

A CHRONICLE OF EVOLVING TURKISH-SERBIAN RELATIONS A CENTURY AFTER THE BALKAN WARS

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Abstract: *Relations between Turkey and Yugoslavia, which were cordial until the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina¹, were shaped by three factors: Yugoslavia's location on Turkey's trade routes to Europe, the long history shared with the peoples of Yugoslavia, and the friendly relations that existed thus far. Diplomatic relations took a new turn for the worse with the war, whereby economic relations also ended up being victim of the war, as well as the ensuing Kosovo crisis. However, the pattern of diplomatic relations and behavior since then has been different from what takes place, which made relations a complex reality: despite the rhetoric employed by both sides, sometimes verging on the inimical, and withdrawal of or denying agreement to ambassadors, relations survived. Prospects as regards an enhanced future rapprochement point to the importance of building and maintaining mutual political willingness.*

Keywords: *Turkey, Serbia, Balkans, Balkan Wars, post-Cold War era.*

BALKAN SAVAŞLARI'NDAN YÜZYIL SONRA EVİRİLEN TÜRK-SİRP İLİŞKİLERİNİN BİR GÜNCESESİ

Öz: Bosna-Hersek'teki savaşa kadar samimi olan Türkiye-Yugoslavya ilişkileri, üç etmen tarafından biçimlendirilmiştir: Yugoslavya'nın Türkiye'nin Avrupa'ya giden ticaret yolunun üzerinde yer alması, Yugoslavya halklarıyla paylaşılan uzun tarih ve o zamana kadar var olan dostça ilişkiler. Diplomatik ilişkilerde savaşla birlikte bozulma gözlemlenmiş, bu nedenle ekonomik ilişkiler de savaşın ve sonraki

1 "Bosnia-Herzegovina" and "Bosnia" shall be used interchangeably throughout the article.

Kosova krizinin kurbanı olmuştur. Ancak, diplomatik ilişkilerin yapısı ve aktör davranışları, göze görünenden farklı bir nitelik sergilemiş, bu da ilişkileri karmaşık bir gerçekliğe sokmuştur: iki tarafça kullanılan, bazen düşmanlık eşliğinde seyreden politik söyleme, büyükelçi geri çekme ve retlerine rağmen, ilişkiler devam etmiştir. Yeniden gerçekleşebilecek uzlaşma arayışları ortak siyasi iradenin inşasının ve muhafaza edilmesinin önemine işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türkiye, Sırbistan, Balkanlar, Balkan Savaşları, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönem.*

Introduction

In the twin local conflicts which came to be labeled as the “Balkan Wars” in 1912 and 1913, the Ottomans and Serbs, as adversaries, went through a bitter struggle that most overtly exposed the prevalent nationalist sentiment against the dwindling Ottoman state in the region. The Balkan Wars ended with more Ottoman territorial losses. The two adversaries once again found themselves on opposite camps in the longer and more destructive World War I. Although both wars were undisputedly waged for an “independent Serbia”, they failed in bringing this about. The outcome by 1918 was a new kingdom in which Serbia would share a common political space with its kin: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (KSCS).

After the formation the KSCS² on December 1, 1918, relations between Turkey and this Balkan neighbor had been mostly cordial until the war in Bosnia broke out in 1992. In the aftermath of World War I, Yugoslavia began to pursue a friendly foreign policy towards the regional states, including Turkey. During Turkey’s War of National Liberation (1919–22), Britain asked for Yugoslavia’s support against Ankara. However, this was turned down by Belgrade and a copy of the letter explaining the refusal was also sent to Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) (1881–1938) who reciprocated with the gesture of allotting land for the Yugoslav embassy in Ankara. In the course of the War of National Liberation, Mustafa Kemal also stated that Turkey would in no way enter a secret or an open alliance against Yugoslavia. The two countries tried

2 The country was renamed as “Kingdom of Yugoslavia” in 1929; “Democratic Federal Yugoslavia” in 1943; “Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia” in 1946; “Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” in 1963; “Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” after disintegration in 1992; “Union of Serbia and Montenegro” in 2003. Serbia and Montenegro became separate states in 2006. Throughout the study, the term “Yugoslavia” shall be used.

to improve bilateral relations during the interwar period in a multilateral framework by signing the Balkan Entente (1934) in an effort to form a bloc with security concerns in the volatile region of Balkans.³

During World War II, Yugoslavia fell to the Axis powers in April 1941, but expelled the Nazis in 1945, while Turkey successfully remained out of war. The efforts to revive the Balkan cooperation of 1934 were brought to pass once again in the 1950s with the Balkan alliance when it was seen by 1948 that Yugoslavia would remain socialist, although not in the Soviet orbit. As Turkey and Yugoslavia made efforts to formulate a cooperative framework during the Cold War, there appeared three factors that shaped this: Yugoslavia is located on Turkey’s trade routes to Europe, there is a long history shared with the peoples of Yugoslavia, and cordial relations existed, although within the limits due to the Cold War.

However, there was more to the story after the Cold War, particularly after the war in Bosnia broke out, because relations between Ankara and Belgrade seemed to enter into a precarious situation. Although the components of economic relations - the most important dimension in relations - were there, they eventually fell victim to power politics with the war. Ankara tried to break out of the vicious circle of war through diplomatic means by actively trying to make its pleas be heard by the West, but this concerned a larger picture whereby Turkey’s relations with the Balkans was not totally free, but worked in the shadow of the USA and Russia. The case study of post-Cold War relations between Ankara and Belgrade is worthwhile to ascertain how bilateral relations ended up altered, as Slobodan Milosevic’s latent designs came to surface. When ethnic problems appeared in Yugoslavia with Milosevic’s assumption of power, ensuing developments forced Turkish–Yugoslav relations to a precarious situation.

After a brief historical account of bilateral relations, this case study shall explain how diplomatic/political, economic and military relations came to evolve between the two states since the end of the Cold War and seek to find answers as to whether the relations between the two states entered a normalization process given the memory of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia,

3 Atilla Kollu, *Türkiye - Balkan İlişkileri, 1919–1939*, [“Turkish–Balkan Relations, 1919–1939”], (PhD thesis, Hacettepe, 1996), p.116. The author cites Desanka Todorovic, *Yugoslavya ve Balkan Devletleri, (Yugoslavia and the Balkan States)* (Belgrade: 1979), p.80; Borivoy Erdelyan, *Politika, [Politics]*, December 31, 1989 and January 12, 1990, p.9; and Mustafa Kemal Karahasan, “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’ün Barış Felsefesi İşığı Altında Türkiye–Yugoslavya Dostluk İlişkileri”, [“Turkish–Yugoslavian Relations in the Light of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Peace Philosophy”], XI. Turkish History Conference, (Ankara: TTK, 1990), pp.2525 – 70.

the twin crisis of Kosovo, and the independence bestowed upon Kosovo, mainly through US support. The article argues that the pattern of diplomatic relations and behavior throughout the whole ordeal has been different from reality. Even after the war, despite the occasional bleak rhetoric employed by both sides, sometimes verging on the inimical, and withdrawal of or denying agreement to ambassadors, relations survived. Why this is the case will be explored in the following sections. Currently, the dynamics shaping bilateral relations since 2009 can be seen as offering a prospect to talk about an improvement in a trilateral framework, which includes Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Turkey and Yugoslavia: Common Timeline until 1990

