Soft power in Turkish foreign policy

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*This article examines to what extent Turkey's foreign policy identity has
transformed from being a 'hard power' to a 'soft power' over the last few
years. In doing so, this article also contends that there is a close relationship
between the degree of securitisation of issues and whether the power used to
deal with them is hard or soft in nature. If issues of concern were securitised,
the tendency to use hard power would increase. Another argument is that
the main difference between these two types of power stems from the kind of
'logic of action' that governs the behaviour of agents. If an instrumental
logic of action were in play, meaning if the goal were to force others to make
a cost-benefit analysis through coercing or coaxing strategies, then one could
talk about hard power. If the goal were to ensure that others would
automatically follow the lead of the power-holder due to the power of
attraction the latter has in the eyes of the former, then one could refer to the
existence of soft power. The main conclusion of this article is that recent
internal and external developments have contributed to Turkey's soft power
potential.*

Introduction

An analysis of Turkey's soft power will not only help analysts understand in
which direction Turkey's foreign policy has been moving over the last few years,
but will also shed light on the theoretical discussions carried out on this subject.
Even though discussions relating to soft power have so far been mostly carried
out in the context of the United States and the European Union (EU), an analysis
of Turkey's soft power, a middle-sized country that has an imperial tradition
and a capability to help shape the developments in its environment, will
certainly improve the quality of discussions held in this regard.

This article contends, first, that there is a close relationship between the
degree of securitisation of issues and whether the power used to deal with them
is hard or soft in nature. If issues of concern were securitised, the tendency to
use hard power would increase. Second, the main difference between hard and

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soft power stems from the kind of 'logic of action' that governs the behaviour of agents, rather than the kind of instruments employed. If an instrumental logic of action were in play, meaning if the goal were to force others to make a cost-benefit analysis through coercing or coaxing strategies, then one could talk about hard power. If the goal were to ensure that others would automatically follow the lead of the power-holder due to the power of attraction the latter has in the eyes of the former, then one could refer to the existence of soft power. Whereas the concept of hard power assumes a strong emphasis on the agent/actor, the concept of soft power underlines the significance of perceptions others hold *vis-à-vis* the agent/actor.

In this context this article also argues that middle-sized countries offer better grounds than major powers to examine whether soft or hard power would be in use. Major powers, such as the US and the EU, irrespective of their preferences for military or civilian instruments of power, are likely to act as hard powers, simply because they have a strong agency and would tend to see external developments from a security angle: the more powerful an actor, the more likely that issues of concern would be securitised.

On the other hand, middle-sized countries would behave as hard powers if they thought that threats to their security had increased. For non-securitised issues, they have no alternative but to behave like a soft power. This does not, however, mean that all middle-sized countries would have soft power when faced with non-security issues. That is why the case of Turkey is important. Examining its foreign policy might help analysts understand under which conditions middle-sized countries could be considered as acting as a 'soft power'.

That said, the next part will discuss the place of the hard–soft power dichotomy in international relations. Then an analysis of Turkey's foreign policy will follow with a view to unravelling Turkey's soft power potential. The main conclusion is that a mixture of internal and external developments have recently contributed to Turkey's soft power potential in its environment.

Theoretical discussion

Before discussing soft power, we should first define what power is. Power is the capacity to influence other actors and shape their preferences through the possibilities in hand. In this sense, three basic conditions are required so that power can come into existence. First, countries must have the possibilities/assets to influence other actors. Measurable elements like military and economic possibilities and elements that are more difficult to measure like a cultural structure, value systems and the mode of life constitute the first dimension of power. Second, the actors retaining these power elements must be conscious of having them. They should have the will to capitalise on their assets. The third, yet the most important, element of power is that other actors in the system must

see that power. For power to exist, other actors must change their policies in line with the interests of the party that has power. In this sense, power is relational (see Barnett and Duvall 2005). Here the main distinction between hard and soft power surfaces. How would others change their policies in line with the preferences of the power-holder? Is it going to be due to a cost-benefit analysis or the legitimacy of the power-holder?

According to the literature, the best way to materialise national interests is to use military and economic power elements with a view to forcing other actors to undertake a cost-benefit calculation. In other words, most actors pursue a 'carrot and stick' policy in their foreign policies. An actor preferring to use hard power will frighten, buy or coax the adverse party. In general, the literature makes a distinction between hard and soft power on the basis of the instruments used. Hard power would come to the fore if military and other coercive methods were used. Soft power would be in play if civilian, economic and normative instruments were used.

