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RESURGENT TURKEY: THE TURKISH MODEL AND THE ARAB SPRING

Abstract:

The Arab Spring has brought significant change and turbulence in the Middle East region. Concerning the developments and future prospects, the debate on the Turkish model has intensified once again. For over six decades, Turkey has a democratic society, democratic elections, plural political system, institutions based on democratic accountability and a long-standing tradition of secular government. The Turkish model is probably the most relevant one to the wider region, because it incorporates successfully the principal elements of both worlds: East and West. Although labeled as ‘work in progress’, it is the finest know-how and the best practice available to the awoken peoples of the Arab spring. Its history offers quite a few lessons for those interested in implementing the ideas and institutions from the West into the East and it suggests that this objective can be achieved, although it takes a long time. Moreover, this is why after the Arab spring, the Turkish model became vigorously operational.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

In light of the recent developments in the Middle East and the Arab World countries, Turkey’s effort to establish itself as a prominent and adherent partner of the international community in the region seems to be challenged once again. If we take aside all hastily born and radical ideas on the region’s future,¹ we are left with some highly interesting predictions. Remarkably enough, for the most part, they envision Turkey’s raising authority and/or immense power, thus paving the road for its hegemonic rise and recognition.² The latter comes as no surprise

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¹One of these ideas promotes the return to the Islam or the turn to the radical Islamic legacy of nations in the wider region. Another one promotes the rise of Turkey as economic giant, therefore envisaging the possibility to create a New Turkish Economic Sphere. The latter is advanced as a highly probable outcome, bearing in mind the current trends. See more in: Zeynep Dereli and Jean Pierre Lehman, *Turkey’s dynamic resurgence in the new global era - the pivotal bridge of the 21st century*, (Lausanne: International Institute for Management Development, February 2011).

²For instance, a theory on Turkish rise and hegemony has been promoted by Israel Shamir. He annotates that: “...there is a great new plan of creating a Middle East Union as a regional equivalent of the European Union. This is the right place for Turkey - at the head of this new formation. In a way, it will be a restoration of the Ottoman Empire: to the same extent to which the European Union is a restoration of the Charlemagne’s Empire. The difference is that Europe was fragmented for centuries, while our region was united until 1917. Even if full political union may be a far-away perspective, this is good to start moving towards this goal”. Israel Shamir, *Turkey is the Key*, 23.03.2012, http://www.israelshamir.net/English/Turkey_Key.htm. Similar stand is being advertised by Eric Walberg, *Russia and Turkey: Cleaning up the mess in the Middle East*, 28.09.2010, http://ericwalberg.com/index.php?view=article&catid=37%3Arussia-and-ex-soviet-union-english&id=278%3Aturkey-and-russia-cleaning-up-the-mess-in-the-middle-east&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=90

to anyone researching the region's prospects or the Turkish political history. Yet, among some scholars and analysts, a certain level of distrust is shown in Turkey's interests and motivations and even in its capability to lead its stranded neighbors toward the right course. At the same time, Turkey's ambition toward neo-ottoman ascend³ is being asserted. A part of the reasons for this outlook derives from the Turkey's regional positioning (the recent disturbed relations with Israel⁴ and active involvement in the Syrian turmoil).⁵ The second and probably more significant element is deduced from the Turkish internal political

³Neo-ottomanism is being reluctantly labeled as anti-West or as "an orientation of Turkey away from Europe and toward an empire that once included parts of three continents", therefore implicating the Turkish ascend toward the New Ottoman Empire. Moreover, while the Turkish official course may not decisively acknowledge this possibility, the fact remains that "Turkey has committed itself here to economic integration, seeing its future in at least an echo of its past". See more in: Anthony Shadid, 'Resurgent Turkey Flexes Its Muscles Around Iraq', *New York Times*, January 4, 2011 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/world/middleeast/05turkey.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all; The recent promotion of the film "Fetih 1453" (Conquest) in theaters produced additional elements confirming the concerns about the rising Turkish hegemony. This film deals with the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 and it has been seen by more than 2.5 million in Turkey during the first week. Due to its story, it was banned for the population under 16 in Germany. See more in: "'Conquest' 1453 reaches more than 2 mln viewers' in *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 4, 2012 at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/conquest-1453-reaches-more-than-2-mln-viewers.aspx?pageID=238&nID=14776&NewsCatID=381>.

