The "Turkish Model" for Islamist parties: attraction, limits and prospects. The importance of External Factors

Beatriz Tomé Alonso
Complutense University of Madrid
beatriz.tome.alonso@pdi.ucm.es

First Draft
(June 15, 2012)
Prepared for presentation at the 2012 IPSA Conference,
Session: RC43 Religion and Politics
Panel "Partis Politiques et Religions"
(Madrid, July 08-12, 2012)

Abstract. The so-called Arab Awakening has brought much attention to Turkey and its ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), as a model for other Islamist parties in the Mediterranean area. Although some scholars link ideology and political behavior to explain Islam-rooted actor's performance, we focus on the importance of external factors. The paper begins by deconstructing the Turkish model. What are its main attraction features? The second part of this work aims to address how Turkey's very own geopolitical and economic conditions have influenced the model's formation and AKP's evolution. In particular, it focuses on how the role played by EU conditionality and the new pro-foreign market business class may set the Turkish model's limits. Can this model succeed in other Mediterranean national scenarios given the so-called international dimension influence? To conclude, this paper holds that the Turkish-AKP model can not be easily transplanted to other countries but its increasing popularity might become a window of opportunity for other Islam-rooted parties and its external relations.

Keywords: Turkish model, AKP, external factors, Islamist parties.

Acknowledgments: The author is grateful for the funding of this research by the Spanish Ministry of Education provided under the FPU Programme.

Exploring the Turkish Model. An Introduction

Recently, there are a growing number of policymakers and academics debating the benefits and limits of the 'Turkish Model'. The Arab popular uprising, the subsequent wave of change and the rise of many Islamist -or Islam-inspired- parties in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area, has renewed alike democratization hopes and concerns about possible negative outcomes. It is within the context of what has been called 'the Arab Spring' that Turkey has gained an increasingly prominent role as a 'model of change'.

In this paper, we will consider three main and interrelated levels of analysis of the Turkish model:
• its factors of attraction for both Western and Islamist voices;
• its limits to be directly copied by other Islam-rooted parties and transferred to Arab scenarios; and
• its prospects of playing a leading role in the re-framing of Mediterranean politics.

In the first part, we will try to answer the following question: What are the main push factors of the ongoing Turkish model? It must be noted that the Turkish model is not new by any means, nor does it hold the exact same meaning for all the actors that adhere to it. While at first, the Turkish model’s emphasis was on modern state-building and Westernization measures, the focus has progressively been displaced towards democracy and Political Islam accommodation. Thus, the evolution of the AKP's discourse and public behavior has become a central feature of the model construction.

The second section of this paper tries to explain how Turkish international context has influenced the model’s formation and AKP's evolution. Many scholars have tried to explain the transformation of Islamist movements and parties by citing exclusively domestic factors. But neither countries nor social or political formations are isolated from the outside. As pointed out by Cavatorta, “international factors might not simply be triggers that domestic actors contend with at the beginning of the transition, but powerful forces that may have a decisive impact throughout the whole process by affecting how domestic actors constantly reassess the resources available and the costs and benefits of their action in light of international pressures, changes and reactions to their stances.”\(^1\)

In particular, we will focus on the transformative role played by EU conditionality and the new foreign-market oriented business class. This is followed by the analysis of how these geopolitical and economic Turkish very own particularities can set the limits for the model's expansion to other Mediterranean scenarios.

This paper will conclude that the Turkish-AKP model cannot be directly transplanted to other countries. This should not be the priority. A more pragmatic and realistic approach should be taken. Considerations for the Turkish model's increasing popularity creates a window of opportunity for other Islam-rooted parties and their external relations.

**Deconstructing the Turkish Model in the Arab-Spring Era**

Rather than a static reality, the 'Turkish model' is flexible and dynamic. Before the example now claimed by both the Al-Nahda leader Ghannoushi and US-State Secretary Hilary Clinton alike, the Turkish model has gone through different phases with regards to: (a) the historical context, (b) the more important and relevant characteristics at the time, and (c) the different demands and necessities of involved actors.

Secularization, Westernization and modern top-down nation-building were key issues of the first version of the Turkish model\(^3\). The focus has progressively been displaced towards democratization and integration of Islam-rooted parties into the established institutional framework. After the 9/11 terrorists attack, relations between United States and Muslim societies were perceived as more controversial. The US administration needed a 'model country' demonstrating that one country ruled by an Islam-rooted party could be compatible with the democratization process. This model country was no other than Turkey. According to Altunisik, "(t)he change in the political strategy of the United states –at least at the discursive level- was largely responsible in pushing the issues of reform to the forefront. The adoption of the Broader Middle East and North Africa

---

2 I borrow the concept of deconstruction applied to the Turkish model from Sinan Ülgen: “From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (December 2011).
Initiative in the G-8 Summit in June 2004 revealed a degree of consensus among the major extra-regional actors in achieving this objective. Within this context the United States began to point to Turkey as a 'model' for the project of democratization in the Islamic World\(^4\).

Table 1. Turkish Model Main Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Context</th>
<th>Model's main characteristics</th>
<th>Prominent actors involved in the model promotion</th>
<th>Prominent actors involved in the model demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation of the Turkish Republic</td>
<td>Nation-state model</td>
<td>Western powers</td>
<td>Countries that had initiated radical modernization (= Westernization) processes (such as Iran or Afghanistan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atatürk-era modernization (=Westernization) reforms</td>
<td>Western-style reforms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a religious-united empire to a nationalist-inspired modern Nation-State</td>
<td>Inclusion into Western civilization and departure from non-modern forces such as religion, tradition...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on secularism and modern state building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Cold War Period</td>
<td>Emphasis on secularism</td>
<td>Western power and a renewed emphasis on (controlled) modernization from above</td>
<td>Central Republic of Central Asia (Uzbek President, Islam Karimov: for those states, “the republic of Turkey is a model of a secular, democratic, Muslim country, aiming to achieve Western standards, in partnership with the West, by applying liberal free market policies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence of the Central Asia Republics</td>
<td>Model of development for the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia (most of them Turkish and Muslim)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush-era War on Terror</td>
<td>Emphasis on the compatibility between Islam and democracy</td>
<td>Demonstration that a country with a clear Muslim majority can be democratic and also a Western ally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There are two main differences between the first versions of the Turkish model and its Arab Spring era renewed interpretation. The new Turkish model is now described in terms of its modern yet traditional political nature while also being promoted by internal actors.

(a) Since its coming to power in 2002 and specially after the Arab Revolts, the AKP is at the center of the Arab Spring-era Turkish model. This Muslim party has adopted conservative democracy as political ideology and economic liberalism as guiding principle. The AKP has been taking democratization measures and has made EU integration a fundamental piece of its discourse and policy.