This article does not buy into this categorisation and further claims that what makes power 'soft' is not the nature of means employed but the way those means are employed.[1] Military power is not hard power and civilian power is not soft power. Military and civilian aspects of power refer to the kinds of means utilised. Hard and soft dimensions of power refer to the ways military and civilian elements of power are used.

Being a soft power in this context would suggest that other actors would change their behaviour in line with the preferences of the power-holder not because the power-holder induces them to make a cost-benefit calculation, but because they view the power-holder's identity and policies as legitimate. Stated somewhat differently, soft power would amount to power of attraction. In this sense, the most powerful actors in the system would be the ones which have soft power, for they would get what they want in a cost-free way.

A transformation from hard power to soft power implies a process. The countries holding a place in the hardest part of the power scale would endeavour to reach their goals by using their dominance in the military area. While doing this, they would encourage their adversaries to work out a cost-benefit calculation. The countries holding a place still in the hardest part of the spectrum but much closer to the softer side would make use of economic/civilian power elements rather than military power elements. Yet the logic driving their actions would still be instrumental. The countries holding a place in the softest part of this scale would not use an instrumental logic to achieve their goals. They would simply get what they want due to the power of attraction they have in the eyes of others.

For soft power to exist, legitimacy/credibility is a must. According to the literature, legitimacy has three important sources (see Nye 2005). First, legitimacy can stem from the values owned by the power-holder. Second, legitimacy can stem from the political, social, economic and cultural institutions of a country. If the people of other countries see the institutions of a particular

country as working and contributing to social and economic welfare, then they would likely consider that country's foreign policy as legitimate too (Nye 2005: 40–65). For soft power to exist, other actors should follow the lead of the 'soft power' actor out of an understanding that such a course of action would be in accordance with their identity as well as serve their interests. Perceptions of others would be of importance here.

Third, legitimacy can arise from the methods employed in the execution of foreign policy. Unilateral foreign policy strategies, which would be executed without taking international concerns into account, can be seen as repulsive by other countries. According to this logic, other states, international organisations and international law are taken into consideration as much as they serve the national interests previously determined. In unilateralism, the objective is to force others to think like you, and, if necessary, to achieve this by using methods of coercion and encouragement (Nye 2005: 65–75).

On the other hand, the soft power potential of a country would likely increase if that country adopted a win-win and multilateral approach in its foreign and security policy. A zero-sum mentality would contradict the idea of soft power. If the objective were to persuade other actors in the context of opinions, it would be more appropriate to hold onto multilateralism as the key principle in foreign policy.[2]

Based on this discussion, the next section will examine whether Turkey has had soft power in the past and whether it has been changing into a soft power over the last few years.

The past: the limits of Turkey's soft power identity

Traditionally speaking, Turkey's Kemalist legacy, the role of the military officers in the foundation of the Republic, the geography of Turkey, and the external developments in Turkey's vicinity are all considered as factors that make Turkey a hard power and a securitised Turkish foreign policy a likely outcome (Karaosmanoğlu 2000). Deterrence of possible challengers, both internal and external, through the adoption of coercive strategies has coloured Turkey's past security practices.

Since the foundation of the Republic in 1923, Turkey's main concern has been to secure the existence of the State. In doing so, the Westernisation process has been seen as the most important security strategy. Turkey's ultimate security would hinge on Turkey's recognition as a Western country by the West itself.

After the end of the Second World War, the main security concern was to defend Turkey's territorial integrity against possible Soviet assaults in the north. Security was defined in a neo-realist vein in the sense that the main threat used to stem from the external realm and the main strategies to deal with such an existential threat consisted of the strengthening of Turkish military forces at

home and securing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and America's help against the Soviets abroad.

During the Cold War, Turkey's hard and soft power capabilities were informed by its relations with the West. Both Turkey's securitised external issues of concern and its credibility in the eyes of the Middle Eastern countries remained low. Turkey, rather than having an international/security identity of its own, was seen as a natural extension of the NATO alliance in the region. This negatively affected Turkey's image, for a substantial number of Middle Eastern countries adopted socialist and communist trajectories of development and modernisation. They also viewed NATO as an agent of the imperial powers in their region. The West was simply exploiting the resources of the region and giving unconditional support to the existence of Israel (Robins 2003).

