey.

The threat posed by the PKK/ PYD-YPG terrorist elements deployed in the Afrin region, to the lives and property of the brotherly people of the region as well as our citizens living close to the border area, is heightened due to the recent increase in the number of harassment fires and attacks.

Since the beginning of 2017, Hatay and Kilis provinces of Turkey and the military observation posts in Idlib have been targeted from Afrin with almost 700 harassment fires and attacks so far, causing civilian casualties.

The ongoing **Operation Olive Branch** aims to ensure our border security, neutralize the terrorist threat emanating from Afrin and thus, save the brotherly Syrians from the oppression and cruelty of these terrorists by preventing terrorist safe havens and *fait accomplis* that are against the will of the Syrian people.

Another dimension of the ongoing instability in our periphery is the resulting irregular migration. Nearly 4 million Syrians are now in Turkey. Turkey continues to be the biggest host country according to the UN Refugee Agency figures. Turkey has spent almost 30 billion US Dollars, whereas the total contribution we received from the international community is far from meeting expectations (526 million USD, excluding the EU's financial assistance, which is 1.85 billion Euro).

Turkey's efforts to provide decent conditions for Syrians, coupled with heightened measures to stem the irregular migration, as well as the successful implementation of [18 March](#) Agreement between EU and Turkey, also help alleviate the burden.

Looking ahead to the future, we have to review the current immigration situation in Turkey and relate its context into the global surroundings. When people migrate for whatever reasons, they take with them not only their families and their belongings, but also their culture and their traditions. Their thoughts are based on

personal relationships, and experiences, and are shared and often transferred to others through day to day life in their new environment. These expressions of ideas and feelings and actions can provide both positive and negative impact on themselves and those around them. This then impacts on the global network, specifically of what determines the future. Whether immigrants stay in their host country or return to their own homes also will leave lasting effects, physically, socially, and financially.

The other issue to address is that the unrest in Syria that began seven years ago has developed into a much wider global terrorism plain. ISIS emerged in this region from this conflict and over time has recruited disillusioned European citizens, many with a naive and disproportionate understanding of what jihad involves. Whilst some have realised that ISIS is in fact an overbidding terror cell, and have tasted that reality when reaching Syria, the ability to escape from the barbaric radical Islamists is invariably difficult. Then there are the few who fall in with the terror ideals and have publicly relished in their global fame through savage cruelty and executions. These terrorists are trying to infiltrate into our regions and cause untold death and disruption to our lives, as seen by recent attacks in Turkey and beyond into Europe. These terrorists are the reason we must stand shoulder to shoulder in our defense to root out the evil and regain stability to our World.

In these challenging times, while the broader region is undergoing a tumultuous transformation and is mired with significant challenges, I sincerely believe that only through dialogue and cooperation that Turkey and other countries worldwide can play constructive roles, exploiting their respective capabilities fully.