⁴Michael Singh assumes that "if Turkey truly desires to serve as a bridge between East and West and achieve "strategic depth," it would do well to shed such zero-sum thinking and find a way to repair its relations with Israel. Likewise, Israel must do its part by demonstrating a willingness to compromise regarding the flotilla incident and avoiding actions which exacerbate bilateral tensions. The choice facing Turkey has been sometimes mischaracterized as between Iran and its allies on one hand, and Israel and the West on the other. In fact, Turkey's choice is between opportunism and responsibility. Choosing the former may seem appealing in the short term to Ankara, but the long-term costs to Turkey and the region will be heavy". See more in Michael Singh, 'The Choice Turkey Must Make About Israel', *Foreign policy online*, November 5th, 2010, http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/11/05/the_real_choice_turkey_has_to_make_when_it_comes_to_israel

⁵ In a recent article (Turkey's Balancing Act) [Mohammed Ayoob](#) marks Turkey as the spearhead of a joint Western-Arab-Turkish policy aimed at forcing President Bashar al-Assad to cede power in Syria. He says that "this is quite a turnaround in Turkish policy, because over the past two years the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had gone out of its way to cultivate good relations with neighboring Syria, with whom it shares a long land border". Ayoob comments that this change of political course will be accompanied by grave costs in terms of its relations with Iran (which is the main backer of Assad's regime). He also reminds us "that only few months ago many American leaders were livid at what they perceived to be Turkey's betrayal. In their view, Turkey had re-oriented its foreign policy toward the Muslim Middle East and away from the West – a shift supposedly reflected in the country's deteriorating relations with Israel and improving ties with Iran and Syria". Ayoob says that Turkey has suddenly shifted its position on Syria and joined the Western powers stance due to two main reasons: 1. The decision of the ruling AK Party not to oppose democracy in Syria since it can not afford it mainly because of its own democratic legitimacy and 2. The strategic importance of Syria for Turkey and securing future Turkish interests on Syrian soil for which Erdoğan's government was ready to jeopardize its relation with Iran. See more in [Mohammed Ayoob](#), 'Turkey's Balancing Act', *Project syndicate*, 09 January 2012, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ayoob1/English>; On the impact of the Turkish involvement in Syria, please consult Bayram Balci, *The Syrian Dilemma: Turkey's Response to the Crisis*, Carnegie Endowment, February 10, 2012, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2012/02/10/syrian-dilemma-turkey-s-response-to-crisis/9jxj>

course.⁶ The debate on the Turkish model has intensified once again. Its scope involves long existing considerations on the Turkish democratization success, the dedication of the political elite towards its accomplishment, the probability of its export to other eastern societies and so forth. Hence, the following questions emerge: can Turkey become a model for the recently awoken Arab world peoples? What is the essence of the Turkish model? Is it reasonable to deduct that Turkey with its model can provide the bridge they need in order to establish democratically elected and responsible governments?

Naturally, the answers are embedded in the nature of the Turkish society. In Turkey, the majority of the population belongs to the Islam, but the government is democratically elected and it is in coherence with the Islam well for some time now. Turkey offers a fine example of the idea that secularism can be executed in Muslim, as well as in other societies and that democracy as a form of government can exist in the Eastern, as well in other cultures. The Turkish westernization project is not a new or recent endeavor. It has its roots in the times of the Ottoman Empire. Its pronounced nature, every now and then, is wrongfully interpreted as a Turkish attempt to import the western civilization and values to a traditional, Islamic and hesitant society. In fact, the Turks have been moving to the West since the sixth century BC, first because of the need to acquire new lands and later because of their efforts to import Western technical, military and institutional practices as well as the Western way of life.⁷ The imminent direction westwards has defined the Turkish culture over centuries. Hence, the language has been influenced by Arabic as well as by Western languages, just as its architecture and cuisine.⁸ Atatürk sought to reform all aspects of the Turkish life. He banned the fez (headwear of the Muslim gentlemen), discouraged veiling of women, adopted Common Era calendar, replaced the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet, made surnames compulsory and much more or, as Mamedov says, he made a clean sweep.⁹ Still, the most important values imported from the West were the ideas of secular and republican government (leading to the abolition of the caliphate and monarchy). These reforms aimed at the modernization of the Turkish society. In addition, while the Turks call it Atatürkism, mark it as an ongoing movement that is open to change and continuously developed, the westerners often call it Kemalism¹⁰ and label it as state doctrine, thus implying that it is static and easily revertible upon the control of political

⁶See more in footnote 46. Also, see more in: Halil M. Karaveli, 'No Escape from Authoritarianism? Turkey suffers from lack of constituency for liberal change', *Turkey Analyst*, vol. 5, no. 6, 19 March 2012, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2012/120319a.html>

⁷Halil Erdemir, *Why Turks turned their faces to the West – The Westernization of Turkey and Turkish migration to the Federal Republic of Germany*, (Izmir: Manisa Ofset Basi, October 2006), summary and p. 3.

⁸Erdemir, op. cit. p. 3.

⁹Andrew Mango, *The Turks Today*, (London: John Murray Publ. 2004), p. 22-23; Eldar Mamedov, 'Why Atatürk's secularism is liberal', *Hurriyet Daily News*, paper edition from 7.03.2012.