A second factor curtailing Turkey's soft power potential was that, since 1923, Turkey followed a different modernisation and development strategy than that of the countries located in the Middle East. The transformation of society in a top-down manner and the secular character of the state–society relationship have been the two fundamental principles defining Turkish modernisation. Turkey has seen the social values shaped by Islam as the greatest obstacles to the modernisation process and the main reasons for 'backwardness'. Turkey's adoption of a French type of secular understanding—denying religion a place in the public space—contradicted Middle Eastern practices. Islam has always been an important part of social life in the Middle Eastern countries (Altunişik 2005).

The third factor that has historically restricted Turkey's soft power was that Turkey was considered as the successor of the Ottoman Empire. The assumption prevailing in the Middle East was that Turkey would continue the imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire and try to do its best to exploit the countries in the Middle Eastern region (Mango 1993).

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, threats to Turkey's national security have increased. Unlike western Europe, Turkey did not experience the peace dividends that the end of the Cold War bought. The emerging regional instabilities in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East posed major security concerns.

Turkey's relations with the West have also become securitised in the 1990s, for Turkey's Western partners began to question Turkey's Western identity in the absence of a common Soviet threat. The more the Western credentials of Turkey's identity were questioned, the more Turkey felt itself threatened by the West.

Given that the EU began to see the main criteria of membership as liberal-democratic transformation, Turkey experienced troubled relations with the EU because the ongoing struggle with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorism at home decreased Turkey's ability to set in motion such a process. Besides, a majority of Europeans thought that Turkey's accession to the EU would increase the security burdens on the EU because Turkey straddles problematic geographies. Moreover, when the main security interest of the EU

was defined so as to continue the integration process, Turkey's accession might have put a serious brake on it, for there existed serious differences between Turkey and the EU in terms of structural economic conditions, socio-political conditions and cultural attributes.

Turkey's troubling relations with the US have also decreased Turkey's soft power potential. The 'alliance' relations between the two countries that had characterised the Cold War years gradually changed into a strategic partnership in the 1990s, which then gave way to mere cooperation on some key issues. With the transformation of NATO from a Western collective defence alliance into a global semi-political semi-military collective security organisation, membership in NATO has not sanctified Turkey's Western identity.

Turkey has also started to experience internal security threats, mainly through the issues of the rise of political Islam and ethnic Kurdish separatism. Such issues were simply defined as security, rather than political issues, for they posed existential security threats to the secular, unitary, and homogeneous character of the Kemalist regime. Turkey was also exposed to a multitude of new generation security threats during the 1990s such as illegal trade in drugs, goods and human beings, organised crime, national and transnational terrorism, environmental pollution, political corruption, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and so on.

Beset by such security threats, Turkey resorted to an instrumental logic in dealing with them. Coercive strategies in particular became popular *vis-à-vis* neighbours to the south and east, for the demise of the Soviet Union denied many of Turkey's neighbours the capability to modernise their militaries and develop their economies. For example, Turkey behaved as a typical hard power *vis-à-vis* Syria. In late 1998, Turkey warned Syria against the dire consequences of harbouring PKK terrorists in Syrian territory. The deployment of Turkish troops on the Syrian border was meant to make it clear that if Syrian authorities did not expel Abduallah Ocalan, the leader of the outlawed PKK, Turkey would have to take military action in return. At the end, this strategy paid off and Ocalan fled Syria.

A similar logic was also played out in relations with Greece and Greek Cypriots. Turkey defined Greek Cypriots' efforts to join the EU as a strategy to realise the unification of the island with mainland Greece through the back door. This was seen as a serious security threat, for Turkey had legitimate interests on the island and if the island acceded to the EU before Turkey, the Greek Cypriots would be able to exploit Turkey's aspirations to join the EU. The message given to the Greek side was clear: if you endanger Turkey's prospects of joining the EU through your tactical manouevres, and then cause Turkey's estrangement from the EU, this would be against your security interests.

Turkey behaved as a typical hard power actor when the Greek Cypriot government announced its intention in early 1997 to install some Russian-made S-300 'surface to air missiles' on the island. Despite the Greek Cypriot claim

that those missiles were defensive in nature, Turkey reacted harshly and threatened Nicosia with launching surgical attacks on the missiles were they to be deployed.

