



Transatlantic Academy Scholars Views on Turkish Public Opinion

October 1, 2009

The German Marshall Fund of the United States released its annual survey of European and American public opinion, *Transatlantic Trends* (www.transatlantictrends.org) in September. Among its findings were some interesting data on Turkish attitudes about its international role, its neighbors, the U.S. and the EU. In a section titled, "The Turkish Enigma," the authors noted

On a range of measures—
their (Turkish) confidence in Obama, their support for the
United States and the European Union, their backing of
American and EU global leadership, their attitudes toward
Iran, Russia, and the security alliance—the Turkish people
are out of step with Europeans and Americans

As the Transatlantic Academy is focusing on Turkey and its Neighborhood in its current year and has assemble six scholars from both Europe and North America to deal with the complex of issues surrounding Turkey's changing foreign policy role, we asked them for their analysis of the Transatlantic Trends findings. Here are their analyses.

Behind the Bounce: Turkey Views the US and the World

Ronald H. Linden, Senior Fellow, Transatlantic Academy*

Ask most Americans to name a Muslim country where the US is viewed negatively and you are likely to hear "Iran" or maybe "Pakistan." But the Pew Global Attitudes Survey published in June found that the Muslim country in which the US held the least favorable rating was Turkey. How could that be? A NATO ally since 1952, a secular "moderate" Muslim country, one with full and productive ties with Israel?

The answer lies, to some extent with Turkish suspicion of George Bush and his policies. The same Pew survey found, for example, that Turks had roughly the same amount of confidence in George Bush as they had in Osama bin Laden. This good news is that with a change of administration in Washington the opportunity to improve US standing among the people in this crucial ally should be available.

There is some evidence that this is the case. The German Marshall Fund has just released its Transatlantic Trends survey of popular views held in major European countries. In Turkey, as in virtually all European countries, there is a substantial "Obama bounce." Approval ratings jumped from eight percent for George Bush in 2008 to 50 percent for President Obama today. The survey was taken after the President was warmly received in the country in April so there may appear to be more spring in this bounce than there in fact is. Still, it is a trend that mirrors Obama's positive ratings throughout Europe and it is a welcome reversal of a long decline in favorable views of the US in Turkey.



While general “approval” is helpful, especially if the US asks a country to take on dangerous or substantial burdens, in the case of Turkey it overlays serious differences as to how the world should be approached. For example, when asked if NATO is essential, fully 72% of the British public thinks it is, as do more than half the French, Germans and Slovaks. But only 35% of Turks view the alliance that way. As NATO’s role grows both functionally and geographically, especially in western Asia, skepticism in a population of 72 million could be a liability.

But for Turks, skepticism toward NATO goes deeper. It is part of what observers call the “Sèvres Syndrome,” a feeling among Turks that the West would, if it had the chance, try to carve up the Turkish state as it did after World War I—an attempt defeated by Atatürk. When asked in the Transatlantic Trends survey with whom Turkey should cooperate most closely with, some 43 percent said Turkey should act alone—nearly twice the percentage of those favoring cooperation with the EU and ten times that of those favoring cooperation with the US.

Even more dramatic—and more puzzling to Americans—are Turkish differences with the US over how to deal with Iran—a neighbor with whom Turkey shares a 310-mile border. The GMF poll shows that while nearly half of Americans think diplomatic pressure should be increased on Iran and a military option should be maintained, only 16 percent of Turks support this approach. Seventeen percent of Turks would rule out a military option altogether while nearly one-third accepts the idea that neighboring Iran may acquire nuclear weapons.

Turks do not share US apprehensions about Iran. Ankara very quickly recognized and congratulated President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on his re-election despite widespread protests and claims of fraud. Nor is Teheran hostile to Turkey, though Turks are Sunni Muslim and for the most part determinedly secular in orientation. Here also Turkish views are guided by history, namely the treaty of Kasr-I Sirin of 1639 which secured both the border and relative peace between the two states. And contemporary economic ties are strong. Last year, more than one million Iranians visited Turkey, attracted by the business opportunities and the lack of strictures on personal dress and behavior. In 2008 Turkey did nearly ten billion dollars worth of trade with the supposedly sanctioned Islamic Republic.

