

# The “Turkish Model” in Historical Perspective

From Integration with Europe to De-Westernization

*Pavel V. Shlykov*

## Abstract

The paper studies the “Turkish model” in a comparative historical perspective from three angles: as an example of mobilization modernization; as a combination of liberal democracy and Islam; and as a de-Westernization paradigm. The focus is on the transformation of the “Turkish model” and its substantive evolution from the early 1990s to the middle of the 2010s, and on how peaks of international interest in the “Turkish model” impacted Ankara’s foreign policy activities and its positioning on the international stage by Turkish elites. This approach helped to identify the factors behind periodic resurgence and transformation of the “Turkish model” and the shifting balance between the expectations of its potential recipients and Ankara’s plans to use it as a foreign-policy tool. Research methodology is based on the theory of multiple modernities and the concept of symbolic interactionism in international relations. In the case of Turkey, this approach provides broader possibilities for interpreting Ankara’s foreign-policy strategies and understanding the mechanisms of its relations with other countries in the Greater Middle East.

**Key words:** Turkey, Middle East, Turkish model, non-Western democracy and civil society, Europeanization, de-Westernization, Islamization

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*This research funded by RFFI Grant No. 17-01-00203.*

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DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2018-16-2-121-148

Turkey is one of the most Westernized countries in the Middle and Near East. In the early 20th century, it was one of the first to have embarked on the path of European civilization, as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk put it, largely setting the vector of sociopolitical development for the whole region. In the 1990s, the charm of the post-Kemalist model that combined Turkism with liberalism turned it into a beacon and a center of attraction for post-Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, with Turkey itself doubling its efforts to join the European Union. In the early 2000s, Western leaders cited Turkey as a unique example of Islamic democracy and an alternative to radical Islamism. In the late 2000s, a combination of high economic growth rates, democratic reforms and safeguarded Islamic values spurred a discussion on the “Turkish model” as an example to be followed by the Middle East’s Muslim countries plunged into the whirlpool of Arab revolutions.

A long-standing member of NATO (since 1952), the Council of Europe (since 1949), the OECD (since 1961), and the OSCE (since 1975), Turkey has become deeply integrated over the past century into the West’s political and economic space as a country that essentially represents the West in the Middle East and demonstrates how its political and civilizational values could be incorporated into the development strategies of Muslim-populated countries. However, today Turkey’s drive for being part of the pan-European space is more and more often accompanied by de-secularization, sociocultural expansion of Islamic movements, and increased activity of Turkish and Muslim communities in European countries and the United States. Mounting political problems at home, from the Kurdish issue to international terrorism, and the ruling regime’s efforts to consolidate Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s personal power have encouraged de-Westernizing and authoritarian tendencies in the country.

Processes evolving in modern Turkey have a direct effect on the future and security of Europe, for which the “Turkish issue” is no longer limited to Turkey’s admission to the European Union. This warrants closer attention to present-day Turkey.

Methodologically, this article is based on Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities (2002, 2003) and the concept of

symbolic interactionism in international relations developed by Alexander Wendt (1999), who argued that the socialization theory could be used for analyzing interaction not only between individuals or social groups but also between states. The concept interprets interaction between states as an ego-alter ego relationship which presupposes a certain set of roles and counter-roles. On the one hand, the use of sociological approaches for studying international relations stems from a rather long-standing tradition based on Kalevi Holsti's work on the national role conceptions (1970: 233–309) written in the early 1970s, which extrapolated the patterns of relationships between individuals and social groups to interstate relations. On the other hand, although Holsti has followers (Walker, 1987), until recently his theory of roles remained underexplored and was largely reduced to journalistic clichés about the U.S. role in NATO or the UN Security Council. However, the national role conception offers a new look at one of the key problems in the theory of international relations, namely, the balance between country and system analysis and models of interaction between the system and individual countries (Harnisch, 2011: 7–16).

The national role conception as an expression of the state's identity and positioning with regard to other subjects of international relations makes it possible to combine different levels of analysis with research strategies, which, in turn, leads to a better understanding of the state's foreign-policy decisions and specific aspects of the transformation of “the international social order” which, paraphrasing Alexander Wendt, is a derivative of the states' activities, that is, of the roles they assume. In the case of Turkey, this approach provides broader possibilities for interpreting Ankara's foreign-policy strategies and understanding the mechanisms of its relations with other countries in the Greater Middle East.