Turkey's approach to northern Iraq was another example of Turkey's hard power identity in the first decade of the post-Cold War era. Turkey long pursued a 'militarised' foreign policy towards northern Iraq. Northern Iraq was important for Turkey for two main reasons. First, the continuing sanctions on Baghdad and the international protection of Iraq's north might have accelerated the process resulting in the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, an anathema for Turkey. Second, PKK's terrorists might have found a safe sanctuary in the region due to the power vacuum there. In order to forestall such developments, Turkey pursued five strategies. First was to give full support to the idea that Iraq should remain unitary. Second was to support the Turkoman communities in northern Iraq with a view to balancing the rising Kurdish influence. Third was to exploit every opportunity to chase the PKK terrorists. Fourth was the willingness to establish cooperation with Iraq's neighbours, which are also home to significant numbers of Kurdish people. And fifth was to plead with the Americans to tolerate Turkey's military operations in northern Iraq in return for Turkey's acquiescence in the continuation of Operation Provide Comfort/Operation Northern Watch based in southern Turkey (Barkey 2000).

Turkey's approach towards Armenia was also demonstrative of Turkey's hard power identity. Turkey put an economic embargo on Armenia and closed the border. Turkey made it quite clear that if the Armenian Republic wanted to have cooperative trade relations with Turkey, it would have to come to a settlement with Azerbaijan and renounce the Armenian massacre claims.

Turkey's soft power potential was also seriously curbed by the increasing gap between the Western expectation that Turkey could become a role model for the newly independent states in Central Asia and Caucasus and Turkey's capability to deliver in this regard. Turkey's democracy deficit and structural fragilities at home combined to deny Turkey the capability to play a 'big brother' role in these geographies.

Against such a background, the rise of Turkey as a soft power, particularly in the context of the Greater Middle Eastern region, is something quite new and deserves special treatment.

Facilitating factors behind the rise of Turkey's soft power

What follows are some internal and external factors that have added to Turkey's soft power potential over the last five years. These are the factors that both accelerated the process of desecuritisation and increased Turkey's credibility in the eyes of both Western and Middle Eastern countries, a *sine qua non* for Turkey's soft power.

Internal factors

Looking at the domestic causes of this transformation, one can argue that Turkey has been relatively successful in putting its house in order, and that the EU-related reforms could deliver solutions for Turkey's economic, political and security problems. The changing character of civilian–military relations during the reign of the current government has also contributed to this transformation.

Before analysing the process that produced such an outcome, it would be appropriate here to offer a concise description of what the so-called Turkish model entails. First, Islam in Turkey is mainly cultural, not ideological and political. Second, Turkey has to a significant degree succeeded in establishing the roots of secularism: the logic of state is superior to the logic of religion. This is not seen in the Muslim world, where the logic of religion is a legitmate input in the formation of national interets. Third, Turkey has turned its face to the West in its efforts to develop and modernise. Fourth, despite the legacy of the past, Turkey has developed friendly and alliance-like international relations with the Western states. Fifth, Turkey is the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire and therefore feels a particular responsibility for relations between the West and the East. Sixth, Turkey has never been colonised and therefore can lead the Islamic world in its effort to develop equal relations with the Western countries. Seventh, the nature of the current Turkish government constitutes another defining element of the Turkish model. This government comes from a political Islamist past *and* has achieved the most in Turkey's efforts to join the EU. If political Islamists could take steps to join the EU and undertake reforms in line with political liberalism, then the rest of the society could do so as well.

The attractiveness of the Turkish model and the concomitant rise in Turkey's soft power has become possible following the government-led desecuritisation process in which previously securitised issues are now being gradually redefined as political issues. It is only in a desecuritised environment that analysts can examine whether Turkey's soft power exists or not. Securitisation of issues would legitimise the threat and use of force in their elimination (Waever 1995). More politicisation, according to government circles, would not only increase civilian primacy in this process, but would also help prioritise negotiation and consensus-building as the most important tools of conflict resolution. If problems were political, eradicating the structural causes of problems would be the goal.

