

Turkey in its quest for more power over Balkans

Blendi LAMI

DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED SCIENCES,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION,
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA, TIRANA, ALBANIA
blendi.lami@uet.edu.al

Abstract

Turkey is currently a major player in the Balkans, as it is continuously trying to expand its sphere of influence. As part of its foreign policy strategy, Turkey is developing common interests in the region. European Union has changed its policy toward Turkey and, at the same time, Turkey constantly challenges Europe. As history tells us, Balkans have been battleground for clashes of different powers. Turkey is increasing becoming a powerful actor that has to be taken into consideration, even though in the Balkan area it is showing certain limits. The qualitative method is used in the study, referring to secondary data, as it relies on various critical journals entailing Turkish politics, foreign policy and international relations. The study focuses on two main areas: economic relationships and religious influence, through which Turkey is trying to project power into the Balkans. The paper tries to test the hypothesis that economic struggles and Balkans orientation toward European Union have prevented Turkey in fully achieving their goal.

Key words: *major player, foreign policy strategy, geo-economy, religion, influence*

Turkey a major player in the region

Turkey's goal is to become a preeminent regional power not only in the Middle East (Nehme, 2009). It is a mistake, however, to think of Turkey as an exclusively Middle Eastern power. The modern Turkish Republic is the heir to the Ottoman Empire, which at its height ruled a vast expanse of territory stretching west across North Africa, as far north into Europe as Vienna, east into the Caucasus, and south throughout much of the Arab world. The heart of Turkey's power is its core strategic territory and its influence radiates from this strategic location.

Davutoglu (2001) laid out its "Strategic Depth" doctrine regarding expanding influence in Balkans, and since then Turkey's quest for power in Balkans has continued. Nowadays we see Ankara's involvement in Bosnian issues, its rapprochement with Serbia, the influx of Turkish investors, and the popularity of Turkish TV soap operas across the region or use of religion. Such activism is part of the so-called "Neo-Ottomanism", which fuels fears that today's Turkey is at best inspired by imperial nostalgia to gain a strong position in the region. According to Bechev (2012), "Turkey has been linked to the Balkans: in its security strategy and diplomacy, geography, demography, and political imaginaire" (f. 4).

It should be noted that the post-Cold War world system created opportunities for Turkey to exert influence in countries that were previously unavailable - the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Turkey's position was further strengthened following the events of September 11, when, under this new order, the West considered Turkey an indispensable ally in the fight against Islamic terrorism. Despite this Western approach, in 2002 an Islamist-rooted government took power in Turkey. In the new context, Turkey takes another role in foreign policy. This study will analyze two main dimensions Turkey uses to exert power in Balkans: economy and religion. The new vision for foreign policy emphasizes the incarnation of strategic depth towards well-defined goals - in political, economic and cultural terms. In his speech on Europe Day, 8 May 2009, Davutoglu (2009) reflects these goals. First, according to the cultural perspective, it represents a country through which historical cultural mobility is integrated in universal culture:

The first is the cultural aspect. We need to put to the forefront the consolidating rather than the dividing nature of cultures. We imagine a Europe that communicates well with the whole accumulation of human culture that unifies the principle of plurality with "common good" and "ethics of coexistence".

To reinforce Davutoglu's words, in a much stronger tone, "Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım portrayed Erdoğan as a descendant of a well-regarded Ottoman-

era sultan” (Peterson, 2017). A local official of Justice and Development Party (AKP) controversially posted on his Facebook page that Erdoğan “will be the Caliph of the Presidency,” and that in 2023 – when the Turkish republic reaches its 100th birthday – “Allah will finish the light.” (Ibid). Actually, other officials say that Turkey is in the process of restoring its historical Ottoman influence as a leader of the Islamic world. Those references point to a moderate, inclusive form of Islam, but also authoritarian rule in the form of a sultan.