What does this mean for US policy? Washington will now have the advantage of a more positive orientation (as well as high expectations) from a country that had recently lost faith in us. That is the good news. At the same time, it is worth remembering that tasks we see as global and challenges we expect others to embrace may not be seen as such in other countries. As Washington saw in 2003 when Turkey refused to allow itself to be used as a base from which to invade Iraq, contributions we expect to receive just because we asked may not be forthcoming.

Better approval ratings do not necessarily translate into shared visions. Other countries and societies have a stubbornly persistent habit of seeing the world through their own lenses. The more we understand about the nature of those lenses, the more capable we will be of turning a “bounce” into a benefit.

Turkish “Enigma” is driven by Turkish paranoia



Kemal Kirisci, Senior Fellow, Transatlantic Academy

The 2009 Transatlantic Trends survey results suggest that Turkish public opinion on a number of issues central to the alliance continues to remain an “outlier”. Turkish support for President Obama is much higher than was the case for President Bush. Obama’s visit to Turkey and the policies of the new administration contributed to this result. Yet, Turks compared to other allied nations covered in the survey continue to be much more skeptical about the United States’ role in global politics and in addressing a range of issues from global climate change to Afghanistan. The level of trust towards the US as well as the European Union in general remains as low as in previous surveys.

The gap between Turkish opinion and other allied publics becomes particularly conspicuous on Iran. The survey report actually refers to these differences as the Turkish “enigma”. Why these differences? For those who adhere to the Huntingtonian view of world politics, the answer to the enigma lies in cultural and religious differences. After all, Turkey is the only Muslim country included in the survey. Additionally, political Islam has been on the rise and in the eyes of many Western as well as Turkish commentators secularism is being eroded if not threatened outright.

But moving beyond this essentialist analysis, it is worth noting that many of the issues addressed in the survey occur in the immediate neighborhood of Turkey and directly impinge on its national security. With the example of the American handling of the Iraqi challenge as a reference point, Turkish opinion is going to reflect concern about the possible use of force against Iran. There are economic considerations too that shape Turkish views. Such alternative explanations to a purported “clash of civilizations” offer a richer and more insightful analysis of the Turkish “enigma”.

Yet, there is more to the “enigma”. Why for example do Turks prefer to rely on themselves rather than cooperation within the alliance? Why, after more than fifty years as members of NATO do Turks remain skeptical about the utility of the alliance? On the one hand Turks see membership in the EU as something good for the country but they also think that the likelihood of the EU admitting Turkey is low. The answer to these puzzles lies in part in Turkish political culture. One aspect of this is often referred to as the Sevres syndrome: the conviction among many Turks that western allies have the long term goal to revive the Sevres Treaty that would have divided up the remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire into ethnically based states composed of Armenians, Greeks, Kurds plus a small landlocked Turkish state. The treaty however could not be put into effect because the founder of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, forced the occupying powers to sign a new treaty ensuring that the Sevres treaty became defunct. As absurd as it may sound, today many Turks from all walks of life, but especially among the better educated, interpret western policies through the lenses of the Sevres syndrome. It is no wonder that surveys including the recent Transatlantic Trends survey, repeatedly confirm that many Turks do not trust the west and continue to believe that “Turks have no allies other than Turks”.

Recent involvement with the EU has helped erode the hold the Sevres syndrome has on Turkish views of the world, at least to some extent. The announcement by the EU in 1999 that Turkey could start membership negotiations once it meets certain political criteria concerning human rights, the rule of law and liberal democracy drove a massive reform process. The reform process improved Turkish democracy but also contributed to addressing thorny internal as well as external problems. A decade ago who would have dreamt

that Turkey would support a solution in Cyprus based on the re-integration of the two sides on the island or turn around its conflict ridden relations with Greece into a reasonably “normal” relationship based on ever growing trade and flows of people. Similar observations can be made about the Kurdish problem. The reform process did introduce some cultural rights such as broadcasting and education in Kurdish but few expected the launching in July this year a debate to address the Kurdish problem in a much more comprehensive manner. Less than a couple of years ago public use of Kurdish or giving newly born children Kurdish names was enough for prosecutors to start legal proceedings and attempt to repress any manifestation of Kurdishness. Yet, today mainstream politicians are racing with each other to utter at least a few words in Kurdish even if they may often get the phrases wrong. Furthermore, the government is seriously contemplating reintroducing Kurdish names to localities whose names had been Turkified in the past. One last important example of reform and change in Turkey has been on relations with Armenia. There is a much livelier debate on the issue of Armenian genocide and the government seems genuinely wanting to improve relations with Armenia.

