



ORIGINAL PAPER

Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations

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Abstract:

This study examines Turkey's western identity constructed during the early republican era following the westernization movements in Turkey that started more than 200 years ago, the identity crisis occurred in Turkey with its western identity losing power after the cold war and its reflections on Turkish-Russian relations. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that Turkey, a 'torn country' according to Huntington's popular definition, pragmatically built interest-based relations with Russia, another torn country seen considered as an outsider by the West, trying to reconstruct its identity owing to domestic dynamics after facing with the identity crisis. This study demonstrates that Turkey developed its relations with Russia as a regional power by reading Turkish-Russian relations through the lenses of Huntington's torn state syndrome.

Keywords: *Westernization, Torn Country, Turkish Identity, Cold War, Turkish-Russian Relations.*

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Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations

Introduction

It is possible to mark the beginning of the westernization process in Turkey with the military modernization the Ottoman Empire started after the military defeats in the 17th century. Together with the military modernization, western ideas that flourished important values as equality, freedom of thought, human rights and modernization in the western world began to enter into Turkish intellectual life. Western way of thinking deeply influenced many significant developments in the modern Turkish history. Some of them are the Imperial Edict of Reorganization (*Tanzimat Fermani*) in 1839, the Edict of Reform (*Islahat Fermani*) in 1856, Young Turk (*Jeunes-Turcs*) movements and the westernization process started with the comprehensive reforms of the early Republican Era under the leadership Kemal Atatürk following the war of independence between 1923 and 1938. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire brought along the emergence of a new nation state. Identity issue was one of the top priorities of this new-born nation state. Westernization was accepted as a path to modernization during the early Republican Era in the 1920s and 1930s. Westernization movements that came along with top-down reforms show the efforts of Turkey to gain a western identity and to have herself accepted in the West as a western (probably a European) country.

Turkey continued the westernization process after the Second World War (WWII) by standing together with the triumphant Western powers. The Cold War Era also marks the continuing efforts of Turkey to have her western identity accepted by the western states. Turkey assuming a western identity preferred to stand with the western world in a bi-polar world system. However, the end of Cold War made Turkey to question her western identity for the first time. Besides, the rejection of Turkey's membership application to the European Economic Community (EEC) created an identity crisis in Turkey, which was already a member state of the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The changes in the western perception of Turkey's identity – the United States (USA) was dealing with the issue of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons based in the former Soviet Republics and the European Union (EU) was busy with taking care of the Eastern European countries – led Turkey to turn her face to the East, the Middle East and Muslim countries by developing new identities like Turkish-Islamic identity together with the effects of domestic dynamics in late 1980s.

Huntington explains the rupture emerging with the identity crisis after the end of the Cold War and the historical reflections of this rupture in his esteemed article published in 1993. He defines Turkey, Russia and Mexico as 'torn countries' mentioning his three basic criteria to determine a country's identity: (1) political and economic elites of that country should support the new movement, (2) the people should be eager for this redefinition and (3) the dominant groups of a civilization welcoming this country should be willing to accept this country in transformation (Huntington, 1993: 44). In addition, Huntington states that the process of redefinition of an identity is a long one with ups and downs and a difficult one in terms of politics, culture and economy (Huntington, 2002: 139). He also thinks that Turkey is a deeply torn country and gives Turkey as the most appropriate sample for this definition (Huntington, 1993: 22-49).

This study deals with the reflections of the identity crisis of Turkey – a torn country – on her relations with Russia – another torn country – depending on Huntington's definition. Hence, this study assumes that Turkey, which has developed new identities apart from the western one following an identity crisis, has built up

strategic relations with an anti-western state, Russia, as part of her pragmatist interests. The study consists of two main parts. The first part briefly focuses on the westernization process and western identity construction in Turkey. The second part discusses the Turkish-Russian relations following the end of the Cold War until the invasion of Ukrainian territory of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

Turkey's Westernization Process and Western Identity

The westernization process in Turkey starts with the military modernization in the Ottoman Empire. This part of the study briefly discusses the historical development of the modernization movements in Turkey. The historical background demonstrates how Turkey constructed a western identity and how withdrew from it.