Secondly, in the above speech, Davutoglu (2009), according to the economic perspective, claims that Turkey deserves to be amongst the superpowers:

Second dimension of our vision for Turkey is related to the economy. Again, as Turkey we want to maintain our ambition to rank as one of the most powerful economies of the world with our powerful human resources, with a new understanding of technological revolution, science, and project of sustainable economic development. This geography cannot maintain weak economies. Such an economy entails instability as well as distrust in this region. Being aware of this, in the period ahead we hope that Turkey will rank among the top ten economies of the world.

To understand Turkey’s power, Friedman (2012) lists the powers of the future in the famous book “The Next 100 Years”, he notes:

Then there is Turkey, currently the seventeenth-largest economy in the world. Historically, when a major Islamic empire has emerged, it has been dominated by the Turks. The Ottomans collapsed at the end of World War I, leaving modern Turkey in its wake. But Turkey is a stable platform in the midst of chaos. The Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Arab world to the south are all unstable. As Turkey’s power grows—and its economy and military are already the most powerful in the region—so will Turkish influence (f. 7).

Methodology

This is a social research and the method of data used was secondary methodologies of data collection. It involved the use of secondary sources, i.e. collecting information and data that could be used for this research. While carrying out the research, emphasis was to look for data about the foreign policies of Davutoglu, how he influenced their implementation in Turkey and how is TFP is working in Balkans.

While carrying out the library research, reliance was on books published about the Turkish foreign policies. Furthermore, there was a need of looking at the profile of the authors before using the published books. Materials relied on were ones published by academics with experience in addressing Turkish foreign policies.

Research Question / Hypothesis

This paper tries to answer the question: Are economic and religious dimensions contributing to the success of Turkish Foreign Policy objectives in Balkans?

The hypothesis of this study is: Economic struggles and Balkans orientation toward European Union have prevented Turkey in fully achieving their goal of projecting their power in Balkans.

Theory of International Relations

While doing the research, constructivism is the theory helping in testing the hypothesis. Constructivism is the claim that important aspects of international relations are historically and socially constructed, instead of the inevitable consequences of human nature or other essential characteristics of world politics (Jackson, P & Nexon, M, 2002).

Constructivists create the necessary spaces for the identity and interests of international actors to take a central place in the theorization of international relations. In this context, now that actors are not simply governed by the imperatives of a self-help system, their identities and interests become important in analyzing the behaviour of these actors. Taking into account the nature of the international system, constructivists see such identities and interests by not being objectively based on material forces, but as being the result of ideas and the social construction of such ideas. In other words, the meanings of ideas, objects, and actors are set on the basis of social interaction (Ibid). In this sense the historic legacy takes priority.

Many authors (Bulent, Aras, Friedman, etc.) point out that Islam is the foundation of AKP's policy. Using the parameters - geography, history, population and culture - Turkey applies soft power. Rather than judging them as a barrier, which has happened in its Kemalist past, Turkish policymakers have turned them into strategic assets. Thus, the new Turkish public diplomacy has been built to spread the soft power of the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus, but also beyond. It seems Turkey has become more confident in overcoming the fears of the past by building a new identity in international relations.

To illustrate the above-mentioned concept of constructivism, when cognitive maps are outlined, using explanations from critical geopolitics, Davutoglu mentions the collective memory or what is commonly referred to as common heritage. In this context, Davutoglu (2001) states that "the analysis of the sphere of international relations, without penetrating the historical depth, is similar to the psychological analysis when it does not take into account the data on a person's

memory” (p.551). Thus, a foreign policy perspective, without considering historical assets and geographic depth, would not be compatible with Turkey’s geography.

