



# Turkey

**Assessment:** Fair

**Trend:** ↔

**Capital:** Ankara

**Type of Government:** Republican Parliamentary Democracy

**Head of Government:** Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit (since 11 January 1999)

**Foreign Minister:** Sukru Sina Gurel

**Population:** 66,493,970

**Human Development Index Ranking 2002:** 85

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkey has a **fair** record of support for democracy abroad. Between 1992 and 2002, Turkey participated in election monitoring missions and gave rhetorical support to democratic development in the region. On several occasions, Turkey made significant contributions to peacekeeping operations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts that were essential in preparing the ground for establishing democratic regimes. However, Turkey's performance has been rather poor when it comes to providing economic assistance to support democracy promotion abroad and to criticizing the policies of most undemocratic regimes.

The legacy of the Ottoman empire and its geo-strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia make Turkey an important actor in several neighborhoods of varying degrees of democratic development, including: Europe, the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. With limited economic resources and internal political problems, however, Turkey has not been a global actor in promoting democracy abroad. Turkey has consistently chosen to emphasize protection of its economic and strategic interests over democracy in these regions. Turkey has encouraged democratic development only when it did not compromise its vital interests.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, Turkey's major foreign policy objectives have centered around becoming a member of the European Union (EU) and expanding its influence in the Eurasian region. Other issues of primary concern for the Turkish foreign policy establishment have included resolving ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus, securing the export of Caspian energy resources through Turkey, protecting Turks in Cyprus and supporting the territorial integrity of the countries in the neighboring regions.

Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey has worked to establish closer relations with the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, Turkey's secular, democratic political system and free-market economy were offered as a model to the newly independent states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. In this context, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) was established in January 1992 to coordinate and direct Turkish development assistance. However, very little of this aid was channeled to democracy-building projects. In international fora, Turkey has supported the membership of these Central Asian countries in the UN, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)<sup>1</sup> and Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Yet, Turkey's limited economic capacity and political influence in the region hindered the Turkish model from being embraced fully by the leaders of these countries.<sup>2</sup> Besides energy politics and other economic interests, Turkey's foreign policy objectives also include preventing the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and balancing Russian and Iranian influence in the region. Support for democracy promotion is not high on the list of priorities.

With regard to the Balkans, Turkish foreign policy objectives have focused on bringing peace and stability to the region. Turkish media and civil society organizations called for greater involvement in



protecting Muslim populations in Bosnia and Kosovo. Turkey chose to act through multinational initiatives, rather than acting unilaterally, to safeguard these interests. It has contributed to peacekeeping operations as a NATO member and has supported the Southeast European Stability Pact. On several occasions, Turkey has emphasized that building pluralistic democratic regimes is crucial for preserving peace in the region. Through the OSCE framework, Turkey has also provided election-monitoring assistance in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia. Countries such as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia have also received Turkish economic assistance to help their reconstruction efforts.

Ongoing disputes between Turkey and Greece over control of Cyprus have continued to complicate Turkey's foreign policy. In 1974, the Turkish military intervened in Cyprus to prevent a Greek-led takeover of the island and occupied 40 percent of the territory, which was later declared the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus." Turkey's policy of demanding greater autonomy for Turkish Cypriots as a condition for Cyprus' accession to the EU has had a negative effect on Turkey's record of support for democracy promotion abroad. Ankara's support for the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, and his preference for linking the island's EU accession to a negotiated solution, has been a source of international criticism. Moreover, there is growing concern, both in and outside of Turkey, that Mr. Denktash's policies don't actually reflect the general will of the Turkish Cypriots. As Turkey intensifies its own efforts to join the EU, influential NGOs, newspaper columnists and other second-track diplomacy groups have started to call for a more flexible foreign policy with regard to Cyprus. They hope such an approach would encourage a more democratic environment in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and allow the Turkish Cypriots to discuss their future more freely.

Over the past decade, the number of NGOs focusing on human rights and democratization in Turkey has grown. As these NGOs start to gain more ground in Turkey, an increased level of second track diplomacy could emerge and complement the traditional foreign policy tools, as already demonstrated in the cases of Turkish-Greek and Turkish-Armenian relations. An increased involvement of civic organizations in the making of foreign policy would benefit Turkey's record of support for international democracy.

## RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Turkey has been reluctant to interfere with the domestic politics of foreign countries, and has avoided issuing strong statements with regard to unconstitutional overthrows of governments. In general, Turkey has issued statements that expressed regret in the face of such developments, but has not called for any concrete actions such as imposing sanctions or severing diplomatic relations.

With regard to the military coup in Pakistan (1999), Turkey cautiously disapproved of the move, but did not issue a strong condemnation. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's remarks at the time emphasized the historical "brotherly relationship" between the two countries and pointed out that these relations transcended the governments of the day. Turkey neither severed diplomatic relations nor called for sanctions. Nevertheless, it did call for an end to the interruption of democracy in a peaceful way as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup> During General Musharraf's official visit to Turkey in November 1999, shortly after the coup, he was advised to take the necessary steps to return to a democratic system.<sup>4</sup> And when Prime Minister Ecevit paid an official visit to India in April 2000, he turned down General Musharraf's invitation to extend his visit to Pakistan. Since then, Pakistani-Turkish relationship has continued to operate on a bilateral basis and through the framework of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), even after the controversial referendum of April 2002, which confirmed Musharraf's position for another five years.

Turkey's muted reaction to anti-democratic developments in Pakistan can be explained by various factors such as the Turkish military's continued influence on the country's foreign policy as well as its expectations with regard to the future policies of General Musharraf, including the possible establishment of a relatively secular and democratic regime. Broader foreign policy concerns such as maintaining economic relations with Pakistan and securing Pakistan's support for its position regarding Cyprus have also been important in mitigating Turkey's reaction.

In the case of Azerbaijan, Turkey's fear of antagonizing Russia and Iran limited its intervention. Turkey took a passive stance when President Elchibey, who supported a pro-Turkey policy, was ousted from power in June 1993. The lack of strong condemnation of the military coup demonstrated the limits of Turkish influence in the



new Turkic countries. Moreover, allegations have surfaced that an attempted coup against President Aliiev in 1995 had the fingerprints of certain Turkish intelligence agents. President Demirel helped President Aliiev preserve his position by sharing the Turkish National Intelligence Agency dossier on the coup.<sup>5</sup>

### **RESPONSE TO MANIPULATED ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Turkey has participated in electoral monitoring activities through international organizations such as the OSCE and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Parliamentary Assembly. Turkey has shown particular interest in the elections taking place in Balkan nations, with large Muslim populations such as the former Yugoslavia, where Turkey has also been participating in peacekeeping operations. Turkish officials have stated on various occasions that they supported efforts to establish the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation, and encouraged the holding of free and fair elections as a way to maintain the multicultural and multiethnic state, with its constituent nations and a pluralistic democratic society. Furthermore, Turkey made sure that Bosnian refugees in Turkey were able to vote in the September 1996 Bosnian elections. Turkey has also made efforts to protect the voting rights of the Kosovar Turks by asking the UNMIK to take the necessary measures to guarantee their rights as enshrined in the 1974 Kosovo Constitution.

Another region where Turkey has participated in election monitoring is the Caucasus. Members of the Turkish Parliament participated as observers in the November 2000 elections in Azerbaijan, and despite some irregularities determined the elections were generally successful. This was a distinctly minority view among international and domestic monitors. While the Turkish delegations called on the Azeri authorities to investigate these irregularities, reactions never reached a stage that would impair relations between the two countries. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided not to issue statements on the Azerbaijani elections, as this would constitute "interference into the domestic politics of a sovereign country."<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Algeria (1992), Turkey's official response to the military's intervention in the election process was also cautious and muted. Turkey believes that the secular nature of the Algerian regime must be preserved. The botched elections of 1991-1992, however, prompted Turkey's

own Islamist groups to organize protest rallies against the Algerian military and, as a result, rekindled the debate on Islam's compatibility with democracy. Even in this context, Turkey did not support or condemn the Algerian military's position with regard to the electoral process.