¹⁰Kemalism, according to Cagaptay's citing of the Kadro, was described as the forth way, that was neither fascist, communist nor capitalist. See more in: Soner Cagaptay, 'Secularized Islam defines Turkishness' in: *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey - Who is a Turk*, ed. Soner Cagaptay, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 103.

elites. Yet, it stands as the first and only successful experiment of secularization and westernization of an Islamic society.

Although Turkey/Ottoman Empire began its westernization project during mid-XIX century with the Tanzimat (Restructuring) and the Young Ottomans' Movement¹¹ (some even claim that it began during the time of the Tulips - *Lale Devri*), the real western approach on behalf of Turkey was done after the establishment of the Republic in 1923 or, more precisely, during the Kemalist Era.¹² Kedourie pinpoints the constitutional and representative government in the Turkish Republic as "the outcome of one hundred and fifty years of tormented endeavor to discard old ways, which have ceased to satisfy and replace them with something modern, eye-catching and attractive".¹³ Yet, Ortayli denies this claim and underlines that the Ottoman Europeanization did not give advantage to the West because of admiration but because of necessity.¹⁴ He also notes that the Turkish approach to the West is an ongoing conscious cultural undertaking.¹⁵ In recent times, the main reason behind it was the thinking that by approaching the West, Turkey will experience advanced development¹⁶ or, according to Mango, what is at issue in Turkey is not so much the membership in the European Union, but the European standard of life.¹⁷ Until recently, this could be easily proved by the high rate of internal support for the Turkish membership into the European Union. However, the recent economic troubles that the European Union is experiencing are expected to produce a definite turnaround in the Turkish stance toward the European integration.¹⁸

Most of the analysts agree that Turkey joined the Western world in reality only after the Second World War when, led by the US (with Truman doctrine, the Marshall Plan and NATO), the relationship was cemented and secured.¹⁹ During those times, Turkey even agreed to join MEDO (Middle East Defense Organization) under the rising influence of the Great Britain and the USA and the belief that it may serve more by taking part in another regional alliance instead of NATO. This was due to the conviction that Turkey with its historic ties with the area might

¹¹See more in: Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey- The Quest for identity*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), p. 33-39.

¹²A very informative elaboration on ongoing Turkish turn toward the West, especially concerning the Turkish migration to western countries (and Germany in particular) can be found in the study: Erdemir, op.cit.

¹³W. M. Hale, Foreword in *Turkey: Identity, Democracy and Politics*, ed. Sylvia Kedourie, (London: Frank Cass Publications, 1998).

¹⁴Ilber Ortayli, *Najdolgiot vek na imperijata*, (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija i Sojuz na turskite nevladini organizacii vo Republika Makedonija, 2009), p. 32.

¹⁵Ilber Ortayli, *National identity and cultural change*, in November 10, 1994 State Ceremony Speeches and Ataturk and Turkish identity panel, Ataturk Research Center, (Ankara: Ataturk Supreme Council for Culture, language and history, 1999), p. 56-57.

¹⁶Mango cites surveys conducted in 2003 among the Turkish population and notes that there has been some 70 % support for the Turkey's integration into the European Union. Some more recent studies and surveys show less support among the Turkish population, which can be explained by the lengthy and tremendously difficult Turkish path to the EU. See more in Mango, op.cit., p. 2.

¹⁷Ibid. p. 2.

¹⁸See more in: Semih Idiz, 'EU losing attraction for Turks', *Hurriyet Daily News* 14.02.2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/eu-losing-attraction-for-turks-.aspx?pageID=449&nID=13703&NewsCatID=416>

¹⁹Ahmad, op. cit. p. 167.

well act as a bond to unite the region and thus contribute to the interests of the West in general.²⁰

Turkey became member of NATO in 1952, along with Greece. As Kurkcuoglu notes, the Turks saw this as a confirmation of their status of a European nation.²¹ In turn, it became a great contribution to the modern Turkey of Ataturk. Soon afterwards, the idea to join the European Community (European Union) emerged. Turkey applied for associate membership in 1959 and for full EEC membership in 1987. The Customs Union between Turkey and European Community came into effect in 1996, while the candidate status was granted in 1999. The negotiations began in 2004 and currently they are under a stalemate. Over the past decade, several members of the European Union have declared their objection to Turkish entry. Meanwhile, the European Union integration has understandably achieved mythic proportions for Turkey and it has become no less than a symbol of the successful completion of the long-term Ataturk revolution, involving the most basic and vital points of the Turkish identity and orientation.²² The formal explanation of the European Union standpoint on Turkish membership is that Turkey does not satisfy the democratic requirements of membership, thus making the incorporation of Turkey into the EU impossible.²³ As an aspiring member, Turkey needs to meet the so-called Copenhagen criteria, which state the following: “membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.”²⁴ Still, the main reason behind the opposition does not seem so benign. In fact, political figures from European Union member states have repeatedly stated that Turkey should not become a full member and they have done so representing the vast majority of their own respected countries’ populations. The European stance against the Turkish membership derives from the prolonged and continuous fear of the broad cultural gap between Turkey and the European Union Member States.