\(^4\) Meliha Benli Altunisik: “The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East”, Arab Studies Quarterly (ASQ), (Winter-Spring, 2005).
There is a local and regional support for the new Turkish model. It has to be noted that the Turkish model has not always been applauded by all of the actors involved. In the Bush Era, the fact that not only the Muslim but also the (supposed) Islamic character of Turkey was emphasized, provoked the discontent of the largely secular military establishment in Turkey. They were skeptical towards a model where the most important Turkish characteristics according to them, such as secularism and Western civilization attachment, were displaced in favor of Islam. There were also concerns about what this model meant in terms of Turkish domestic and regional identity. The Kemalist elite feared the rise of 'Islamic politics' and the perception of Turkey being included in the Middle East rather than into the European area. As explained by Omer Taspinar, "the primary target audience for such a model, the Arab world, (do) not always share American enthusiasm for the Turkish example." Today Muslim populations and Islamist parties leaders demand a societal and state-transformation model at the same time that Turkey offers it through a new foreign policy that reconnects Ankara with Middle East and North African countries. This demand reinforces the model and makes it more representative of local motivations. Therefore, not only is good democratic performance important but also Turkish economic success and development are also fundamental. In essence, Muslim Arabs are searching for what can be called a 'third way' in the democratization process: an example that promotes democracy and at the same time preserves local identity.

Table 2: Turkish Model Characteristics in the Arab-Spring Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Context</th>
<th>Model's main characteristics</th>
<th>Prominent actors involved in the model promotion</th>
<th>Prominent actors involved in the model demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab-Spring Era</td>
<td>Secularism</td>
<td>Alternative model to revolutionist/radical Islamism</td>
<td>Arab Population (especially since the rise of Turkey as a democratic and economic Middle East power and foreign policy reconnection with MENA area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise and electoral triumph of Islamist (or Islam-rooted parties)</td>
<td>Democratic and peaceful participation of an Islamist party into State institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Islamist parties' leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Economic success as main focus of attraction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close links to the West</td>
<td>(Not only is democracy a key feature of Turkish system, but its good economic performance is also important.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Key features of the Arab Spring-era Turkish model

What are the main features of the Arab Spring era Turkish model (from now on simply the Turkish model)? Who are the main actors interested in promoting and in embracing the

---

Do they want to implement the same key features? Does the Turkish example represent different ideas from / for different actors? Although the following features are deeply interrelated, we discuss them individually as analytical tools for academic purposes.

**Democratic Performance**

In a region where democratization is still full of difficulties, Turkey's democratic experience becomes one of the main push factors of the proposed model. According to Freedom House statistics, Turkey has the highest rating among MENA countries, obtaining the score of 'partly free' (3.0 freedom rating)\(^6\). According to Fuller, “...the first important way in which today's Turkey has now truly become a model for the Muslim world is that it is one of the few Muslim states in which truly representative and democratic politics have emerged”\(^7\)

The fact that Turkey's democracy is not a completed reality but mostly a *work in progress*\(^8\), makes it more attractive to Arab eyes. As Kirişçi recently notes, being Turkey itself in the process of consolidating its democratic political system allows a more direct dialogue with countries that are receiving ‘democratic lessons’. Thus, the Turkish model permits the restructuring of traditional hierarchical relations among developed and developing countries. Discussions among Turkish and Arab actors tend to be more fluent than with Western counterparts since the ‘problem of the other’ can be avoided.\(^9\)

This ongoing democratization also involves a progressive emancipation from the military establishment towards a civil power. It has supposed an important setback for the vigilance and guard system imposed by the military. Undoubtedly, this *transformation of military-civil relations* and the empowerment of political and civil decision making is also a focus of attraction. In this contexts, as Atasoy rightly points out, it has been a paradoxical reformulation of reformist and *status quo* forces in this context. Years ago Kemalists were pushing for change and evolution against traditional actors, meaning mainly religious ones. Today, Muslim politicians are reforming the Turkish system to get closer to European common rules. AKP leaders have well learned that their very best route to gain more power inside the Turkish state is no other than through democratization, human rights and EU integration.\(^10\)

**Secularism.**

The traditional Turkish secularism is inspired by the French *laïcité*. Thus, it advocates for strict separation between political and religious spheres and also avoids any public profession of religious identity. Secularism is pointed out by its defenders as one of the key features of the Turkish model. Kemalist elites have been very vocal trying to guarantee a public and political space free of Muslim references. They aim to preserve what is considered one of the pillars of Ataturk ideology: secularism. For many Western voices, secularism is a *sine qua non* condition for democracy. Fuller also argues ‘emotional’ reasons for Western promotion of Turkish secularism, that is “perceived as a sort of nod of

---

\(^6\) Freedom Scores 1-2 corresponds to Free Counties, 3-5 to partly free regimes, and 6-7 to not free. Although Turkey is included as a Western Europe country, we analyze it as a MENA state for comparision purposes. Among MENA countries, no county is scored as free and only two more are classified as 'partly-free': Lebanon (4.5) and Morocco (5). See: Freedom House (2012): *Freedom in the World: Turkey*, at [http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/turkey](http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/turkey), (accessed 1 June 2012).

\(^7\) Graham E. Fuller: “Turkey’s Strategic Model: Myths and Realities”, *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, n.3 (Summer 2004), pp. 51-64.

\(^8\) Kemal Kirişçi: “Turkey’s ‘Demonstrative Effect and the Transformation of the Middle East”, *Insight Turkey*, vol. 13, n°2 (2011). I borrow the term ‘work in progress’ from Kemal Kirişçi.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Seymen Atasoy: “The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?”, *Middle East Policy*, vol. 18, n.3 (Fall 2011).
recognition toward the superior political-cultural model of the West.”

The coming to power of the AKP has pushed this traditional secularism towards reformulation. Erdogan and other AKP leaders have emphasized their adherence to state secularism. But they have also been working towards the expansion of the (public) space for religious manifestations. They promote the use of the veil and the right to attend Quran classes. AKP members do not base their defense of what can be called ‘social Islam’ on well-known Islamist arguments, such as, for example, Muslim identity preservation. They do it in the name of individual freedoms and civil rights.

The AKP is therefore pleading for a more passive formulation of secularism. The conceptual model for state system would not be anymore the laicité, but rather the American version of political and religious independence. While traditional Turkish assertive secularism constrains social influence and public visibility of Islam and promotes secularism as one of the pillars of the Turkish nation-state, passive secularism involves state neutrality towards Muslim symbols and rejects the state’s forcible marginalization of Turkish Muslim identity.12 The ruling party defends what can be referred as a kind of secular divide. State institutions would maintain themselves completely secular at the same time that social public space allows the manifestation of religious identities. According to Duran, Turkish secularism “is reinterpreted to accommodate universal values such as democracy, human rights and civil society; [secularism] should be restricted as much as possible so as to maximize social and individual choices and differences.”

What can be called the reformulation of the Turkish secularism under the AKP government is not free of controversy. It has rather been a source of polarization of national polity. On one hand, there are those who associate secularism with military rule, dictatorship and human rights’ violations and who have been main supporters of the rise of political Islam.14 On the other hand, there are the Kemalist elites, that traditionally control the judiciary, the military and the rest of the state institutions. Their concerns are not only about ideological issues, but also about the loss of their self-proclaimed role of tutelage and protection of the Republic. Until recent years, the so-called secular establishment had a wide range of instruments to protect the Atatürk’s legacy. Deeper and continued democratization has been key to put an end to Turkish tradition of military coups and political repression.