However, these developments should not suggest that the Sevres syndrome has disappeared. If one follows the debate inside Turkey on any of the above issues one would be struck by the number of commentators, politicians and officials warning the public how all these efforts for reform are foreign instigated and how they mean to weaken Turkey. For example the leader of the opposition party, Deniz Baykal, has resisted the government’s efforts to address the Kurdish question in a more substantive manner and alleged that the government is trying to reform under external pressure. Baykal cries aloud that the reforms would provoke a disintegration of Turkey’s territorial integrity. The manner in which he exploits Turkish paranoia puts him uncomfortably, for a social democratic leader, close to the position of Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of an ultra-nationalist political party. Another example is the way in which the former chief of staff of the Turkish military in April 2007 declared the EU a threat to Turkish territorial integrity in spite of repeated previous claims that the military supports EU membership.

The Sevres syndrome is not limited to just the realm of public debate and Turkish politics. The trauma of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the paramount importance given to the protection of the newly born Turkish republic from “enemies” inside and outside the country to this day remains a central feature of the Turkish education system and the socialization of members of the Turkish military as well as bureaucracy and the judiciary. Since a large number of people are affected by this syndrome, politicians, independent of whether they intellectually believe in it or not, frequently resort to stoking Turkish paranoia towards the external world and especially the west. It is against this continuing invocation of a historical threat that the Turkish “enigma” needs to be understood.

Nevertheless, the Sevres syndrome is weakening as Turkey becomes more and more an open society with pluralist democracy. Treating and bringing the Sevres syndrome under some degree of control is primarily Turkey’s problem. However, allies have a role to play too. Using the Transatlantic Trends survey as a guide, they could at least avoid aggravating the Sevres syndrome. The best policy for the allies might be to engage Turkey positively and constructively and reassure people that reform in Turkey will indeed bring the stability and prosperity associated with EU membership and is not a threat to the integrity of the Turkish culture or state. This would help efforts to address the difficult and sensitive issues in transatlantic relations such as



global warming or managing the Iranian challenge. It would also help reformers relegate the Sevres syndrome and the accompanying paranoia about the west to its final resting place in Turkish history.

Why Turkey's "go-it-alone" instincts are not surprising

Nathalie Tocci, Senior Fellow Transatlantic Academy

In reading the 2009 Transatlantic Trends, one result stands out starkly: Turkey appears on many counts as an outlier when compared both to the US and to fellow European countries. The results may initially appear startling to Americans and Europeans, used to viewing Turkey as an historical ally in Europe as well as in the wider Middle Eastern and Eurasian arenas. Yet a closer look at the data from a Turkey-specific and wider comparative angle both explain the results and offer food for a policy rethink on Turkey.

Turkey's approvals of both George Bush in 2008 (8%) and Barack Obama in 2009 (50%) are the lowest amongst European countries.¹ Turkey scores lowest in viewing NATO as essential (35%). Turkey also displays the least favorable view of the EU, a mere 32% - 16% points below the traditionally Eurosceptic British. Unlike American and EU citizens, Turks have a higher level of acceptance (or perhaps expectation) that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons (29%) and are less supportive of using military force (16%) or increased diplomatic pressure (17%) to deter Iran. Alongside these comparative findings, Turks by far prefer the option of acting unilaterally in international affairs (43% compared to the second highest figure of 22% who believe that Turkey should cooperate with the EU).

While startling at first sight, in comparison to other countries, Turkey really stands apart only when the issues at hand touch directly upon its perceived national interests. By contrast, when issues relate to international relations in general, Turks fall in line with the Transatlantic trend. When asked about troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, for example, Turkey shares similar views to the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Spain and Italy (50%). When it comes to climate change, Turkish concern (53%) matches those of Italy, Romania, France, the UK and Germany. Turks feel that the global economic crisis hit them hard (78%), as do similarly to Americans, Bulgarians, Romanians and Slovaks. Probably because of this, Turks are more inclined to rethink the benefits of the free market economy (17% support), like Slovaks, Romanians, Bulgarians and French, but unlike most Americans.