Referring to Cohen (2016), constructivism has precedence in the Davutoglu’s thinking. First, Davutoglu (2001) has emphasized that Islamism and history are important in creating solidarity or friendship between different civilizations and cultures. He stresses that “the best way to ensure that interaction between cultures is positive is communication among international organizations. . . and that the role of culture and history is of great importance in improving relations between nations” (Cohen, 5). Second, constructivists argue that states’ interests are not determined by power, but by identities built during a long process of socialization. Unlike realism, according to Wendt (1999), “it is not the hard power that promotes international relations but the power of ideas” (p. 8). And third, another element - reflected in the outlying principles drafted by Davutoglu - is the priority given to the soft power in relation to the hard power, and according to Cohen (2016), “power in Davutoglu’s thinking involves not only realistic transitional aspects but also social and civil identity, as these factors further stimulate a nation’s ability to add power and influence to other actors” (p. 7).

How does Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) works in Balkans

Since the AKP came to power, Turkey has adopted new principles in forming foreign policy. This new foreign policy now operates within a conceptual framework formulated by Ahmet Davutoglu, based on principles such as balance between security and democracy, zero problem policy toward Turkey’s neighbors, developing relations with the neighboring regions and beyond, rhythmic diplomacy, and multidimensional foreign policy.

In this framework of TFP, Aras & Fidan (2009) explain this change by referring to the notion of geographic imagination, which defines “cognitive maps of political elites and thus paves the way for labelling regions . . . and provides a framework for assumptions and representations for policymakers” (p. 196). From this perspective, Turkey, as it has increased contacts with neighboring countries through political, economic and cultural mechanisms, has reduced conflicting perceptions of the past. Turkey is reinterpreting its international position through a new foreign policy vision.

“Strategic depth” is essentially based on the geopolitical and historical analysis of Turkey’s international position. As Davutoglu (2010) notes, the concept is a “reinterpretation of Turkey’s history and geography in line with the new international context” (p. 430). In this context, the “Strategic Depth” analysis is essential to understanding the current agenda of Turkish foreign policy. According

to Kirisci (2009), “the meaning of the book derives from. . . introducing the concept of Strategic Depth as a factor that should characterize Turkish foreign policy “ (p. 36).

“Strategic Depth” is the guide of Turkish foreign policy. Based on this guide, geography takes on Turkey a very important role as much as culture and history. The strategic location and historical heritage of Turkish geography enables Turkey to engage in all the processes and geopolitical developments of the regions surrounding it. This circumstance makes it a geographic center - one of Davutoglu’s basic concepts. One of them is the Nearby Land Basin which includes three regions related to Turkey with land borders: the Balkan Peninsula, the Middle East and the Caucasus.

Based on this premise, this basin directly impacts on the formulation of Turkish foreign policy. Davutoglu (2001) gives extraordinary importance to this area as it states that “Turkey should not make the mistakes of the past. . . in the alienation of this basin” (p. 157). As Turkey tends to become an economic superpower, it is also trying to expand its influence in these regions.

It is commonly known that the Balkans represent the Turkish bridge to the West, and Turkey aims to use this bridge not only to exert its influence in this area, but also to establish a relationship with the West. Turkey’s goals are clear and in the case of the Balkans there is a double purpose: influence in the region and other opportunities to Europe because “an Anatolian country that has no impact on Balkan developments . . . neither can maintain the integrity on this sensitive geopolitical field and nor can be opened to the world” (Davutoglu, 2001: 157).

Then, in his analysis of the strategic depth, Davutoglu (2002) protects Turkish “imperialist” interests, calling Muslim populations “Ottoman remnants”. He adds that “particularly two countries (Bosnia and Albania), where Muslims, the natural allies of Turkey, have a Muslim majority, have expressed the will to turn this historic experience based on Ottoman legacy into a natural alliance. Meanwhile, Turkish and Muslim minorities in Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Sandzak, Kosovo and Romania are important elements of Turkish politics in the Balkans “ (p.161).