As the first attempt of their bilateral cooperation, Turkey and Yugoslavia signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1925. In 1934, the two states, along with Greece and Romania, signed the Balkan Entente. The Entente intended to guarantee the signatories' territorial integrity and political independence against threat by another regional state. The Balkan states aimed to transform the Balkans into a stable and secure region. Despite hostilities among them, the Balkan states engaged in efforts to form a Balkan union. Relationships, however, loosened because of ensuing developments as the political situation in Europe deteriorated. Despite fluctuations in domestic and foreign policy, Belgrade preserved its political solidarity and continued dialogue with Ankara throughout the 1930s. In general, regional states could at least discuss issues among themselves and sometimes act together.⁴

During World War II, Britain put forward the idea of another combination of states against the German threat in the Balkans: a bloc to be established by Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. This was welcomed by Turkey, but somehow did not yield any results. Yugoslavia turned down the idea since it saw it as a provocative move against Germany. By 1941, the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia as well as Greece.⁵

During the initial phase of the Cold War, Turkey's quest for membership

4 Oral Sander, *Balkan Gelişmeleri ve Türkiye (1945–1965)*, [*Balkan Developments and Turkey 1945–1965*], (Ankara: Sevinç, 1969), pp.7-11.

5 Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi*, [*20th Century Political History*], (İstanbul: Alkım, 2005), vol: 1-2; 1914–1995, pp.408-9.

in NATO disturbed the Soviet Union which was most clearly evident in a verbal note sent by Moscow in November 1951. The note stated that the responsibility to arise from joining this bloc, formed against the Soviet Union, would rest on the Turkish government. In reply, Turkey stated that although Ankara had acted in peaceful lines, the same could not be observed on the part of the Soviet Union. The second note which was also received in November 1951 did not have a less hostile tone, which prompted Turkey to seek to form new alliances in its vicinity. Although NATO stretched into the Balkans, it did not include Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was not included in the Soviet bloc, either. Therefore, it would be easier to invite Yugoslavia into a new alliance system at a time when a rapprochement had started between the two states and the Greek foreign minister visited Turkey in early 1952, which would be followed by further mutual visits. It looked as if the Balkan Entente of 1934 was to be revived with these mutual visits and Yugoslavia was also part of these contacts. Consequently, the Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration was signed by Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia in Ankara in 1953 and the subsequent signing of the Balkan Alliance became possible in 1954. During talks in Ankara, the parties reached a compromise that it was time to sign an alliance agreement and that Yugoslavia was not a NATO member did not form an obstacle for alliance. Eventually, a treaty was signed on August 9, 1954 in Bled, Yugoslavia. This was a military agreement which recognized all parties' liabilities concerning the United Nations (UN) as well as Greece and Turkey's liabilities *vis-à-vis* NATO. This was not an alliance agreement *per se*, yet it was an important step to that end, geared mainly by the USA. The agreement envisaged economic, cultural and security cooperation. In accordance with Article 6 of the agreement, the parties would not engage in any alliance or any act which was against the interests of one another.⁶ The pact did not last since the Soviet Union reconciled relations with Yugoslavia after Stalin's death in 1953 and the Cyprus problem began to create hostility between Turkey and Greece as of 1955.

In the 1960s, Turkey saw that Yugoslavia (and Bulgaria) supported Greek arguments concerning Cyprus. During Todor Zhivkov's assimilation campaign on the Turks of Bulgaria in the late 1980s,

6 Ibid, pp. 521-22. Celal Bayar was of the opinion that Balkan Entente had to be revived and launched a plan to this end. He thought the revival of the Entente would be a basis for a prospective Mediterranean pact. The idea of a regional pact was also supported by the USA.; Yavuz Sezer, "Demokrat Parti'nin İlk Yıllarında Balkan Politikası", ["Balkan Politics in the First Years of Democrat Party"], (Master's thesis, Dokuz Eylül, 2006), pp.54-5.

Yugoslavia criticized Bulgaria and gave asylum to Turks who escaped from Bulgaria and granted them refugee status.⁷

As seen, the chronicle of two country's relations was shaped by dynamics which did not put them on adversarial camps during the Cold War. Yet, a serious blow in relations was to come with the war in Bosnia in 1992, which had an enduring impact on bilateral relations and exacerbated ties even further with the war in Kosovo in 1999.

Post-Cold War Diplomatic and Political Relations

Slobodan Milosevic Period: the 1990s

After the declaration of independence by Croatia and Slovenia in 1991, Yugoslavia began to make efforts to be in good terms with Turkey so that Ankara would not support the secessionist movements in Yugoslavia. Subsequently, Milosevic came to Ankara in January 1992, right one week after the former Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Slovenia were recognized by the international community. Milosevic stated that "Turkey had shown that it followed a responsible policy by acting in accordance with the general international attitude that hoped to see Yugoslavia intact."⁸ The Serbian President was met by Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü and taken to Çankaya to meet with President Süleyman Demirel, which would be the last meeting between Demirel and Milosevic. In a 2000 interview, Demirel stated that the message given to Milosevic during this one-day meeting was plain and clear: He expressed Ankara's concerns and warned Milosevic that they (Belgrade) would not be able to bear the results of bloodshed – if that should happen. The visit was not planned; Milosevic was not invited, either. However, it appeared that the Serbian President came to express Belgrade's concerns more than to listen to Ankara's views regarding the situation. Milosevic expressed his appreciation of Turkey's non-interventionist attitude, which in fact did not last. Demirel argued that Ankara saw certain developments alarming. However, it appeared that Milosevic did not seem to have imbibed the message given by Turkey as the subsequent bloodshed in Bosnia upon Milosevic's return witnessed.⁹

7 İlhan Uzgel, "Balkanlarla İlişkiler", ["Relations with the Balkans"], Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, [Turkish Foreign Policy: Phenomena, Documents, Interpretations since the War of National Liberation], vol. II, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp.174-81.

8 Fikret Bila, "Demirel, Milosevic'i Anlatıyor", ["Demirel Speaking of Milosevic"], *Milliyet*, 7 Oct. 2000.

9 Ibid.

The Yugoslav government withdrew its Macedonian-origin Ambassador to Ankara in June 1991. From then on, Turkey’s relations with Yugoslavia displayed a dual course: while the relations were strained due to the war in Bosnia and the anti-Turkish attitude of ultranationalist Serbian leaders, the fact that Yugoslavia was the gateway for Turkish trade routes to Western Europe was the primary concern in Turkey’s policy formulation.¹⁰ Equally importantly, Turkey made efforts to avert any perception of Orthodox–Muslim conflict in the region and was careful not to antagonize Serbia’s main ally, Greece, when the two states already had strained relations due to constant bilateral conflicts.¹¹ While most criticism came from religious–nationalist circles, the official viewpoint in Turkey maintained that the developments should be attributed to the Serbian government and not the Serbian population, and that a differentiation should be made between them.¹²

During the war in Bosnia, Yugoslavia’s policies were hinged on Serbian nationalism based on an anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic attitude.¹³ According to Ivo Banac, this anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic attitude had its roots in the fall of individual South Slavic national elites and states to the Ottoman rule with the process that began in 1389 with the Battle of Kosovo and ended in 1459 with the abolition of the vassal Serbian despotate.¹⁴ Serbian uprisings against the Ottomans in the nineteenth century assumed hostility towards religious and national diversity,¹⁵ and were in fact not very different from other uprisings in the Balkan Peninsula at that time. Through the end of the 20th century, the opposition to diversity and the pursuit of homogenization materialized in the attempt to establish ethnic unity which gave its initial signs in Milosevic’s speech at Kosovo Polje on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, as follows:

I ... ask the critics of homogenization, why are they disturbed by the homogenization of peoples and human beings in general if it

10 Şule Kut, “Türkiye’nin Balkan Politikası”, (“Turkey”’s Balkan Policy”), Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayarı (eds.), *Türkiye’nin Yeni Dünyası: Türk Dış Politikasının Değişen Dinamikleri*, [*Turkey’s New World: The Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*], (İstanbul: ALFA, 2002), p.110.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Osman Karatay, “Milosevic Dönemi Yugoslav Dış Siyaseti: Başarısız Bir Mirasyedilik Olayı”, [“Yugoslav Foreign Policy in the Milosevic Era: An Unsuccessful Case of Prodigality”], Ömer E. Lütem and Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun (eds.), *Balkan Diplomasisi*, [*Balkan Diplomacy*], (Ankara: ASAM, 2001), p.148.

14 Ivo Banac, “Nationalism in Serbia”, Günay Göksu Özdoğan and Kemali Saybaşı (eds.), *Balkans – A Mirror of the New International Order* (İstanbul: Eren, 1995), p.133. See Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), pp.11-21.

15 Banac (1995), p.133.

*is carried out on the basis of just, humane, and progressive ideas, in one's own interests, and is no harm to others? Is this not the meaning, the aim, to which humanity has always aspired? Surely, the sense of the human community is not to be inhomogeneous, divided, even when its aspirations are progressive and humane?*¹⁶

The unity Milosevic had in mind was opposed to Muslims and Turks in the region. Therefore, it was difficult to understand Yugoslavia's policies which were simultaneously based on Turcophobia and Islamophobia while having close relations with states such as Iran.¹⁷ Moreover, the official Yugoslav argument in the first half of the 1990s was based on the belief that Washington wanted to help establish a new Ottoman state through Turkey, which laid the basis of NATO attacks to build the alleged "green corridor" – the line densely populated by Muslims crossing Bosnia, Sandjak, Kosovo, Macedonia and Western Thrace.¹⁸ In a 1992 interview, Milosevic stated that Muslims in the Balkans were getting more and more fundamentalist as Alija Izetbegovic, the President of Bosnia-Herzegovina during 1990 - 92, was in cahoots with radical Islamic states such as Iran, Libya, and Sudan. He accused Izetbegovic of being a fascist fundamentalist, "who was jailed in 1947 for his membership in the underground organization 'Young Muslims' and his sympathies for the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hitler's war-time ally. We call it the Green Snake of Islam. It is crawling westward through the Balkans via Turkey, Kosovo and Macedonia."¹⁹

Despite such hate-speech, Turkey did not pursue a policy which would antagonize Serbia. It did not label the war as a "Christian-Muslim conflict" but a humanitarian crisis in all international platforms. It repeatedly stated that it was against any unilateral intervention which would be outside the UN framework. It made serious diplomatic efforts to convene the parties for a negotiable solution. Most significantly, it was the first state to devise and submit to the UN an "action plan" as early as August 1992, the essence of which was seen in the eventual NATO military operation *modus operandi*.

After the Dayton Peace Accord was signed, Serbia and Turkey tried to make amends in relations, although this remained at minimum levels

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.149-50.

¹⁷ Karatay (2001), pp.149-52.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Robert Kroon, "Serbs Will Not Be Cowed Leader Sees Need for Separate State within Bosnia", October 19, 1992, *International Herald Tribune*.

until at least four years after the Accord was signed. Bilateral contacts resumed in 1996.²⁰ Subsequently, Onur Öymen, then Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, went to Belgrade. The Turkish delegation touched upon the statement by the Office of Chief-of-Staff that Serbia appeared on the list of countries providing the terrorist organization PKK with missiles. The Yugoslav officials said they were prepared and willing to cooperate against terrorism. This was the second high level visit after former Deputy Speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Uluç Gürkan's visit to Belgrade. The second and equally important issue on the agenda of this visit was the economy whereby Turkish officials expressed their hope to see transit passages facilitated through Serbia.²¹ This visit was interpreted as being part of new openings within the framework of regionalism in foreign policy which had been introduced by former President Turgut Özal. Ostensibly, there was no reason that could potentially impede the normalization of relations between Ankara and Belgrade given that the war in Bosnia had ended and that it was seen that the Milosevic government wanted to open a new page in bilateral relations.²² Senior Turkish diplomats also confirmed that the Serbs were willing to hold further high level contacts.²³

Turkey also reciprocated and invited Serbia to join the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC).²⁴ Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz's talks with Milosevic during the 1997 Balkan Summit in Crete gave signals of normalization in relations.²⁵ However, relations were strained once again when the crisis broke out in Kosovo in 1998 which put Turkey and Yugoslavia on opposite camps. Turkey saw the Kosovo crisis as another grave mistake of the Serbian government, although Ankara did not articulate the matter as fervently as when it called for international support during the war in Bosnia as well as due to the sensitivity of the issue because of the importance Turkey attaches to territorial integrity.

This policy received criticism from different circles in Turkey and also from the Kosovar Albanians. First, critics asserted that Kosovo would already be an independent state based on US policies about restoration and aid plans toward the region.²⁶ Second, it was argued that Turkey tied

20 Kut (2002), p. 111.

21 "Belgrad: PKK'yı Desteklemiyoruz", ["Belgrade: We do not Support the PKK"], *Milliyet*, July 28, 1997.

22 Sami Kohen, "İyi Komşuluktan Öte", ["Beyond Good Neighbourliness"], *Milliyet*, August 1, 1997.

23 Taha Akyol, "Balkanlar ve Türkiye", ["The Balkans and Turkey"], *Milliyet*, September 24, 1997.

24 Kut (2002), p. 111.

25 "Girit'te Olumlu Sinyaller", ["Positive Signals in Crete"], *Sabah*, November 4, 1997.

26 "Ankara – Bağdat – Belgrad", ["Ankara – Baghdad – Belgrade"], *Sabah*, June 13, 1999.

itself too much to the view that Serbia was Turkey's trade gateway to Europe. Third, Turkey conducted much self-restraint so as not to be seen as attempting to revive the Ottoman heritage. The critics alleged that Kosovo was already swayed into bloodshed while Turkish officials emphasized the importance of its territorial integrity.²⁷ The content and relevance of these arguments were debatable but what was not was the crisis had intensified even more.

As the crisis deepened, Yugoslavian Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic described relations between the two countries as quite 'normalized' in economic, cultural and scientific venues but not as much in the political venue.²⁸ It seemed that the PKK problem resonated in bilateral relations as print media pointed to an alleged 'Serbian-Greek-PKK' alliance in 1998 by writing how terrorists were financed and equipped with the provision of missiles and weaponry in Greece and Serbia, and later sent to Damascus after being trained. It was alleged that IGNA missiles were obtained by the PKK owing to close relations between Milosevic and Abdullah Öcalan, PKK's leader.²⁹ Since relations had already been in a precarious condition, alleged links between Serbia, Greece and PKK concerning the most sensitive security issue for Turkey served to add another negative dimension in bilateral relations.