### **THE “TURKISH MODEL” IN THE 20TH CENTURY: THE GENESIS**

The success of radical Westernization carried out in the 1920s by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk evoked much interest among new leaders in the Middle and Near East. Iran's Reza Shah Pahlavi, King Amanullah

Khan of Afghanistan, and subsequently independent Tunisia's first President Habib Bourguiba studied the Kemalist reform experience most closely when they were making their own modernization plans (Taşpınar, 2003: 7; Bal, 2000: 5–41; Altunışık, 2008: 41–43). However, in their public speeches Middle Eastern politicians of that time never mentioned Turkey as an example for the Muslim world to follow (Holsti, 1970). The West did not view it as such either. It was only mentioned as a true ally and a vehicle for the West's interests in the region, not as a geopolitical entity in its own right or a successful secular and democratic Muslim state.

The idea of Turkey as a model for the first time appeared in the Western mass media in late 1991 and was touted as an example for post-Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus to follow (Alemdar, 1991). Already in 1992, the notion of "Turkish model" was widely used by Western leaders who viewed it as a recipe against Iran's Shi'ite influence and was eagerly welcomed by Turkish politicians who were looking for new beacons to guide their country's foreign policy (Ozal, 1992: 14).

During his Central Asian tour in February 1992, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker publicly urged the leaders of the post-Soviet republics to look at Turkey (Greenberger, 1992: 12). At a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel in Washington in February of the same year, U.S. President George Bush said: "Turkey is indeed a friend, a partner of the United States. And it's also a model to others, especially those newly independent Republics of Central Asia. In a region of changing tides, it endures as a beacon of stability," a country which many view as an example of what one can achieve through democracy and a free market economy (Bush, 1992). The "Turkish model" was also actively promoted by European leaders. Secretary General of the Council of Europe Catherine Lalumiere spoke about it during her trip to Central Asian countries (Mango, 1993: 726). NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner said publicly on many occasions that a democratic and secular Turkey as a sociopolitical development model was a guarantee of security and a barrier against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism (Pope, 1992).

The leaders of Turkic republics shared Western politicians’ optimism about the “Turkish model” in a bid to gain international recognition and get political, economic, and technological assistance as soon as possible. During his visit to Turkey in December 1991, Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev described it as a “guiding star” for Turkic republics (Star Tribune, 1992: 12). Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who traveled to Ankara in December of the same year, referred to Turkey as “the elder brother.” Azerbaijani leaders, particularly Abulfaz Elchibey, praised Turkey as well (Bal, 1998: 6).

Ankara embraced the idea of the “Turkish model” with enthusiasm and regarded the newly independent countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus as a natural testing ground for its foreign policy. By that time Ankara had strengthened its historical, political, religious, linguistic, and cultural ties with the post-Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Kut, 2002: 8–10) where the majority of people were ethnically and linguistically close to Turkey. The crisis in relations with Brussels (Ankara’s application for admission to the European Economic Community was basically put on hold in 1989) was one of the key factors that prompted Turkey’s “pivot to the East.”

For decades Turkey’s foreign policy had been underlain by its self-perception as NATO’s southern outpost and its only member bordering on the Soviet Union. When the latter ceased to exist, this factor lost its strategic relevance. Ankara did not share the optimism of its Western partners about “a new world order” and worried about national security threats coming from some of its neighbors. In an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* in May 1989, Turkish Admiral Güven Erkaya (*Cumhuriyet*, 1989: 18) did not hide his disappointment about Western allies’ policy. “Turkey still feels the threat from the North... Who can guarantee Turkey’s security if it has been denied military-political and economic integration with Europe within the Western European Union and the European Economic Community?” he said.