Why do Turks differ on the US, the EU and Iran? Turkish views of the United States will not simply be conditioned by general political opinions as may be the case for other European countries, but will depend on the state of US-Turkey relations and the manner in which US foreign policy affects perceived Turkish national security interests. Chief worries for Turkey are how US policy shapes developments in Iraq and Iran. In this respect, Turkey's appraisal of US foreign policy is negative and has been negative at least since 2002. Despite an Obama bounce and the widespread Turkish appreciation of Obama's Turkey visit in April 2009,

¹ Although Turkey displays the widespread "Obama bounce" that characterizes all other European countries as well as the US.



Turks are likely to judge the US President more by what he does regarding Northern Iraq and especially the PKK, as well as Iran.

Likewise Turkish views of the EU are conditioned less by overall levels of euroscepticism and more by the very specific sense of disappointment with the EU's perceived snubbing of Turkey. Indeed, currently only 19% of those surveyed in EU countries approve of Turkey's entry. Despite this, Turks feel a sense of belonging to Europe. Turks in fact opt for cooperation with the EU (22%) rather than the US (4%) regardless of the set-backs in Turkey's accession process and the belief that the Union will never let Turkey into its club - only 28% believe Turkey will enter still, 48% still support accession.

The belief that the US may have hampered Turkish interests and the EU has unjustly turned Turkey away, alongside Turkey's ingrained go-it-alone instincts explain Turkey's relative preference for unilateralism in international affairs. On Iran for example, many wonder why Turkey does not feel threatened by the prospect of a nuclear Iran, despite living at Iran's doorstep. The answer lies precisely in the fact that Iran is Turkey's neighbor. As such and in contrast to other countries, Turkish views are informed by three considerations. First, Turkey and Iran have been historically good neighbors, with a long-standing stability of their common border. Second, following an initial period of concern that revolutionary Iran would try to export its system to the region, Turkish-Iranian relations have been steadily developing in political, energy, trade and social terms. Hence, Turkish concern is not that Iran is a threat, but that destabilizing Iran and jeopardizing bilateral relations and stability in the region would be dangerous. Third, Turks appreciate that Iran's nuclear ambitions have far more to do with Iranian bilateral relations with Israel and the US as well as wider calculations of the balance of power in the Middle East than with any Iranian threat to Turkey itself. This explains both the relatively higher acceptance of a nuclear Iran and the relatively lower readiness to engage coercive means to deter Iran.

What all this tells us is that Turkey broadly falls in line with the European and American vies on broader international issues, e.g. the global economy, but departs in cases where perceived vital regional or national interests are concerned and US or EU policies are viewed as hampering these. This kind of perspective is not so different from what one might find in the US, France or Lithuania were the issues at stake the ICC, Algeria or Russia respectively. Yet to the extent that the core of Transatlantic issues lies at the heart of Turkey's national concerns and that Turkish support is viewed as critical to the success of US and European policies, then far greater attention ought to be paid to the very specific reasons driving Turkish attitudes and beliefs. It is only by framing Transatlantic policies in a manner that genuinely accounts for Turkey's perceived interests that we may expect to take Turkey fully on board.

Turkish Differences and Turkish Paradoxes

Ahmet Evin, Senior Fellow Transatlantic Academy

The key findings of *Transatlantic Trends 2009* once again draw attention to the gap between the European and Turkish outlook on issues of common concern. Some of the contrasts between the Turkish and European



response, however, suggest that Turks view transatlantic relations from a different optic rather than merely being “out of step” with their Western allies.

One set of striking figures involve Turkish views of the EU. Although European support for Turkey’s EU membership has reached a low of 19%, support for EU membership remains significantly high in Turkey (48%). Yet, only one out of three (32%) Turks has a favorable opinion of the EU and only 34% feel that Turkey “shares enough common values part of the West.” Why would a significant number of Turks wish to enter a club which they do not approve? Why would they insist on pursuing a European future while they feel they are culturally different from Europe? An equally surprising result is that, even while Turkey is engaged in accession negotiations with the EU, only 28% of Turks actually believe that their country will eventually be admitted into the European club.