²⁰According to Omer Kurkcuoglu, ‘The developments leading to Turkey’s entry into NATO’ in: *The Importance Ataturk placed on global place and Turkey’s membership in NATO*, (Ankara: Supreme Council for Ataturk Culture, Language and History, Ataturk Research Center, 2001), p. 34-35; The initiative was promoted by Great Britain and supported by USA. It has been noted that MEDO was an attempt on behalf of the West to keep the Soviet Union out of the region of the Near East. The Bagdad Pact (title used often instead of MEDO) came into existence in 1955, signed by Turkey, Great Britain, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. USA never signed the pact. Under the persuasion of the Egypt President Nasser, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan refused to join MEDO. Soon, MEDO was transformed into CENTO - Central Treaty Organization. It ceased to exist in 1979. More on the USA interests in the creation of MEDO see at declassified CIA document from 1952: *Prospects for an inclusive Middle East Defense Organization*, CIA document, 17.03.1952 http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0001356471/DOC_0001356471.pdf

²¹Kurkcuoglu, op.cit., p. 36.

²²According to Barry Rubin. See more in Barry Rubin’s Introduction in: *Turkey and the European Union*, ed. Ali Carkoglu and Barry Rubin, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2005), p. 1.

²³See more in: Metlem Muftuler-Bac, ‘The Never-Ending Story: Turkey and the European Union’ in: *Turkey before and after Ataturk – Internal and external affairs*, ed. Sylvia Kedourie, (London: Frank Cass Publication, 2006), p. 241.

²⁴*Conclusions of the Presidency*, European Council in Copenhagen, 21–22 June 1993. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop_en.pdf

The idea that Turkey belongs to the Eastern, Muslim and underdeveloped world was the defining factor behind it.

Because of its geostrategic and geopolitical attributes, Turkey remains to be the West's most important partner.²⁵ Notably, this is due to its unique position of being in-between. It has been interpreted as a buffer zone as much as it has been seen as a bridge or, as some westerners bluntly put it, as uncertain. In fact, this can prove itself to be a blessing as much as a curse, since Turkey has enjoyed the commodity to pick and choose its course and direction.²⁶ For the past six decades, the Turkish motorway was paved toward democratization. Yet, since "no state has ever possessed a government that fully measures up to the criteria of a democratic process and none is likely to...", according to Dahl, we need to concur with Lovell when pinpointing that "democratization, in the broadest sense, is never complete".²⁷

THE TURKISH MODEL

In order to advance and develop, each country needs peace on the inside and on the outside; therefore, Turkey is no exempt for this. The need for peace on its borders and orderly neighbors has been more or less assured on the western part of Turkey.²⁸ If we take aside the Greek-Turkish dispute and the ongoing Cyprus stalemate, we can rightfully argue that Turkey has no immediate worry in the West.²⁹ The borders with the former Soviet Union continue to convey conscious

²⁵According to Tony Karon: "Turkey's location at the fulcrum between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia gives it an opportunity to expand trade and influence far greater than that allowed by an exclusive focus on Nato partners". Tony Karon, 'In the flood of US cables, a resurgent Turkey emerges', *The National*, 6.12.2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/in-the-flood-of-us-cables-a-resurgent-turkey-emerges?pageCount=2>

²⁶One intriguing trend may be named - Turkey as Eurasian China. Namely, according to Soner Cagaptay, the trend shows that Turkey has had increase of exchange, communication and collaboration with countries that do not belong to the "West" rather than with the ones that do. "Europe's economic doldrums coupled with Turkey's new trans-European vision under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government means that the country's traditional commercial bonds with Europe are eroding while its trade links with the non-European world flourish. Accordingly, the Turks are increasingly trading with the non-OECD world". He says that paralleling this trend, it looks like Ankara is pursuing a foreign policy that transcends Turkey's old European focus. "The AKP's vision of reaching beyond Europe politically is now Turkey's vision as well. If Turkey is no longer trying to fit into Europe, then what is it doing?" According to him, "the best way to describe the new Turkey is as a "Eurasian China" - a country that is aggressively trading with the entire world while building connections to distant destinations. Is the "Eurasian China" model sustainable? This requires the Turkish economy to keep humming along and the country's politics to remain relatively stable". Cagaptay says that there has to be a foreign policy angle at work involved, because "Turkey is relatively stable at a time when the region is in upheaval. This, in turn, attracts investment from less-stable neighbors like Iran, Iraq and Syria. Investors are looking for a stable economy. Ultimately, political stability and regional clout are Turkey's hard cash. Its economic growth and ability to rise as a "Eurasian China" will depend on both". See more in: Soner Cagaptay, 'Op-Chart: Turkey's Changing World' in *CNN Global Public Square*, January 30, 2012, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1812>

²⁷David W. Lovell, *The challenges for democracy in Turkey*, (paper presented at the 21st IPSA World Congress, Santiago, Chile, July 12–16, 2009).

