



# A Trilateral EU-US-Turkey Strategy for the Neighbourhood: The Urgency of Now

Nathalie Tocci

## Abstract

Turkey, the European Union and the United States have always shared the same vision for the European neighbourhood. During the Cold War and its immediate aftermath, this shared vision neither necessarily meant agreement on policy means, nor did it call for joint action. 9/11, the end of the Middle East Peace Process, the search for a credible alternative to EU enlargement, and Turkey's growing regional prominence converged, upping the stakes for a joint EU-US-Turkey strategy. Yet the greater the need for joint action, the less likely it appeared to be. Then came the Arab spring, which has transformed, once again, the tone of the debate, making a trilateral strategy for the neighbourhood both more desirable and more feasible. Such a strategy could include the establishment of a standing trilateral working group for the neighbourhood, which would determine whether, when and in what policy areas complementary action should proceed, separately or simultaneously. Broadly speaking, a strategy would foresee diplomatic public and private interventions, assistance, trade and security cooperation. In some areas, such as diplomacy, assistance and trade, there could be a useful division of labour between the three. In the field of security instead, as currently demonstrated in Syria, joint action would be warranted.

**Keywords:** *European Union / United States / Turkey / Mediterranean countries / European Neighbourhood Policy*

## A Trilateral EU-US-Turkey Strategy for the Neighbourhood: The Urgency of Now

Nathalie Tocci\*

### Introduction

Turkey, the European Union and the United States have always, broadly speaking, shared the same vision for the European neighbourhood. Be it during the Cold War, in the decades that followed, or in the aftermath of the Arab spring, the three have consistently called for stability, prosperity, and, compatibly with their particularistic interests, peace and democracy in the region. During the Cold War and its immediate aftermath, this shared vision neither necessarily meant agreement on policy means, nor did it call for joint action. With few exceptions, the foreign policies of the three proceeded along parallel paths. 9/11, the end of the Middle East Peace Process, the search for a credible alternative to EU enlargement, and Turkey's growing regional prominence converged, upping the stakes for a joint EU-US-Turkey strategy. Yet the greater the need for joint action, the less likely it appeared to be. Particularly between 2009 and 2011, talk in the West about the "loss" of Turkey, Turkey's "change of axis" and its "drift to the East" was commonplace. True, Turkey was recognized as an increasingly important actor in its neighbourhood. Yet the prospects of a joint transatlantic strategy with it seemed dim. Then came the Arab spring, which has transformed, once again, the tone of the debate. On the one hand, Turkey's regional role and the synergies between Turkey and its transatlantic partners in the southern neighbourhood are as critical as ever. On the other hand, Turkish foreign policy seems to have entered into its "third wave",<sup>1</sup> bringing the country back into the transatlantic fold. But assuming a trilateral strategy is both desirable and possible, what would it consist of?

### 1. When Turkey, the United States and Europe proceeded along parallel foreign policy paths

As the Cold War came to a close, a new era of *pax Americana* was in the making in the Middle East, epitomized by the 1990-91 Gulf war, the no-fly zone and sanctions policy towards Iraq, and the US-sponsored Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). The United States was dominant in the region both militarily and politically. So much so that the entire region came to be classified according to the countries' relationship with the US. On one side, the "moderate" camp, which could count on copious Western economic, political and military support: *primus inter pares* Israel, followed by Egypt and Jordan,

---

Paper prepared for the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), March 2012.

\* Nathalie Tocci is Deputy Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

<sup>1</sup> Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey's Third Wave - And the Coming Quest for Strategic Reassurance", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 26 October 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/turkeys-third-wave-and-the-coming-quest-for-strategic-reassurance>.

which signed a peace treaty with Israel, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC), which contrasted Iranian hegemony, as well as Tunisia, Morocco and, later, Algeria, which cooperated with the West in the fight against terrorism and irregular migration. On the other side, the “radicals”, i.e., those countries and movements which opposed American-Israeli hegemony of the Middle East and were isolated or openly fought by the West and Israel through sanctions and wars, but could boast revolutionary credentials towards their respective populations: Syria, Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah.

To the north and east instead, the European Union was in the lead, primarily through its enlargement to the Central and Eastern European countries, aimed at reuniting Europe after the Cold War divide. Despite its initial blunder, as the 1990s progressed, the EU also took the lead in the Western Balkans. As the violence subsided and it came to stabilizing, reconciling, democratizing and modernizing the post-war and post-communist region, the EU was in the front line.

In both neighbourhoods, the United States and Europe complemented each other. In the Mediterranean, the EU constructed around the MEPP its Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), aimed at embedding Arab-Israeli peace through cooperation and integration in the broader Euro-Mediterranean space. Indeed, as and when the MEPP faltered in the early 2000s, the EU vaunted the fact that the EMP represented the one and only forum in which Arabs and Israelis still sat around the same table. In Eastern Europe instead, the US and NATO were critical in pacifying the Balkans and thereafter supported the process of EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. Throughout the 1990s, the US also engaged in robust energy diplomacy in the Caucasus and the Caspian regions aimed at promoting European energy security while bypassing Russia and Iran. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline would have probably never seen the light of day without active American diplomacy in the late 1990s.

In this context, Turkey by and large followed its own foreign policy course. True, it was critical to (although not uncritical of) the implementation of the no-fly zone and sanctions policy in Iraq; it supported the MEPP; and participated in NATO operations in the Balkans. It was also a cardinal hub in the transatlantic conception of European energy security. But Turkish foreign policy and its approach to the neighbourhood followed a logic of its own. To the south, Turkey was singularly concerned with Iraq, Cyprus and the Aegean. Indeed, while part of the EMP, Turkey never shared the European vision of the Euro-Mediterranean space. Never regarding itself as a Mediterranean power,<sup>2</sup> Turkey strove to establish closer relations with the EU, first through the customs union in 1996, and then through the accession process after 1999. To its north and east, Turkey turned to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, intent on acting as a role model for the Turkic world, redirecting these countries away from the Russian fold. The premises for a trilateral EU-US-Turkey strategy in the neighbourhood in the 1990s simply were not there.

---

<sup>2</sup> Meliha Altunışık, “Turkey as a ‘Mediterranean Power’”, in Nathalie Tocci (ed.), *Turkey: Reluctant Mediterranean Power*, Washington, German Marshall Fund, 2011 (Mediterranean Papers), [http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Mediterranean-paper\\_10.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Mediterranean-paper_10.pdf).

## 2. Then Turkey stepped in the transatlantic vacuum amidst cries of its drift to the East

As the 1990s gave way to the new millennium, the logic of a trilateral strategy became increasingly compelling. But the more desirable a joint strategy became, the more its feasibility waned. With the benefit of hindsight, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought with it the gradual, albeit erratic, decline of *pax Americana* in the Middle East. True, 9/11 and the ensuing war in Iraq gave the optical illusion of American hegemony in the Middle East being at its peak. Yet at a deeper and more structural level, US engagement in the region was gradually declining. A Middle East Peace Process, worthy of its name, ended at Camp David in August 2000. Even though the establishment of the Quartet - composed of the US, the EU, Russia and the UN - did not alter Washington's primacy in Mideast mediation,<sup>3</sup> the peace process was never truly resurrected. Other regional actors started filling the vacuum of effective mediation, be they Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey. The US also started scaling down its military presence in the region by reducing its naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, where American and European capabilities are now roughly equivalent. This scaling down process has culminated with the US withdrawal from Iraq, where other regional actors, foremost Turkey, have started filling the gap.<sup>4</sup>

While American hard power declined in the Middle East, European soft power did likewise in Eastern Europe. Following the big bang enlargement of 2004, the EU was struck by "enlargement fatigue", a condition which aggravated first with the Union's constitutional-institutional travails in 2005-2009, and then with the eurozone crisis in 2010-2012, peppered all along with the rise of populism, euroscepticism and extreme right-wing politics across the continent. The Union was well aware that countries to its east still faced key challenges to their transformation processes and looked upon it as a guiding light. It continued to pursue enlargement towards the Western Balkans and Turkey, but the appeal, credibility and thus effectiveness of the process severely declined.<sup>5</sup> Particularly with the nationalization of enlargement policy, whereby member states press to insert their own particularistic conditions in the process, enlargement itself lost much of its gloss. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Turkey.<sup>6</sup> Further east, all the EU could muster was the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), an enlargement-lite initiative with an inbuilt flaw when it came to Eastern Europe: it was not enlargement. In the Mediterranean, where there is no appetite for EU membership, the ENP could have represented an appealing alternative, but the policy fell well short of its original intent of offering, conditionally, "all but institutions".<sup>7</sup> At the multilateral

<sup>3</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "The EU, the Middle East Quartet and (In)Effective Multilateralism", in *MERCURY Papers*, No. 9 (June 2011), [http://www.iai.it/pdf/Mercury/Mercury-epaper\\_09.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/Mercury/Mercury-epaper_09.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Ian O. Lesser, "Strategy Toward Europe's Neighbourhood and the Turkish Role: An American Perspective", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 5 April 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/strategy-toward-europes-neighborhood-and-the-turkish-role-an-american-perspective>.