The peak of the controversy between these two segments of the Turkish political arena came with what is known as the ‘2008 Closure Case’. The AKP is then accused to carry anti-secular activities. As indicated by Atasoy: “(...)the insistence of some female students to wear the headscarf in universities, the demand to easier access to University education for graduates of professional high schools for religious service prides, and the desire of some

12 The differences between assertive and passive secularism applied to Turkish reality is paraphrased from Ahmet T. Kuru, Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey (Cambridge University Press, 2009), cited by Seymen Atasoy: “The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?”, Middle East Policy, vol. 18, n. 3 (Fall 2011): “[assertive secularism] seeks to constrain the social influence and public visibility of religion and promotes secularism as a life philosophy, while passive secularism involves state neutrality towards all religion, and rejects the state's forcible dictation of a particular lifestyle to its citizens”.
14 Meliha Benli Altunisik, op.cit.
15 According to Atasoy “(u)ntil recent years, Turkish political culture made a crucial distinction between the ‘state’ and the ‘government’. The former was considered to the above politics and consisted of the TDK, the judiciary, some high-ranking civilian bureaucrats and the president – until 2007, when a former AKP politician, Abdullah Gül, was elected to that post. The ‘government’ consisted of the cabinet that emerged from the elected parliament, the Grand National Assembly. (...) An active judiciary further limited the room for maneuver of governments…”, see Seymen Atasoy: “The Turkish Example: op.cit..
families to enroll their children in Quran courses at an early age. He claimed that the representation of these widespread public demands by the AKP also violated laicism and the constitution. The AKP claimed that laicism, defined as separation of church and state, is a macro-level attribute of the political system and not an adjective that can be applied to individual persons. (…) The AKP also noted that it is calling for ‘democratic laicism’, which the prosecutor treated as evidence for his closure case”

The Turkish Constitutional Court decided not to ban the party due to AKP support for harmonization measures towards UE membership. But it also concluded that the AKP has effectively become the center of anti-secular activities in Turkey.

What can be called the 'Europe-factor' is key. As previously mentioned, AKP's discourse has evolved from former Islamist organizations' rhetoric. Instead of claiming for Muslim identity, it avoids fundamentalist slogans and uses the language of democracy and human rights. So, we can conclude that the AKP “found its new voice as an opposition party by shifting from the old claim that Turkey was not religious enough to claim that Turkey was not democratic enough. Both charges attempted to frame the Turkish regime as illegitimate to some degree, but the charges of the poor democracy sought to engage the secular democratic system on its own terms.”

Secularism and what can be considered its counterpart, religiosity, have become key features of the Turkish model. A survey conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in MENA countries concludes that “to those that felt that Turkey could not be a model for the region, the most common reasons given were Turkey is not Muslim enough (23%), its close relations with the West (16%) and its secular political system (13%)” Thus the Turkish model can become paradoxical. While Western powers promote the Turkish example largely because of its secularism, this is one of the main rejection causes for the Arab audience. Instead, a more flexible and lax reformulation of secularism may be positive for the success of the Turkish model. Thus what can be referred as the 'Muslim identity card' is one of the main soft power instruments to implement Turkish interests in the region and also to promote the model among MENA countries. Thus, conservative policies implemented by the Turkish government at the domestic level and the international defense of Muslim values reinforce the model inside and outside the country.

Political Islam
Can Islam-rooted parties be accommodated into stable, democratic and pro-Western political systems? Since the 2002 AKP electoral victory, the integration of Political Islam into a well-established institutional framework is at the core of the model.

However, AKP's political trajectory did not start in 2002. The current party itself is a transformation of Turkish Islamism. The mainstream trend inside traditional Turkish Islamism has evolved from a revolutionary vision to a reformist character based on “tolerance, pluralism, and the participatory aspects of democracy and civil society” AKP leaders are, in essence, searching for what can be considered a new relationship between Islam and politics. They even avoid the term 'Islamist' when referring to the party. Instead, they consider themselves proponents of 'conservative democracy'. Accordingly, they

16 Seymen Atasoy: “The Turkish Example: op.cit.
18 Mechen cited by Meliha Benli Altunisik, op.cit..
describe the AKP as a party that wants to “give voice to the Turkish people’s values and to bridge the gap between the state and the people.”

Nevertheless, an analysis of the AKP leaders trajectory makes the Islamist reference clear. After the dissolution of the 'Virtue Party', the political discourse was change and it was a political rift between 'reformists' and 'traditionalists'. The first group abandons the claim for an Islamic state and developed aspirations for EU membership. They went on to form the Justice and Democratic Party (AKP) under Erdogan's leadership. The second group founded a new party within the National Outlook Movement, the 'Felicity Party'.

Moving away from the main Islamist core -the National Outlook Movement-, the AKP adopted a new strategy that “might be described as incremental adaptative transformation.” The AKP can be now explained as an Islam-rooted party. Indeed, following Brumberg's classification of Political Islam into three main categories (a) "radical/militant fundamentalists", (b) "reformist fundamentalists"/"tactical modernists" and (c) "strategic modernists", the AKP would fall under the most advanced stage. The Felicity Party and its consecutive incarnations would be "Reformist fundamental/tactical modernists [that] also pursue an Islamic state as their ultimate goal, but agree to make use of democratic instruments and discourses in achieving it." Within this classification, the AKP would represent a evolution towards 'strategic modernists' that are defined by Brumberg as “Muslim liberal democrats that embrace liberal democratic values and seek to extend religious freedoms in a political environment where they co-exist among other political movements in a secular order.”

When referring to the AKP, some authors even use the term 'Post-Islamism'. The ideological transformation and pragmatism of Erdogan and its followers guarantee that the AKP was able to assume the same objective as former center-right parties and to

---


22 Sultan Tepe: "Turkey's AKP: A Model 'Muslim-Democratic' Party?", Journal of Democracy, vol. 16, nº3 (July 2005). Tepe defines this "incremental adaptative transformation" as follows: "The AKP avoids strong ideological statements or open conflicts, and constantly adapts its positions to the expectations of other political players. Yet the end reslt is meant to be transformation."


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
represent the 'silent conservative majority' that was mainly excluded from the economic and political center dominated by Istanbul's elites. In its post-islamist phase, Islamism would have lost its revolutionary character and the focus would now be on "infiltrating the social and cultural practices of daily life". Other scholars have recently developed the concept of 'Muslim democracy'. For Nasr, Muslim democrats try to integrate traditional Muslim values into political platforms pragmatically designed to gain regular democratic elections and assume compromises that go beyond religious interests. On the contrary, these political platforms are concerned about middle class issues and on how to take advantage of opportunities created by the ballot box.