Westernization Movements in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire had kept the channels open with the western civilization, but considered the Islamic civilization above the western one when at the peak of its power. For this reason, the West was not recognized as a model by the Ottomans until the 17th century (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2001: 35). The Ottoman Turkey first met with the standards of the western civilization during the Siege of Vienna in 1683. Following the siege, a radical transformation came into the scene in the Ottoman Empire's attitude to the Europeans, which brought along westernization reforms in the army, education, administration, political and civil rights to survive against the expansionist movement of the great powers of the West (Rumelili, 2011: 243). Starting from the 17th century the Ottoman Empire began losing military dominant power and fell behind the western states. Therefore, the Empire started the modernization process to regain its power and took the West as a sample (Müftüler-Bac, 2000: 28).

The westernization movements gained momentum with the Sultan Mahmud II with the wide-range reforms initiated a social transformation before the Imperial Edict of Reorganization in 1839 (Bacık, 2001: 58). Transferring the western technology and western values like liberalism, nationalism and constitution; Young Turk movements and the Constitutional Monarchy during the Sultan Abdul Hamid II followed these reforms (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2001: 41-45). Hence, the westernization, as a notion and program to transform the state and the society, acquired an identity-constructing orientation (Dağı, 2005: 22). Turkish diplomats and scholars enjoying a western-type education started to import the European values, western ways of life and schools of thoughts to Turkey and these people also helped various movements of thought like nationalism, patriotism and freedom into the Turkish life of thought (Müftüler-Bac, 2000: 28). These thoughts laid down the keystones for constructing the western identity in Turkey.

Westernization Process in the Early Republican Era and the Western Identity of Turkey during the Cold War

The new elites of the Republic of Turkey were determined to have the Europeans to recognize the western identity of Turkey (Müftüler-Bac, 2000: 28). The new nation-state brought along a transformation on the basis of political legitimacy and on the symbols of the political community (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2001: 36). During the early Republican Era, the main objective was to westernize Turkey and the term 'westernization' had also been used for decades to express the foreign policy orientation of Turkey. The westernization reforms initiated by Atatürk set forth the western identity of Turkey and this also

Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations

influenced the foreign policy making during this period (Oğuzlu and Kibaroglu, 2009: 578). Along with these reforms, Turkey began constructing a new identity, a western one instead of the dominant Islamic identity in the Anatolia in order to facilitate the integration of the country into the West and the western movements became a scientific ground for Turkish reforms (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2001: 47). Following the social and political reforms, Turkey stepped into a comprehensive economic development in the 1930s and the westernization became a tool for modernization (Huntington, 2002: 144).

Turkey was able to stay neutral during the WWII and did not lose time to define herself together with the Western world. Following the western democratic models, Turkey managed to conduct a multi-party-political system (Huntington, 2002: 144). Turkey found her place within the western institutions established for protecting the common values of the West after the WWII, which offered her the legitimacy to become a European country (Müftüler-Bac, 2000: 29). In addition, Turkey showed a significant willingness to become a member state of NATO together with the other western states and became one of the first member states of NATO in 1952 (Oğuzlu and Kibaroglu, 2009: 578). NATO membership brought along economic and security aids from the West and Turkish army was trained and equipped by the West. Besides, Turkey was included in the command element of NATO and welcomed the US military bases. Hence, Turkey was considered as a fortress of the Western bloc preventing a possible expansion of the Soviet Union towards the Mediterranean (Huntington, 2002: 144). During the Cold War, the western identity of Turkey was mostly based on security perceptions of the West.

Turkey wanted to join the EEC as a western state and applied for membership in 1959 later signing the Ankara Agreement with the EEC in 1963 to integrate into the political, economic and military institutions of the West and to balance her relationship with the USA. This was a gesture of recognizing Turkey's Europeanness and her potential to achieve political and economic developments demanded by the EEC (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2001: 69-71). This association agreement was affirming Turkey's western identity created with the westernization process and the member states were welcoming a country that transformed its identity into their civilization. Turkey's western identity was seemingly accepted by the West for economic and security reasons during the Cold War. Turkey's participation into security associations formed to protect the western values also shows that the West recognized the western identity of Turkey.