But skepticism among Turkish politicians quickly gave way to euphoria after the emergence of independent Central Asian and Caucasian republics in 1991. Since the Turkish Republic was

proclaimed in 1923, the Kemalist government and its successors had always sought to emphasize their “choice in favor of the West and Europe rather than the East and Asia.” Ankara’s geopolitical positions were built along the pro-Western track, and Atatürk’s slogan “Peace at Home, Peace in the World” implied that Turkey would reject all revengeful projects and distance itself from the Turks in Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The drive for estrangement from the Soviet Turks after World War II received a new impetus when Turkey joined NATO, which automatically put it among the Soviet Union’s opponents and pushed it even farther away from the neighboring Turkic peoples. All this made Ankara steer clear of any contact with “outside Turks” for almost seventy years (Winrow, 1995: 7) to avoid irritating Moscow. This explains why the regaining of independence by former Soviet republics was regarded by Turkey as a chance to restore long-forgotten ties with its “Turkic brothers” (Sazak, 1991: 12; Kohen, 1991: 4; Halman, 1991: 15). In addition to the purely emotional effect, the restoration of close ties with the Turkic republics meant a geopolitical investment, which would make Turkey even more important for the West as a “gateway” to Eurasia. Western politicians’ inflated expectations heightened Ankara’s interest in the “Turkish model” concept (Aras, 2000: 56; Oran, 2010: 752).

Following his visit to Washington in 1992, Demirel became the main advocate of the “Turkish model,” introduced it into the domestic political discourse and actively promoted it as convincing proof that Islam, democracy, human rights, and a market economy could get along together (Demirel, 1997). Demirel’s successor as prime minister and ruling party leader Tansu Çiller said during her visit to Moscow in 1993 that the “Turkish model” of secular democracy and respect for Islamic values were the best way to prevent the spread of fundamentalism, accelerate economic development, strengthen social justice, and broaden the scope of democratic pluralism (Batur, 1993: 19; Christian Science Monitor, 1993).

Turkey became the first country to have recognized the independence of post-Soviet republics. Moreover, it sought to become their principal

political and economic partner and used all available means to that end. It launched ambitious investment projects, allowed their military officers to attend its training centers, issued grants to students, started special local television and radio broadcasts, and the state-owned Turkish Airlines began direct flights from Istanbul to the capitals of Central Asian countries (Robins, 1993, p.603; Aydin, 1996, p.162).

However, it soon became clear that Turkey lacked economic resources for the implementation of its projects. This and the mounting political problems at home quickly devalued the “Turkish model.” A new outbreak of confrontation over the Kurdish issue and the following escalation of hostilities with rebels from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party drew criticism in the West which accused Turkey of multiple human rights violations. The financial crisis, the worst one in its modern history, which hit Turkey in 1994 had a chilling effect on the Central Asian leaders and made some of them turn to China in search of a replacement for the “Turkish model” (Pomfret, 2000, pp.269–284). By the middle of the 1990s, Russia had started to show more interest in the near abroad and defined the post-Soviet space as an area of its priority geopolitical interests.

A coup in Azerbaijan in the summer of 1993 and the removal of pro-Turkish President Abulfaz Elchibey essentially stopped the expansion of the “Turkish model” in the post-Soviet space (Goltz, 1993: 94–104). As prominent Turkish columnist Gun Kut (1993: 2) wrote, “Elchibey’s exit marks the end of the “Turkish model.” Ankara failed to consolidate Central Asian republics into a political and economic union. With the Central Asian leaders seeking to strengthen relations with Moscow and expand international ties with the West and China, the Turkic Union project proved stillborn as the first Turkic summits clearly demonstrated (Winrow, 1995:16–31).

The rapid decline of the “Turkish model” made it clear to Ankara that it did not have enough geopolitical, financial and economic resources to play the global role the West had in mind for it. International mass media kept their ear to the ground and promptly changed the tack, stopping to praise the “Turkish model” and starting to talk about the gap between Turkey’s ambitions and its possibilities. The Associated

Press, which was the first to have used the term ‘Turkish model’ several years prior, stated that while seeking to attain the status of regional power, Turkey was lacking resources for that (Dunn, 1993: 46). The leaders of Central Asian countries began to lose interest in Turkey as a conduit for establishing ties with the West (by the middle of the 1990s Turkish mediation was no longer needed for that), while the West had realized it had overestimated the “Iranian threat” and Ankara’s possibilities to respond to it. And yet Turkey was not pushed to the sidelines. Speaking in Ankara at the end of 1999, U.S. President Bill Clinton described Turkey as a country at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia and supported its European integration as a democratic secular Islamic state. In the same year, Anthony Blinken, a senior member of the U.S. National Security Council who was overseeing European affairs, spoke of Turkey’s big potential as a model of secular, Islamic, democratic, and Westernized state and a reference example for a big part of the Islamic world (Bal, 2000: 184).

### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE “TURKISH MODEL” IN THE 2000S**

Two factors brought the “Turkish model” back to life in the early 2000s: the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. after which the world community started to talk about the need for joint efforts against international terrorism, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003), which split the anti-terrorist coalition into Washington’s allies and critics. Just like in the 1990s, Western politicians, primarily American ones, actively promoted the “Turkish model” but this time they focused on the compatibility of Islam with liberal democracy, which Turkey was expected to demonstrate to the world. The message was addressed to Middle and Near Eastern countries engaged in “the war against Islamic fundamentalism” and radical terrorist groups (Ülgen, 2011: 4).

It became clear after 9/11 that the Bush administration intended to make Turkey an inalienable part of an ambitious project aimed at bringing democracy to the Islamic world. Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Condoleezza Rice, at that time the president’s national security adviser, publicly spoke about the “Turkish model” as an alternative to radical Islamism (Hürriyet, 2003), and George W.

Bush lauded Turkey in one of the interviews as a beacon of democracy for Muslims around the world (Peterson, 2002).

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power in Turkey, and this spurred public expectations and interest. Liberal experts and journalists welcomed the young party’s victory as the beginning of a new era. They believed that its main focus should be on socio-political reforms similar to those carried out by Christian Democrats in Germany and on the resolution of the long-drawn conflict between Islamists and “laicites,” while others earnestly hoped that the Justice and Development Party led by energetic Recept Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gül, who had broken away from Necmettin Erbakan’s “old” Islamist parties, would lead the country along the road of modernization, inevitably causing the “shadow state” of the military elite to collapse.

Ambitious reforms to elevate Turkey to the European level and meet the EU accession criteria, also known as Copenhagen criteria, made Turkey and the “Turkish model” more appealing. At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s Turkey was swept by a wave of reform initiatives designed to liberalize the administrative and political system, expand the scope of civil rights and freedom of speech, and alleviate the situation of ethno-confessional minorities. A new round of Turkey’s Europeanization began in 2001 when major amendments to the Constitution of 1982 were adopted, followed by a new Civil Code and three “harmonization packages” in 2002 to harmonize Turkish laws with EU legislation (Ayдын and Keyman, 2004: 15).

Another factor that drove public interest in the “Turkish model” in the West was the commencement of the American project to democratize the Muslim East “from above,” approved at a G8 summit in June 2004 as the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (G8 Gleneagles Summit, 2005; Melkumyan, 2006). Speaking at a NATO summit in June of the same year, President Bush lauded Turkey as an example of a Muslim country that was firmly committed to the principles of democracy and human rights (The Gurdian, 2004).

Turkey and Italy were elected co-chairmen of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue as part of the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

However, the resurgence of the “Turkish model” caused a controversial reaction in Turkey. A considerable part of the Turkish establishment, especially the military elite and secular-minded members of the civil service bureaucracy led by President Ahmed Sezer, regarded the “Turkish model” as a U.S.-inspired project that did not take into account the national interests of Turkey. The Kemalist part of the establishment, but particularly members of the military, were worried by the fact that the “Turkish model” put emphasis on Islam and the Islamic nature of the Turkish state, while secularism (laicism), which had been one of the key constitutional principles in the Turkish Republic since the 1930s, was pushed into the background.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s remarks that Turkey was “a moderate Islamic republic” (Cumhuriyet, 2004: 8) antagonized Ankara. President Ahmed Sezer retorted publicly by saying that “Turkey is not an Islamic republic, nor is it a country of moderate Islam” (Middle East Transparent, 2004). Even Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the ruling pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP), responded half-heartedly to the ambitious initiative to spread the “Turkish model” across the Middle East (Yeni Şafak, 2004). As a result, the initiative quickly ran out of steam despite the Bush administration’s massive support. One of the reasons for that was the decision to promptly wind out the democratization project for the Broader Middle East and North Africa when it became clear that the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq was not developing in the way Western leaders had planned at their summits in the early 2000s (Kirisci, 2011: 33-35). In addition, by the middle of the 2000s, Turkish-American relations had sunk into a protracted crisis caused by mutual dissatisfaction with how the two countries were fulfilling their partner obligations, especially in Iraq. On the one hand, Washington was flirting with Iraqi Kurds, and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party’s activity in northern Iraq annoyed Ankara; on the other hand, the Turkish parliament prohibited the Americans from using military bases in Turkey for humanitarian interventions in Iraq.