²⁸See more in: Mango, op.cit., p. 250.

²⁹Ibid., p. 250.

considerations, but still, the Turkish security is unlikely to be threatened from that side.³⁰ The main reason for Turkey's security concern lies on its eastern borders. Moreover, here lays the main reason why has Turkey been so interested and involved in the Arab spring and so eager to assist its neighbors in achieving stable democratic regimes. The turmoil in the region of the Middle East affects Turkey in terms of politics and security.³¹ Another aspect is the economic development. The wider region surrounding Turkey could be considered as a welcomed extension of Turkey's market and the less developed Turkish neighbors could learn a lot from the Turkish experience in production, technology and development of competitive economy. The Middle East is important to Turkey not just because it is this country's neighborhood, but because the Middle East extends into Turkey.³² However, until recently, Turkey was fairly secluded from the region. Hale was utterly accurate to deduct that Turkey was treated as the odd man out, which receives only passing attention or is even omitted entirely.³³ He found the reasons for the omission in the fact that since the establishment of the Republic, Turkey's internal political structures and foreign policies have tended to diverge fairly sharply from those in its Arabian neighborhood. The latter, according to him, was stipulated even further by the continuous political moves by consecutive Turkish governments at least until the 1980s. Because of these, it seemed that Turkey turned its back on the Middle East region and sought to differentiate its history and culture from those of its Muslim neighbors.³⁴ Another important factor, according to Hale, is the fact that the academics and practitioners dealing with the Middle East affairs tend to leave Turkey out of the regional studies, surveys of modern history, politics and society of the region. The main reason for this is their attitude, which is affected by the ancient barrier between the Islam and Christendom.³⁵

Living for decades under oppressive and dictatorial governments has led the peoples from the Middle East Arab World to rise and stake their claim for democratic and free society.³⁶ The turbulence that began

³⁰Ibid., p. 250.

³¹Turkey has 2548 km length in borders. It has 8 neighbors: Armenia (268 km), Azerbaijan (9 km), Bulgaria (northwest with 240 km), Georgia (northeast with 252 km), Greece (west with 206 km), Iran (to the east with 499 km), Iraq (southeast with 352 km), Syria (southeast with 822 km – the longest border from all neighbors). In addition, it has the [Mediterranean Sea](#) and [Cyprus](#) to the south, the [Aegean Sea](#) to the west and the [Black Sea](#) to the north. The [Sea of Marmara](#), the [Bosphorus](#) and the [Dardanelles](#) (the [Turkish Straits](#)) demarcate the boundary between [East Thrace](#) and [Anatolia](#) and also separate the continents of Europe and Asia. See more at *CIA World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

³²Mango, op. cit., p. 250.

³³Hale, op. cit., p. vii.

³⁴He annotates the fact that some Turkish newspapers still report on events from the region like reports from Middle East and, by that, it is assumed that Turkey does not belong to the Middle East region. Ibid., p. vii.

³⁵Ibid., p. vii.

³⁶Interesting view on the Middle East relations and the impact of external factors can be found in: Efraim Karsh, 'Cold War, post-Cold War: does it make a difference for the Middle East?', *Review of International Studies* (1997), 23, British International Studies Association, pp. 271–291; A valuable analysis on Arab world and democracy in: Larry Diamond, 'Why Are There No Arab Democracies?', *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 21, Number 1, (January 2010), pp. 93-112.

in Tunisia extended in a chain reaction to almost all Arab majority speaking nations and even further. In fact, the regional unrest was not exclusive to the countries of the Arab world and during 2010 and mid-2011 its scope rose and came to be known as an exceptional disorder.

With its secular democracy, booming economy and emergent international influence, Turkey acted as a model to the aspiring Arab democracies – a true Arab spring proponent.³⁷ Moreover, this came to no surprise, because Turkey has been exercising soft power politics toward the region by slowly but steadily increasing its economic cooperation (mostly in trade exports) and cultural influence (mainly through popular soap operas, student exchange and so forth). In addition, it provided a proven political equation on how to be modern (democratic but non-western) and Muslim at the same time. Therefore, Turkey cannot be regarded as a bystander in the Arab spring³⁸ and it should not be in future. In fact, time and imminent research will tell whether the Turkish model was the one that Arab world people looked for and aspired to (thus labeling Turkey as the stimulating might behind the Arab spring). Alternatively, perhaps Turkey had little to do with the inspiration or support of democratic changes in its neighborhood, since they were a product of genuine internal revolt against gerontocratic, kleptocratic and oppressive regimes in the Arab world countries. Nevertheless, the ultimate outcome was resurgent Turkey (with its model) as byproduct of the revolts.