Another sensitive issue was Kosovo and the two states' respective stances towards the issue. When the Kosovo crisis peaked by 1999, Darko Tanaskovic, the former Yugoslav Ambassador to Ankara, stated that although there were approximately 30 places in the world similar to Kosovo, the West had chosen to point its finger at Kosovo and that the entry of the Turkish Army to Kosovo after 300 years was not something to be desired. According to Tanaskovic, if there was a commonality to be established between Kosovo and Southeastern Turkey, terrorism was the only issue common to both cases. Although Tanaskovic refuted analyses in news reports which reflected his views as seeing a full

27 "İğneyi Kendimize ...", ["Criticizing Oneself ..."], *Sabah*, April 11, 1999; "Kosova", ["Kosovo"], March 25, 1999, *Sabah*. See "Ankara'dan Siyasi Operasyon", ["Political Operation from Ankara"], March 8, 1998, *Milliyet*; "Balkanlar Atağı", ["The Balkans Move"], *Cumhuriyet*, March 8, 1998; "Cem Ziyaretten Memnun Döndü", ["Cem Returns Content from Visit"] *Cumhuriyet*; March 9, 1998; "Cem'den Çözüm Önerileri", ["Cem's Recommendations for Solution"], *Milliyet*, March 9, 1998; E. Özkök, "Milosevic: Arnavutça Fizik Dersi Olmaz", ["Milosevic: There cannot be Physics Course in Albanian"], *Hürriyet*, March 9, 1998; Sami Kohen, "Türkiye'nin Ağırlığı", ["Turkey's Weight"], *Milliyet*, March 10, 1998; Yavuz Gökmen, "Akan Kanları Artık Durdurun", ["Stop the Bloodshed"], *Hürriyet*, March 10, 1998; and "Milosevic Cem'in Ziyaretinde Kosova'yı Yok Saydı", ["Milosevic Ignores Kosovo in Cem's Visit"], *Cumhuriyet*, March 10, 1998.

28 Sami Kohen, "Sorun Ayrılıkçı Terörizm", ["The Problem is Separatist Terrorism"], interview with Theodoros Pangalos, Zivadin Jovanovic, *Milliyet*, June 9, 1998.

29 "Sırp - Yunan - PKK İttifakı", ["Serb - Greek - PKK Alliance"], *Sabah*, May 5, 1998.

similarity between the situation in Kosovo and the Southeastern Turkey,³⁰ it was not clear whether he compared the two regions in terms of the existence of secessionist acts or geographical/administrative status or level of development or in terms of all of these indicators.

In overall terms, it may be argued that if NATO's response to Bosnia was too late, it was too much and too soon for Kosovo. Turkey participated in the Kosovo operation with a relatively cautious attitude when compared to the war in Bosnia due to the preparedness of the international community to take harsh measures as opposed to the Bosnian experience.³¹

Post-Milosevic Period: the 2000s

Following mounting public and political opposition against him mainly because he tried to amend the constitution to secure him another term of office and because he caused a second defeat (in Kosovo), Milosevic was ousted in 2000 and Vojislav Kostunica was elected president the same year. This raised hopes and expectations in bilateral relations about a fresh start and a clear break with the Milosevic period given that Kostunica was an opponent of Milosevic and his policies. In Ankara, Kostunica's assumption of power was expected to reverse ruined relations and in such a conjuncture of favorable prospects – although it was not an air of total euphoria – the first meeting between the two states took place in October 2000 at the unofficial meeting of presidents and heads of government during the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) in Skopje. After holding contacts with Kostunica, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit stated that regional states were willing and ready to support Belgrade, to which Kostunica reciprocated by stating that they also wanted to see improvement in bilateral relations.³² It seemed that there was consensus at least in the verbal exchanges.

Kostunica's participation constituted the most important aspect of this meeting by way of which Belgrade showed that it was willing to integrate with the rest of Southeast Europe. It was also argued that if

30 “ABD Bölgeyi Karıştırıyor”, [“USA, Muddying Waters in the Region”], *Cumhuriyet*, June 27, 1999. For a general account on territory and how it has come to shape the Serbian policies and identity, see G. White, “Place and Its Role in Serbian Identity”, Derek Hall and Darrick Danta (eds.), *Reconstructing the Balkans – A Geography of the New Europe*, (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996), pp.36-52.

31 Kut (2002), p. 112. Turkey participated with eighteen F-18s in the operation which began on March 24, 1999. It also opened its borders to host approximately 20,000 refugees.

32 “Dirsek Teması”, [“Close Contact”], *Hürriyet*, October 26, 2000.

there were burdened relations between Belgrade and Ankara, this stemmed from Milosevic's unilateral policies and that bilateral relations have indeed been friendly ever since the end of World War I.³³ Whether Ankara shared this view was questionable.

Eventually, relations came to the verge of breaking pursuant to NATO attacks in which Turkey also took part and the new period of conciliation took two years that began with Foreign Minister İsmail Cem's visit to Belgrade on March 2, 2001. It was the first high level visit after October 5, 2000 when Milosevic was ousted in Belgrade and replaced by Kostunica.³⁴ Cem held contacts with Kostunica, Prime Minister Zoran Zinzić, and State Minister Rasim Ljajić after which it was decided that there would be increased cooperation between the two states. Diplomatic sources stated that the invitation extended to Cem by Kostunica for a separate meeting was interpreted as a sign of cordiality.³⁵ Although in Turkey this was occasionally interpreted as a "new white page" in relations, it did not prove to be too effective later on, due mostly to the fresh memory of the war in Bosnia and the Kosovo issue.

Following this, Foreign Minister Goran Svilanović paid an official visit to Ankara in April 2002, which was seen as part of Serbia's efforts to erase the vicissitudes of the Milosevic period and to become a member of international community. Svilanović referred to Cem's visit in 2001 as the starting point of future cooperation and said they supported the initiative for dialogue between religions and cultures as well as the combat against terrorism. When asked how to restore the memories of Bosnia and Kosovo, two issues which shadowed relations, Svilanović had positive expectations as he said the two states preserved economic relations even during the war. According to Svilanović, it was time to take economic relations even further.³⁶ Svilanović visited Turkey again in early February 2003 to hold contacts with Prime Minister Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Yaşar Yakış. The Serbian Foreign Minister was quite hopeful concerning the new state of 'Serbia and Montenegro' and that he expected to see Serbia and Montenegro in the EU in ten years' time.³⁷

33 Semih İdiz, "Balkanlar'da İstikrarın Önemi", ["Importance of Stability in the Balkans"], *Star*, October 26, 2000.

34 "Belgrad"la Yeni Dönem", ["New Era with Belgrade"], *Hürriyet*, March 2, 2001.

35 "Belgrad"la Beyaz Sayfa", ["White Page with Belgrade"], *Hürriyet*, March 4, 2001.

36 "Yugoslavya ile Yeni Başlangıç", ["New Start with Yugoslavia"], *Hürriyet*, April 11, 2002.

37 "İstanbul'da Başka Ülkenin Bakanı Oldu", ["Svilanović Becomes Minister of another State in İstanbul"], *Milliyet*, February 6, 2003. Svilanović came to Turkey as the Foreign Minister of the Federation Republic of Yugoslavia. The name of the country was changed as Serbia and Montenegro on February 4, 2003. Svilanović left Turkey as the Foreign Minister of Serbia and Montenegro.