<sup>5</sup> Tanja A. Börzel, "When Europe hits...beyond its borders: Europeanization and the near abroad", in *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4-5 (September/December 2011), p. 394-413, <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/cep/journal/v9/n4/pdf/cep20118a.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Christophe Hillion, "The Creeping Nationalisation of the EU Enlargement Policy", in *SIEPS Report*, No. 2010/6 (November 2010), <http://www.sieps.se/en/publikationer/the-creeping-nationalisation-of-the-eu-enlargement-policy-20106>.

<sup>7</sup> Nathalie Tocci and Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "Rethinking the EU's Mediterranean Policies Post-1/11", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 1106 (March 2011), <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiw1106.pdf>.

level instead, the absence of a genuine Arab-Israeli peace process was the nail in the coffin of the EMP, and its stillborn successor, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). In other words, in a post-enlargement Union, the political weight of the EU has dramatically diminished both in the southern Mediterranean and, above all, in Eastern Europe. The decline in Europe's soft power in its neighbourhood opened the space for regional actors such as Turkey (and Russia) to play a more assertive role. Although the role of Turkey (and indeed Russia) is viewed as being very different from that of the EU,<sup>8</sup> particularly in the Eastern neighbourhood, they have nonetheless come to occupy a field left fallow by the Union.

Indeed, the relative decline of the United States and of the European Union in the neighbourhood has been partly offset by the resurgence of Turkey.<sup>9</sup> Across its neighbourhood and in policy areas as diverse as security, trade, energy and migration, Turkish foreign policy has fundamentally transformed since the end of the Cold War. In some cases, such as Turkish policies in the Balkans, the Black Sea or in the fields of trade and migration, the rise in Turkey's level of engagement since the end of the Cold War has been incremental. In other areas, such as in the Middle East and in the realm of security policy, the shift has been more abrupt and visible. But in both cases, far from the inward-looking Turkey of the 1990s with a highly securitized and defensive foreign policy, 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey is outward looking, deploying the whole panoply of its soft power tools to deepen its reach in the neighbourhood.

More precisely, Turkey's resurgence in the neighbourhood has come partly as a consequence of the US's partial retreat from the Middle East and the waning credibility of the EU accession process. As for the US, the 2003 war in Iraq triggered Turkey's attempts to foster regional integration with its southern neighbours and to venture into the choppy waters of Mideast mediation.<sup>10</sup> As concerns the EU, while it would be mistaken to argue that Turkey's neighbourhood policy has been a linear reaction to its distancing from the EU in view of the latter's second thoughts on Turkey's membership, Ankara has clearly had to adapt to a post-enlargement Europe. Turkey has tried to turn its hybrid identity into a foreign policy asset in the absence of the institutional power of EU membership.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the second wave of Turkish foreign policy has been partly a reaction to the more permissive external environment created, *inter alia*, by the US's retreat from the European neighbourhood and by the implications of post-enlargement Europe.

The new Turkey, coupled with the partial retreat of the EU and US from the region, upped the stakes for a trilateral strategy. Not only do the three roughly share the same aims in the region, but joining forces in a moment of transatlantic retreat appeared all

---

<sup>8</sup> Particularly in the Caucasus, the EU, while generally being viewed as weak, is nonetheless considered as relatively benign, whereas Turkey (and more so Russia) is considered as being driven exclusively by national interests and realpolitik.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald H. Linden *et al.*, *Turkey and its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Nathalie Tocci, Chapter 6 in *Turkey's European Future: Behind the Scenes of America's Influence on EU-Turkey Relations*, New York and London, New York University Press, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Bahar Rumelili, "Turkey: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Socialization in a Post-Enlargement Europe", in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (March 2011), p. 235-249, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07036337.2011.543528>.

the more compelling given that, alongside Turkey, other powers whose views differ widely from those of the West, started flexing their muscles in the neighbourhood, be it Russia in the Caucasus, as epitomized by the August 2008 war in Georgia, or Iran in the Middle East. But precisely because the resurgence of Turkey occurred partly as a reaction to the vacuum left by its transatlantic allies, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the prospects for a joint transatlantic strategy with Turkey seemed dim. As Turkey turned its hybridity into a foreign policy asset, it came to value its newfound “strategic autonomy”.<sup>12</sup> This did not necessarily mean its distancing from the West, as evident in its support for the Annan Plan in Cyprus, its attempted reconciliation with Armenia, its cooperation with the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with the EU in the Balkans. But it did mean that the foremost determinant of Turkish foreign policy is the Turkish body politic itself. Hence, when US and EU interests clashed with Turkey’s, Ankara had fewer qualms parting ways with its transatlantic allies, be this over Russia, Cyprus, Iran, Syria, Israel or the Palestinians. Particularly in 2009-2010, as the strategic Turkish-Israeli alliance foundered and Turkish-Iranian relations warmed, the chorus of Western cries of Turkey’s “drift to the east” became increasingly shrill,<sup>13</sup> leading some to provocatively question Turkey’s NATO membership *tout court*.<sup>14</sup> A trilateral strategy for the neighbourhood was definitely off the cards.

### 3. The Arab spring and the alignment of the transatlantic stars

Then came the Arab spring in 2011, and the dynamics between Turkey and its transatlantic partners changed once again. True, critical challenges bedeviling joint action remain, but the desirability as well as the feasibility of acting together particularly in the southern neighbourhood<sup>15</sup> have never been so high.

#### 3.1. Pending challenges

The radical change in the external context brought about by the Arab spring has added to the logic of an EU-US-Turkey strategy in the southern neighbourhood, but has not, alone, swept away the obstacles to joint action. First and foremost amongst which is the dire state of EU-Turkey relations. As well known, Turkey’s accession process seems to be irredeemably stuck, with no negotiating chapter having been opened since June 2010 and political dialogue between Turkey and the Council of Ministers and

---

<sup>12</sup> Şaban Kardaş, “Quest for Strategic Autonomy Continues, or How to Make Sense of Turkey’s ‘New Wave’”, in *On Turkey Analysis*, 28 November 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/quest-for-strategic-autonomy-continues-or-how-to-make-sense-of-turkeys-new-wave>.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Kitfield, “Who Lost Turkey?”, in *National Journal.com*, 21 June 2010 (updated 7 November 2010), [http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/ns\\_20100621\\_3616.php](http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/ns_20100621_3616.php); Michael Rubin, “Turkey, From Ally to Enemy”, in *Commentary*, Vol. 130, No. 1 (July-August 2010), p. 81-86, <http://www.michaelrubin.org/7639/turkey-ally-enemy>.

<sup>14</sup> David Schenker, “A NATO without Turkey?”, in *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704013004574517210622936876.html>.

<sup>15</sup> In what follows I will concentrate on the North Africa and Middle East region. The Arab spring has, inevitably, changed the name of the game for the southern rather than the eastern neighbourhood. In the latter, the feasibility as well as the desirability of a trilateral strategy is not as clear. While it is true that synergies between the EU, the US and Turkey exist also in the Caucasus or in Central Asia, the obstacles to joint action are far greater, foremost amongst which are Turkey’s delicate balancing act in its relationship with Russia, as well as its interrupted reconciliation process with Armenia.