Main differences between Islamist parties and Islam-rooted parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Islamist Parties</th>
<th>Islam-rooted Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Outlook Movement</strong></td>
<td>Islamization of state and society</td>
<td>Promotion and defense of Muslim Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>Islamization of state and society</td>
<td>Promotion and defense of Muslim Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Legal framework</strong></td>
<td>Defense of Sahri'a</td>
<td>EU harmonization packages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-Religion Relations</strong></td>
<td>Religion prevail over state institutions</td>
<td>Passive secularism Promotion of conservative moral values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign Policy</strong></td>
<td>Preferential relations with Muslim countries.</td>
<td>EU integration as main foreign policy's goal Zero-problems policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Western Relations</td>
<td>Preferential relations with Muslim countries.</td>
<td>EU integration as main foreign policy's goal Zero-problems policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- with Muslim countries</td>
<td>Preferential relations with Muslim countries.</td>
<td>EU integration as main foreign policy's goal Zero-problems policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Policy</strong></td>
<td>Preferential relations with Muslim countries.</td>
<td>Neo-liberalism economy Integration into the global economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country's identity</strong></td>
<td>Muslim country</td>
<td>Historical and geo-strategic depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted audience</strong></td>
<td>Islamism sympathizer</td>
<td>Middle class former center-right voters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why is the AKP attracting so much attention? For Western Turkish model promoters, what has to be emphasized is the AKP's ideological transformation, its normalized political performance and its liberal economic discourse. While not being possible to avoid Islam as the main vehicle for popular unrest and discontent in most of the MENA countries, Islam-rooted parties can be integrated not only into the domestic institutional framework, but also into the so-called international system. In conclusion, what is more attractive to the US and EU leaders' eyes is that the Turkish model rests on the ideological and behavioral accommodation between: a) pro-Western domestic-level institutions (ongoing democratization) and international-level institutions (NATO, EU); b) pro-Western economic discourse and practice (promotion of globalized economic relations); and c) Political Islam.

On the 'demand' side, other motivations are involved. The AKP creates a new and stable nexus between authenticity, universality and modernity. For the ruling party's members, modernity is not equivalent to Westernization. Leading concepts and values -such as democracy, rule of law, human rights or civil participation- are considered universal rather than the property of a concrete civilization. Also, Muslim traditional values can be integrated into a modern economic and political

system that benefits citizens at the same time that respects their traditions. As pointed out by Duran, with “the rejection of a Euro-centric definition of modernity, Islamists strive for the revitalization of Islamic civilization.”

**Foreign Policy**

Since the coming to power of the AKP, Turkish foreign policy is becoming an issue of concern to Western eyes. American and European anxieties are summed up in the following question: *Is the West losing Turkey?* On the other hand, the so-called 'Arab street' is seduced by the Turkish increasingly independent, non-interventionist and assertive foreign behavior.

Turkish foreign image has changed over the last decade. From being perceived by its neighbors as a military power and a US client-state, Turkey is now seen as a positive actor that has “succeeded in balancing its alliance commitments with the pursuit of its own principles and national interest.”

The story of misunderstandings and controversies between Turkey and its Arab neighbors started during the Ottoman empire and wrote its main episodes in the Cold War period. Ankara was then a key actor of the Western block and a key piece into the NATO's communist contention strategy. It was seen by mainly pro-Soviet new nationalist Arab governments as "an agent of American policy in the Middle East" Turkish participation in the 1955 Baghdad Pact -an US attempt to bring together Middle Easter countries against Soviet influence-, its close relations with Israel -with which started diplomatic relations in 1952-, the signing of a secret pact with Israel and Iran against Arab nations, and the support of France in the Algeria independence War deepened Turkish negative image in the region.

Since being declared *persona non grata* by Nasser, Turkey has evolved towards a reconnection with the MENA region. Based on Ahmed Davutoğlu 'zero-problems' policy, Turkish foreign relations have transformed from confrontation to political and economic cooperation. Not only bilateral relations have improved, also a comprehensive regional approach has emerged and a new mediator role has been developed. According to the 2011 third annual regional public opinion survey conducted by TESEV, "(g)enerally speaking, the country is seen as an acceptable actor, whose presence is welcomed in the region and respondents appreciate the values that it represents."
Erdogan is today one of the most popular leaders among Arab people thanks to his controversial relations with Israel and his passionate defense of the Palestinian cause. According to Pew Global Attitudes Project: "Erdogan, for example, has received considerable attention for breaking with previous Turkish policy and taking a more confrontational approach toward Israel regarding Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza. In the Palestinian territories themselves, Erdogan receives somewhat less support than in...

Source: TESEV: "The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2011"

Turkish Prime Minister has emerged as a convinced defender of ‘Muslim interests’. As previously noted, the 'religious factor' plays a relevant role in the increasingly positive perception of Turkey by its Arab neighbors. To those that see Turkey as a model for their own country developments, Turkish Muslim background is one of the main reasons given (23%).

**Economic Performance**

Turkey's democratic gains, increasingly independent foreign policy and promotion of Muslim values are not the only push drivers for MENA countries. Turkey's strong economic performance has also been a major factor of attraction for the so-called 'Arab street'. Turkey is not only perceived as a political power, but also as an emerging economic leader in the region.

Being the 6th largest economy in Europe, Turkey has a GDP average growth rate of 9% in 2010 and 8.5% in 2011, while the Euro area's average growth rate is at 2% and 1.5% respectively. According to The Economist, by the end of 2010, Turkey's economy recorded the third-fastest rate of growth in the G20.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkey GDP evolution</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross domestic product (output approach)</td>
<td>758 390.8</td>
<td>843 178.4</td>
<td>950 534.3</td>
<td>952 558.6</td>
<td>1 103 749.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross domestic product (expenditure)</td>
<td>758 390.8</td>
<td>843 178.4</td>
<td>950 534.3</td>
<td>952 558.6</td>
<td>1 103 749.8</td>
<td>(E)1 300 726.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD.

This dynamism of the Turkey's economy contrasts with the economic development failure of many Middle East and North Africa countries. Not surprisingly, economy is seen as 'the most pressing issue' by many Arabs. It has to be also noted that last year’s turmoil negatively affected many MENA regimes’ already poor economic performance. Comparatively speaking, Turkey is the most economic advanced country in terms of: GDP, unemployment rates and international incomes.

**The limits of the Turkish model**

What are the limits of the Turkish model? How have Turkey's very own particularities influenced the Turkish model formation and the AKP's evolution (now at the center of the model)? Can we talk about Turkish exceptionalism? According to Hugh Pope, "Turkey's key achievement has been a rough-and-ready balance between authoritarianism,

---

37 Mensur Akgün and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar: “The Perception of Turkey... , op.cit.
38 “Turkey is not just a political power, but it is perceived as an economic power too. When we asked respondents which country was the region’s strongest economy now and in ten years, currently Saudi Arabia leads Turkey. But it should be noted that Turkey is seen as the region’s coming economic leader in ten years”, Mensur Akgün and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar: “The Perception of Turkey... , op.cit.
41 (40% of the regional weighted average) Mensur Akgün and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar: “The Perception ..., op.cit.
militarism, statism, religious fundamentalism and nationalism – all dynamics from which it suffered for decades, and which still plague the Middle East.”

Many scholars have explained Turkey’s evolution and the transformation of Islamist movements and parties arguing exclusively endogenous factors. Thus, the Turkish model’s limits would be based on two key axes:

(a) **Particularities of the Turkey’s institutional and political system.**
Turkey has evolved from an authoritarian rule and a single-party regime to a multi-party political environment. The culmination to this process was the 1950 coming to power of the Democratic Party, until then condemned to constant opposition labors. Far from being a perfect and completed democratic system, Turkey has a history of military intervention in politics. Considering itself ‘protector of the Republican values and the Ataturk's legacy’, Turkish military have never maintained political power on its hands.

(b) **Particularities in the Turkey's Islamism evolution towards moderation.**
Since the rise of what can be called ‘religion and identity politics’, the transformation of Islamism has been of increasing concern. The extensive academic literature about Political Islam offers a wide range of explanations for Islamists’ moderation. Some authors argue that particular ideological aspects of mainstream Turkish Islam(ism) in contrast to conceptual Arab Islam developments. Opposite to those who focus on ideological aspects, many voices try to demonstrate that Political Islam does not operate in a vacuum and that variables external to Islamist movements themselves -such as domestic context- affect their evolution, durability, success and behavior.