The same expectation was voiced also by the new President of Serbia and Montenegro, Svetozar Marovic, during his visit to Ankara in early December 2004. Marovic pointed out the imprint on Southeast Europe of Turkey and argued that Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey had common strategic priorities such as EU membership which could be accelerated if the two states made joint efforts.³⁸ In fact, the EU-related themes were something common in Turkey’s relations with the Balkan states after 1995 and those with Serbia and Montenegro did not display a different context: Turkey supported the integration of every Balkan country into Euro-Atlantic structures for the consolidation of stability in the larger European geography and that included Serbia and Montenegro as well.

During this 2004 visit, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s remark that “Turkey and Serbia and Montenegro have announced themselves as neighbors although they do not share borders” was affirmative of the importance attached to regional security³⁹ because this visit was particularly important on the part of Serbia and Montenegro to emphasize their resolve to join NATO and to ask Turkey for due support.⁴⁰ By September 2004, Turkey stated it strongly wished to see Serbia and Montenegro overcome possible obstacles to its entry into the Euro-Atlantic integration processes as soon as possible. However, it was added that Serbia and Montenegro must first meet the requirements for entry, including full cooperation with the UN War Criminals Tribunal at The Hague.⁴¹

Similarly, contacts continued in 2005 during Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül’s visit in Serbia and Montenegro which took place following a visit to Kosovo which had been administered by the UN and NATO since 1999. President Boris Tadic and Gül discussed the situation in Kosovo, EU integration and other topics. Given that Serbia and Montenegro wished to retain at least formal control over Kosovo, Tadic stated that Kosovo should remain part of Serbia and Montenegro and called for protection of all minorities in the province.⁴² The official stance of Serbia

38 “Kıbrıs’a Örnek Olabiliriz”, [“We Can be a Model for Cyprus”], *Hürriyet*, February 12, 2004.

39 “Savaştan Barışa”, [“From War to Peace”], *Milliyet*, February 13, 2004.

40 “Srbistan’a NATO Desteği”, [“NATO Support for Serbia”], *Hürriyet*, February 13, 2004.

41 “Serbia–Montenegro, Turkey Sign Agreement on Military Cooperation”, *Southeast European Times*, September 7, 2004 as retrieved on http://www.mfa.gov.yu/FDP/set_070904-e.html on 28 February 2006; and “Relations of Serbia, Turkey as Precondition for Stability, Tadic”, *Tanjug*, August 20, 2004, http://www.mfa.gov.yu/Bilteni/Engleski/b200804_e.html#N4.

42 “Turkey’s Foreign Minister Visits Serbia and Montenegro for Talks”, *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, October 12, 2005, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=20653>, as retrieved on February 28, 2006.

and Montenegro was affirmed by Tadic's statement that an independent Kosovo would have serious implications for the region.⁴³ Turkey wanted Kosovo to have a democratic and multiethnic structure where everyone was fairly represented.⁴⁴ For further improvement of economic relations, Gül and his counterpart Vuk Draskovic signed two agreements on the prevention of double taxation and on social security.⁴⁵ In the final analysis of the policy agenda at that time, Kosovo issue would prove to be the most sensitive topic in the two states' relations in the ensuing years.

As regards European integration, there remained a set of issues awaiting solution on Serbia's road to the EU and the rest of Southeast Europe. The EU declared that there were still some obstacles to start accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro in early October 2005 (and the prospective membership of Serbia and Montenegro was pronounced as 2010). In Turkey, this was interpreted as too early a date when compared to Turkey's relevant experience and expectations. Belgrade's foreign policy had to resolve two major issues: 1) its Kosovo policy and 2) the 2006 separation of Montenegro from Serbia. Last but not least, there was overwhelming pressure and criticism towards Serbia and Montenegro concerning the handover of war criminals such as Ratko Mladic.⁴⁶

As far as the status of Kosovo was concerned, international attitude, and mainly the USA, became supportive of independence while calling upon the Albanians to give Serbs minority rights.⁴⁷ Turkey continued to contribute to the security and stability in Kosovo in Kosovo Force (KFOR) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission with military existence and police force⁴⁸ while Serbia wished to retain at least formal control over Kosovo. Since the declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2008, Serbia has been prompted to reshape its Kosovo policies. Domestically, it exacerbated the rift between the pro-EU and conservative groups in the Serbian parliament which resulted in early elections in May 2008.

43 "Gül'le Gece Diplomasisi", ["Night Diplomacy with Gül"], *Radikal*, October 13, 2005.

44 "Gül Leaves for Kosovo", October 11, 2005, http://archive.turkishpress.com/news.asp_id=74375.

45 "Gül'le Gece Diplomasisi", ["Night Diplomacy with Gül"], *Radikal*, October 13, 2005; and "Gül Leaves for Kosovo", October 11, 2005, http://archive.turkishpress.com/news.asp_id=74375.

46 "Srbistan Karadağ Pazarlığı", ["Serbia Montenegro Bargain"], *BBC Turkish* October 10, 2005.

47 Live interview with Richard Holbrooke, on CNN International after Milosevic was found dead in his cell, March 11, 2006.

48 "Tükiye, Sırbistan – Karadağ ve Kosova İlişkileri", ["Relations between, Turkey, Serbia – Montenegro and Kosovo"], <http://www.bilimastirmavakfi.org/html2/yayinlar/yayinlargiris.html> as retrieved on February 22, 2006, 06:13:49 GMT.

Internationally, it divided many of the actors influential in the region. Turkey was among the first states to recognize Kosovo’s independence while trying not to strain relations with Serbia and Russia over the issue, which undisputedly, was a daunting task.

The second and equally important matter for the country was the separation of Serbia and Montenegro. In accordance with the agreement between Serbia and Montenegro dated March 14, 2002, both states were entitled to hold a referendum for independence as of February 2006.⁴⁹ Accordingly, Montenegro submitted an official proposal of separation in February 2006 stating that the union did not function effectively and its institutions were sluggish. The draft document signed by the Montenegrin President Filip Vujanovic and Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, said that Montenegro favored a new, permanent and a more stable model which would eliminate the shortcomings. Prime Minister Gjukanovic further stated that due to its previous problems related to nationalism and the Kosovo issue, Serbia overshadowed the efforts of Montenegro to join the EU.⁵⁰ While the EU preferred to see a union in which the two states took part on the eve of the referendum,⁵¹ the USA supported an independent Montenegro, since from Washington’s viewpoint, the union would not work with more than one prime minister, foreign minister and internal borders.⁵² By March 4, 2006, all of the 68 members of parliament present out of 75 at the session voted for a referendum to be held on May 21, 2006 in Montenegro. Polls before the referendum showed that 41.4 per cent of the population supported independence; 32.2 per cent were against; 14.9 per cent abstained and 11.4 per cent did not comment on the issue.⁵³

While Serbia and Montenegro made efforts to restore the country’s

49 Erhan Türbedar, “Karadağ’ın Bağımsızlığına Yeni Bir Engel”, [“New Obstacle before Montenegro’s Independence”], February 12, 2005, <http://www.turksam.org/tr/yazilar.asp?kat=53&yazi=169>.