Between Davutoglu’s lines there is the tendency for hegemony. It seems that Davutoglu has secured the influence in Albania as he worries about Russia’s neutralization in the region and maintaining the equilibrium with the US. He also worries about the countries over which Turkey really has influence when proposing the preparation of a plan. “. . . internal security in the Balkans would equilibrate the Russian factor in the area as well as the preparation of a framework plan would be necessary to guarantee the internal security and territorial integrity of Albania, Bosnia and Macedonia. . . “ (Davutoglu, 2001: 162).

Economic relations

Turkey's economic role in the Western Balkans has been somewhat successful in achieving economic relations. In fulfilling "No Problem with Neighbors" principle, Turkey has been focused on normalizing and intensifying cultural, political and economic ties with neighboring countries, including Albania and other Balkan countries. Therefore, relations with the Balkans countries have improved considerably. In this sense, promoting economic integration and diplomacy as a way of solving problems has helped raise Turkey's profile as soft power.

Factors driving Turkish tendency to invest in Albania's economy are common history, geographic proximity and Turkey's growing economic influence. On the Albanian part, the government of Albania has defined Turkey as a strategic partner, along with Italy, Greece and Austria - the so-called four-angle Albanian foreign policy.

In 2012, trade between the two countries was estimated at \$ 400 million. Turkey has increased its investments that have already reached over a billion dollars. Albania is not yet integrated into EU structures due to problems with law enforcement and corruption. This situation creates a tendency to find support in other countries. As Likmeta (2010) says, Albania finds the "rescuer in the former imperial ruler" (f. 3). However, it should be noted that there were over 160 bilateral agreements between Turkey and Albania in various areas of cooperation, including agriculture, tourism, national archives, environment, education, defense, energy, trade and the economy. Turkey regards Albania as a key strategic player in establishing peaceful co-existence and stability in the Balkans, and also supports Albania's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions (Pawel, 2010: 12), while still had leverage on such structures.

Considering the whole Balkans countries, economic relationships should be the major path for Turkey to create the leverage it aims. And yet Turkey's relative economic success for much of the 2000s has *not* been translated into a large increase in Turkey's economic presence in the Balkans. This is mainly because the Turkish economy has stalled in the last decade or so (Srivastava, 2016).

Turkey was a success story before the 2008 financial crisis, with GDP growth reaching a peak of 9.4 percent in 2004. The effects of the financial crisis hit Turkey hard, but Turkey rebounded quickly, posting a 9.2 percent growth rate in 2010 and 8.8 percent growth in 2011. Since then, however, Turkey's economy has slowed: GDP growth has oscillated between 2 and 4 percent since 2012, and that slowdown has been accompanied by diminished potential for Turkey to improve its trade position with Balkan countries. (Ibid)

At present, apart from internal problems and the conflict in Syria, the Turkish government's biggest challenge is the increasing economic prosperity and repairing the damage to investor confidence caused by domestic political instability. Erdogan and the AKP have centralized much power as via constitutional amendments or by shutting down media organizations – tactics they have already employed – but without economic prosperity, this power will be far from secure (Toskoz, 2017).

The underlying weakness in the Turkish economy has manifested in the Balkans by the limited extent to which Turkey has managed to increase the value of its regional trading relationships. Despite Turkish officials' flurries of high-level visits to the Balkans, in part because of the government's concentrated push to solidify economic relationships in the region, Turkey has failed to take a significant position in trade with most Balkan countries, let alone a dominant one. This is illustrated by the chart below.

Investment in the Balkans

The media has made much of expanding Turkish influence in the Balkan region. The statistics regarding the level of investment, however, do not bear this out. The latest data on outgoing Turkish foreign direct investment (FDI) is from 2012, but it paints an underwhelming picture of Turkish investments.

Both in absolute terms and a percentage of Turkey's overall FDI, Turkish investment in the Balkans is limited. According to the data above, countries like Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania each accounted for less than 1 percent of Turkey's outgoing FDI. It is also unlikely that Turkey's FDI behavior has changed markedly since 2012 (Toskoz, 2017).