In the process of desecuritisation, for example, the government has made a clear difference between PKK-led terrorism and Turkey's Kurdish problem. In the past the two were seen as synonymous. Today the former is seen as an obvious security issue involving terrorism, whereas the latter is mainly considered as a political problem that needs a political solution. Turkey's Europeanisation process has certainly accelerated the politicisation of the Kurdish dispute. The EU itself now makes a distinction between the Kurdish dispute and PKK terrorism, and recognises the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

The desecuritisation process can also be explained by the logic of Turkey's domestic politics. The leading figures of the party have drawn some important lessons from the 28 February process, which refers to the ousting of the then Turkish coalition government of the centre-right True Path Party and the political Islamist Welfare Party in 1997, following a military-led post-modern coup. The most significant lesson has been that if the Justice and Development Party, which many people still see as the successor to the Welfare Party, wanted to stay in power and be considered as legitimate, the nature of internal and external politics should be as civilised as possible (Özel 2003).

Another factor that has positively impacted Turkey's soft power is that the current government has adopted a multilateral, cooperative, win-win approach in foreign policy. The government believes that Turkey, as the successor of the Ottoman Empire, should play a responsible and proactive role in the maintenance of regional peace and stability in the Middle East. Even though the core of Turkey's Kemalist security establishment is uneasy with the idea that Turkey should adopt a proactive and visionary approach towards the Middle East, lest such efforts contradict Turkey's Western identity, the current government believes that such a course of action is the only way for Turkey to increase its credibility in the eyes of both the West and the Islamic world. The goal now is to demonstrate Turkey's relevance to the West by helping contribute to Western efforts to deal with the security threats emanating from the Middle East.

External factors: the regional context in the Middle East

For Turkey to be considered as a soft power, the credibility of the Turkish model needs to be recognised by the Western and Middle Eastern countries.

Turkey's soft power has been positively affected by recent developments in the Middle East. First, the modernisation project that Turkey has been following for decades has produced positive outcomes. Once the EU decided to formally start accession talks with Turkey on 3 October 2005, people in the Middle East have started to seriously consider the idea that Turkey's potential entry into the EU could also help them develop/modernise and live in peace with the West. The closer Turkey moves to the EU, the more important it becomes in the eyes of the Middle Easterners (Daği 2005).

Second, the modernisation and development policies followed in the Middle East are now on the verge of failure. Many of the regional countries are among the losers of the globalisation process. This, in turn, makes the Turkish model appear more attractive to them (see UNDP 2003). Third, the West has begun to pay an increasing amount of attention to the transformation of the countries in the region in line with liberal democracy. Integration of regional countries into the global system now appears as a serious security question. Since Western countries began to depict Turkey as a model for regional countries to emulate,

this has contributed positively to Turkey's soft power. The September 2001 attacks have reinforced this logic, for the West has increasingly recognised that support given to authoritarian regimes in the region in the name of stability has not produced security for the West.

Fourth, an increasing number of liberal/moderate Islamists now see Turkey as an asset in their struggle against radical Islam, which they think does not represent true Islam. The need to prove that Islam cannot be hijacked by radical Islamists, whose ultimate goal is to demonstrate the incompatibility between Islam and democratic norms of the Western world, has enhanced Turkey's attractiveness.

The election of a Turkish national to the position of Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has also added to Turkey's soft power. This is important because Turkey has long shied away from getting involved in relations among Islamic states. When the OIC was first established in 1969, Turkey did not want to join, because by doing so it would have been thought to contradict Turkey's Western-oriented secular modernisation process.

The Western dimension

For Turkey to be considered as a soft power, Turkey's Western partners have to also recognise Turkey's soft power identity as legitimate. The most important external factor contributing to Turkey's soft power concerns the globalisation process that the country is going through. Globalisation fosters the idea that we are all in the same boat. A militarised and securitised approach to foreign policy would contradict this mentality, since issues are getting too complex and problems demand political solutions (Karaosmanoğlu 2004).

Second, the EU's demand that the military's role in Turkey should disspiate with respect to the formulation and implementation of policies appears to curb the influence of the military, the agency most responsible for the militarised character of Turkey's foreign policy. The demilitarisation of politics is regarded by the EU as a *sine qua non* for Turkey's entry to the club. Accordingly, the number of officers in the National Security Council (NSC) is now less than the number of civilians, and the mandate of the NSC is now defined so as to advise governments on issues of critical concern.