50 “Karadağ, Sırbistan’dan Ayrılmak İstiyor”, [“Montenegro Inclined for Separation from Serbia”], *BBC Turkish* February 23, 2005, *Deutsche Welle*, <http://www.turkatak.gen.tr/index.php?option=content&task=view?id=71&Itemid=2> as retrieved on February 23, 2006, 00:11:52 GMT.

51 Erhan Türbedar, “Karadağ’ın Bağımsızlığına Yeni Bir Engel”, [“New Obstacle before Montenegro’s Independence”], February 12, 2005, on <http://www.turksam.org/tr/yazilar.asp?kat=53&yazi=169>

52 Live interview on CNN International after Milosevic was found dead in his cell, March 11, 2006. See Can Karpat, “Sırbistan ve Karadağ: Mutsuz Çift Boşanma Yolunda mı?”, [“Serbia and Montenegro: Unhappy Couple on the Road to Divorce?”], on <http://www.axisglobe.com/article.asp?article=596> as retrieved on March 3, 2006, 01:13:37 GMT.

53 “Sırbistan Karadağ Yol Ayrımında”, [“Serbia – Montenegro at the Parting of the Ways”], *Yeni Mesaj*, 4 March 2006, http://www.yenimesaj.com.tr/index.php?sayfa=dünyadan&haber=10095&tarih=2006_03-04 as retrieved on March 6, 2006, 16:10:27 GMT. For more information, see Erhan Türbedar, “Sırbistan’ın Listesi Karadağ’ı Kızdırdı”, [“Serbia’s List Enrages Montenegro”], June 21, 2005, on <http://www.avsam.org/TR/gunlukyazdir.asp?ID=636> as retrieved on June 24, 2005, 06:20:49 GMT.

image and become integrated to the international community, the news that Milosevic was found dead in his cell where he was on trial in The Hague evoked various arguments as to divine justice, total defeat of Serbia, and elevation of Milosevic to a hero status. It is dubious that the tribunal in The Hague had any considerable effect upon the ultranationalist Serbs⁵⁴ bearing in mind that Milosevic remained somehow a symbol of Serbian nationalism so much so that Kostunica, whom the opposition swept into power, initially balked at handing him over to The Hague. Just as there are people in Russia nostalgic for Stalin and those in Germany nostalgic for Hitler, Milosevic also had supporters, although a few.⁵⁵

As the last shred of former Yugoslavia, Montenegro declared independence, forming a new state and separating on June 2, 2006. The independence ceremony was not attended by any Serbian officials and Prime Minister Kostunica did not congratulate Montenegrin leaders on the results.⁵⁶ In face of the possibility that with Milosevic dead, there was an opportunity that Milosevic supporters would not miss the chance to elevate him to a national hero. That implied a remaining threat to the security of the Balkans, particularly in respect of Kosovo's independence, which Turkish foreign policy-makers duly took into account. Serbian reaction came forth with attacks on the Turkish embassy in Belgrade after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008. Ankara chose to downplay the incidents.

The course of bilateral relations, which was low-profile, has been shaped with a new discourse which is "strategic partnership" since 2009. In this context, Turkey has tried to play a pioneering role by initiating a trilateral mechanism which involves Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, and advocated the idea that such a process would contribute remarkably to the stability in the region and to the relations between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular. The first tangible outcome of this process has been the decision to send an ambassador from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia, which can be regarded as a very important step towards the normalization of relations between the two states, upon Turkish efforts of mediation. However, despite its conciliatory moves, it is still too soon to expect Serbia to alter its Kosovo policies. Put more clearly, Serbia is not likely to accept a unilateral declaration of independence but at least

54 "The Death of Milosevic", *International Herald Tribune*, March 14, 2006.

55 Milan Panic, (a Serbian-American biomedical entrepreneur who was Prime Minister of Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1993), "For Serbs, Milosevic's Death Removes a Stain", *International Herald Tribune* March 15, 2006; and Ferai Tinç, "Milosevic, Ölümüyle de Sorun", ["Milosevic, Problem also With His Death"], *Hürriyet*, March 13, 2006.

56 Predrag Milic, "Montenegro Declares Its Independence from Serbia", June 4, 2006, *The Washington Post*.

supports a dialogue process on the issue.⁵⁷ The official statements left aside, the extent to which Serbia welcomes such a Turkish mediation is also debatable, however one thing that is not, is this mechanism has led to fruitful outcomes within the span of only one year, including the decision on sending a Bosnian ambassador to Serbia, and maybe more importantly, Serbia’s apology for Srebrenica massacre in March 2010, despite being done for restoring the Serbian image in the EU.⁵⁸ In overall terms, Turkish-Serbian relations have taken a new turn since 2009 via the trilateral process and prospects give hints that they are likely to be handled in the framework of this new process in at least the medium-term. If duly explored, the new acceleration in relations may lend itself most efficiently to the economic sphere.

Post-Cold War Economic Relations

Turkey had sound economic relations with Yugoslavia even on the eve of the war in Bosnia. Indeed, the criticism that Turkey did not take an active stance in the initial phases of the war harbored this economic fact. Turkey had good economic relations with Yugoslavia as the country is situated on Turkey’s trade routes to the West. Economic cooperation between the two states was still on track shortly before the war in 1990 when State Minister Cemil Çiçek went to Belgrade to attend an economic meeting.⁵⁹ Bilateral economic cooperation at the time was advanced so much so that it included possibilities concerning joint ventures to sell products to third parties.⁶⁰ However, this potential was disrupted with the coming war. The legal framework of economic relations is based on Agreement on the Prevention of Double Taxation (2003), Agreement on Mutual Assistance between Customs Administrations (2003), Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation (2003) and Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism (2004)⁶¹ and the Free Trade Agreement (2010).

57 “Türkiye, Bosna-Hersek, Sırbistan Üçlü Danışma Toplantısı”, [Turkey-Bosnia and Herzegovina – Serbia Trilateral Consultation Meeting”], February 9, 2010, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-bosna-hersek-sirbistan-uc-lu-danisma-toplantisinin-metni.tr.mfa>.

58 The relevant voting in the parliament was carried out with 173 MPs out of 250. The motion was passed with a narrow majority of 127 showing how divisive the issue was at the parliament level. The motion was criticized by the Bosnian Muslims as well as Muslims in Serbia because it does not describe the events as genocide.

59 *Türkiye*, May 8, 1990.

60 *Milliyet*, October 14, 1990.

61 “Sırbistan-Karadağ Ülke Bülteni”, [“Serbia and Montenegro Country Bulletin”], May 2006, <http://www.deik.org.tr/bultenler/200662810157Bul06may.pdf> as retrieved on October 9, 2006, 01:55:24 GMT.