Here, too, Turkey's commitment to the Balkans is relatively underwhelming in terms of the type and quality of projects it has undertaken and the financial value of TİKA's activities in Balkan countries. In its 2014 annual report, TİKA reported a budget of \$168 million. The largest Balkan recipient of this aid by far was Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 7.35 percent of the TİKA budget that year. In absolute terms, that is just under \$12 million – insufficient to create influence or power in a foreign country. Furthermore, most of the other Balkan countries only received 2 percent or less of TİKA's budget in 2014, according to the annual report (TIKA, 2014).

Religious influence

Religion, as another dimension Turkey employs to connect with the Balkans in the strategic thinking of Davutoglu (2001), is part of geo-culture, a term used to describe how human beings think about their culture in order to explain basic assumptions

and the meanings upon which human nature is built. Moreover, “geoculture is a set of norms, which are widely accepted in a certain social environment. It is closely related to a political process and the factors constituting geocultural norms are derived from political aspects (Wallerstein, 1991: 15).

Religion has been one of the most debatable issues in social sciences for years (Davutoglu, 2001). Even the definition of religion has raised several questions and hence there are several approaches concerning the definitions of religion in different fields. Furthermore, the discipline of international relations has also become interested in the role of the religion in politics especially since the early 1990s (Ibid). The debate on this issue has increased in the post-Cold War world. From the rise of fundamentalist religious movements to the increasing role of religion in politics, the secularization theories, which had assumed the decline of the religion in social life thanks to the advance of modernization, had to be revised (Venetis, 2015).

However, since 2005, the AKP’s foreign policy has changed to multi-dimensional foreign policy which is described by Öniş and Yılmaz as “soft EuroAsianism” strategy (Venetis, 2015). Yet, according to them, “soft Euro-Asianism” does not just apply to the former Soviet Union region and the Middle East, but to all of Turkey’s neighbors.

Religion is also a potential lever that could allow Turkey to exercise power in the Balkans. As the map below shows, Kosovo and Albania both have Muslim-majority populations. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bulgaria have sizable Muslim populations as well. This map, however, obscures the significance of the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This country is a combination of two distinct entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The population of the former is roughly 80 percent Orthodox Christian, and the latter is about 70 percent Muslim, which means in practical terms that at least part of Bosnia and Herzegovina should be considered a Muslim-majority country like Kosovo or Albania.

The fact that Turkey is a Muslim country creates a natural shared interest between Turkey and the Balkans’ Muslim states. Turkey even committed a brigade of troops to the region in the 1990s, within the context of U.N. and NATO intervention in the Balkans. This was in large measure to support the Muslim populations in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania. Any time EU seems to distance itself from these countries, and the situation is destabilized, Turkey is ready to intervene and gain influence in the region.

However, these relationships will also be a barrier to any strong assertion of Turkish power in the region. While there is a sizable Muslim population in the Balkans, there are also many Orthodox Christians and ethnic groups of various stripes that will be hostile to any Turkish move (Srivastava, 2016). Although Turkey

and Serbia have managed to work together in terms of their economic relationship, they are on opposite ends of the Kosovo issue. More broadly, a large swath of the Balkans would not welcome a return of Turkish influence in the region - contrary to what Davutoglu says: Turkey is a natural actor in this region (Tozkoz, 2017).

Furthermore, Turkish Islam was pushed in the Balkans during recent decades as a tool of Turkish influence. The Gulen movement, a one-time ally of the Turkish government, established schools and social services throughout the Balkans with the government's blessing and encouragement. Since then, there has been a break between Fethullah Gulen, a predominant Turkish preacher and politician, and the AKP government. Erdoğan has blamed Gülen for being one of the masterminds behind the attempted coup last year. As a result, Turkey has established a new organization called the Maarif Foundation to take the place of Gulen's organization. The Turkish government is pressuring countries to relinquish control of Gulen offices and schools to the Maarif Foundation. Turkish government officials have also brought up the issue of expelling Gülen teachers and closing their schools in countries like Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. And while many countries have already acquiesced to the Turkish government's demands, the Balkans' Muslim countries have not. They have made public pronouncements supporting the Erdoğan government, but the Maarif Foundation's head noted in an interview with Turkey's Daily Sabah that "talks with Balkan countries like Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina were continuing" (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2017), without the expected success.