The reforms introduced in the early Republican Era and political elites of the country together with the support of the society could transfer the western identity to the younger generations after the WWII. However, the military coup in 1960 restructured Turkish political life and demands for political Islam were in the rise in the 1970s (Dağı, 2005: 24). The emergence of government-supported Turkish-Islamic synthesis and a new elite group in favor of liberal economy but conservative politics started to form domestic and international perceptions of Turkish state and society (Yavuz, 1998: 29). The embargo imposed on Turkey following the Cyprus Crisis and the letter of the US President Johnson created an anti-western campaign in Turkey demanding to leave the western oriented foreign policy (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2001: 63). The rising demands for political Islam brought along the Islamic identity, which Turkey carefully enjoyed after the end of the Cold War along with her western identity, and helped Turkish-Islamic identity – a creation of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis – to gain power when re-establishing relations with the Central Turkic states following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These identities gained strength in the coming decades and Turkish political

elites started to prefer these identities instead of the western one, which also brought about the discussions regarding Turkey's Atlanticist stand in foreign policy. The following section discusses other identities of Turkey that were the determinants of her foreign policy and deals with Turkey's western stand in foreign policy.

Identity Crisis after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War is widely considered as a milestone marking the end of the ideological clashes. It is also seen as the beginning of a new world order. Considering Turkey's westernization process and her relations with the West, it is obvious that Turkish identity was subject to several transformations with different ideologies and security perceptions. Turkish elites were in favor of keeping the western identity and the NATO membership to stay within the western society even after the end of the Cold War. However, NATO membership was a fruit of the Cold War. The end of Soviet threat caused Turkey to reconsider her relations with the West and this also weakened them (Huntington, 2002: 145). The discussions regarding Turkey's western identity with the end of the Cold War also induced changes in Turkish foreign policy and interest-based assessments began to become important items in Turkish foreign policy-making processes (Oğuzlu and Kibaroglu, 2009: 579).

Two different ideologies emerged at the beginning of the 1990s in Turkey: political Islam and conservative nationalism (Sakallioğlu, 1998: 9). Political Islam influenced the identity issue in Turkey during this period. Capitalist development flourished in Turkey hand-in-hand with westernization and democratization was able to bring the dominant and traditional Ottoman-Islamist world view and Turkish-Anatolian culture to the center from the periphery, which also introduced the first prime minister (PM) enjoying an Ottoman-Islamist identity (Yavuz, 1998: 20). The newly-appointed PM Erbakan stated that Turkey should go back to her real friends and Muslim siblings in the Middle East blaming Europe for imperialism and reflected an anti-western attitude by contacting Iran, Iraq and Libya (Müftüler-Bac, 2000: 32; Sakallioğlu, 1998: 10). Neo-Ottomanism movement was another reaction against the West that appeared during the same period. According to Yavuz, there were several reasons behind the rise of this movement: domestic social developments emerged thanks to the liberal political and economic environment, end of the bi-polar world system, rejection of Turkey's membership application by the EEC, the silence of European states over the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina and ethnic Kurdish nationalism in the south-eastern part of Turkey (Yavuz, 1998: 22).

Following the end of the Cold War, Turkey's western identity was especially influenced by two factors: end of the Soviet threat and the rejection of Turkey's membership by the EEC. These two factors led Turkey into an identity crisis in the 1990s and resulted in new identity creations. These new identities also helped Turkey to reorient her foreign policy and for example, Turkish-Islamic identity created in the 1970s was useful for Turkey's foreign policy for the Central Asia and Caucasia.

Turkey's Western Identity in the Early 21st Century

This part of the study deals with transformation of Turkey's western identity between 2002 – when Justice and Development Party (AKP) gained most of the seats in the parliament in 2002 general elections – and 2014. Turkey kept warm relations with the EU till 2005 benefiting from her western identity. Turkey's western identity was affirmed with the accession negotiations, yet it was taken under question during the Iraqi

Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations

Occupation by the USA and when Turkey set relations with Islamist countries like Sudan, Iran and with Islamist organizations like the Hamas. Besides, Turkey's NATO membership became an important discussion topic when Turkey was reluctant, only at the beginning, of an armed operation against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014 for domestic security reasons (Schanzer, 2015). The EU accession negotiations started in 2004 almost came to a full stop in 2005. The souring relations with the EU and the rising tensions in the US-Turkish relations following the Iraqi Occupation caused a second wave of identity crisis in Turkey leading her to have cooperative relations with non-western countries. Turkey was slow in implementing the reforms related to the EU membership after October 2005 and started to give some signs that she would have an Islamic social agenda, which demonstrated the signal that Turkey's western oriented foreign policy might change (Baran, 2010: 126).