It may be the Turks’ mistrust of Europe, more than fatalism, which accounts for their serious doubts about Turkey’s eventual accession to the EU. Having witnessed increasingly loud and denigrating objections to their country’s European ambitions, the Turkish public opinion has come to believe that Europeans would be able find a way to exclude Turkey from the EU, even if Turkey were to meet all the criteria for membership. Turks disappointment with what they perceive to be Europeans double standards also goes a long way toward explaining why two out of three Turks do not believe that Turkey shared “enough common values with the West to be a part of the West.” The tacit European acceptance of institutionalized procedures stands in sharp contrast to the personalized way in which Turks relate to political issues. Where only one in five Europeans from eleven EU member states believes that “it would be good for Turkey to join the EU,” 54% think that Turkey is likely to join the Union after the completion of negotiations.

Turkish suspicions of Europe are paralleled by a sharp loss of confidence in the U.S. since the Iraq war. Turkish support for the U.S. remains the lowest among the countries surveyed, with only 22% of Turks having a favorable view of the U.S. (compared to 69% of Eastern and 74% of Western Europeans). Moreover, 42% of the Turkish public continues to hold a *very* unfavorable view of the U.S. Turks appear to be far more skeptical about President Obama’s ability to manage global challenges than Europeans, 75% of whom have confidence in Obama fighting international terrorism. Depending on the issue, Turkish confidence in Obama’s leadership ranges from a high of 40% (managing relations with Russia) to a low of 8% (managing relations with Iran).

The Obama factor appears to have made no difference towards alleviating the Turks’ deep mistrust of American involvement in their neighborhood. The U.S. continues to be widely blamed for destabilizing Iraq and creating a serious security problem in Turkey’s backyard. Turkish realities may explain the difference between how Turks view Iran as opposed to European and American respondents. The fact that Pakistan, for example, was able to develop nuclear capabilities right under Western eyes is a fact that has not been lost on



Turks. Nearly one out of three Turks (29%) prefer to accept that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons (as opposed to only 8% of Europeans and 5% of Americans), because they doubt that international sanctions will work in the case of Iran any more than they worked in preventing other countries from developing nuclear capabilities. Moreover, Turks' relatively relaxed attitude regarding Iran's nuclear capability (only 17% support increased diplomatic pressure on Iran without a military option and merely 16% with a military option) can be said to result less from the fact Turkey has had no border conflicts with Iran for nearly four centuries than the knowledge that Iranian missiles would likely to be directed at targets other than Turkey.

A significant element of mistrust characterizes the particular optic from which Turkey views its external relations. Turkey's loss of confidence and trust, for different reasons, in both the EU and U.S. appears to have reinforced the deeply seated Turkish tendency towards isolationism, exemplified by the saying, "A Turk has no friends but a Turk." *Transatlantic Trends 2009* brings this feature into sharp focus: a significant plurality of Turks (43%) has registered a strong preference for Turkey acting alone in the international scene rather than cooperating with other countries. But, Turkish realities can be complex: a similar number of Turks ironically continue to show a strong preference for joining the EU.

A different look at Iran: views from the Turkish neighbor

Juliette Tolay, Post Doctoral Fellow, Transatlantic Academy

When considering the Iranian issue, especially its nuclear program, observers can distinguish two different approaches: the American approach – privileging the threat of economic sanctions and military force, and easily tempted to dismiss diplomatic solutions – and the European approach – more inclined to diplomacy and more wary of some of the counterproductive effect of punitive approaches. The 2009 data from the *Transatlantic Trends* project of the German Marshall Fund seem to confirm this gap between the two sides of the Atlantic. When asked about how to deal with Iran's nuclear program, 48% of European respondents opt for "Increase diplomatic pressure but rule out military force", for 29% of American respondents. Conversely, 47% of Americans privilege "Increase diplomatic pressure and maintain military option", while only 18% of Europeans choose this option.