The Turkish model is genuine and specific. Its main characteristics are: 1. Democracy and secularism (i.e. pluralism and secularism as main attributes of the Turkish model; the latter is extremely essential since Turkey is a dominantly inhabited by Muslim population); 2. Parliamentarianism (first practiced in 1876 and, although interrupted by military coupes, it remains to stand as strong rooted experience and practice); 3. Capitalism (functional open market economy with uneasy but successful transition from planned model, almost equally accessible and cooperative with the East and the West as its main attribute); 4. NATO Alliance membership (Turkey stands as the most eastern border of NATO collective security umbrella); and 5. Aspiring membership in the EU (Turkey has a strong record in adoption of the EU *acquis communautaire* and the current stalemate is anticipated to result as positive in near future).

However doubtful or attractive the Turkish model seems, it is necessary to underline that the modernization process in Turkish terms and policies was done in a very specific manner – i.e. *à la turca way*. As

³⁷It seems that Karon put it quite correctly when stating that: “When Turkey stands up to Israel, it wins the support of the Arab street, whose own leaders are often silent and quiescent. Surveys find that Mr. Erdogan has eclipsed Mr. Ahmadinejad as the leader most popular among the Arab public for that very reason”. Karon, *op. cit.*

³⁸In support of this claim see more in: ‘Friends of Syria to establish forum will meet in Istanbul next month’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 24.02.2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/friends-of-syria-to-establish-forum-will-meet-in-istanbul-next-month.aspx?pageID=238&nID=14587&NewsCatID=352>; ‘Turkey is trying to avert Syria’s division, FM says’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 25.02.2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-is-trying-to-avert-syrias-division-fm-says.aspx?pageID=238&nID=14635&NewsCatID=338>; On rising Turkish role on the Middle East region consult also Henri Barkey, *Turkey emerges as Middle East leader*, *CNN*, June 03, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-06-03/opinion/barkey.turkey.israel_1_gaza-war-israeli-turkish-akp?_s=PM:OPINION

noted before, the reforms were conducted from top down and the secular arrangements of the Turkish society were imposed. Now, if we consider the Arab world countries that recently experienced revolts and the Turkish model, we find it greatly significant to remark that there are certain limitations of the model, as each society has its own characteristics and caution in implementation is recommended. Hence, although the Turkish model proved as functional and workable, it should neither be implemented by copy-paste technique, nor even when the most important principle – secularism, is in question. Moreover, even though some may regard secularism as irrelevant, marginal and redundant, we must underscore that the separation of state and religion is the single most important principle in modern societies, principle that validates the differentiation between democracy and theocracy. Although the conviction imposed by critics that Turkey remains to stand as alien to the West and is a non-functional western replica is greatly debated, it is a fact that Turkey did not just copy the western political, economic and social model and it was not the only one to accept and implement it. According to Mango, like the countries of southern Europe, Turkey has copied the laws and institutions of republican France and it has social networks similar to those in Italy. In addition, it has had economic development through the agency of large family-owned conglomerates parallel to the one in Portugal and it has survived the *kulturkampf* between secularists and religious believers just as the one that has ranged through-out Europe.³⁹

A reasonable worry comes to light regarding secularism when assessing the public opinion in the Arab world concerning the implementation of the Turkish model into their respected societies. A recent poll⁴⁰ and a subsequent debate titled: “This House believes Turkey is a bad model for the new Arab states”⁴¹ show that “about 3 in 4 respondents across the Arab world (72 %) believe the Turkish political system would be a good model for the ‘new’ Arab states, such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya to follow”.⁴² When asked for three main reasons for their support, the respondents that were in favor of the Turkish model stated the following: 1. They believe that Turkey is very close to the Arab world in terms of culture, religion and traditions (57 %); 2. They believe that the Turkish model has allowed Turkey to become a well-respected country in the eyes of the world (56 %); and 3. They believe that the Turkish model has involved Islam in politics, which fits into the needs of the Arab world (49 %).⁴³ In addition, the poll shows a rate of 24 % of positive response to the notion that Turkey is a democratic country and 19 % support to the idea that any new model is better than the

³⁹See more in: Mango, op. cit., p. 249.

⁴⁰*Should Arabs follow the Turkish political model?*, The Doha Debates, 9 February 2012, http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/doha/polling/YouGovDoha_Debates-The_Turkish_Model_report.pdf

⁴¹The debate “This House believes Turkey is a bad model for the new Arab states”, was conducted on the 12th of January 2012 at Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey within the Doha Debates, founded by Tim Sebastian in 2004. See more at: *This House believes Turkey is a bad model for the new Arab states*, The Doha debate transcript, 12 January 2012, <http://www.thedohadebates.com/debates/item/?d=116&s=8&mode=transcript>

⁴²Doha Debates, op. cit.