Following the resumption of trade activities in 1996 with the lifting of the UN embargo on Yugoslavia, the Kosovo crisis came as the second episode in the recession of trade relations. Although there is currently no such crisis or violence to cause an impediment, current bilateral economic relations still do not reflect satisfactory levels. Just about when the trilateral mechanism was introduced, Turkish exports to Serbia were already more than \$ 390 million while Serbian imports were \$ 52 million. The major export items are textile fibers and by-products, vegetables, fruits, metal products, electrical machines, tobacco while import items include iron and steel, textile fibers, rubber and by-products, leather, vitamins, antibiotics, medical equipment, vegetables, fruits.⁶² To give a few examples of Turkish investment, *Efes Pilsen* bought the Pancevo brewery for six million Euros in 2003 and Zajecar brewery for 12 million Euros in 2004. *Gintaş* concluded an agreement with the Montenegrin government to build a trade center in Podgorica worth \$ 30 million.⁶³

Representatives of the economic venue, both from the business and state agencies, have come to acknowledge that they are significant economic partners and that the two states should speed up the promotion of economic cooperation in various bilateral meetings, particularly between 2000–2005. The unsatisfactory bilateral trade volume was spelled out by Serbia and Montenegro International Economic Relations Minister Branko Lukovac during a meeting held in the Serbian Chamber of Commerce in Belgrade. Faruk Cengic, the representative of the Turkish part of the Business Council of Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey, conveyed the same message by stating that the existing trade volume did not reflect real possibilities of economic cooperation.⁶⁴

Turkish businessmen are interested in taking part in the building of infrastructure in Serbia which was most recently demonstrated by one of the eminent Turkish businessmen, Şarık Tara.⁶⁵ Turkish companies have shown interest in the privatization of large scale textile companies there as manifest by Turkish companies' participation in the Textiles Fair and

62 "Türkiye-Sırbistan Ticari ve Ekonomik İlişkileri", ["Turkey- Serbia Trade and Economic Relations"], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-sirbistan_ticari-ve-ekonomik-iliskileri.tr.mfa, as retrieved on June 25, 2008. The figures and trade items do not cover Montenegro.

63 "Sırbistan - Karadağ Ülke Bülteni", ["Serbia and Montenegro Country Bulletin"], May 2006.

64 "Turkey, Important and Prospective Partner of Serbia - Montenegro", *Tanjug*, http://www.mfa.gov.yu/Policy/Bilateral/Turkey/activities_e/290503_1/_e.html as Last accessed on September 27, 2006, 06:43:06 GMT.

65 "Improving Economic Cooperation of Serbia-Montenegro and Turkey" <http://www.srbija.sr.gov.yu/vesti.php?id=9122&q=srbia+turkey>.

Leather and Footwear Fair in Belgrade in October 2006, which made up half of the participating 45 states.⁶⁶

Fields of cooperation remain to be developed given the fact that export possibilities of Serbia are appealing for Turkey’s import possibilities. In addition to textiles, they include domestic appliance, automotive and components, electronic items, and chemical products. There are large pharmaceutical factories in Serbia. Future projects can be launched for pharmaceutical production for Turkey in Serbia, which would decrease costs. Finally, hotels privatized in Montenegro may offer significant opportunities for Turkish tourism companies, if they are duly explored.⁶⁷

The recent “strategic partnership” rhetoric on both sides since 2009 heralded more investment prospects by Turkish entrepreneurs in Serbia. In October 2009, the two states signed an agreement on the reconstruction of a 66km road between Novi Pazar and Tutin, 85 per cent of which was to be financed by Turkish banks and the remaining 15 per cent by the Serbian budget.⁶⁸

According to Sūha Umar, former Turkish ambassador to Belgrade, the investments to be made in Serbia are subject to state guarantee since Serbia is the most institutionalized state in the region and Turkish investors should take this fact into consideration in their business deal prospects. A large portion of industrial investments of former Yugoslavia is located in Serbia and there are still privatization prospects for some of these facilities. If made, investment in Serbia is likely to have a double effect for Turkish entrepreneurs: they will not only benefit in the country itself but since the country has a free trade agreement with Russia and Eastern Europe, they will be able to sell their products without customs obligations to Russia and Eastern Europe. The only obstacle, if there is one to be named, is Turkish entrepreneurs’ prejudice according to Ömer Şimşek, Head of the Serbian-Turkish Businessmen Association in Belgrade.⁶⁹ It can be expected that the prospects offered by Serbia’s investment potential will outweigh the prejudices with more investment. Abolition of the visa regime and the operationalization of the free trade

66 “Textile Companies to be privatized”, *Beta News (BE92)*, October 13, 2006, <http://www.b92.net/eng.news/economy-article.php?nav-id=37308&fs=version=print>.

67 “Srbistan–Karadağ Ülke Bülteni”, [“Serbia and Montenegro Country Bulletin”], May 2006, <http://www.deik.org.tr/bultenler/200662810157Bul06may.pdf>.

68 “Gül: Turkey Eyes Investment in Serbia”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, October 27, 2009, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=gul-turkey-eyes-investment-in-serbia-2009-10-27.

69 “Srbistan, Türkiye’nin Yeni Pazarı Olacak”, *Zaman Online*, July 19, 2010, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazdir.do?haberno=1006572>.

agreement in 2010 had positive impact on the bilateral trade volume. This has led to a win-win outcome for both countries: while Turkey will benefit both through the free trade agreement and enjoy the opportunities that Serbia's free trade agreements with Russia and Eastern Europe offer; through the Serbian perspective, Turkey can function as a springboard for Asian markets.⁷⁰ How the existing potential in the economic sphere will be used will depend on the competence of the entrepreneurs and the state support that they receive.

Post-Cold War Military Relations

No rapprochement effort, if we can talk about one, would be accomplished without cooperation endeavors in the military realm, and Turkish-Serbian relations were no exception in this sense. Arguably, military cooperation is quite instrumental for building mutual confidence, especially upon a background of antagonism. To this end, Turkey and Serbia and Montenegro signed an agreement on military cooperation in July 2004. This is rather a belated date compared to the conclusion of similar strategic agreements with other regional states, which already started in the 1990s. This agreement was the first of its kind that Serbia and Montenegro had with a NATO member. In accordance with the agreement, Serbia and Montenegro would receive military equipment supply support from Turkey. Defense ministers of the two countries, Vecdi Gönül and Prvoslav Davinic, agreed on future mutual visits by military representatives of each country. The deal was expected to provide opportunities for the Serbian military industry which did not find a market for its products.⁷¹ The same year, President Sezer voiced support for plans to include Serbia and Montenegro in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. NATO officials said Serbia and Montenegro could be invited to join NATO's program on the condition that it cooperates in the hunt for war crimes suspects, defense reforms and dropping the complaint at the international court over NATO's raid during the 1999 Kosovo War.⁷²

Through 2005, the agreement on cooperation in military scientific and technical fields was put into effect. The agreement envisages cooperation

70 "Serbia, Turkey Trade Deal Comes Into Force", *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 2, 2010, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=serbia-turkey-trade-deal-comes-into-force-2010-09-02.

71 "Serbia – Montenegro, Turkey Sign Agreement on Military Cooperation", *Southeast European Times in Belgrade*, September 7, 2004, http://www.mfa.gov.yu/FDP/set_070904_e.html, Last accessed: 9 March 2007.