The latter came as a response to concerns among Islamist deputies from the ruling Justice and Development Party and to objections from Kurdish legislators who sympathized with Iraqi Kurds and abstained from voting. The parliament’s decision became a massive slap in the face for Washington from a NATO ally (Filkins, 2003).

On top of it all, the AKP government tried to disavow any reference to Turkey as “a country of moderate Islam” and to the “Turkish model.” During his visit to Washington in 2004, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan openly said that Islam could not be labeled as moderate or non-moderate (Yeni Şafak, 2004). That was the end of the discussion on the “Turkish model” as a synthesis of Islam and democracy, or Islamic democracy.

#### **THE “TURKISH MODEL” IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ARAB SPRING**

The idea of the “Turkish model” reemerged again in the wake of the statehood crisis in the Middle East in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Mass protests that had swept the region and led to regime change in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen became a strong motivation factor that spurred the discussion on the “Turkish model” both in the West and the Arab East. Ankara’s foreign policy in the region, which by that time had clearly assumed the form of a “pivot to the East,” generated positive expectations among many people in Middle Eastern countries. The “Arab street” was inspired by Turkey’s financial and economic successes (the country’s economy grew at an amazing rate of 5 to 9.5 percent and per capita income kept rising during the years of the AKP’s rule), ambitious social support programs, and the strengthening of Turkey’s positions on the international stage. These achievements presented a striking contrast to gerontocracy, nepotism, corruption, and appalling unemployment and social injustice—everything that had galvanized people into action known as the Arab Spring.

A new version of the “Turkish model” combined key features of the two previous ones less the Turkism of the 1990s. It implied a secular democratic political system, respect for Islamic values, a socially-oriented state policy, and a market economy. However, it was extremely personified and tailored to the growing popularity of the

Justice and Development Party and Erdogan personally. After a public quarrel with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres at the Davos Forum in 2009 and strong criticism of Tel Aviv's policy, Erdogan became a real hero of the "Arab street" (Telhami, 2012). Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, chairman of Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the actual head of state after Hosni Mubarak's overthrow in February 2011, said that Turkey's example had inspired the people of his country (Ülgen, 2011: 3). He was echoed by Rached Ghannouchi (TimeTurk, 2011; Martin, 2011), a Tunisian politician and the founder of the moderate Islamic Ennahdha (Renaissance) party, who was publicly saying during the Arab Spring that Turkey could be an example for Tunisia as a country that had transcended the bitter legacy of the authoritarian past and managed to combine socioeconomic development achievements with adherence to Islamic values. Mustafa Abdul Jalil, head of Libya's National Transitional Council in 2011-2012, was even more specific: "The Turkish model of democratic development is an example for Libya and other countries in the region that have experienced the shock of the Arab Spring... and Libya will by all means use Turkey's experience as a model for creating its own democratic political system" (Aljazeera, 2011).

Hillary Clinton (2011), who was U.S. Secretary of State at that time, supported the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa in their effort to draw a lesson from Turkey's experience. U.S. President Barack Obama said openly that a secular democratic Turkey was critically important as a model of development for other Muslim countries in the region (Corriere della Sera, 2010). Western mass media eagerly picked up the idea of the "Turkish model" for countries that had lived through the Arab Spring turmoil and started treating it as "a reality, not a figure of speech" (The Economist, 2011b).

People in the Arab countries enthusiastically supported the idea of borrowing the Turkish experience. A public opinion poll conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV, *Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*) in key Middle and Near Eastern countries in 2011 showed that more than 61% of respondents would have welcomed the use of the "Turkish model" in their countries

(Akgün and Gündoğar, 2012). A similar survey in 2012 registered an increase in the number of people thinking positively of Turkey, with 72% of those polled agreeing that the Turkish example could become an effective model for the development of Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya (İdiz, 2012).