Another factor that adds to Turkey's soft power is the realisation that Turkey has not benefited from its hard power assets in its quest for EU membership. Turkey's hard power capabilities have long been a burden on Turkey's road to EU membership. Admitting Turkey into the EU appears to have exposed Europe to additional security risks. Turkey's problematic geography, realpolitik security culture, different social and cultural attributes, and the significant role that the military has played in politics were seen to pose obstacles to the EU's integration process, the most important security strategy of the EU (Buzan and Diez 1999; Oğuzlu 2002). The fact that the EU has become more

Europe-oriented and that it has begun to give more importance to enlargement towards the Central and East European countries after the Cold War has decreased its need for military security services, which Turkey could offer (Aybet and Müftüler-Baç 2000).

This situation has changed in the post-11 September environment. The EU feels exposed to threats arising from Turkey's region, and the integration of Muslims living in Europe has become an important issue. As the EU's relations with the Muslim world has become more important, the issue of Turkey's membership has increased in significance. Turkey's membership would mean that there can be peace between civilisations and that the EU project carries a secular, value based, extrovert, universal and multicultural character (Oğuzlu 2005–06). This realisation has positively affected Turkey's soft power.

Many Europeans have also increasingly observed that Turkey has been acting as a European country in the Middle East, rather than as a Middle Eastern country in Europe. Just as the EU has contributed to peace and stability in the Central and Eastern part of Europe through its enlargement process, Turkey tries to contribute to regional stability in the Middle East by helping project the European norms of international relations onto the area. Turkey has been working to help transform the region into a more stable and secure place by acting European. The fact that Turkey and the majority of the EU members share similar interests regarding some critical issues in the Middle East has also increased Turkey's power of attraction in European eyes. Turkey and the EU hold similar viewpoints on the issues of Iraq's future, Iran's nuclear policies, tranformation of the Middle Eastern region, the Palestinian–Israeli dispute, and so on.

Third, Turkey has realised that it can no longer benefit from its traditional hard power assets in its relations with the US. The US-led war in Iraq demonstrated that Turkey was no longer an indispensable ally, for the US could have opened a northern front against Iraq without Turkey's security cooperation. The technological ability of the US military has rendered Turkey's geopolitical location and strong military capabilities meaningless in US military strategy.

On the other hand, the fact that the US now sees Turkey as a role model within the framework of the liberal transformation of countries in the Middle East has contributed to Turkey's soft power. The Western strategy of inducing the countries in the Greater Middle Eastern region to liberalise and democratise has helped underline the potential role that Turkey could play in this process. Turkish officials know this and benefit from it. Since 11 September, Turkey's importance to the US stems from its potential role in helping the US fight the 'global war on terror' on an ideational basis (Oğuzlu 2004).

Soft power in use

The first example of Turkey's transformation into a soft power identity can be seen within the context of northern Iraq. The militarised and securitised approach used thus far has failed to produce the desired outcomes. First, Turkey could neither prevent northern Iraq from becoming a state-like entity ruled by the Kurds, nor eliminate the PKK camps in the region. Second, developments since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime have accelerated the decentralisation process. The recently adopted Iraqi constitution appears to have legitimised the federalisation process in an irreversible way. Third, Turkey has seen very clearly that the Turkoman card did not pay off. The Turkomans did not go to the polls in the recent elections as a distinct group to pursue their rights. Even the ones who voted acted in cooperation with either the Kurds or the Shi'ites. It became quite clear that the Iraqi Turkoman Front, which Turkey has sponsored since its inception, could not represent the whole Turkoman community in Iraq.

Fourth, Turkey cannot now enter northern Iraq as freely as it could before the war. Neither the Americans nor the Kurdish groups would allow such an action, and Turkey's European friends would also find it unacceptable in terms of the dynamics of the ongoing accession process. Fifth, the strengthening of the Kurdish rule in northern Iraq has started to impact developments inside Turkey. It is imperative that Ankara finds a political solution to the Kurdish dispute because Turkey's Kurds will not want to lag behind the Kurds of northern Iraq in terms of economic, social and political achievements. The danger for Turkey is that should Turkey's Kurds see no improvement in their status, northern Iraq might become a powerful attraction in their eyes.

These factors have combined to produce a new Turkish approach to the region in line with expectations of being a soft power. A growing number of people in Turkey have been arguing in favour of a more holistic approach towards the region that embraces the Turkomans as well as the Kurds. Just as the Turkomans are regarded as Turkey's relatives, so should the Kurds. In this view, Turkey's interests in northern Iraq could be better served should Ankara start to behave as the 'big brother' of Kurds living there. The more dependent the region is on Turkey, the more Ankara can warn the Kurds not to challenge Turkey's 'red lines'.