Interestingly, however, *Transatlantic Trends* proposed a third option, only occasionally considered by most policy debates, "Accept that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons". Indeed a mere 8% of Europeans and 5% of Americans preferred that answer. However, 29% of Turkish respondents found that option more attractive than the other two, with 17% choosing the "diplomacy only" option and 16% the "diplomacy and military" option. Turks seem to feel at ease with the idea of a nuclear Iran, how could this be? For years now, the spectrum of a nuclear Iran has given nightmares to the international community, especially Western countries. Furthermore, Turkey is a direct neighbor of Iran: if Iran gets the bomb, Turkey would have to cope with the

renewed level of instability in the region engendered by incentives for a dangerous arms race, and with the possibility of becoming an accidental or intentional target for the weapons themselves. So what is wrong with Turkey? Understanding Turkey's lack of concern regarding Iranian nuclear ambitions requires looking at Iran from a Turkish perspective. In turn, this perspective provides interesting insights on Iran's position in the region that can help rethink US foreign policy.

History, and the Turkish perception of this history, provides a major piece of the explanation. Since the agreement of Kasr-i Shirin in 1639, the border between Iran and Turkey (then Ottoman Empire) has remained unchanged, and a peaceful bilateral relationship has ensued. Or at least, so it is taught in schools and ingrained in Turkish minds. The relationship with Iran appears as the most stable and long-lasting relationship Turkey ever had with a neighbor: in fact, Iran is probably the only neighbor with which Turkey has no major tensions today. Therefore in Turkey, the general view regarding Iran is one of a respected and reliable partner.

That said, later history led to a certain distance between Turkey and Iran. In 1979, Iran adopted the model of an Islamic democratic theocracy, and cultivated the practice of a rather confrontational foreign policy to impose itself on the international scene. In contrast, Turkey always kept a more consensual posture, with political institutions firmly embedded in the Western democratic model and a foreign policy that all-in-all used to accommodate American and European interests. As a result, Turkey and Iran have never been very close partners, and they never engaged in any form of extensive military or economic integration the way Turkey did with the US (NATO) and the EU (Custom Union). These Turkish commitments to the West precluded very tight relations with Iran. Strategic interests therefore led Turkey to keep interactions with Iran to a minimum.

However, these diverging strategic interests did not affect the respectful public perception of Iran in Turkey, which can be explained by Iran's symbolic position in the world order. Iran's estrangement from Western values espoused by Turkey – democracy, human rights, individual liberties – certainly has a negative impact on Iran's image. However, this is counterbalanced by the perception that Iran has come to embody a critique to the “neo-liberal and neo-imperial world order” dominated by the US. This discourse is popular in Turkey: it echoes the concerns of the “Sevres Syndrome”, a constant state of suspicion regarding the “real” intentions of Western powers, seen as greedy for more power, territories or resources. In this framework, Iran's attitude in global affairs is, for some Turks, a source of pride and admiration, or at least, for many, a healthy discursive counterweight to Western hegemony.

These considerations have two main consequences for US foreign policy. One is about Iran's image among Washington's key allies. In Washington and other European capitals, Iran might look like a “scary and nasty rogue country”. But in other places, such as Turkey, Iran's image might be much more positive and seen as a country with a rich culture and history, self confident enough to behave as an autonomous actor on the world stage. Gaining a deep understanding of these dynamics would be a strong asset for American foreign policy makers as it can help predict how US actions in the region will be perceived by key actors, as well as the conditions under which US will be seen as the “good guy” or the “bad guy”.

The second consequence concerns the future of the Turkish-Iranian relationship and what it means for the US. Besides the data showing a Turkish public opinion unconcerned with an Iranian threat, there are signs



that Turkish interests in Iran may grow in the near future. Economically, Iran represents a substantial market for Turkey, and Turkey needs to export more to Iran in order to balance their bilateral trade deficit. Politically, Iran fits into the new Turkish foreign policy vision of engagement and development of constructive relationships with all its neighbors. For the US, a closer Turkey-Iran relationship would present a challenge: if the US asks for multilateral sanctions or military intervention in Iran, a reluctant or resisting Turkey might be a handicap. But it can also present a strong opportunity for the US as Turkey could become a strategic intermediary between Iran and the US. According to the same Transatlantic Trends data, more than 50% of Turkish respondents are not confident in Obama's or in the EU's ability to handle the Iranian challenge. Perhaps, then, the key to the Iranian puzzle is not in the US or in Europe, but rather in Turkey.