European Council risking interruption (by Turkey) as Cyprus' EU presidency approaches and inter-communal talks on the island near a breakdown. The Cyprus conflict does not only represent the major thorn in the side of Turkey' EU membership prospects. It also hampers EU-Turkey foreign policy cooperation, as evidenced by Cyprus' blocking of EU-Turkey negotiations over the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) chapter or of Turkey's participation in EU discussions on sanctions against Syria.

But if Cyprus represents the major official problem in EU-Turkey ties, France represents by far the major political problem. This is true not only for Turkey's membership prospects, but also for EU-Turkey foreign policy cooperation, as highlighted by President Sarkozy's initial reluctance to engage Turkey in transatlantic discussions over Libya. Here too, bilateral French-Turkish ties touched their nadir following the French Senate's vote on the criminalization of denial of the Armenian genocide in December 2011, triggering Ankara's recall of its ambassador to France.<sup>16</sup> EU officials, and notably Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle, High Representative Catherine Ashton and Trade Commissioner Karel de Gucht, appreciating the acute costs of the current state of EU-Turkey ties, have attempted to revamp the relationship through a "positive agenda". The agenda features visa facilitation through multiple entry visas and visa free exemptions, resolving problems in the functioning of the EU-Turkey customs union and extending it to public procurement, and, last but not least, foreign policy cooperation. It remains to be seen, however, whether the agenda will translate into practice and whether it will suffice to restore trust in the relationship. Above all it is doubtful that anything short of a credible accession process will put the EU back in a position to assist Turkey's own domestic transformation journey, which risks going off course as the country grapples with heightened challenges regarding freedom of expression, the reigniting of the Kurdish question, and the troubled path towards reaching a new civilian constitution.

As for US-Turkey relations, as discussed at length below, a rapid process of interest realignment has been in the making over the last year. Whether over Iraq, Iran, Syria or the Arab spring more broadly, Turkish-American interests have increasingly converged, sweeping away alarmist cries in Washington about Turkey's axis shift. Hence President Obama's acknowledgement that Prime Minister Erdoğan is amongst the five world leaders with whom he has established trust-based relations.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding this, the fly in the ointment of Turkish-American relations remains Israel.<sup>18</sup> Following the flotilla incident in June 2010, Turkey and Israel have not only failed to make up. Their relations spiralled downwards following the publication of the UN's Palmer report, which justified Israel's naval blockade of Gaza, providing further ammunition for Israel's refusal to apologize for the killing of eight Turkish citizens aboard the Mavi Marmara

---

<sup>16</sup> In February 2012 the bill was judged unconstitutional by the French Constitutional Court bringing back a degree of normalcy in French-Turkish ties.

<sup>17</sup> In an interview with Fareed Zakaria, the Editor-at-Large of *Time* magazine, President Obama named Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak, and British Prime Minister David Cameron among leaders that he was able to forge "bonds of trust".

<sup>18</sup> Soli Özel and Mehmet Ali Tuğtan, "How Will the United States Avoid Paralysis with Turkey?", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 12 October 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/how-will-the-united-states-avoid-paralysis-with-turkey>.

and triggering Turkey's expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and cancellation of military cooperation.

Furthermore, Turkey's Cyprus-related problems with the EU and Israel-related problems with the US have converged to give rise to a worrying trend in regional geopolitics.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, Turkey's warming with Arab countries and its distancing from Israel, which has been left bereft of regional allies, has brought about a regional realignment between Israel, Cyprus and Greece. Beyond the banal "my enemy's enemy is my friend" rationale, energy politics are at the heart of this newfound alliance. Israel, in fact, discovered large reserves of natural gas in the Tamar and Leviathan basins in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2010.<sup>20</sup> The two basins lie close to the Cypriot-Israeli maritime border, inducing the two countries to sign a maritime border agreement in December 2010 to delimit their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and cooperate on energy exploration in Cyprus' EEZ. Cyprus has also agreed to allow Israel to construct an Israeli base on its territory where Israeli natural gas will be liquefied. Tensions escalated when the Republic of Cyprus began exploratory drilling close to the Leviathan basin in September 2011. Rejecting Greek Cyprus' exclusive right to conduct the drilling prior to a comprehensive agreement with the Turkish Cypriots, Turkey sent its own exploration vessel to the area and threatened to scale up its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Beyond disputes over gas exploration rights, Israel, Cyprus and Greece are also exploring the construction of a 1000 km long sub-sea power cable linking the three countries.

A trilateral EU-US-Turkey strategy in the neighbourhood is thus far from a done deal. Bilateral EU-Turkey, US-Turkey relations, as well as regional problems continue to hamper the search for joint action. But an arguably more powerful set of dynamics is also at play in the region, pushing in the opposite direction. The Arab spring has demonstrated that none of the three actors can act effectively alone in a neighbourhood undergoing historic transformation. Three are the reasons why in a post-Arab spring context both the imperative and the feasibility of a trilateral strategy towards the neighbourhood have significantly increased.

### 3.2. *The monumental challenges facing the neighbourhood*

First, the logic of joint action has become more compelling because of the monumental challenges facing the southern neighbourhood, challenges so great that no external actor can tackle them alone. Politically, the southern Mediterranean has become even more fragmented, polarized and complex than in the past.<sup>21</sup> Within it, some countries

---

<sup>19</sup> Ebru Oğurlu, "Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 1204 (March 2012), <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiw1204.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> The Tamar basin is estimated to have approximately 250 bcm of gas, a quantity that would meet Israeli domestic energy needs for the next four decades. The Leviathan basin is estimated to have 500 bcm. See Theodore C. Kariotis, "Hydrocarbons and the Law of the Sea in the Eastern Mediterranean: Implications for Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey", in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring 2011), p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Silvia Colombo and Nathalie Tocci (eds), *The Challenges of State Sustainability in the Mediterranean*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, September 2011 (IAI Research Papers No. 3), <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=665>. For an explanation of the different outcomes of the Arab spring see Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East", in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (January 2012), p. 127-149.



have experienced mass uprisings, but with radically different outcomes. Tunisia is tentatively moving towards democracy through a secular-Islamist reformist coalition, while Egypt remains under the firm grip of military tutelage. Libya and Syria, having attempted this route, became embroiled in civil war-like conditions, with the major difference between the two countries, to date, being the readiness of the international community to intervene. Other countries have resisted mass unrest, but through radically different means. Morocco and, to a lesser extent, Jordan are attempting the route of partial incremental reforms, while Algeria, and the GCC states are quelling public discontent by both repressing and buying off their populations with their energy-related wealth.

Such diverse processes and outcomes are reshaping the geopolitical picture in the region. The post-Camp David I constellation of the Middle East is rapidly changing. No longer neatly divided between “moderates” and “radicals”, today’s Middle East escapes simple categorizations between pro- and anti-Western states. Egypt, while still a key American ally, is vying to recapture the mantle of Arab leadership, brokering intra-Palestinian reconciliation and distancing itself from Israel. Fatah and Hamas are tentatively edging towards reconciliation, as the former is finally recognizing that it has reached the end of the MEPP road, while the latter is cautiously moving away from Damascus and testing the ground in Amman. Israel, fearing the outcomes of the Arab spring, has paradoxically found itself in the same camp as Iran, both being deeply sceptical of a regime change in Syria. Despite significant differences in approaches to political rights and freedoms, the Arab monarchies of the Gulf on one side, and of Jordan and Morocco on the other, are uniting, with the latter two being invited into the GCC, a body whose anti-democratic colours were flown in Bahrain. In short, the categories, balances and patterns of conflict and cooperation of the post Camp David I era are rapidly vanishing.

While the politics and geopolitics of the Middle East are transforming, the socio-economic situation is simply getting worse. As is well known, socio-economic ills - ranging from poverty, rising food prices, inequalities and mass unemployment particularly amongst the young - lay at the heart of the anti-authoritarian uprisings. Yet across the region, and particularly in those countries that either experienced or are experiencing regime overthrows, economic ills have dramatically deepened. According to the International Monetary Fund, Tunisia and Egypt saw their GDP growth in 2011 drop from 3% to 0%, and 5% to 1%, respectively. Libya’s economy is thought to have contracted by over 50% after its six-month long civil war. Foreign direct investment in Egypt plunged from \$6.4 billion in 2010 to \$500 million in 2011; in Libya it dropped from \$3.8 billion to almost zero. The causes of these dramatic drops range from rampant lawlessness, frequent strikes and governance structures in disarray. Needless to say, in such a context, the much-needed structural socio-economic and political reforms required to overhaul the private and public sectors away from patronage and protectionism are nowhere in sight.