From this perspective, ostracizing Gulen may have created political confusion in some of these Balkan countries rather than developing an affinity for the Turkish brand of Islam. The basic religious doctrine is the same between AKP's version of Islam and Gulen's. The difference between AKP and Gülen versions is political. Still, there is a limit to how much Turkey can play the Muslim card in these countries, both due to the Gulen-AKP fracture and because the countries have created their own versions of Islam. There will also be an inevitable backlash from the region's non-Muslim countries if Turkey pushes the issue too hard (Ibid).

The role of Turkish Islamic networks in Albania

After the Cold War, an important role in exercising the cultural dimension in the Western Balkans, including Albania, has been given to the introduction of Turkish Islamic networks in the region. This role - has been fulfilled by the "Diyanet" - Turkish Presidency for Religious Issues and non-governmental networks, such as neo-Sufi communities and charitable Islamic foundations. Though their influence may be limited, it is natural that these networks have a long-lasting influence on

Islam in the Balkans by fulfilling their goal: strengthening ties between Turkey and these countries.

Since 1924, Diyanet was perceived as an instrument to create national identity based on Pan-turkism, Islamic religious tradition and the secular state system, as it is emphasized in the Constitution of Turkish Republic: “ The Presidency of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity” (Article 136). However, referring to the AKP foreign policy, it can be noted that Turkey is very interested in controlling Diyanet. Conservative AKP on one hand, and Diyanet, a Kemalist institution, do not find a common language in their intentions. But after 12 years in power, the AKP has worked to “introduce some state institutions under its umbrella, aiming for a strong control over the Kemalist-born Diyanet “(Axiarlis, 2014: p. 83).

Since the early 1990s, Diyanet has opened its own missions throughout the Balkans, aiming to support Turkish communities in the region, as well as to develop cooperation with Islamic institutions. The main task of Diyanet’s representatives is the selection of students to study theology in Turkey. Another aspect of Diyanet’s work is the translation and distribution of religious literature. Only 40,000 texts have been translated and distributed in Albania (Korkut, 2012: 117 - 123).

Turkish Islamic charity networks in the Western Balkans

A considerable number of Turkish Islamic charity organizations are also active in the Western Balkans, including Albania. Charitable institutions have a long tradition in Turkey. In Ottoman society, educational services, health and social services were provided mainly by religious foundations (vakifs). These foundations were nationalized in 1924, but the institution’s Islamic of vakif provided a model for pro-Islamist civil society in the 1980s and 1990s (Barnes, 2012: 7).

“Suleymans”, a community established in the ‘20s as a reaction to the closure of schools, have their roots in Sufism. Currently they are influential in some European countries. They teach Balkan Muslims the Turkish tradition Sunni-Hanafi and protect them from the influence of neo-Salafism, which they consider a deviation from Islam. They have a very well organized network in the Western Balkans, with dormitories and schools where the Koran is studied throughout the region through a number of different foundations. Suleymans have been active in Albania since 1996, and run nine dormitories in eight different locations across the country. They have been active in Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia since the early 2000s. They are also aiming to expand their activities and open new dormitories in many regions. (Barnes, 2012: 8-12).