Turkey's foreign policy interest focused mostly on the Middle Eastern issues starting from 2008 and political, economic, commercial, cultural relations were increased with the Arab world. Turkey facilitated the negotiations between Israel and Syria and took active steps for the resolution of the crisis regarding the Iranian nuclear program in 2009 (Tezgür and Grigorescu, 2014: 257). The doctrines of neo-Ottomanism came to life in Turkish foreign policy assigning Turkey a mediator role for the regional conflicts and making her a significant regional player (Murinson, 2006: 953). It might be possible to explain this new orientation in Turkish foreign policy with the rise of historical and cultural factors since contrary to the former governments, the Turkish government started to give an emphasize on the Islamic and Middle Eastern characteristics of Turkey as the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire (Oğuzlu, 2008: 12-13). However, Turkish elites were previously thinking that western identity would become prominent by less emphasizing Islamic and eastern characteristics of Turkish identity and this would rise the hopes of getting the EU membership (Oğuzlu, 2008: 13). Nevertheless, Turkey's increasing relations with the Middle Eastern countries and cooperation with anti-western states and organizations – also contacts with the Hamas leaders and Sudanese President al-Bashir in 2006 and 2008 – put a noticeable distance between Turkey and her western identity. Turkish foreign policy's changing orientation created reactions in the West, where Turkey's western identity is supposed to be affirmed, and Turkey's weakening western identity resulted in fading relations with the West while building up relations and cooperation with the states following an anti-western policy like Russia.

Turkish-Russian Relations after the End of the Cold War

Turkey stayed on the track of a western-oriented foreign policy during the first years of the 21st century until the relations began to sour with the EU in 2005. However, Turkey's change of a track in foreign policy that resulted in turning towards the Muslim countries and cooperating with states and organizations considered as the enemies of the western values brought along the concerns over Turkey's withdrawal from western oriented policies. Along with the increasing relations with the Muslim countries of the Middle East and the Balkans in particular, Turkey turned to Russia – another torn country – for cooperation despite the West. Even though Turkey kept warm relations during the Independence War in the early 1920s, that did not take so long because Turkey chose to be a part of the western bloc during the Cold War years following the WWII. The relations were kept at minimum level with the Soviet Union until its collapse. When the relations with the West got tense with the western embargoes in the

1970s especially after the intervention of Turkey into Cyprus in 1974, Turkey sought ways to develop cooperation with the Soviet Union to establish state economic enterprises in particular (Kazgan and Ulçenko, 2003: 151). The relations with Russia gradually began to flourish in the 1990s depending on cooperation at a pragmatic basis after the collapse of the Union.

The collapse of the Soviet Union also terminated the threat on the eastern border of Turkey. This also made significant changes in security perceptions in the region ending the 400 years-old Russian threat (Aktürk, 2006: 340). Within the first six months of 1992 Turkish and Russian ministers of foreign affairs paid reciprocal visits and 15 different agreements were signed for scientific, technological, educational, cultural and economic cooperation (Aktürk, 2006: 340). On the other hand, Turkish-Russian relations witnessed rivalry in the Central Asia and Caucasia during the same period (Kınıkloğlu and Morkva, 2007: 534). Turkey's activities in the region made Russia to consider Turkey as a proxy of the USA (Hill and Taşpınar, 2006: 83). Nevertheless, this rivalry did not prevent the relations from progressing. Turkey and Russia paid mutual importance in deepening relations. Turkey and Russia signed Eurasia-Action Plan in 2001 to increase dialogue in commerce, culture, tourism and cooperation in trade, energy – following the rising dialogue two countries decided to have close cooperation in energy sector – and defence and they announced a joint declaration to fight terrorism (Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2015). Together with the increasing relations, high-level meetings started, and Putin and Erdogan came together for four times in 2005 (Kınıkloğlu and Morkva, 2007: 535).