72 "Turkey Backs Serbia and Montenegro's NATO Partnership", *Turkish Daily News*, February 14, 2004.

in the following fields: military training, cooperation between the armed forces, organization, equipment and structure, personnel management, environmental issues, military observer exchange for exercises, logistics management, cooperation in defense industry, military medical services, topography and mappings, military history and military museums, military publications and archives, social, sports, cultural activities between the armed forces, cooperation in undertaking scientific research and projects to develop new defense-military equipment, cooperation in exports to third countries.⁷³ The Serbian Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Zdravko Ponos, proposed to Turkish Chief of General Staff, General Yaşar Büyükanıt, to sign a military and defense cooperation agreement in September 2007 and asked for Turkey’s support in Serbia’s bid for NATO.⁷⁴

This and similar attempts by Serbia were made in the context of modernizing Serbia’s military posture and advocating better relations with NATO just as the rest of the regional states. To give some examples, Serbian military annulled conscription and began creating a professional army, which was announced to be completed during Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac’s term of office. Serbia is a member of the PfP program of NATO since 2006 and it is the biggest weapon and military equipment exporter country in the region which makes it an important military actor in its neighborhood.⁷⁵ In this process, Turkey and Serbia entered a new phase in 2010 which involves military cooperation in the larger context of building a strategic partnership which was realized with the signing of a military training agreement in April 2010. The agreement envisages training in specialized centers and exchange of trainers, among other foreseen activities.⁷⁶ A similar agreement was signed in 2011 as well.

There is no need to go too far back to remember that Turkey and Serbia were on opposite camps during NATO’s Kosovo operation in 1999.

73 “T.C. Hükümeti ile Sırbistan ve Karadağ Bakanlar Konseyi Arasında Askeri–Bilimsel ve Askeri–Teknik İşbirliği Konusunda Anlaşmanın Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun Tasarısı ve Dışişleri Komisyonu Raporu”, [“Draft Law and Foreign Affairs Commission Report on the Approval of the Ratification of Military Scientific and Military Technical Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Council of Ministers of Serbia and Montenegro”], <http://www.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem22/yil01/ss938.htm>.

74 Serkan Demirtaş, “Serbia Proposes a Military Agreement with Turkey”, *Turkish Daily News*, September 12, 2007

75 “Modernizing Serbia’s Military”, *SETimes*, November 10, 2010 http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2010/11/10/feature-03

76 “Serbia and Turkey Sign Agreement on Military Training”, April 13, 2010, <http://www.pioneer-investors.com/news2.asp?newsid=14181> and “Military Medical Cooperation Between Serbia and Turkey”, April 28, 2009, http://vma.mod.gov.rs/cms/en/meni_link/23/strana/12/tekst/539/.

However, military relations have been improving recently in the strategic partnership discourse although they have not reached the levels achieved with other regional states. To reiterate, strategic cooperation serves as a very essential tool in the initial phases of restoring relations as it inspires confidence. The recent military gestures could be viewed as fulfilling such a long-term purpose. Still, the two states are likely to wait to see some initial results in this field.

Concluding Remarks

In hindsight, since the Balkan Wars, relations between Turkey and Yugoslavia developed on a friendly basis after the formation of KSCS in 1918 right until the war in Bosnia broke out. The serious blow in relations came with the war Bosnia in 1992. Although Ankara acted in accordance with the West by assuming a non-interventionist attitude, this did not last long. Thereafter, relations followed a dual course which connoted a complex reality: relations were strained but Ankara had to take into account the fact that Yugoslavia was the gateway for Turkey's trade routes to Europe. Meanwhile, Turkey had to avert the arguments that it tried to play the Muslim card in the Balkans. After the Dayton Peace Accord was signed, Turkey and Serbia embarked on a process of reconciliation in 1996. However, relations were severed once again with the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and did not lend themselves to a meaningful rapprochement until at least 2009.

The economic ties which were strong even on the eve of the war in Bosnia are currently not satisfactory as they have fallen victim of power politics with the outbreak of war. As for the military sphere, unlike Turkey's military relations with other Balkan states, military options with Serbia display a dim picture. The outcomes of current gestures in economic and military fields remain to be seen.

In the final analysis, the war in Bosnia and the divergences over Kosovo stand as the two main factors that led to conflictual relations between the two countries after the Cold War. After Kosovo declared independence and was recognized by Turkey, Ankara was determined to maintain good relations with Belgrade. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Serbia had an important role and responsibility in the future of the Balkans and that Turkey attached importance to improving relations and cooperation with Serbia both on a bilateral and a regional basis. However, Serbian officials did not balk at withdrawing Vladimir Curgus,

Serbian ambassador to Ankara in protest when Turkey decided to recognize Kosovo's independence.⁷⁷ The Serbian ambassador left Turkey few days after Kosovo's declaration of independence by handing out a note of protest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Expressly stating that bilateral relations should not be expected to be the same any more, the ambassador said that they expected Turkey to revise its decision concerning Kosovo's independence.⁷⁸ The first ostensible sign of this policy was Serbia's refusal to allow Süha Umar, former Turkish ambassador to Belgrade, to submit his credentials to be able to start his official duty in May 2008, not to mention Serbian demonstrators' pelting stones earlier at the Turkish embassy in Belgrade only few days after the declaration of independence.⁷⁹ The Turkish ambassador began his term of office however, as such he was not expected to receive high level acceptance.⁸⁰

The timing of the twist in the nature of relations has come about in such a crisis environment and ended up negotiated in a trilateral mechanism only a year later which can be viewed in the context of the recent "zero problems with neighbors" policy. Whether the policy would be applicable in all the regions surrounding Turkey was and is still questionable, however, the fact remains that almost half of Turkey's foreign trade is with the EU and Serbia is a strategic point for Turkey in this respect.⁸¹

Currently, Serbia's foreign policy agenda rests on Kosovo issue, EU integration, handing over war criminals, restoring relations with the Bosnia-Herzegovina and restoring Serbia's international image. In the light of these, Belgrade is making efforts for bolstering its place in local, regional and international politics. Although it is too early for bold expectations, the course of ongoing efforts can be expected to continue in the established trilateral mechanism as long as no essential

77 "Turkey Recognizes Kosovo, Advises Parties to Stay Calm", *Turkish Daily News*, February 20, 2008.

78 "Serbian Envoy Leaves Turkey in Protest", February 21, *Turkish Daily News*, 2008.

79 Barçın Yinanç, "Serbia Snubs Turkish Envoy", *Turkish Daily News*, May 2, 2008

80 Umar started his duty and unlike expectations, he could overcome the bureaucratic hurdles quite soon and was able to establish contacts with the country's ministers without even submitting his credentials. In an interview he stated that the timing of Turkey to recognize Kosovo was not well-arranged and is of the opinion that Ankara should have waited for some time, at least until he was posted to Belgrade. He also says that the Serbian administration felt betrayed by Ankara because during previous contacts in 2007, the Serbian officials were told by their Turkish counterparts that Turkey would recognize Kosovo, but not soon. Umar states that the immediate recognition of independence created a feeling of betrayal on the part of the Serbs and led to a crisis with Serbia; Leyla Tavşanoğlu, "Yugoslavya Kulağımıza Küpe Olsun", ["Yugoslavia Should be a Lesson for Us"], *Cumhuriyet*, January 4, 2011.

81 Annually, more than 120 thousand Turkish lorries pass through Serbia.

divergences arise in agenda-setting and policy implementation as well as future topics. Turkish-Serbian relations have not attracted new enmities after 2008. The main determinant in shaping the future course of relations towards either an enhanced rapprochement or a return to limited prospects will be the degree of political willingness on both sides as well as how Serbia accommodates its policies towards Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Given the current state-of-affairs, Turkish-Serbian relations seem to reflect a picture not totally free from political problems, whilst harboring many chances for advancing economic links. How and when the two governments will be able to elevate the level of relations to at least those achieved between Turkey and other regional states and whether the trilateral mechanism cooperation will last, remain to be seen in the medium term.

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