For those who subscribe the **Inclusivist approach**, the more inclusivist the state strategy is, the more the possibilities that Islamists moderate their discourse and action and less a movement is inclined towards violence. We can note that the Turkish secular elite that has traditionally governed the country has used the carrot-and-stick policy towards Islamism. According to Altunisik, “as long as the Islamic movement and parties did not aim to change the regime to an Islamic one and accept to play the rules of the game, they were largely allowed to operate. Contrary to the common perception, the Turkish state did not opt for an integrationist strategy in its relations with political Islam to a great extent. Furthermore, as in many countries in the Middle East, the state at times used Islam as an instrument and perceived it as a panacea against other oppositional ideologies, particularly those of the left.”

The political and social learning hypothesis explains the moderation process as a result of the increasing relations between Islamist leaders and other social and political actors. When analysing AKP’s evolution, political learning has frequently been pointed out. Accordingly, the necessity to adapt to the Turkish political and institutional environment has been a powerful incentive among Erdogan and other party’s members. As indicated by Atasoy, the transformation towards ideological and behavioral moderation “happened spontaneously as the Islamist learned through experience that their best space route form the pressure of the state was through democratization, human rights and EU integration.” Many authors agree that what has been called the 1997 ‘post-modern stroke’ that lead to the RP closure has a major transformative impact on Islamism cadres.

---

43 Hugh Pope: The ‘Turkish Model’ and the Middle East”, Transatlantic Academy, 13 May 2011.
46 Meliha Benli Altunisik: “The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East”, Arab Studies Quarterly (ASQ), (Winter-Spring, 2005).
48 Seymen Atasoy: “The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?”, Middle East Policy, vol. 18, nº 3 (Fall 2011).
that adopted a more reformist and practical agenda to ensure their political survival.

The so-called Middle-class hypothesis has also received much academic attention. According to this approach, the Middle class would push towards moderation, democratization and political and economic liberalization. Then, the more a party tries to become a real political alternative, the more pragmatic its discourse and its political objectives become. Islamist or Islam-rooted parties increasingly invest in middle-class voters for their success. As rightly pointed out by Wegner and Pellicer, this middle class profile essentially corresponds to a horizontal network type of voters. "An Islamist voter would thus be an individual who supports what he sees as a party of like-minded individuals. It would be someone who would benefit from increased transparency and better public services promised by many Islamist parties. This individual would vote along programmatic lines. However, rather than asking for radical and/or substantial change (as in the grievance profile), the horizontal network supporter would ask for a change of policies rather than of politics."

The importance of the international factor

Endogenous factors should not be the only explanation to domestic processes. As held by relatively new developments in literature on regime transformation, what can be called the international dimension plays a central role in domestic politics. Neither countries nor political formations work alone. Both are integrated into a particular international environment and both receive (external) pressures and influences (from the outside). Thus, external variables may become key factors to national systems' transformation and domestic actors' evolution. According to Cavatorta, "international factors might not simply be triggers that domestic actors contend with at the beginning of the transition, but powerful forces that may have a decisive impact throughout the whole process by affecting how domestic actors constantly reassess the resources available and the costs and benefits of their action in light of international pressures, changes and reactions to their stances." Thus, international factors may intervene in:

(a) the cost-benefit calculation of domestic actors;
(b) the power distribution among domestic actors;
(c) the performance of domestic actors according to external incentives and/or international legitimacy parameters.

50 Miquel Pellicer and Eva Wegner: “Socio-economic voter profile and motives for Islamist support in Morocco”, Party Politics, vol.18, n.2 (March 2012). They conclude that Islamist movements recruit supporters along horizontal, not vertical, lines (as it would be the case in the clientelist profile). In turn, movement organizations should be considered as horizontal networks. As the core of the organizations consists of educated, upwardly mobile, middle class individuals, horizontal recruitment implies that the same type of characteristics would apply to Islamist supporters.
53 According to Cavatorta, "international context affects the domestic distribution of power and resources among key local actors. In an increasingly interdependent world, international pressures can affect the cost and benefit calculations of domestic actors and therefore modify their incentive structures, with consequences on the timing, development and outcome of the transition. (…) When it comes to the domestic actors involved in the transition, their choices and strategies constantly adapt to the changing international circumstances which they also contribute to shape. Not only that, but some of the choices they make may actually be forced on them for lack of alternatives. (p.34). According to Yilmaz, "It is shown that, in a democracy-promoting international environment, the leaders of an authoritarian state would base their decisions about whether to democratize on their expectations of both the
Taking into account recent theoretical framework developments that link external factors and domestic transformation, our paper focus on two dimensions that determine the impact of the international variable on regimens and actors:\footnote{54}

1. **The geo-political dimension.** The relative position of the country in the international system determines:
   - the system of values and significances that surrounds the country's perceived choices;
   - the integration in one concrete sub-regional system and thus, the policies that are perceived as more pertinent and relevant for domestic actors across the whole political spectrum;
   - pressures from international and/or regional powers, that push towards democratization or that prefer to maintain allied autocratic regimes in their surrounding area.

1. **The economic dimension,** or country's participation into the world economic system. According to Cavatorta, "(t)he level of integration into the economic system makes a country more or less prone to being penetrated by outside forces and renders it more or less susceptible to changes taking place in the external environment as a whole or to the policy changes if a specific international actor."\footnote{55} The financial and economic model that a country choses affects:
   - The more a country is prone to integrate into global markets, the more susceptible it is to adopt international rules, values, procedures and institutions that permit a better insertion into world economy.
   - The more domestic actors are interested in gaining access to international markets, the more they push towards economic (and political) liberalization and towards stability.\footnote{56}

Together, the geopolitical and the economic dimensions make it possible to cover structural and agent pressures\footnote{57} and to examine external-domestic linkages. Both dimensions are thus integrated in a comprehensive frame of analysis in order to study the key influence of the so-called international factor on the Turkish model and on the transformation of the ruling Islam-rooted party, that has become one of its main features after the Arab Spring. In this regard, this paper challenges the conventional works around the international dimension of the Turkish transformation process. The focus has traditionally been on the EU's access or on the rise of a new business class with strong regional interests.\footnote{58}

In the light of the exposed theoretical approach, our paper will consider Turkey's accession process to the EU and the Turkish economy's transformation and empowerment as the main external drivers for domestic transformation.

---


\footnote{55} Ibid.

\footnote{56} According to Cavatorta: "The implication for a country undergoing regime change is that this powerful structural pull towards adopting very specific economic reforms in order to conform to the requirements of the global economy tends to direct it towards the constitution of a set of institutions and rules that permit the easy insertion of the country into the global economy.", Francesco Cavatorta (2009): *The international dimension of the failed Algerian transition. Democracy betrayed?*, Manchester University Press, p.45

\footnote{57} Ibid.