From “Where” to “What” on Turkey

Joshua W. Walker, Post Doctoral Fellow, Transatlantic Academy

Placing Turkey in the modern international system continues to present challenges to Western policymakers in Washington and Brussels. The 2009 Transatlantic Trends public opinion survey recently released by the German Marshall Fund of the United States highlights this very fact by devoting an entire section to the “Turkish Enigma.” Taken in isolation and without a thorough understanding of modern Turkish developments, the report can be interpreted as a cause for grave concern about Turkey's Western-orientation. Yet the fact is that Turkey is more than the sum of its parts when it comes to its geographic belonging and identity.

Key to this understanding is the findings from the report that Turkey's threat perception has declined and its confidence has increased compared to a year ago. Some in Washington and Brussels may be disturbed by the implications of the report's findings that Turks are much more comfortable with the idea of a nuclear-armed Iran (29% than are Americans (5%) or Europeans (8%). Yet in many ways the Turks have a far more realistic view of the situation while simultaneously having the most to lose from a nuclear-armed neighbor. Given the fact that Turkey shares a border with such troublesome neighbors as Iran, Iraq, and Syria, its pragmatic and realistic responses are different than Western interests that often have a more detached and idealistic tint to them. Turkey's military strength combined with *realpolitik* diplomacy under the current government appears to be serving Turkey's national interest in a powerful new way that makes some Europeans uncomfortable. Yet, as a result, U.S.-Turkish interests are more closely aligned now than at any point in the past six years. However, Turkey cannot be taken for granted. The lesson for Western policymakers is that Turkey's identity and survival are not entirely bound up in the West anymore. Less than 34% of Turks surveyed who believed they shared any common values with the West.

Today Turkey has become more European, more democratic, more Islamic, and increasingly more nationalist all at the same time. It is not just “Islamist” political power, Turkey's diplomatic efforts in the region, or the sense that Turkey with its newly minted seat on the UN Security Council is a “player” that causes Turkey to be an outlier from the West. It is all of these things. Without abandoning its drive for EU membership, Ankara's engagement with its neighbors is designed to enhance its strategic options and has garnered the Turks newfound regional prestige, Turkey's new self-confidence and regional prominence has transformed a



static Cold-War bulwark into a potential catalyst for regional stability. During the Cold War, a commonly held perception for Western policymakers was that given its invaluable geostrategic location, great military strength, secular political system, Muslim population, and commitment to fighting terrorism, Turkey was automatically going to foster stability in one of the most unstable regions of the world simply because of where it was located.

This common perception, highlighted in the Transatlantic Trends report, however, is in fact a fatal *mis*perception. The emphasis placed on Turkey's role as a "model" of secular Muslim representative democracy is based on a gross misunderstanding of the rules of the political game in Ankara, in Turkish society, and in the region. In reality, the emergence of Turkey as a stable model for the region must stem from the quality of its own political principles, and from the vitality of its own political and economic dynamics—not merely from its military strength or its geo-strategic location. None of these properties, together or alone, has been able to create stability within Turkey in the last two decades. On the contrary, the politics and mindsets that have driven contemporary Turkish politics have failed to produce non-violent resolution of conflicts, just development, access to a broad spectrum of human rights, or uncorrupt and accountable public administrations.

Attempts to anchor Turkey in the West by continually trying to assimilate this country of 73 million people to a standardized definition of what it means to be European or Western will continue to fail. Turkey is an outlier when compared to Germany or France, however by broadening the definitions used to include a more inclusive understanding of Turkey's place in the international system there would no longer be inherent contradictions between being a EU, NATO, and Transatlantic partner along with being a Muslim-majority nation. Turkey is too big, complex, and strategic to be an outlier that is not brought into the center. Moving beyond its geographic centrality Turkey has the potential and challenges as a microcosm of the various regions and communities it finds itself a part of.

Pigeonholing Turkey into any single geographic grouping or community is not in any Western policymakers' interest. Therefore, learning from the results of the Transatlantic Trends survey Washington and Brussels must endeavor to formulate a unique Turkey strategy that calibrates "what" Turkey has become and not just "where" it is located.