⁴³Ibid.

current models across the Arab world.⁴⁴ When asked “why would the Turkish system not be a good model for the new Arab states?” respondents claim that the Turkish model is irrelevant to the Arab world (46 %) and because each country should have its own model (44 %). Interestingly enough, 43 % assert that Turkey is closer to Europe than it is to the Arab world and, as a result, the implementation of that model into the new Arab states is not supported.⁴⁵ The most worrying response during the poll came from the following question: “How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: Islamists in the Arab world are keen to adopt the Turkish model so they can introduce certain beliefs into Government under the banner of religion?”. Namely, up to 45 % stated that they agree or may be concerned.⁴⁶ According to Idiz, this calls for essential education from the Arab world opinion makers to their masses about just what the model they appear to like so much is really about.⁴⁷ Therefore, here rests the most valuable lesson for the Arab world states.

Turkey is a democratic society and it has been so for over six decades.⁴⁸ It has democratic elections, plural political system and institutions based on democratic accountability. In addition, it has a long-standing tradition of secular government - this is why Turkey should be a model for Middle East/Arab world countries. The Turkish model is probably the most relevant one to the wider region, because it incorporates successfully the principal elements of both worlds: East and West. It may be still ‘work in progress’, as Izid notes, but it is the finest know-how and the best practice available to the Arab spring awoken peoples. With its political history and ongoing process of western approach, Turkey is the actual bridge for the Arab world states between

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Furthermore, poll shows that when asked for three reasons why they do not support the implementation of the Turkish model into the new Arab states, respondents gave these additional reasons: 1. Turkey has its own issues around the integration of religion into politics (up to 35 %); 2. Turkey has a poor human rights record (up to 26 %); 3. adopting the Turkish model would increase the influence of the religious forces in politics (up to 12 %); and 4. Turkey lacks freedom of press/expression (up to 10 %). Ibid.

⁴⁶A similar stance was promoted by Ece Temelkuran and Hassan Mneimneh during the debate. Temelkuran noted that: “there is no Turkish model. There is the AKP model, which represents only 47 percent of this country. Yet, it is understandable for the outside world to be deceived, because the political and intellectual representatives of the remaining 53 percent are either in jail or silenced by various kinds of oppressions. AKP cannot be a model for the Arab world because, firstly, Turkey has been under a state for modernism and secularism for about eighty years, which has not been experienced anywhere in the Arab world in the same manner. Secondly, AKP’s so-called ‘accomplishments’ couldn’t have happened without the long-lasting network of Fethullah Gülen’s movement, that has no equivalent in the Arab world”. Mneimneh said that: “Arab Islamists are interested in the Turkish model because it gives them a cover for wanting to implement Islamism in their own societies... I propose to you that the Turkish model exists only when Turks or Europeans or other Westerners are talking to Arabs - and not just any Arabs but the Arab Islamists. ...I would like the poll to be phrased without mentioning Turkey and France and others. If no mention was there in the poll, I promise you Turkey would not be on the radar of the Arab populations”. Ibid.

⁴⁷See more in: Semih Idiz, ‘Do Arab know what the Turkish model is?’, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 28.2.2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/do-arabs-know-what-the-turkish-model-is-.aspx?pageID=449&nID=14789&NewsCatID=416>

⁴⁸Multiparty democracy was introduced in Turkish Republic in 1945 with the abolition of single-party system. It was accompanied by tumultuous times of the political arena, since Turkey experienced four military coups (in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997).

the places where they were to where they are going to. Turkey is significant not just because until recently it has been the only secular and democratic state in the Muslim world, but because it is the prototype of a country not belonging to the West and conducting a continuous endeavor to utilize its society along the modern Western standards. Its history has quite a few lessons for those interested in implementing ideas and institutions from the West into the East and it suggests that this objective can be achieved, although it takes a long time.⁴⁹ Moreover, this is why after the Arab spring the Turkish model became vigorously operational.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Turkish advance towards a modern and democratic society has been long and tremendously difficult at times. After the establishment of the Republic, Turkey positioned itself as a part of the European system. This geopolitical membership has had significant internal and external policy implications and it has been the defining factor of numerous reforms and achievements within the Turkish society. The recent developments in the wider region, demanding and challenging as they are, could bring a positive incentive to the Turkish-European relations stalemate. They can contribute vastly to the process of consolidation of the Turkish internal political dynamics and its regional repositioning on one hand, and act as catalyst of potentially renewed and reconsidered European Union policy towards Turkey, on the other.