\footnote{58} Mario Zucconi: “The Impact of the EU Connection on Turkey’s Domestic and Foreign Policy”, *Turkish Studies*, vol.10, n.1 (March 2009); Yadir Yildirim: “Muslim Democratic Parties in Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco: An Economic Explanation”, *Insight Turkey*, vol.11, n.4 (2009).
(a) **Turkey’s accession process to the EU.** Despite increasing frustrations and several setbacks, the accession process to the EU has been key to Turkish political and economic transformation. The rewriting of civil-military relations, the empowerment of civil society and the rise of new political actors are among the main evolutions of the domestic scene.

(b) **Turkey’s economy’s transformation and empowerment.** The Turkish economic area has transformed since the 1980s. During the Özal government’s economic liberalization measures were designed to progressively transform a State economy into a market-oriented one. But this evolution is mainly the result of the adoption of economic and institutional requirements set by the EU. A conservative, self-sufficient and competitive group of businessmen has also emerged as an increasingly influential domestic actor. What are known as ‘Anatolian Tigers’ are today protagonists of Turkey’s policy and economy.

Both dimensions are included in a wider and progressively globalization process. This paper maintains that the more a political party benefits from opportunities created by globalization, the more it supports institutional and economic transformation. Thus, as a result of (a) opportunity structures provided by the globalization process, (b) regional and international contexts, that push towards economic and political liberalization, and (c) international powers’ direct policies, the Islam-rooted ruling party continues with institutional, social, political and economic reforms that extend its power and prefers a reformist strategy rather than a revolutionary one.

**Geopolitical position and EU transforming role**

Turkey's very strategic geographical position and its traditional Western orientation have had a major impact on Turkish domestic developments:

(a) Turkish elites have historically been prone to adequate national institutions, rules and agenda towards what has been perceived as the Turkish main axis of reference and belonging.

(b) Since Western powers have identified Turkey as a central piece of their foreign policies, Ankara has become a main target for US and EU harmonization measures. Thus, Turkey has been receiving direct and indirect pressures to transform and integrate into the globalization process.

---

59 See: Kutlay, Mustafa, 2011, “Economy as the ‘Practical Hand’ of ‘New Turkish Foreign Policy’: A Political Economy Explanation”, *Insight Turkey*, vol.13. Some scholars even insist on the influence towards moderation that this new business has had over Erdogan and other (former) Islamist leaders and partisans. See Taskin, Yüksel, 2008, “AKP’s Move to “Conquer” the Center-Right: Its Prospects and Possible Impacts on the Democratization Process”, *Turkish Studies*, vol.9.

60 See Ahmet T. Kuru: “Globalization and Diversification of Islamic Movements: Three Turkish Cases”, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.120, n.2 (Summer 2005) : “The hypotheses that I will test are: first, the more an Islamic movement benefits from international opportunity structures shaped by globalization, the more it becomes pro-globalization; and second, the more the normative framework of an Islamic movement is tolerant and open to cross-cultural interactions, the more it becomes pro-globalization”, p. 254.

61 The model proposed by Cavatorta identified three types of variables: (1) External shocks; (2) Direct Active Policies of International Actors; (3) Larger trends in the international system. See Francesco Cavatorta (2009): *The international dimension of the failed Algerian transition. Democracy betrayed?*, Manchester University Press.

62 According to Yilmaz, there are ”(t)wo important dimensions of the position of a state in the world capitalist system are as follows. First, whether the state had a peripheral or semi-peripheral status and second, which regional power (Japan, Western Europe or the United States) the state was primary linked to in term of the interchanges of human beings, commodities, capital, information, ideologies, political institutions and legal systems. (...) What the capitalist centers expected from a peripheral state were in most cases limited to developing and administrative capacity for preventing political turmoil, feeding its population and keeping a pro-Western foreign policy stance. (...) Though democracy has not been on the immediate agenda of the peripheral states, it has been an issue for the so-called semi peripheral states of the capitalist system. (...) ”The ways in which these semi-peripheral states were linked to the
Turkey’s long-lasting close relations with the United States have been highly impressive. At an earlier stage, the strategic partnership between the US and the Turkish militaries helped to protect secularism and fixed Ankara into the so-called transatlantic community by its NATTO membership.

However, it has been the still unfinished Turkish accession process to the EU that has most impacted the current Turkish model’s key features. The EU’s political and economic conditionality has pushed towards state (and party) transformation. Since, becoming a ‘candidate country’ in the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Turkey has undertaken numerous measures to meet the Copenhagen social, political and economic criteria:

(a) Transformation of Civil-military relations. Turkish polity has progressively been desecuritized and de-militarised as a consequence of pro-EU measures. From a legal point of view, constitutional reforms have strengthened civil power, eliminated military prerogatives and left the decision-making process in civilian hands. Accordingly, the 2010 National Security Policy was drafted mainly by civilians.

(b) Improvement of Minority Rights. Minority groups and Kurds in particular have usually faced restrictions on language, culture and religion. Although full respect has not been achieved, the situation has improved due to pro-EU reforms.

(c) Empowerment of the Civil Society, that participates actively in elections.

(d) Economic Transformations. As indicated by EU annual reports on Turkey’s progress, the country has succeeded in transforming its economy from a protectionist model to an open, market-driven one and is following the path of liberalization and privatization.

Thus, what can be called the EU-factor has played a vital transformative role in least in two complementary ways.

1. Encouraging steps towards the country’s transformation.

   The EU has provided a clear incentive for political (and economic) reform. Measures taken under the Copenhagen criteria represent a gradual reconstruction of the state. With a progressive withdrawal from authoritarianism, this reconstruction is increasingly based on democratic sources.

   What can not be ignored is the essential role played by reformist actors, the so-called Turkish transformers. As correctly pointed out by Nathalie Tocci, domestic change can better be explained by the interaction between external and internal

   capitalist centers required a more thorough harmonization of their political, ideological and economic structures, which the ones prevailing in the center. (...) high degree of harmonization of the political and legal institutions, modes of production, patterns of consumption, as well as of the culture and ideology. This harmonization has often taken the form of the export of the ways of the center to the semi-peripheral countries, sometimes by force and sometimes by the voluntary adoption by the dependent states.” See Hakan Yilmaz: “External-Internal Linkages in Democratization: Developing an Open Model for Democratic Change”, Democratization, vol.9, n.2 (Summer 2002).

63 See Altunisik, op.cit.


65 See Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2011, Turkey at http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/turkey?page=22&year=2011&country=8152 (accessed 10 June 2012) and European Comission (2011): Turkey 2011 Progress Report at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/tr_rapport_2011_en.pdf. As indicated by Freedom House: “The situation has improved with EU-related reforms. In October 2010, the Diyarbakir city council voted to restore Kurdish names to villages in the region. However, some municipal officials in the southeast have faced criminal proceedings for communicating in Kurdish. Alleged collaboration with the PKK is still used as an excuse to arrest Kurds who challenge the government. Also in October 2010, 151 suspects, including 12 mayors from the BDP, were put on trial for alleged ties to a group called the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an urban extension of the PKK. The court rejected a request by the defendants for permission to present their defense in Kurdish; while the law grants the right to such a defense, the judge argued that the defendants were sufficiently fluent in Turkish.”
actors rather than by external forces imposing internal change. The EU anchor is thus used by national forces to gain the necessary credibility and strength to continue with deep and far-reaching reforms. National players have their own agenda to implement. This would explain the AKP emphasis on EU membership. Erdogan even referred to the Copenhagen Criteria as the Ankara Criteria to demonstrate his high compromise with the ongoing political and economic transformation process. In addition to his reiterated adherence to democratic values, there are more attractive options on the EU's programme. The wider the Turkish democratic space is, greater is the AKP's capacity for action.