Following these high-level visits in 2005, it is possible to find out some changes in general foreign policy. Turkey's regular disappointment by the EU for the membership despite the start of accession negotiations also reduced Turkey's willingness for accession as an unwanted country. On the contrary, both Turkey and Russia wanted the EU to recognize them as European Great Powers with an important imperial past and roles in the Middle East and the Eurasia trying to revive their imperial state traditions (Hill and Taşpınar, 2006: 84-85). Not different from Turkey, Russia had declared 'Near Abroad' doctrine stressing the differences of interests between Russia and the West in 1993 (Yapıcı, 2010: 284). The failure of the Atlanticist school objecting to the imperial past resulted in the rise of Eurosianists denouncing integration with the West and westernization (Yapıcı, 2007: 17). It is remarkable that Turkey and Russia have developed pragmatic relations during the same period when two countries started to leave the Atlanticist stand, which also affirms Huntington's thesis of torn countries.

According to Warhola and Bezci, Turkey's getting closer to Russia was the result of the worsening relations with the West and the USA in particular and it came to the scene when the relations got worse between them and the West. They also stress that the quality of their relations with the West determines the course of events between Turkey and Russia (Warhola and Bezci, 2013: 3-4). It could be claimed that Turkey's relations with Russia were way better than her relations with the USA between 2002-2014. One of the reasons behind these better relations with Russia could be anti-western discourses of Turkish and Russian governments and increased Western stress on Russia following the invasion of Ukrainian territory of Crimea by Russia in 2014 (İdiz, 2015). Trenin mentions that both Turkey and Russia have an imperial past, fought with each other in destructive wars in late 19th century, experienced revolutions in their homelands at the beginning of the 20th century and both were excluded by the Europeans owing to their Muslim and Orthodox Christian identities. He also asserts that despite their

Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations

different political views and differences in their regimes – Russia an authoritarian one and Turkey a liberal and democratic one – these two countries are giving efforts to define their new identities as the two largest neighbors of Europe and are subject to serious social transformations (Trenin, 2015).

The cooperation in tourism, investment and trade between the two countries increased dramatically between 2005 and 2014 and Russia became the second biggest trading partner of Turkey after the EU starting from 2008 (Flanagan, 2015). In the recent years before 2014, Turkey and Russia started to give more emphasis on the energy and trade issues following the visit of Putin in 2014 and signed another agreement for energy cooperation with 100billion USD trading volume until 2020. What is more, during the same visit Russia declared that Turkey was chosen for transferring natural gas to the southern Europe instead of EU member Bulgaria and this movement is also very important to show that the two countries came together also in strategic issues (Tharoor, 2015). These partnership movements of the two 'torn countries' in the process of new identities make them come closer for further cooperation, yet mostly at pragmatic and strategic partnerships.

Conclusion

Turkey's westernization process is a continuing one. The westernization movements in Turkey, unlike the European countries, started as a top-down process mostly aiming technical and military modernization, which transformed Turkey into a torn country as Huntington described. The western identity Turkey wanted to gain during the early Republican Era was an artificial one away from the basic needs of the society and public opinion, which eventually created an identity crisis. What is more, the western identity of Turkey gained recognition in the West during the Cold War owing to the security perceptions and Turkey became a member state of the western (European) organizations for security reasons and needs of the West. However, her western identity started to weaken when the security threat from the Eastern Bloc died out and Turkey's membership application to the EEC was rejected in the last years of the Cold War, which led her into an identity crisis. This identity crisis helped Turkey to create herself a new identity. A conservative moderate Islamic identity Turkey began to have starting from the early 2000s has caused significant changes on her relations with the West and has made her to have interest-based relations with Russia, another non-western conservative state, aiming strategic partnership. However, Turkey is still away from getting into a strategic alliance as she historically stepped in for it with the West.

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Öncel Sençerman

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Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations

Article Info

Received: July 31 2022

Accepted: August 12 2022

How to cite this article:

Sençerman, Ö. (2022). Turkey's Identity Crisis and Its Reflections on the Turkish-Russian Relations. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 75, pp. 62 – 71.