However, official Ankara acted with great caution. Responding to a straightforward question about the “Turkish model” at an international forum in the spring of 2011, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu cautiously said: “We would not like Turkey as a country or the AKP as a political party to serve as a model for anyone. We pursue our policy in the interests of our country and our citizens and are not seeking to create any models... We cannot force our model upon anyone else because every country has its own path of development to follow” (Davutoğlu, 2011). With time, Turkish politicians began to speak more specifically, but Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, who was president at that time, and other high-ranking functionaries from the ruling AKP party and government carefully avoided the words ‘Turkish model.’ In his remarks to the parliament in the spring of 2011, Erdogan said that Turkish democracy has inspired the Arab world to rise against the old regimes (The Economist, 2011a). President Gul echoed him by saying that Turkey had become “a source of inspiration” for the Middle East (NTV, 2011).

One of the reasons for such cautious rhetoric was that Turkish politicians still remembered the failure of the “Turkish model” in the 1990s and the 2000s. Also they sought to avoid a negative reaction from the new leaders of the Arab countries who could interpret the very word ‘model’ as an attempt to export the political regime as a continuation of the West’s “regime-change strategy” (Naumkin, 2011). “We do not intend to export our regime. This would just be impossible... but if our help is needed, we are ready to provide it,” Erdogan said in an interview with the American *Time* magazine in the fall of 2011 (Tharoor, 2011). Moreover, Erdogan stressed that Turkey’s positive experience, especially in the economy, should not be localized and treated as a purely regional phenomenon. “The success of the Turkish economy can be an example not only for countries in the region but

for any country in the world,” Erdogan said at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 2012 (Hürriyet, 2012).

A new look at laicism was an important element of the “Turkish model.” During his visit to Tunisia and Egypt in the fall of 2011, Erdogan explained the meaning of laicism in the following way: “We are not building laicism in the Western way, using the French or Anglo-Saxon model... only the state is secular but citizens keep their religiousness... a Muslim can successfully govern a secular state... In Turkey 99 percent of people are practicing Muslims, and this is not a problem... You can do the same in your countries” (Çetin, 2011). On the one hand, these words can indicate that Erdogan had learned the lesson of the 2000s when the “Turkish model” was advanced by the West as an example of Islamic democracy. On the other hand, they can be interpreted as his intention to show the critics of Turkey who had accused it of pursuing the policy of Islamization that they were largely wrong. The Western press assessed this as a well-calculated move designed to make the “Turkish model” even more attractive and at the same time contrast Turkey with more conservative countries in the region (Salem, 2011).

The “Turkish model” was much more appealing than it had been in the 1990s and especially in the early 2000s. Moderate pro-Islamic political movements across the region started using Erdogan’s “justice and development” formula in the names of their parties: Justice and Development Parties sprang up in Libya and Tunisia, the Freedom and Justice Party emerged in Egypt, earlier the Movement for Justice and Development had been created in Syria.

But the main problem was that the “Turkish model” could not be transferred to other countries in the region and that the process of de-Westernization had already started in Turkey itself. The “Turkish model,” just like the period of the AKP’s rule, was extremely controversial. On the one hand, the AKP sincerely wanted to bring Turkey to the European level through economic, administrative and political reforms. On the other hand, the success of those reforms and economic growth were accompanied by repressions against political

opponents and persistent attempts to bring into public and political discourse such traditional problems from Islamist rhetoric as the need to lift the ban on head covers and abolish special admission rules in universities for the graduates of religious schools, as well as numerous examples of favoritism with regard to “Islamic cadres” who were filling administrative positions across the country, from the heads of municipalities to directors and rectors of educational institutions. In addition, socioeconomic successes were the result of several decades of systematic reforms which could hardly have been implemented in the mobilization mode in other countries (this was admitted by Arab intellectuals as well) (Barkey, 2011), and the balanced system of democratic institutions was a derivative of the peculiar political regime in Turkey, where the military elite “measured out” the democratic process through regular coups (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997), thus restraining the development of democracy, while not allowing it to wither away completely (Barkey, 2011).