2. **Acting as a firewall to the Turkish military.**

In spite of its traditional pro-Western orientation, the EU accession process has brought some concerns to the Turkish military and secular establishment. As pointed out by Fuller, “(t)oday, the so-called pro-Western, adamantly secularist military remains anxious about the reforms stipulated by the EU because they would further legitimize moderate Islamists and even the Kurdish movement within the country. The good news is that the Turkish military itself, a highly respected and uncorrupted institution, has also evolved and broadened its democratic horizons over the years in keeping with the advances made in the civilian sphere.” During the last years, Turkish military has faced a paradox. While EU integration has been its main objective, the measures necessary to meet it have been disappointing. To become an EU Member State ‘completes’ the Ataturk modernization process and makes the Turkish adherence to Western civilization very clear. But also, the EU membership means the transfer of much of its power to those who have traditionally been perceived as the main enemies of the Turkish Republic: (moderate) Islamists and Kurdish separatists. What allows the Turkish military accord is the EU itself. They are convinced that the EU will act as guarantor of the Turkish Republic system.

A third relevant –and paradoxical- consequence of the Turkey’s unconcluded candidature to the EU should be pointed out. Far from being a straight path, EU-Turkish relations have come to a halt over the last few years. The accession stagnation of the accession process has been a great incentive to Turkey’s reconnection with the Middle East. In addition to some European leaders’ public statements against Turkish integration, the 2006 European Council freezes the accession process. Due to the Turkish refusal to apply to Chypre the Ankara Agreement's Additional Protocol, the Council decided not to open the corresponding eight chapters nor provisionally closing them. These backward steps resulted in growing frustration on the Turkish side. “People seem to have become less convinced of the potential benefits and eventual likelihood of membership, all resulting in overall lower levels of support for membership in the EU.” It is increasingly believed that Turkey will not be admitted into the ‘European club’ although it meets all Copenhagen criteria requirements. Traditionally, EU membership has been understood by Turkish elites

66 Nathalie Tocci: “Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform?”, *South European Society & Politics*, vol.10, n.1, p. 74.

67 Graham E. Fuller: “Turkey’s Strategic Model: Myths and Realities”, *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, n.3 (Summer 2004), pp. 51-64.


as an identity issue. That would be the final success of the modernization process initiated by Atatürk. The link between national identity and European integration meant that a failure to entry into the EU would also be a failure of the Turkish national process. This is no more the case. While EU accession remains a priority for the government, the sources of Turkish national identity have been expanded. Thus, this relative departure from EU membership, new regional opportunities and a renewed strategic concept are great incentives to Turkish reconnection with the Middle East. The active promotion of the Turkish model fits into this new context. It is the promotion of soft power foreign policy instruments.

Economic factors

Turkey has reached a “high degree of integration with the world economy, through both trade and financial channels”\(^\text{70}\). Due to the aforementioned liberalization process, Turkish economy has gone through a deep structural transformation. It has evolved from a state economy to a market-oriented system where new economic actors have emerged. The rise of what has been called the ‘Anatolian Tigers’ has had a direct impact on the current Turkish model:

(a) The new export-oriented capitalist business class has turned national economy performance into a pivot issue. Anatolian most prominent business associations, such as MÜSİAD and ŞİAD, have an increasing influence on Turkish politics. Today, they push towards a deeper economic and political penetration into the MENA region in the same way that they stood for Europeanization during 1990s\(^\text{71}\). Thus, the new emphasis is on international trade, political stability and the use of soft power instruments. In fact, as a consequence of its growing attention to economic and commercial relations, many scholars refer to Turkey as a ‘trading state’\(^\text{72}\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Exports</th>
<th>Exports to EU Countries</th>
<th>Exports to Near and Middle Eastern Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>36,069</td>
<td>20,415</td>
<td>3,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>47,253</td>
<td>27,394</td>
<td>5,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>63,167</td>
<td>36,581</td>
<td>7,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>73,476</td>
<td>41,366</td>
<td>10,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>85,536</td>
<td>47,935</td>
<td>11,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>107,272</td>
<td>60,399</td>
<td>15,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>132,027</td>
<td>63,390</td>
<td>25,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>102,129</td>
<td>47,013</td>
<td>19,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>113,900</td>
<td>52,670</td>
<td>23,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^\text{72}\) According to Kirisci, a trading state is one that emphasizes the role of economic interdependence in its foreign policy over hard-power instruments, thus “Turkey’s national interest cannot be solely determined in terms of a narrowly defined national security, and that economic considerations, such as the need to trade, expand export markets, and attract and export foreign direct investment are just as important.”, See Kemal Kirisci: ”The transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The rise of a Trading State”, New Perspectives on Turkey, vol. 40 (2009); y Ulgen, Sinan: “A Place in the Sun or Fifteen minutes of Flame? Understanding Turkey’s New Foreign Policy”, Carnegie Papers, (2010).
The rise of this new class of ‘conservative capitalist’s’ is related to the promotion, empowerment and transformation of the AKP. They share socio-economic and geographic origins and also their Muslim conservative character. Those who have been described as ‘Islamic Calvinists’ due to the link that they establish between religion and ‘individualistic, pro-business and hard-work qualities’ share the same political interest and strategy with the ruling party. These business Muslims ‘needed a Turkey integrated into the global economy, had anchored its stability in the EU, and had closer ties with all the neighboring countries (…). No wonder all of the ‘Islamic Calvinists’ were supporters of Erdogan and Gül. Some scholars even focus on the moderating influence of these new very capitalist classes on Islamism moderation. According to other voices this ‘alliance’ between new economic and governmental elites shows a deeper transformation into the Turkish arena. The (political and economic) center is being occupied by a conservative class that has traditionally been pushed into the (geographical, economic and political) periphery.

The Arab scenario and 'its' international dimension

Can the Turkish model be ‘transferred’ to other Arab countries? Can the AKP example be completely assumed by other Mediterranean Islamist parties? A variety of academic studies have arrived to the conclusion that Turkish very own particular historical, political, social and institutional genesis is at the core of the Turkish model’s limits. From a different and complementary perspective, the following brief overview tries to provide a general perspective on how Southern shores of the Mediterranean’s very own geopolitical and economic factors have a direct impact on the limits of the Turkish model.

The geopolitical factor and the shortcomings of EU’s transformative role

The EU’s international activity is mainly constructed around the notion of normative power. Consequently, EU’s foreign policies attempt to export European values and norms through mutual dialogue, diplomacy and trade, and positive conditionality, being more visible and successful in its closer area where the EU influence is stronger. Thus, if democracy promotion and policy transformation are prevailing foreign goals, it should be admitted that the EU has not played an identical transformative role in Turkey than in other Mediterranean scenarios. In this sense, it is necessary to point out that only Turkey is involved in the Enlargement Policy. Thus, in this framework the promotion of European standards is stronger than in the European Neighborhood Policy, where Arab countries are integrated.