### *3.3. The persisting flaws in the transatlantic response*

Second, while the challenges have grown exponentially, both the United States and the European Union have not truly reversed their disengagement and flawed policies of the last decade. In the vacuum, other global and regional powers are increasingly making

their voices heard: Russia and China siding with Assad in Syria, Iran, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia active in regional diplomacy and, of course, Turkey.

American military disengagement, particularly from North Africa, was vividly reconfirmed in Libya. Of course, the US remains by far the most powerful actor in the region and is the primary guarantor of security not only for Israel, but also for Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf. True also, without American support, NATO's intervention in Libya would not have been possible. But in Libya, France and the UK, and not the US, were in the driver's seat. Washington sat comfortably in the back seat. Also economically, the American response does not reflect the magnitude of change in the region. Afflicted, like the EU, by severe economic woes, Washington's economic response has been unimpressive. By far the biggest recipient of American assistance of the countries of the Arab spring is Egypt. The US has committed \$150m to Egypt in emergency assistance,<sup>22</sup> as well as a conditional \$1bn in debt swaps.<sup>23</sup> But when it comes to the other Arab countries, levels of assistance fall significantly behind.

As for the EU and its Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Union's response was characteristically disappointing, marred by the typical divisions between member states. The Union initially hesitated vis-à-vis both Tunisia and Egypt, due, *inter alia*, to the stubborn initial support by some member states for Ben Ali and Mubarak. In Libya, while France and the UK were in the international front line pushing for intervention, they were held back by Germany, which abstained on UN Security Council resolution 1973. Needless to say that in a context of such bitter intra-EU division, a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission to lead the intervention in Libya was simply not in the cards. All the EU could agree on was EUFOR-Libya, a CSDP mission to support humanitarian efforts that would be activated only if requested by the UN-OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), a condition that was highly unlikely to materialize. Likewise on Syria, while the EU ultimately converged on tough sanctions, initially several member states - Cyprus, Estonia and to some extent Germany - expressed reservations about sanctions targeting Assad himself.

The EU has fared better on the review of its neighbourhood policy. The review of the ENP has been carried out amidst self-admission of past failures. Indeed, high-ranking EU officials such as High Representative Catherine Ashton and European Commissioner for Enlargement and the ENP Stefan Füle have candidly recognized the failures of the Union in the past. In the words of Füle: "We must show humility about the past. Europe was not vocal enough in defending human rights and local democratic forces in the region. Too many of us fell prey to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region. This was not even Realpolitik. It was, at best, short-termism - and the kind of short-termism that makes the long-term ever more difficult to build"<sup>24</sup>.

The motto of the ENP review are its "3 m's": money, markets and mobility, to be deployed in the neighbourhood following the principle of "more for more". Indeed, much

<sup>22</sup> In addition to the \$1.3bn in military assistance and \$250m in economic assistance.

<sup>23</sup> Out of a total debt to the US of \$3bn.

<sup>24</sup> Štefan Füle, *Speech on the recent events in North Africa* (SPEECH/11/130), 28 February 2011, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/11/130>.

of the criticism of the ENP in the past had revolved around the fact that the EU was neither willing to offer appetizing carrots to its neighbours<sup>25</sup> nor ready to grant such carrots conditionally on the basis of the neighbours' progress on reforms.<sup>26</sup> To their credit, EU institutions have attempted to reverse these shortcomings, raising the value of its "3 m's" and doing so particularly towards those countries in the neighbourhood which are undergoing either revolutionary (Tunisia and Egypt) or evolutionary (Morocco and Jordan) change, thus granting "more" to countries willing to engage in "more" reform.

As far as "money" is concerned, the Union has offered an additional €1.2bn for the neighbourhood as a whole, on top of the €5.7bn already programmed in 2011-13. Of these, €35m will be spent on the new SPRING programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) for countries progressing on political reform,<sup>27</sup> €146m on Erasmus Mundus grants for academic exchange, and €22m on the new Civil Society Facility to help civil society organizations in the region develop their advocacy capacities, monitor reforms and evaluate EU programmes. In addition to grants, the European Investment Bank has increased its funding by €1bn and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has extended its mandate, with the possibility of granting an additional €2.5bn per year to the region. Turning to "mobility", the EU has extended the reach of its Mobility Partnerships to the southern Mediterranean, launching new partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco in October 2011.<sup>28</sup> As concerns "markets", the Union is negotiating "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements" with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan.

On closer inspection however, the main failures of the ENP, encapsulated in the motto "more for more" are still there. While an increase in assistance is laudable, particularly at a time of profound economic distress in Europe, the magnitude of this assistance falls far short of what is needed to support structural reforms in the neighbourhood. In particular, the amounts cited above apply to fifteen countries with a combined population of over 400 million over three years (2011-2013), i.e., an average of €5,6 per capita per year.

Mobility partnerships, while a step forward in fortress Europe's approach towards the neighbourhood, also have several inbuilt problems. Mobility partnerships are non-binding and rely on the voluntary participation of the member states, which retain the principal competences over immigration matters. Also, and above all, they provide far too meagre incentives in terms of legal migration (essentially limited to students, researchers, and skilled workers), while continuing to demand much in terms of readmission and the fight against irregular migration. In other words, for many

---

<sup>25</sup> Judith Kelly, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighbourhood Policy", in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 2006), p. 29-55, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00613.x/pdf>; Tanja A. Börzel, "When Europe hits...", cit.

<sup>26</sup> Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Tobias Schumacher, "From Brussels with Love: Leverage, Benchmarking, and the Action Plans in the EU's Democratization Policy", in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (August 2011), p. 932-955.

<sup>27</sup> And in particular Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan.

<sup>28</sup> The aim of mobility partnerships is that of including legal migration opportunities for third countries as a counterpart to their commitments regarding irregular migration and readmission.

neighbouring countries, mobility partnerships are simply not worth the bargain, let alone providing an incentive for wholesale political reform.

A similar argument can be made for the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements. DCFTAs no doubt offer more from an EU perspective. But they also demand more in terms of the neighbouring countries' approximation with the *minutae* of the *acquis communautaire*, an approximation which countries at a lower level of economic and institutional development with no prospects of and interest in acceding to the EU balk at.<sup>29</sup> What the southern neighbours are interested in is the liberalization of trade in agriculture, which still accounted for 12% of GDP and 25% of the labour force in the southern Mediterranean between 2000 and 2009. Here some steps forward are being made, with an agreement with Morocco on the liberalization of agriculture ratified by the European Parliament in February 2012.<sup>30</sup> It remains to be seen however whether Morocco is the exception that confirms the rule or whether it truly marks a slow but steady opening of the EU's agriculture markets. Equally problematic is the fact that, whether through the association agreements or future DCFTAs, the EU still operates in a hub-and-spoke mode, doing little to promote intra-neighbourhood trade, particularly in the south where it is dismally low.<sup>31</sup>

Not only is the "more" wanting in many respects; the "for more" principle is also problematic. Setting aside old shortcomings in the EU's use of political conditionality, such as the vagueness of conditions and the absence of clear benchmarks,<sup>32</sup> in a post-Arab spring context, the EU is faced with a dilemma. Essentially, conditionality can only be applied towards those countries that have either experienced regime change or appear to be progressing towards reforms as a result of domestic - and not external - pressure. Tunisia and Morocco stand out as two prime cases. Yet in these countries the sense of popular empowerment generated by the fact that domestic change has come from within may render external conditionality inappropriate.<sup>33</sup> This is particularly so given that Arab peoples are well aware that the EU, up until recently, had happily engaged in unconditional partnerships with former dictators. Towards those countries in which authoritarianism remains robust - e.g., in the Gulf and Algeria - the EU remains woefully unable or unwilling to use conditionality. In other words, in a post-Arab spring situation, conditionality is possible where it is most inappropriate and impossible where it is most needed. As such, the EU may have to come to terms with the fact that in a post-enlargement and post-Arab spring context, conditionality may no longer represent a viable and desirable instrument to induce domestic change in the

<sup>29</sup> Rosemary Hollis, "No friend of democratization: Europe's Role in the genesis of the Arab Spring", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (January 2011), p. 81-94, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01058.x/pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> The agreement foresees an immediate 55% reduction of tariffs on Morocco agricultural and fisheries products (up from 33%) and a 70% reduction of tariffs on EU agricultural and fisheries products within 10 years (up from 1%).