#### **IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION: “TURKISH MODEL” AS A PARADIGM OF DE-WESTERNIZATION?**

The “Turkish model” of societal and state modernization has been drawing the attention of scholars and politicians around the world for nearly a century as a unique example of a Muslim country whose political system is based on essentially Western principles of secularism (laicism) and democratic government. The main theoretical conceptualizations of the “Turkish model” either emphasize the legacy of the Kemalist secularization reforms and the state-led modernization (classical modernization theory) or highlight the role of social forces within the period of economic liberalization since the late 1980s and the democratization reforms of the AKP’s first tenures (neo-modernization theory). The multiple modernities paradigm challenges Eurocentric and deterministic conceptualizations of modernity (Eisenstadt, 2002) by arguing that the processes of secularization and economic development do not necessarily result in the consolidation of liberal democratic regimes. Both structural and societal approaches to the “Turkish model” assume the primacy of the Western experience

of development and unable to consider all “the nuances of the unique process of transformation in Turkey” (Göksel, 2016: 261). While expecting Turkey to replicate the Western experience, both approaches neglect the significance of historical contingency, path dependency and international context for the socio-economic and political history of Turkey. The multiple modernities paradigm with the symbolic interactionism concept, on the contrary, take all these factors into account and evaluates their impact on Turkey’s modernization and the historical transformation of the “Turkish model.” Applying this theoretical framework to the analyses of the economic, social and political development of Turkey makes it clear that the modernization process in non-Western milieu is a complex phenomenon that produced diverging “modernities” and resulted in the multidimensional nature of the “Turkish model” rather than converging ones towards Western values such as liberal democracy.

The pause in the European integration coincided with the start of political de-liberalization in Turkey. With each election cycle, the AKP increased its electoral base and felt less and less need for the “EU factor” as a means of mobilizing its supporters and confronting its opponents. While in 2002, when the AKP came to power, the promises of democratic freedoms were very important for its survival as a conservative Islamist party in the face of threats from the secular Kemalist elite, it had secured enough support by 2007 to launch an attack on its ideological opponents, which climaxed in a number of high-profile cases such as Ergenekon and Sledgehammer coup plot trials and others. Each new election cycle (2011, 2014, and 2015) brought a new round of charges against political activists, regulatory restrictions on the freedom of speech and assembly, and brutal suppression of public protests. Mass terrorist acts, mainly against civil activists, during the election marathon in 2015 and the rollback of the “peace process” with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party threw Turkey back in time to the period of repressive policies in the early 1980s.

Mass repressions after the coup in July 2016 were not at odds with the overall paradigm of Turkey’s political development. On the contrary, they looked like a logical step after the segmentation of

liberal reforms to match the AKP’s priorities (since the end of the 2000s liberalization continued only in military-civilian relations and migration policy). With each passing year, the Erdogan regime has to pay an ever higher price for keeping the power and exert more efforts to maintain stable relations with partners in the region and the world. The “European dream,” with which the AKP won its first election, a model that successfully combined democracy with Islam, civil freedoms, and economic growth—all these gains that only recently were symbols of a prosperous “new Turkey” have been sacrificed.

The new mythology is being created in order to replace Kemalist values of secularism and “foreign policy restraint” with neoconservative guidelines which combine nostalgia for the imperial past with the vision of Turkey as “a central state” in the macro-region of Afro-Eurasia. The “neoconservative,” or rather “neo-Ottoman” as it is often referred to in Russia and the West, policy has most vividly manifested itself, on the one hand, in the permanent laudation of the Sublime Porte’s sultans and generally the glorious chapters of Ottoman history in films and television series financed by the government, and on the other hand, in attempts to consolidate Turkey’s military presence in Syria and Iraq as part of the “Ottoman geopolitical space,” often by enlisting jihadists’ support in regional policy.

Although Turkey becomes increasingly less predictable for Western partners and no longer serves as a “showcase for democracy with an Islamic face” in the Middle East, it nevertheless has not lost its appeal to countries in the region. Controversial as Erdogan’s domestic policy may be, his power remains quite fascinating. His efforts to tighten his grip undertaken since the 2010s using increasingly harsh methods have not led to a collapse of his regime so far. On the contrary, he has created a new internal balance of power, within which the old system of checks and balances (represented mainly by the army and the military elite) has been scrapped completely. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a step towards a modern political system where the military elite has no political role to play and where the authorities and society make a new social contract. On the other hand, it remains unclear who will act as a balancer in a system where power

is extremely personified and the secular institutional component of the political system is weak.