It has been argued that democracy promotion in the South is based on similar

---

73 “Islamist new thinking in Turkey: a model for party learning”, p. 483
75 Ibid.
76 Mustafa Akyol: Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty
assumptions, objectives and difficulties than has been experiencing in the East. However, one of the main differences is that Mediterranean countries do not opt to European membership. It might also be noted that Eastern and Southern countries have different historical backgrounds, pro-Western sentiments and economic foundations.

Since the prospect of complete adhesion is not on the menu, conditionality may not have the planned effect. Although the so-called Human Right and Democracy Clause is an ‘essential element’ of all EU agreements with third countries, they do not follow the same pattern of adopting and implementing the acquis communautaire. The Copenhagen criteria detailed a strict program of social, political and economic reforms and also a wide financial, administrative and technical support. Not being the integration on the horizon, the carrots offered by the EU seem not to be enough to start, continue or deepen processes of political (and economic) transformation.

While many scholars exclusively describe the EU as a normative actor, recent academic studies link ideological motivations and realpolitik-oriented dynamics. Thus, political transformation and democracy promotion would not be the main objective of the EU towards MENA countries. Rather, foreign policy drivers towards the Mediterranean are mainly stability and security concerns. Pace even pointed out that, “by including democracy promotion in its external relations policies towards the MENA, there is an implicit understanding in the EU’s discursive practices that political change in the MENA is somehow external to this region.” In their relations with Mediterranean countries, European policy-makers have been prone to design and pursue a pro-elite policy. Since migration and energy concerns are at the core of EU relations with MENA countries, it is a perceived need to implement a positive engagement rather than rely on negatives forms of conditionality. The EU prefers to focus on the assistance to limit liberalization measures. Some voices inside the European Union have even claimed for a limited and exclusive ‘good governance’ approach that permits to avoid intergovernmental controversies and problems with Southern countries.

An up-bottom and out-in democracy promotion strategy is also pursued as response to what is considered one of the main regional concerns: the ‘Islamic threat’. Islamists are usually perceived as an authoritarian and anti-Western force. What can be called the Argelian phantom has affected Western reform agenda from the very beginning. The 9/11 terrorists attacks have pushed into the background authoritarianism, democratic and rule of law or human rights. What has to be pointed out is that the EU itself played a significant role in the emergence and rise of Islamist movements by supporting autocratic and corrupt regimes that have been acting as repression machines and neo-client networks of national wealth distribution.

Economic factors

Although many MENA countries are rich in natural resources, structural weakness is a

---


82 Micelle Pace, "Interrogating the European Union's Democracy... op.cit.

83 Ibid.


85 Micelle Pace, "Interrogating the European Union's Democracy... op.cit.
common feature of Arab economies. According to the last Human Development Report, oil-led growth has created weak economic structures and has turner many Arab countries into import-oriented and service-based economies. These types of services contribute little to local development and technological know-how, lock countries into the inferior positions in global markets and also push into the background Arab agricultural and industrial development. In addition to challenges to economic security, this economic pattern directly affects political developments.

It has been widely debated the possible causal link between natural resource wealth and lack of democracy. This negative correlation is based on three dynamics:

(a) Oil-gas rich countries invest a large part of their revenues in defense and thus they are able to strength their military and security apparatus. According to the Stockholm international Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Saudi Arabia occupies the ninth international position in respect of military expenditure, followed at a large distance by Algeria, the UAE.

(b) By controlling the state and its oil-gas production, political elites monopolize not only economy, but also political power. By distributing ‘rents’, they control political incentives and create extensive supportive neo-client networks.

(c) Actors interested in the promotion of democratic values have less pressure power towards those who supply hydrocarbons to their national markets. This trend is reinforced by the arrival to the area of the so-called emerging powers (like China), that are less worried about democratic and human rights developments and that make the demand increase.

Although not all MENA countries are oil or gas producers, the economic and the political spheres of most Arab countries are intimately linked and controlled by authoritarian elites. There has not been an effective economic liberalization. Thus an increasing political independent economic elite has not emerged as a powerful (counter)power. As explained by Darbouche, “(t)he expected rationalization and modernization of these countries’ regulatory framework as a result of their interaction with the EU in the context of the AAs has been confronted with, and largely failed to overcome, the autocratic nature of the political regimes in place.”

Conclusion. The Turkish Model: a window of opportunity

The Turkish model cannot be easily transplanted to other Arab realities, but can become a constructive and positive example for reformist actors.

By being at the center of the model, the AKP may contribute to de-securitize the discourse on Islam and on Islamism that was increasingly constructed around security-oriented notions after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. By acknowledging the moderation and positive transformation of the AKP, the Turkish model confronts the widespread understanding that Islam is not compatible with democratic values and procedures.

The Turkish model reiterates Muslim diversity and contributes to the numerous academic and political attempts to classify Islamist movements and to identify reformist actors. By moving beyond uniformed perceptions, the EU and other international actors may better adapt their policies to regional realities. It has to be recognized the Islamism’s capacity to attract wide popular support not because of its religious basis but because of

---


its continuous denunciation of corruption and political immobility.

The Turkish model effectively articulates modernity-universality and authenticity. The AKP links two reference spheres and creates a new foundation for Islam politics. The integration into the ‘democratic club’ does not mean the abandon of Islamic civilization. In this sense, the Turkish model promotes a democratization process that moves beyond culturalist and essentialist notions and that can be beneficial to both regional actors and international powers.

References
Altunisik, M. B.: “The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East”, Arab Studies Quarterly (ASQ), (Winter-Spring, 2005)
Atasoy, S.: “The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?”, Middle East Policy, vol. 18, n.3 (Fall 2011)
Cagaptay, S.: “Is Turkey Leaving the West?”, Foreign Affairs, (October 2009)
Fuller, G.E.: “Turkey’s Strategic Model: Myths and Realities”, The Washington Quarterly, vol. 27, n.3 (Summer 2004)

Hugh Pope: “The ‘Turkish Model’ and the Middle East”, *Transatlantic Academy, 13 May 2011*


International Monetary Fund: “MENA: Historic Transition under Strain”, *Regional Economic Outlook*, (April 2012)


Kirişci, K.: “Turkey's 'Demonstrative Effect and the Transformation of the Middle East”, *Insight Turkey*, vol. 13, nº2 (2011)


Kutlay, Mustafa, 2011, “Economy as the ‘Practical Hand’ of ‘New Turkish Foreign Policy’: A Political Economy Explanation”, *Insight Turkey*, vol.13

Kuru, A. K. : “Globalization and Diversification of Islamic Movements: Three Turkish Cases”, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.120, n.2 (Summer 2005)

Mensur Akgün and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar: “The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East”, *TESEV Foreign Policy Programme*, (February 2012)


Pace, M. "Interrogating the European Union's Democracy Promotion Agenda: Discoursive Configurations of 'Democracy' from the Middle East", Paper for presentation at the EUSA Conference 2009, Los Ángeles, April 23-25


Tome Alonso, B.: "La política exterior del AKP: en busca de una mayor relevancia regional", paper presented at the X National Congress of the Spanish Association of Political Science (AECPA), Murcia, 7-9 September 2011.


Yilmaz, H. : "External-Internal Linkages in Democratization: Developing an Open Model of Democratic Change", *Democratization*, vol.9, nº 2, (Summer 2002)


Zucconi, M.: “The Impact of the EU Connection on Turkey’s Domestic and Foreign Policy”, *Turkish Studies*, vol.10, n.1 (March 2009)