<sup>31</sup> In order to establish a free trade area, each southern Mediterranean country would need to negotiate, sign and ratify individual free trade agreements, not only with the EU, but with all of the other neighbours, for a total of 121 agreements.

<sup>32</sup> Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Tobias Schumacher, "From Brussels with Love ...", cit.

<sup>33</sup> Rosa Balfour, "Changes and Continuities in EU-Mediterranean Relations After the Arab Spring", in Sven Biscop, Rosa Balfour and Michael Emerson (eds), *An Arab Springboard for EU Foreign Policy*, Gent, Academia Press, January 2012 (Egmont Papers No. 54), <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/paperegm/ep54.pdf>.

neighbourhood. Rather than top-down conditionality aimed at macro-level polity and institutional changes, the EU may have to develop further democracy promotion methods aimed at the micro-level - e.g., through civil society development - and at the meso-level - e.g. good governance and rule of law promotion within sectoral policy areas in which the EU engages with the neighbours.<sup>34</sup>

#### 3.4. *Partners in need: Turkey, the EU and the US in the neighbourhood*

Third, the logic of joint EU-US-Turkey action has become more compelling because Turkey itself has banged its head against the brick wall of its turbulent neighbourhood, increasing its readiness to cooperate with its transatlantic partners. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, a booming Turkey amidst a transatlantic community in crisis believed it could freelance in a multipolar world, confidently seeking “zero problems” with neighbours by (hyper) actively pursuing political, commercial and social ties with them and allying, when necessary, with other global powers. The Arab spring came as a cold shower on Turkey’s foreign policy optimism. As argued by Sinan Ülgen, Turkey’s utopia crumbled with the realization that seeking zero problems with neighbouring regimes inevitably meant turning a blind eye to the fact that neighbouring citizens were not having zero problems.<sup>35</sup>

Initially Turkey staggered. It had few qualms about supporting people power in Tunisia and Egypt, with whom Ankara either had few relations - i.e., Ben Ali’s Tunisia - or engaged in unspelt regional competition - Mubarak’s Egypt. Hence, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, for instance, was the first Western leader to call for Hosni Mubarak’s resignation in a televised speech on Al Jazeera, and President Abdullah Gül was the first head of state to meet with the Egyptian Supreme Council in Egypt. As the Arab spring progressed, however, Turkey’s *realpolitik* crudely came to the fore. In Libya, fearing a loss of commercial ties and the fate of Turkish workers in the country, Turkey initially opposed NATO’s enforcement of a no-fly zone and thereafter restricted its participation in the intervention to the humanitarian dimension. Ankara came round to officially calling for Gaddafi to resign only in May 2011. Ankara followed a somewhat similar pattern with the Syrian uprising. With Syria being the flagship of Turkey’s zero problems policy, Ankara initially engaged in a flurry of diplomatic activity to spur President Assad to reform. As Assad ignored calls for reform and the violence escalated, Turkey took a back seat. It reemerged in the forefront only in the summer of 2011, when violence in Syria escalated to the point of spilling over into Turkey with masses of refugee flows. Since then, Turkey has openly backed and hosted the Syrian opposition, engaged in civil society mediation efforts with Syrian opposition and refugee groups,<sup>36</sup> and hosted the Syrian liberation army under the influence of the Turkish armed forces.

<sup>34</sup> Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig, “EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (August 2011), p. 885-909, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13510347.2011.584730>.

<sup>35</sup> Sinan Ülgen, “Turkey’s ‘Zero Problems’ Problem”, in *Project Syndicate*, 15 November 2011, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/turkey-s--zero-problems--problem>.

<sup>36</sup> In particular the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Mazlumder have engaged in such activities.

As Turkey came round to walking the walk in Libya and Syria, it gradually started talking the talk of democracy promotion, perhaps for the first time in its history. Notable in this respect was Erdoğan's electoral victory speech in July 2011, in which he saluted the democratic aspirations of peoples across the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Hence, despite initial hesitations in Ankara, as in Brussels and Washington, the three transatlantic partners ultimately came round to supporting, at least in principle, the anti-authoritarian drive sweeping across the Arab world.

But not only did Turkey, the EU and the US all come to support the Arab uprisings and broadly share the same views on Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Iran. From the perspective of all three, the desirability of joint action in the quicksands of the Middle East has distinctly increased. Since 2011, Turkey has realized it cannot act unilaterally in the neighbourhood, recognizing that, when faced with historic change and instability all round, partnering with its allies is of the essence. This is particularly so given Turkey's distancing from its historic rivals in the region: Iran and Russia. Turkish-Iranian relations went through a brief honeymoon in the early 2000s, brought about by shared interests over the Kurdish dynamics unleashed by the 2003 war in Iraq and Turkey's rising dependence on Iranian energy supplies. The height of the relationship between the two was in 2010, when Turkey, together with Brazil, brokered an agreement over the Iranian nuclear question and rejected a UN Security Council vote on sanctions on Iran. Yet the Arab spring has brought this honeymoon to a temporary halt.<sup>38</sup> The ancient rivalry between Turkey and Iran has resurfaced over developments in Syria, alongside Turkey's acceptance to host one of NATO's radar systems on its soil, and its increasing distance from the sectarian politics of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, strongly backed by Tehran. The downturn in the relationship is captured by the menacing words pronounced by Iranian Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi: "Turkey must radically rethink its policies on Syria, the NATO missile shield and promoting Muslim secularism in the Arab world, or face trouble from its own people and neighbours".<sup>39</sup> Equally harsh were the words of Turkish Vice Prime Minister Bülent Arınç: "I do not know if you [Iran] are worthy of being called Islamic... Have you said a single thing about what is happening in Syria?".<sup>40</sup> A similar story can be told of Russia, another historic Turkish rival, towards which Ankara had been warming in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, again over energy interests. Also in this case, Turkey and Russia ended up on opposite sides of the Arab spring divide, epitomized by Moscow's veto of a proposed UNSC resolution on Syria, a veto which Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu unflatteringly defined as being driven by a Cold War logic.

The Arab spring has cast Turkey back into the Western fold and away from alternative alliance patterns which seemed to be in the making only a few years earlier, both in the Middle East and in the sovereignist "global south". Turkey, of course, remains far from

---

<sup>37</sup> Nuh Yilmaz and Kilic Bugra Kanat, "Turkish Foreign Policy after the Elections", in *The Middle East Channel*, 21 June 2011,

[http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/21/turkish\\_foreign\\_policy\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/21/turkish_foreign_policy_after_the_elections).

<sup>38</sup> Mustafa Akyol, "Turkey Vs. Iran", in *Foreign Affairs Snapshots*, 21 March 2012,

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137343/mustafa-akyol/turkey-vs-iran>.

<sup>39</sup> Soner Cağaptay, "Next Up: Turkey vs. Iran", in *The New York Times*, 14 February 2012,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/15/opinion/next-up-turkey-vs-iran.html>.

<sup>40</sup> "Amid the smiles, a rivalry intensifies", in *Turkish Forum*, 27 February 2012,

<http://www.turkishnews.com/en/content/2012/02/25/turkey-and-iran-amidst-the-smiles-a-rivalry-intensifies>.

being a trigger-happy interventionist power in its neighbourhood. Moreover, it continues to pursue its strategic autonomy and has not turned back into an uncritical subject of the West.<sup>41</sup> But the discourse of Turkey's axis shift is now passé. Ankara's support for the democratic aspirations of its neighbours is careful, cautious, and above all conditional upon multilateral cooperation with its partners, be it the EU and the US, or the Arab League. In the specific case of Syria for example, Turkey's intervention involving the setting up of a humanitarian corridor, a buffer zone or a no-fly zone would hinge on the agreement, participation and support of the UN, NATO and the Arab League. Well aware that the challenges facing its neighbours are too great to confront alone, Turkey seems to have rediscovered the virtues of cooperating with its allies.