“AMHV” - “Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi” Foundation (AMHV) is associated with Erenkoy community, which nowadays is one of the most influential communities. At first this foundation dealt mainly with social services, particularly distribution of aid to the poor. Now the network has extended itself beyond Turkey. The bulk of its financial resources come from religious Turkish businessmen, many of them originating from the Balkans who want to support their Muslim supporters in the Balkans (Barnes, 2012: 14-17). AMHV started its activity in Kosovo in the late 1990s to provide humanitarian assistance after the war. It set up an association, “Istanbul International Brotherhood and Solidarity” (IIBS) which has opened a permanent office in Pristina in order to coordinate humanitarian activities in the region. Since then, AMHV has been developing its activities in a similar way as in Turkey, building dormitories and running Koran courses. IIBS coordinator in Pristina explains that their main goal is to ensure that the Turkish tradition remains the dominant form of Sunni Islam in the Balkans. Currently they manage dormitories and madrasas in Kosovo. AMHV is also active in Albania - with the madrasa in Shkodra - and constantly tries to extend its activities. (Barnes, 2012: 44).

IHH - İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı (Foundation for humanitarian aid and human rights) was founded in 1993 by German branch Milli Gorus (Milli Gorus - National Vision is one of the leading Turkish organizations in Europe) and supported by the Refah Party (outlawed in 1998). Understandably it is now close to the AKP and to reformist wing of Milli Gorus. IHH has helped - during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo - through humanitarian aid for refugees in Albania, Macedonia, Sandzak and Bosnia. Besides humanitarian aid, IHH also emphasizes the need to provide spiritual support to Muslims in the Balkans, especially in areas where there is Christian missionary activities. In 2006, IHH distributed 10,000 Korans in Albania and Kosovo, and 5,000 books for children in Tirana. Although IHH is now focusing on other countries like Palestine and Lebanon, it still close ties with Islamic institutions and Muslim communities in the Western Balkans (Barnes, 2012: 71).

Besides their humanitarian activities, these charities have played an important role in establishing contacts between the pro-Islamic civil society in Turkey and Muslim and Islamic communities and institutions in Western Balkans - exercising in this way public diplomacy so pronounced by the new spirit of today’s Turkish foreign policy.

With these projects, undertaken by state-financed institutions and the co-called non-profit foundations, Turkey has not been able to dictate its policies in such domains.

Conclusion

The Balkan region is still not one of Turkey's main partners. For example, European Union countries have much stronger economic ties with Turkey than with Balkan countries. However, Turkey is still attempting to extend its tentacles in the Balkans. We talk about Albania as a potential economic partner of Turkey, but, for example, Serbia ranks among the countries with the greatest intensity of economic cooperation. Therefore, in this context, it is to be noted that Turkey, despite its potential, has not yet strongly intervened economically in Balkans.

Encouraged by importance of the Balkans, the new Turkish foreign policy run by the AKP has repositioned Turkey as a regional power in the Balkans. As explained above, Turkey is increasingly using geo-economic values such as foreign direct investment, signing free trade agreements and other forms of economic support to create a political influence.

Turkey continues to use economics not only to strengthen political influence but also to maintain stability in the region from whose destabilization Serbia and Greece could benefit. In this context, Turkey continues to use its strength for economic expansion. The small Balkans countries should know their position and orientation, as Turkey has not used all its potential Turkey has some distinct economic advantages relative to neighboring powers, but the next few years will be tough for Turkey's economy. That will limit its ability to project power in the short term.

According to Friedman (2011), Turkey will rise as a regional power. In this paper, we discussed what that rise will mean in terms of Turkey's ability to project power into the Balkans. We conclude that while Turkey will seek to increase power in the Balkans because of its imperatives, doing so will be difficult in the near-to-medium term. Concerns about Turkey's trade and investment positions in the Balkans are overstated, and while Turkey shares natural interests with Muslim-majority countries in the Balkans, there are inherent limits to how far Turkey can use this to its advantage.

Europe is becoming wary of Turkey's power; at the same time, Turkey is increasingly unafraid of challenging Europe. The Balkans have always been a battleground for outside powers. In the current state of affairs, Turkey's influence is rising, but there are limits to its power and it will face some of those limits in the Balkans.

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