Quite in line with the global tendency towards authoritarian backsliding, the Turkish Republic is creating a new model of relations between society and the state, where the government seeks to emasculate democratic institutions, while cultivating a mass belief that the implementation of a new social contract and preservation of people's benefits depend entirely on a concrete party and even concrete politicians and on whether they stay at the helm or not. Paradoxical as it may seem, such personification of the state and public institutions meets no resistance; on the contrary, it generates the feeling of engagement. Moreover, a new format of political engagement is being created. Multi-million-strong rallies in support of Erdogan in the fall of 2016 are a symbol of this new format. The slogans that brought Erdogan to power—building a new Turkey, a democratic country with religious freedoms, rapidly growing economy, political resolution of the Kurdish issue, and eventual membership in the EU—have given way to a dangerous combination of growing political polarization, declining economy, mounting tension inside the country and along its borders, and extremely strained relations with the West.

While claiming the status of global player with a bizarre idea of moving the UN Headquarters to Istanbul (Hurriyet, 2016), Turkey is militarizing its policy. Its military operation in northern Syria, which has been drawing everybody's attention since its start in January 2018, is essentially part of the strategy to increase military-political presence in the region. This buildup has reached an unprecedented scale since the blockade of Qatar in June 2017 as borne out by armed invasions of Iraq (in 2007 and 2015) and Syria (in 2016, 2017, and 2018), and ambitious projects to create military bases in the Persian Gulf area and Africa. In the spring of 2018, Ankara reached an agreement with Doha to set up a naval base in the north of Qatar in addition to the existing army base in that country in hope to gain more possibilities for influencing Shi'ite Iran and Ibadhiyah Oman (MEMO, 2018). In the fall of 2017, Turkey opened its biggest overseas military base outside of Mogadishu, Somalia (Aljazeera,

2017). Along with the numerous military bases in Iraq and northern Syria (Sagnic, 2016) and an ambitious project to develop an aircraft cruiser for greater military presence in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, this suggests we may soon see a new version of the “Turkish model” symbolizing Turkey as a state that determines the nature of the “regional subsystem” of international relations in the Middle East. “Europe has Schengen, but we are creating Sham-gen [Sham means the Levant—Ed.]” Erdogan has said once (Kirisci, 2013). It is not accidental that Turkey is more and more often referred to in the region as “a new imperialist” (Waldman, 2017).

Over the past decade Turkey has become a much more independent geopolitical player, but it is less predictable and no longer fits into the U.S.’s and the EC’s vision of what it should be like as a “model” for Muslim countries in the Middle East. Turkey is no longer a “beacon of stability” but a source of new, often quite unexpected, impulses in the region. It seems the West is not quite prepared to deal with that kind of Turkey.

The constantly transforming “Turkish model” and its incomplete character still attract attention of regional states which are trying to learn from both Turkey’s successes and failures. Turkey has not yet become a complete “role model,” but occasional role expectations on both the international and regional levels make the “Turkish model” a significant case study for scholars and practical politicians. Marvelous ability to adapt to various circumstances and substantial flexibility made the “Turkish model” relevant not only during post-bipolar transformation of the international system in the 1990s but also when geopolitical instability started to escalate at the beginning of this century. The international and political transformation of the Middle East in the 2010s changed both the essence of the “Turkish model” and external actors’ expectations towards Turkey. In the early 20th century Kemalist Turkey served as a beacon for the Middle Eastern countries in terms of successful modernization based on the social mobilization. In the post-bipolar period the charm of post-Kemalist synthesis of Turkism and liberalism made the “Turkish model” attractive for post-Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian political elites. At the beginning

of this century Western leaders viewed Turkey as a unique example of Islamic democracy and an alternative to radical Islamism. At the end of the first decade of this century a combination of high economic growth, democratic reforms and protection of Islamic values initiated a discussion about the “Turkish model” as an example for the Muslim countries of the Middle East mired in the Arab Spring revolutions. Political transformations taking place in Turkey since the beginning of this decade and fundamental domestic political problems highlighted by them acquire wide international resonance but of a different kind. Military interventions to Iraq (2008, 2015) and Syria (2016, 2017, 2018), large-scale projects of creating military bases in the Gulf and Africa and overall militarization of the Turkish politics pose fundamental questions about the further trajectory of the “Turkish model” and Ankara’s future as an influential actor in the Middle East.

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