Also from a European and American perspective, the logic of joint action with Turkey has become more compelling, given the renewed significance of the Turkish model in a neighbourhood undergoing profound transformation.<sup>42</sup> No longer simply a US-inspired and static Turkish/European embraced slogan, the Turkish model or, more aptly put, the Turkish experience, may become a more dynamic and articulate notion that Arab leaders could explore (alongside other examples) as they grapple with domestic change. As argued by Ülgen, the multifaceted nature of the Turkish model is captured by its support from a mixed bag of actors, ranging from Egypt's General Hussein Tantawi and Tunisia's Ennahda leader Rashid el-Gannouchi, to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Islamist scholar Tariq Ramadan.<sup>43</sup> Turkey, indeed, may offer different ideas to different people, to inspire change in its near abroad. Tunisia and Morocco may turn to the trajectory of Turkish political Islam and, specifically, to the evolution of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a post-Islamist party which has accumulated unprecedented political power within a secular system. The development of military and civil-military relations in Turkey could interest Egypt, including both the Turkish military's preference for the barracks following its interventions in politics in the past, and the more recent reduction of the military's political power in formal and informal institutional channels. Across North Africa and the Middle East, political leaders, businessmen and civil society actors may explore Turkey's model of economic development and, in particular, its switch from import substitution to export promotion to become the world's 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy. Finally, politicians particularly in Egypt and the Gulf may want to explore the evolution of Turkish foreign policy which, while remaining anchored to the West, has displayed rising autonomy and domestic public support. Naturally, what is of interest here is not a clear-cut and static emulation of Turkey's situation, an emulation which would be neither possible nor desirable. Rather, it is a dynamic observation process of Turkey's ongoing experience, learning from its steps forward and, perhaps even more critically, from its mistakes. As argued by Kirişçi, it is precisely the incompleteness of the Turkish model that makes it of interest to its neighbours,<sup>44</sup> and which thus renders Turkey an

---

<sup>41</sup> Şaban Kardaş, "Quest for Strategic Autonomy Continues ...", cit.

<sup>42</sup> Tariq Ramadan, "Democratic Turkey is the Template for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood", in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 2011), p. 42-45.

<sup>43</sup> Sinan Ülgen, "From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East", in *The Carnegie Papers*, December 2011, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2011/12/06/from-inspiration-to-aspiration-turkey-in-new-middle-east/82sv>.

<sup>44</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, "Democracy Diffusion: The Turkish Experience", in Ronald H. Linden *et al.*, *Turkey and its Neighbors ...*, cit.

ideal partner for the EU and the US in inducing transformative change in the neighbourhood.

#### 4. The elements of a joint strategy

Despite well known challenges to its realization, a trilateral EU-US-Turkey strategy has become more compelling and more feasible in light of the Arab spring, as all three actors find themselves on the same page of the manifold challenges bedeviling the European neighbourhood. Assuming political challenges and institutional inertia are overcome, what could that kind of strategy consist of?

##### 4.1. *The institutional framework*

From an EU perspective, perhaps the most difficult hurdle to overcome would be establishing the appropriate institutional mechanisms to engage in joint action. EU-US dialogue takes place through yearly summits, regular dialogues between High Representative Ashton and Secretary of State Clinton and regular working groups spanning a variety of policy areas. Some of these dialogues pertain to issues relating to the neighbourhood, such as crisis management, justice and home affairs and energy security. But a specific foreign policy dialogue on the neighbourhood has not been institutionalized, hampering the elaboration and above all the operationalization of a transatlantic strategy towards the region.

Even more problematic is the state of EU-Turkey dialogue, which has been caught up in the crossfire of Turkey's ailing accession process. Until the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, Turkish officials would meet regularly with the EU troika. When Turkey's accession negotiations were moving forward (albeit slowly), Turkey also used to meet with representatives of the member states at the intergovernmental conferences that opened and closed negotiations over accession chapters. Finally, during times when optimism prevailed in EU-Turkey relations, Turkey enthusiastically aligned its foreign policy positions with the CFSP. As EU-Turkish ties soured, opportunities for Turkey and the European Union to discuss foreign policy became fewer and far between and Turkey, feeling snubbed by the EU, began aligning its positions with the CSFP only when it came at little or no cost.<sup>45</sup> Appreciating the gravity of the situation, HR Ashton and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu have established constructive regular talks as of late, coupled with an annual four-way meeting between HR Ashton, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, Commissioner Füle and Minister for European Affairs Bağış. There has also been talk of Davutoğlu participating in the EU's Gymnich meetings.

But these talks should not only be intensified and conducted under the CFSP accession chapter, they should also be brought up to the heads of state level - i.e. through annual summits - and above all down to sectoral levels, between Turkish ministries and agencies and EU Directorate Generals, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Political and Security Committee as well as between Turkish and European civil society organizations engaged in the neighbourhood. More

---

<sup>45</sup> See Sinan Ülgen, "How to Operationalize the Foreign Policy Dialogue Between Ankara and Brussels?", in *On Turkey Analysis*, April 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/how-to-operationalize-the-foreign-policy-dialogue-between-ankara-and-brussels>.



importantly for our purposes, a trilateral working group at directors level between the EEAS, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the US State Department that would meet every six months and remain in regular contact, mirroring the trilateral talks that civil society groups have been conducting,<sup>46</sup> could provide the necessary institutional framework to work out the details of joint action in the region.

Turning from the framework to the substance of the strategy, one could imagine that whereas, the three would engage in a division of labour in some policy domains and countries, in other areas their messages and actions would be mutually reinforcing.

#### 4.2. Diplomacy

When it comes to diplomacy, there could be a useful geographic and thematic division of labour between the three. Geographically, a transatlantic division of labour is already in place, with the US concentrating its diplomatic efforts on the Mashreq, and the EU on the Maghreb and Eastern Europe. In this respect, Turkey, is bound to speak out more on its immediate neighbours to the north and south than on countries further afield. Thematically, the EU and US may be better placed to focus their interventions on universal norms grounded in international law, whether related to human rights, fundamental freedoms, transparency, accountability or the rule of law. When resting on the solid turf of international law, the EU and the US, whose reputation in the neighbourhood is far from spotless, would be less the object of criticism.

Turkey, by contrast, could pinpoint its diplomatic interventions on more specific political topics, particularly those on which its own experience grants it greater legitimacy. A prominent case in point regards Prime Minister Erdoğan's praise for secularism in Cairo. True, Erdoğan's remarks were scorned by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and reviled by the Salafist al-Nour party. But without doubt the Egyptian reaction would have been far more virulent had an EU or US official uttered the Turkish Prime Minister's words. The fact that calling for secularism was a leader broadly viewed as Islamist at home, conferred a degree of legitimacy on Erdoğan's words that EU or US officials would be hard pressed to achieve. Indeed who, better than Erdoğan, can argue that there is nothing to stop a devout Muslim from ruling a secular state? Following the same line of reasoning, one could imagine retired Turkish military officials advocating the democratic oversight of the armed forces; or Turkish business people calling for export promotion policies in the neighbourhood. Breaking down the elements of the Turkish model, a variety of Turkish actors could send diplomatic messages to neighbouring countries which, while coordinated with those of the US and the EU, would differ somewhat from theirs and could be better received because of the "incompleteness" of Turkey's ongoing democratization process.

#### 4.3. Assistance

Turning to functional cooperation in support of the Arab spring, we could imagine bilateral EU-Turkey action on governance support and US-Turkey action on political party support in the neighbourhood.

---

<sup>46</sup> E.g., such as those organized by the German Marshall Fund.

As discussed above, supporting transformation in the neighbourhood exclusively through EU policies of conditionality may be misplaced. In a post-EU enlargement and post-Arab spring context, conditionality may be neither effective nor appropriate. By contrast, focusing on functional cooperation aimed at strengthening governance at the micro and meso levels may be a more fruitful way forward. It would also be far more in line with Turkey's own inclinations. In a recent motion for a resolution, the European Parliament indeed suggested that "participation of Turkish institutions and non-governmental organizations in ENP instruments would generate unique synergy effects, especially in areas such as institution-building, socio-economic and civil society development".<sup>47</sup> In this respect, the relevance of the EU Taiex and Twinning programmes comes to the fore, whereby the EU engages in exchanges and training to support capacity building within different governance structures in the neighbourhood. Turkey could be usefully brought into these programmes, acting as an additional reservoir of expertise on which to draw.