In congruence with the idea that Turkey should play a responsible role in Iraq, the current government has adopted a holistic approach towards Iraq's groups. Rather then favouring one over the other, as was the case in the past, Turkey is now developing an equidistanct approach towards all. It is in such a context that the Turkish government has recently tried to bring all sectarian groups together and encouraged the Sunni groups to vote in the elections held in 2005.

Turkey's soft power identity has also become visible in its relations with Syria, as Turkey has gradually ceased to view Syria from a security perspective. Since 1999, Turkish–Syrian relations have dramatically improved. The

economic and cultural dimensions of Turkish–Syrian relations have eclipsed its political–military character. Even though relations between Syria and the Western international community have started to sour due to increasing Western pressure on Syria to set into motion a democratisation process at home and to withdraw Syrian soldiers from Lebanon, Turkey does not share the security concerns of the West. Turkey does not feel threatened by Syria's regional foreign policy. Improvements in bilateral trade and Turkey's Arab-friendly attitudes towards regional issues has transformed Turkey's image, in the eyes of the Syrians, from being the collaborator of the West into a responsible country that takes Syria's concerns seriously.

On the other hand, Turkey earns the respect of the West, especially the US, as she warns the Syrian authorities against the dangers of following a collision course with the West and Israel. Turkey has been effective in convincing the Syrian authorities to recognise the results of the elections in Lebanon, which brought to power an anti-Syrian coalition government. Turkey also suggested that Syrian forces be withdrawn from Lebanon. Yet, it would be an over-estimation to claim that the Syrian authorities softened their approach towards the West due to Turkey's friendly warnings.

Recent years have also witnessed an increase in the frequency of high level visits between the two countries. The Turkish President not only attended the funeral ceremony of the late Syrian President Hafiz Esad, but also current Syrian President Basar Esad paid an official visit to Turkey for the first time ever. It is also noteworthy that Syria, a traditional Turkey-sceptic country in the Arab world, did not object to the election of a Turkish head of the OIC.

A similar scenario appears on the Iranian front. The recent war in Iraq has inadvertently increased Iran's influence in the region. The US eliminated the two most important security concerns of Iran—Saddam Hussein and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Iran is now much more capable of exploiting increasing Shi'ite influence in the Middle East to its advantage. Despite Iran's increasing geopolitical power, the country does not figure as an existential security threat for Turkey. Turkey does not share the same security perceptions of the West *vis-à-vis* Iran. First, the two countries have not fought each other for some time and the territorial border between the two has remained the same since the early seventeenth century. Second, Turkey's security policy-makers do not buy into the argument that Iran is close to developing nuclear weapons. Turkey holds the view that Iranian attempts to get nuclear energy is driven mainly by economic needs, that Iran feels itself encircled by the US presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that Iran is threatened by Israel's nuclear power. To Ankara, the Iranian desire to acquire nuclear weapons is better explained by the concerns of having international prestige and the ability to deter adversaries rather than the concern of changing the status quo in the region. Third, economic relations between the two have improved over the last decade. Not only have Turkey's exports to Iran doubled, but also Turkey has become quite dependent on Iranian oil and gas (Olson 2005). Increasing economic interdependence makes it

harder for the two countries to follow a collision course. Turkey certainly has no interest in an increase in oil prices that would certainly be the case should a crisis between the West and Iran escalate.

Iran also sees Turkey's efforts to help facilitate dialogue between Iran and the West in a positive light. Iranian authorities frequently visit Turkey and their Turkish counterparts go to Iran with a view to encouraging the Iranian authorities to adopt a constructive attitude on the issue of nuclear armament. It is also of value that both the American and European powers seem to be content with Turkey playing a facilitator role in this process, thus demonstrating Turkey's increasing international standing.

Turkey's increasing soft power can also be deduced from the economic diplomacy of the current government. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the most-travelled Turkish prime minister ever. He has not only visited the developed Western countries with a view to persuading wealthy Westerners to invest in Turkey, but he has also visited many developing countries in an effort to help boost trade relations.