Equally, the Turkish internal politics has also raised some justifiable concerns. The political direction of some of the recent constitutional reforms, the everlasting problem with PKK, some human rights concerns and so forth have contributed largely to the internal political unrest and to the ongoing dialogue on the extent and substance

⁴⁹Mango, op. cit., p. 254. One particularly important lesson is the implementation of democracy in Turkey. Turkish democratic model is unique. The factors of this distinctiveness were noted and elaborated by Bernard Lewis. Political reasons are that the democratic institutions and values were introduced and implemented by domestic political forces instead of being imposed by foreign powers, which gave them much better chance of survival. According to Bernard Lewis: "...in Turkey, democratic institutions were neither imposed by the victors, as happened in the defeated Axis countries, nor bequeathed by departing imperialists, as happened in the former British and French dependencies, but were introduced by the free choice of the Turks themselves. This surely gave these institutions a much better chance of survival". Historical reasons are that: "...Turkey, of all the Muslim countries, has had the longest and closest contact with the West, dating back almost to the beginnings of the Ottoman state. Turkey, for long the sword and buckler of Islam against the West, made a deliberate choice for westernization, and for a Westward political orientation. Specifically, the Turkish experiment in parliamentary democracy has been going on for a century and a quarter - much longer than in any other country in the Islamic world - and its present progress therefore rests on a far stronger, wider, and deeper base of experience". Social reasons are that the implementation of full democracy was never attempted by the successive Turkish governments, which Lewis considers as very wise. Instead, Turkey went through successive phases of limited democracy, laying the foundation for further development while rise of civil society was encouraged. "The vicissitudes of democracy under the late Ottomans, under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and under his successors would seem to confirm the belief that democracy is a strong medicine, which must be administered in small and only gradually increased doses. Too large and too sudden a dose can kill the patient". See more in: Bernard Lewis, 'Why Turkey is the only Muslim Democracy?', *Middle East Quarterly*, Volume I, number 1, March 1994, pp.41-49.

of the modernization process.⁵⁰ Resurgent as it may be, Turkey still needs to assure endurance of its secular and democratic society and its affirmative and assertive regional leadership, so that it can become a true template for the future of its neighboring infant democracies.⁵¹

Turkey and the wider region, to which it belongs geographically, have entered a period of pronounced social and political instability. The challenge may prove as excessively rising for some of the nations awoken by the Arab spring. In some areas – mainly Tunisia and Egypt, the debate about the future political arrangements is dominated by the idea to what extent Islam should be granted recognition.⁵² Furthermore, all over the Arab world revolted nations, instead of political victory of secular parties, people witness growth of Islamic parties and promotion of anti-secular views. (There are many examples, such as the proposal in the first draft of the Tunisian constitution that Islam is the principal source of legislation. Similar is the debate between the secular parties and the Muslim Brotherhood on the relationship between the executive and legislative power in Egypt, where the latter seems to be promoting the idea that only a Muslim can head the country as president.)⁵³ However, we should be confident in Turkey's ability to absorb and effectively resolve the negative developments (internally and externally)⁵⁴ and help its neighbors determine their path toward free and democratic societies. This is the true nature of the bridging factor, which Turkey represents for the region.

⁵⁰There is a rising concern over the direction of internal political course of Turkey after the coming to power of AK Party. There are many sources on this subject. As an example, see more in : Rabasa, Angel and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008). <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG726>.; M. Hakan Yavuz, 'Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey', *Cambridge Middle East Studies* 28, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Also in footnotes 45 and 46.

⁵¹According to Karon, "Mr. Davutoglu believes neither Turkey's nor the region's - or even America's and Israel's - best interests are served by it continuing to serve as a passive "wing state" of the western alliance. Instead, he argues, Turkey's foreign policy must be based on history and geography, justice and stability, and a willingness to challenge a US approach to key conflicts that is simply not viable". Karon, op. cit.; Also see: Mitch Potter, *Is Turkey building a new Ottoman Empire?*, Washington Bureau of Turkish News, November 14 2011, <http://www.turkishnews.com/en/content/2011/11/14/is-turkey-building-a-new-ottoman-empire/>

⁵²Eldar Mamedov, 'Why Ataturk's secularism is liberal?', *Hurriyet Daily News*, paper edition from 7.03.2012, 7; For detailed outlook please see *Egypt Armed Forces Constitutional Announcement*, Carnegie Endowment, 01.04.2011, <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2011/04/01/supreme-council-of-the-armed-forces-constitutional-announcement>

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴On one hand, it is probably true that currently "Ankara does not want to be perceived, especially in the Arab world, as a neo-imperialist, Ottoman power in the Middle East or a devoted servant of the West. The image of secular and modern Turkey has never been better among the Arab people, especially in countries like Egypt and Tunisia, where the new political elites there have openly [expressed their admiration](#) of the so-called Turkish model". On the other hand, Turkey needs to approach very consciously especially towards the Syria turmoil because of possible negative regional trends (rise of Kurdish problem, instability on its border, influx of refugees). See more in: Bayram Balci, *The Syrian Dilemma: Turkey's Response to the Crisis*, Carnegie Endowment, February 10, 2012, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2012/02/10/syrian-dilemma-turkey-s-response-to-crisis/9jxj>

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