Bringing Turkey into the EU Twinning and Taiex programmes in the neighbourhood would have two principal advantages. First, Turkey could bring to bear its own experience in a number of areas where it has undertaken recent reform. Ülgen cites a number of promising examples.<sup>48</sup> One is the banking sector, where pre-2001 Turkey, unlike the EU and like the neighbourhood, was bedevilled by problems of clientelism and has since then engaged in a radical overhaul of the sector by establishing effective regulatory frameworks. Precisely in view of this experience, Turkey has already been involved in supporting banking sector reform in Syria. Another case is that of urban planning and housing, critical areas in the southern Mediterranean, both in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia which have experienced revolts and in countries such as Algeria which have not. Again, as opposed to the EU, Turkey, having experienced a similar urbanization process and youth bulge and having overcome related housing problems through the work of the Mass Housing Authority, could bring its expertise to bear. A final example is that of SME promotion, a critical element in neighbouring countries, in which undoing state capture of the economy and promoting an independent private sector are difficult jobs that lie ahead. Here, the experience of the Turkish chamber of commerce, TOBB, which, amongst others, has been instrumental in establishing the Levant Business Forum, representing business organizations from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, could be usefully brought into EU programmes.

Second, by bringing a non-EU member state into the EU Twinning and Taiex programmes, the latter could gradually shift their focus away from the export of the *acquis communautaire*. *Acquis* export is one of the EU's most notorious professional biases which, while reasonable in Europe's eastern neighbourhood where the prospect and aspiration of membership, albeit distant, exist, is problematic when it comes to the south. In other words, by including Turkey in its programmes, the EU's promotion of good governance could start to have less to do with the technical exportation of the

---

<sup>47</sup> Ria Oomen-Ruijten, MEP, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament, *Motion for a resolution to wind up the debate on statements by the Council and the Commission pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure on the 2011 Progress Report on Turkey* (PE473.875v02-00), 19 December 2011, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/afet/re/887/887615/887615en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/afet/re/887/887615/887615en.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Sinan Ülgen, "From Inspiration to Aspiration ...", cit.

*acquis* and more to do with a genuine response to the governance needs of its neighbours.

Turning to US-Turkey cooperation in the neighbourhood, a fruitful avenue could be that of pursuing joint action on political party support. Here, the US has long-standing practical, organizational and technical experience in political party support through the work of groups such as the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute and the National Endowment for Democracy. The EU lags significantly behind, having refrained from engaging in explicitly political work abroad. Under Polish impulse, attempts are being made to rectify this through the establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy. However, in a cash-strapped Europe, it is unclear whether embarking on this new endeavour is both feasible and advisable. When compared to the US, EU democracy promotion support through instruments such as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, the Instrument for Stability, the Civil Society Facility and the SPRING programme are a drop in the ocean. Rather than creating yet another, poorly financed programme, the EU may be best advised to consolidate resources in those democracy promotion activities where it has a positive track record. By contrast, Turkey could play a vitally important role in political party support, particularly in the Mediterranean. Much has been said about Turkey being a model of political Islam cohabiting within a secular system and, specifically, about the Justice and Development Party as a model of an economically and politically liberal, but socially conservative post-Islamist catch-all party. Islamist parties in the Middle East, from *Ennahda* in Tunisia, the Islamic Action Party in Jordan, the PJD in Morocco and, to a lesser extent the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas in Palestine, have expressed an interest in the evolution of the Turkish AKP. For AKP cadres and activists to engage in training and dialogue activities in the framework of experienced US political party development programmes may be a fruitful way forward. Yet the AKP's experience may be of interest not only to Islamist parties in the region. Having rapidly become the largest and most successful political party in Turkey, and having consolidated its support base over three terms in office, its experience may be of interest to a variety of secular groups as well. Many of these youth groups, having been at the forefront of the revolts by relying on the internet and the social media, are now struggling to establish more traditional forms of political organization, necessary to win elections and take part in government.

#### 4.4. Trade

As concerns trade, whereas negotiating DCFTAs between the EU and the neighbours seems reasonable in the case of Eastern Europe, applying the same approach to the south is far more doubtful. As discussed above, proceeding along the DCFTA path may prove excessively complex and costly for the southern neighbours and in the medium term would do little to induce intra-regional trade. An alternative, proposed by Ülgen and echoed, across the Atlantic, by Dadush and Dunne,<sup>49</sup> would be to extend the EU-Turkey customs union to the entire southern Mediterranean. True, this would mean exporting Turkey's difficulties in the EU customs union to countries with a lower level of

<sup>49</sup> Uri Dadush and Michele Dunne, "American and European Responses to the Arab Spring: What's the Big Idea?", in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Fall 2011), p. 131-145, [http://www.twq.com/11autumn/docs/11autumn\\_Dadush\\_Dunne.pdf](http://www.twq.com/11autumn/docs/11autumn_Dadush_Dunne.pdf).

development than Turkey. Hence, like Turkey, other non-EU members of the customs union would lose their ability to determine their external trade relations autonomously, having to accept the Common External Tariff and the EU's web of trade relations as a *fait accompli*. This might prove a costly undertaking for the hardly competitive southern Mediterranean economies that would see a substantial lowering of their MFN tariffs vis-à-vis the rest of the world. But on the up side, it would mean that by simply signing one agreement, each participating country would be included in the same customs space as not only the EU and Turkey, but also all of its neighbours, eliminating the need for rules of origin certificates, and significantly reducing existing disincentives to foreign direct investment. Embarking upon such an endeavour should be carefully planned, through a transition period of a decade or more, in which the southern Mediterranean countries, supported by the EU, would engage in gradual tariff dismantlement vis-à-vis the rest of the world and concomitantly work on enhancing their competitiveness. The United States could also assist in this endeavour by signing bilateral free trade agreements with these countries, mirroring the agreements already in place between the US and Jordan and Morocco, which include, *inter alia*, the liberalization of trade in agriculture over the course of a decade.

#### 4.5. Security

Trilateral security cooperation would focus on specific crises in the neighbourhood. At the time of writing, Syria stands out as a prime case in which US-EU-Turkey security cooperation is being played out, alongside the Arab League. As the crisis unfolds and the international community converges on the appropriate form of action, a key question will regard the precise modalities of the EU's participation, which will hinge on whether and to what extent it is possible to forge intra-EU consensus. Hence, whether the EU through HR Ashton or a core group of member states would be in the lead (as in the case of Iran or Libya), remains to be seen. Yet irrespective of the form of EU participation, the establishment of a contact group on Syria - the Friends of Syria - featuring the EU, the US, Turkey as well as key Arab League countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar highlights how a trilateral security strategy in the neighbourhood is already being forged. Spearheaded by Turkey and its transatlantic partners, the Friends of Syria group is testing the way forward for possible modalities of humanitarian intervention, and ways to support the Syrian opposition and broaden the international consensus on what to do in Syria. The work of the Friends of Syria group could act as a useful precedent for trilateral security cooperation if and when other crises erupt in the neighbourhood.

## Conclusions

Talk about a trilateral strategy between Turkey, the European Union and the United States is not new. For years, the broad convergence of views and visions between the three has made a joint strategy a worthwhile endeavour to explore. Yet never has there been an alignment of transatlantic stars as there is today. The historic transformation underway in the Middle East and North Africa has rendered a joint trilateral strategy both desirable and feasible. Above all, the Arab spring has highlighted in full force that none of the three actors can effectively tackle the extraordinary challenges underway alone.

With this in mind, this paper has sketched out the broad contours of what a trilateral strategy for the neighbourhood might consist of. This would include the establishment of a standing trilateral working group for the neighbourhood, which would in turn determine whether, when and in what policy areas complementary action should proceed, separately or simultaneously. Broadly speaking, a strategy would foresee diplomatic public and private interventions, assistance, trade and security cooperation. In some areas, such as diplomacy, assistance and trade, there could be a useful division of labour between the three. In the field of security instead, as currently demonstrated in Syria, joint action would be warranted.