Some observers have even made the point that the nature of Turkey–Russia relations has transformed from geopolitical rivalry to geoeconomic cooperation (Moustakis and Ackerman 2002). The volume of Turkish trade with Russia has quadrupled over the last decade, and there were numerous meetings between Vladimir Putin and Erdogan in 2005. An additional factor driving Russia and Turkey closer emanates from the ambiguities that each experiences in their relations with the West. The imperial tone of American undertakings in the region has brought the two closer in the strategic sense of countering the West's influence in their backyards. In addition, the EU's ambivalent attitude towards Turkey following the Constitutional debacle might have prompted Turkey to seek closer ties with Russia, a country that also feels aggrieved by equivocal European attitudes (Taşpinar and Hill 2006).

Another example of Turkey's increasing soft power can be seen in the incessant calls of Turkish statesmen for further democracy and liberalism in the region. On numerous occasions, both the Turkish Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have stated that peace and stability in the region would come through democratisation and liberalisation. While Turkey's participation in the US-led Greater Middle Eastern project as a democracy partner contributes to her positive standing in Washington, its ongoing democratisation process at home and its 'zero problem approach' with neighbours earns her respect in the Middle East.

Turkey's increasing soft power identity can also be observed on its western front. For example, Turkey's decades-long Cyprus policy has recently begun to change. For years Turkey argued that the Cyprus dispute and Turkey's relations with the EU were not linked, and that for Turkey to contribute to a solution of the dispute the EU needed to come closer to Turkey's EU membership aspirations (Bahceli 2001). This policy stance of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots was seen as intransigent. This position was due to the fact that the

military determined Turkey's Cyprus policy. The military was aided in this process by the nationalistic wing of the political spectrum for whom the Cyprus dispute came to a final solution when Turkey undertook its military operation in 1974 in response to the Greek Cypriots' attempt to unify the island with mainland Greece. However, since 2002 Turkey has joined the side that demands a negotiated settlement on the island. In the reunification referendum of April 2004, the Greek Cypriots cast their votes negatively by a large margin, whereas the overwhelming majority of Turkish Cypriots voted for the Annan Plan (Stavrinides 1999).

Conclusion

The years ahead will be challenging in terms of predicting to what extent Turkey's emerging soft power identity will last. There are two main reasons for this. First, threats to Turkey's national security might increase in the years to come, which would lead to a need to rely on hard power. Second, for the emerging soft power identity to gain legitimacy, it needs to contribute to the resolution of Turkey's perennial domestic security problems, namely radical Islam and separatist ethnic movements.

Given this, some preconditions need to be met so that Turkey can continue to act as a soft power. First, the politicisation of possible security issues inside the country should deliver lasting solutions. Politicisation without concrete achievements might again pave the way for further securitisation. Second, regional dynamics should allow Turkey the luxury of acting softly. The more political uncertainties remain in Iraq, the more likely that Turkey will resort to hard power. The more willingly the Kurds of northern Iraq pursue the political project of independence, the easier it will be for Turkey to act as a hard power. The recent upsurge in PKK terrorist attacks and the ambiguous US approach towards Turkey's demands that the US should fight the PKK, or let Turkey do it, have recently led Turkey to consider that a military and security approach is a more likely outcome.

Turkey might also face increasing security challenges emanating from the deterioration of Iran's relations with the West. Turkey would not want to have to choose between the West and Iran. However, if Iran managed to get nuclear weapons, Turkey's approach to Iran would likely become securitised. After all, a nuclear Iran would have the potential to become the regional hegemon.

Third, the accession process with the EU should continue in an uninterrupted manner and contribute to the solution of Turkey's perennial problems. Uncertainties and ambiguities on Turkey's road to EU membership will dilute the credibility of the soft power idea among Turkey's political and military elites. Fourth, the Middle Eastern states should see the projects of liberalisation and democratisation as inevitable and legitimate. In order for them to see Turkey as a role model, Turkey should be allowed to join the EU. If this does

not happen, the prospects of having cordial and security-friendly relations between the West and the Islamic world will not be so high in the post-September 2001 era.

Notes

1. When soft power is mentioned, some authors mostly understand the use of economic means in foreign policy. However, it is possible to define this situation as civil power. Civil methods refer to the use of non-military power elements. When thought of in this framework, it is not wrong to define the EU as a civil power.
2. Robert Kagan (2002) thinks differently on this subject. According to him, soft power is the only choice available for weak powers.

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