This is not to downplay the many obstacles that hinder foreign policy cooperation between Turkey, the EU and the US, foremost amongst which is the dire state of EU-Turkey relations. But responding effectively to the shift in tectonic plates underway in the neighbourhood is a challenge none of the three can afford to shy away from.

*Updated: 23 March 2012*

---

**References**

- Mustafa Akyol, "Turkey Vs. Iran", in *Foreign Affairs Snapshots*, 21 March 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137343/mustafa-akyol/turkey-vs-iran>.
- Meliha Altunışık, "Turkey as a 'Mediterranean Power'", in Nathalie Tocci (ed.), *Turkey: Reluctant Mediterranean Power*, Washington, German Marshall Fund, 2011 (Mediterranean Papers), [http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Mediterranean-paper\\_10.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Mediterranean-paper_10.pdf).
- Rosa Balfour, "Changes and Continuities in EU-Mediterranean Relations After the Arab Spring", in Sven Biscop, Rosa Balfour and Michael Emerson (eds), *An Arab Springboard for EU Foreign Policy*, Gent, Academia Press, January 2012 (Egmont Papers No. 54), <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/paperegm/ep54.pdf>.
- Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East", in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (January 2012), p. 127-149.
- Tanja A. Börzel, "When Europe hits...beyond its borders: Europeanization and the near abroad", in *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4-5 (September/December 2011), p. 394-413, <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/cep/journal/v9/n4/pdf/cep20118a.pdf>.
- Silvia Colombo and Nathalie Tocci (eds), *The Challenges of State Sustainability in the Mediterranean*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, September 2011 (IAI Research Papers No. 3), <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=665>.
- Uri Dadush and Michele Dunne, "American and European Responses to the Arab Spring: What's the Big Idea?", in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Fall 2011), p. 131-145, [http://www.twq.com/11autumn/docs/11autumn\\_Dadush\\_Dunne.pdf](http://www.twq.com/11autumn/docs/11autumn_Dadush_Dunne.pdf).
- Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Tobias Schumacher, "From Brussels with Love: Leverage, Benchmarking, and the Action Plans in the EU's Democratization Policy", in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (August 2011), p. 932-955.
- Christophe Hillion, "The Creeping Nationalisation of the EU Enlargement Policy", in *SIEPS Report*, No. 2010/6 (November 2010), <http://www.sieps.se/en/publikationer/the-creeping-nationalisation-of-the-eu-enlargement-policy-20106>.
- Rosemary Hollis, "No friend of democratization: Europe's Role in the genesis of the Arab Spring", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (January 2011), p. 81-94, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01058.x/pdf>.
- Şaban Kardaş, "Quest for Strategic Autonomy Continues, or How to Make Sense of Turkey's 'New Wave'", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 28 November 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/quest-for-strategic-autonomy-continues-or-how-to-make-sense-of-turkeys-new-wave>.

Theodore C. Kariotis, "Hydrocarbons and the Law of the Sea in the Eastern Mediterranean: Implications for Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey", in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring 2011), p. 45-56.

Judith Kelly, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighbourhood Policy", in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 2006), p. 29-55, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00613.x/pdf>.

Kemal Kirişci, "Democracy Diffusion: The Turkish Experience", in Ronald H. Linden *et al.*, *Turkey and its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2012.

Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig, "EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance", in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (August 2011), p. 885-909, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13510347.2011.584730>.

Ian O. Lesser, "Strategy Toward Europe's Neighbourhood and the Turkish Role: An American Perspective", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 5 April 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/strategy-toward-europes-neighborhood-and-the-turkish-role-an-american-perspective>.

Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey's Third Wave - And the Coming Quest for Strategic Reassurance", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 26 October 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/turkeys-third-wave-and-the-coming-quest-for-strategic-reassurance>.

Ronald H. Linden *et al.*, *Turkey and its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2012.

Ebru Oğurlu, "Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 1204 (March 2012), <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiw1204.pdf>.

Soli Özel and Mehmet Ali Tuğtan, "How Will the United States Avoid Paralysis with Turkey?", in *On Turkey Analysis*, 12 October 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/how-will-the-united-states-avoid-paralysis-with-turkey>.

Tariq Ramadan, "Democratic Turkey is the Template for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood", in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 2011), p. 42-45.

Michael Rubin, "Turkey, From Ally to Enemy", in *Commentary*, Vol. 130, No. 1 (July-August 2010), p. 81-86, <http://www.michaelrubin.org/7639/turkey-ally-enemy>.

Bahar Rumelili, "Turkey: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Socialization in a Post-Enlargement Europe", in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (March 2011), p. 235-249, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07036337.2011.543528>.

---

Nathalie Tocci, "The EU, the Middle East Quartet and (In)Effective Multilateralism", in *MERCURY Papers*, No. 9 (June 2011), [http://www.iai.it/pdf/Mercury/Mercury-epaper\\_09.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/Mercury/Mercury-epaper_09.pdf).

Nathalie Tocci, *Turkey's European Future: Behind the Scenes of America's Influence on EU-Turkey Relations*, New York and London, New York University Press, 2011.

Nathalie Tocci and Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "Rethinking the EU's Mediterranean Policies Post-1/11", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 1106 (March 2011), <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiw1106.pdf>.

Sinan Ülgen, "From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East", in *The Carnegie Papers*, December 2011, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2011/12/06/from-inspiration-to-aspiration-turkey-in-new-middle-east/82sv>.

Sinan Ülgen, "How to Operationalize the Foreign Policy Dialogue Between Ankara and Brussels?", in *On Turkey Analysis*, April 2011, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/how-to-operationalize-the-foreign-policy-dialogue-between-ankara-and-brussels>.

Sinan Ülgen, "Turkey's 'Zero Problems' Problem", in *Project Syndicate*, 15 November 2011, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/turkey-s--zero-problems--problem>.

Nuh Yilmaz and Kilic Bugra Kanat, "Turkish Foreign Policy after the Elections", in *The Middle East Channel*, 21 June 2011, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/21/turkish\\_foreign\\_policy\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/21/turkish_foreign_policy_after_the_elections).





**Latest IAI Working Papers**

- 12 | 07** V. Boas, Energy and Human Rights: Two Irreconcilable Foreign Policy Goals? The Case of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline in EU-Turkmen Relations
- 12 | 06** Andrew Byrne, Building the Transatlantic Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. The Case of the Passenger Name Record Agreements
- 12 | 05** N. Van Raemdonck, Vested Interest or Moral Indecisiveness? Explaining the EU's Silence on the US Targeted Killing Policy in Pakistan
- 12 | 04** E. Oğurlu, Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy
- 12 | 03** F. Zwagemakers, The EU's Conditionality Policy: A New Strategy to Achieve Compliance
- 12 | 02** E. Soltanov, The South East Europe Pipeline: Greater Benefit for a Greater Number of Actors
- 12 | 01** N. Sartori, The European Commission's Policy Towards the Southern Gas Corridor: Between National Interests and Economic Fundamentals
- 11 | 30** D. Sammut, After Kazan, a Defining Moment for the OSCE Minsk Process
- 11 | 29** F. Ismailzade, The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Current Trends and Future Scenarios
- 11 | 28** A. Dessì, Algeria at the Crossroads, Between Continuity and Change
- 11 | 27** R. Alcaro and A. Dessì, The September UN Vote on Palestine: Will the EU Be Up to the Challenge?
- 11 | 26** F. Di Camillo and V. Miranda, Ambiguous Definitions in the Cyber Domain: Costs, Risks and the Way Forward

**The Institute**

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (The International Spectator), an online webzine (AffariInternazionali), two series of research papers (IAI Quaderni and IAI Research Papers) and an Italian foreign policy yearbook (La politica estera dell'Italia).

**Istituto Affari Internazionali**

Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 00186 Roma  
Tel.: +39/06/3224360 Fax: + 39/06/3224363  
E-mail: [iai@iai.it](mailto:iai@iai.it) - website: <http://www.iai.it>  
Send orders to: [iai\\_library@iai.it](mailto:iai_library@iai.it)