### **PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY**

Turkey has generally supported the promotion of international democracy through major international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe and NATO, and has endorsed the Warsaw Declaration of the Community of Democracies. Its record of ratifying key human rights conventions, however, is uneven. It has accepted the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the European Convention on Prevention of Torture, the European Social Charter, the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Turkey has not ratified the Framework Convention for National Minorities or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

Turkey's aspiration to join the European Union requires it to take important steps to improve its internal political reforms. Most recently, on 3 August 2002, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a package of human rights laws aimed at improving the protection of the cultural rights of minorities, as well as abolishing the death penalty in peacetime.<sup>7</sup> This reform package marks an important change and is a major step towards Turkey becoming a liberal democratic state. Achieving internal peace and stability by strengthening democracy at home could, in turn, translate into an enhanced willingness and capacity for advocating democracy promotion abroad.

Turkey has become a foreign aid donor country since the mid-1980s. Most of its foreign assistance, however, has been used to further strategic and economic interests in designated regions, rather than targeted to democracy building.<sup>8</sup> Providing foreign assistance has gained more importance since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. While Turkey provided only \$5 million to developing countries between 1985-91, this figure jumped to \$1.2 billion in 1992.<sup>9</sup> More recently, the distribution of aid among recipient countries has become more balanced; aid granted to the democratizing Balkan



states such as Albania, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina has begun to more closely approximate that given to the new Central Asian Turkic countries.<sup>10</sup>

### **POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS**

Given its location and strategic interests, Turkey has established cordial relations with most of the dictatorial regimes of Central Asia and the Middle East.

In the case of Iraq, Turkey has abided by the UN Security Council resolutions, suffering huge economic losses as a result. Yet, its strategic partnership with Washington has prompted Turkey, somewhat reluctantly, to support U.S. initiatives aimed at replacing the authoritarian regime in Iraq. Turkey has, however, voiced its concerns over the consequences of a possible military strike to force a regime change in Iraq, citing the possibility of the establishment of a federal Kurdish state in the Northern Iraq, a development Ankara strongly opposes.

Turkey has also maintained strong relations with Libya and Nigeria. Prime Minister Erbakan paid official visits to these countries in October 1996 with a view to establishing closer relations, drawing strong criticisms from opposition parties and the military staff. The attempt to improve relations with these isolated undemocratic regimes was, however, not at the heart of the criticisms. Rather, the critics questioned Mr. Qaddafi's calls for the formation of an independent Kurdish state. Despite this incident, Turkey refrained from actions that could jeopardize economic relations with Libya, where about 100 Turkish companies hold contracts worth billions of dollars.<sup>11</sup>

Securing Turkish economic and strategic interests in the Eurasian region by establishing close

relationships with the autocratic Turkic states of Central Asia and Caucasus has been another priority for Turkey. This has not, however, prevented Ankara from providing support to opposition groups in Uzbekistan, which led to strains in Turkey's "brotherly relationship" with the Karimov regime. In retaliation, President Karimov recalled Uzbeki students who were studying in Turkey, claiming that they were in touch with Muhammed Salih, an Uzbek dissident leader who was granted asylum in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Another crisis erupted in 1999, when Uzbek officials asked Turkey to extradite two of its citizens accused of involvement in an assassination attempt against the Uzbek president. Turkey agreed to extradite the suspects to Uzbekistan only after receiving formal guarantees that they would not face the death penalty. The delay in the extradition and Turkey's demands led to mutual recriminations and diplomatic protests. Relations between the two countries normalized after visits to Uzbekistan by Foreign Minister Ismail Cem and President Sezer in October 2000. The two governments signed a military cooperation agreement and pledged to work together to combat terrorism.

Turkey has sought to establish a closer, cooperative relationship with the authoritarian government of Turkmenistan, citing historical and cultural ties. Turkish business officials have been investing heavily in Turkmenistan over the past decade. Furthermore, the export of Turkmen natural gas through Turkey has been an important bilateral issue. Turkey signed a military cooperation agreement with Turkmenistan in March 2002, similar to that signed with Uzbekistan, with the aim of helping the Turkmen defense industry sector. Not surprisingly, Turkey has not devoted particular attention to democracy promotion in Turkmenistan.

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<sup>1</sup> The ECO membership comprises Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

<sup>2</sup> See Balci, Idris Turkey's Relations with the West and the Turkic Republics: The rise and fall of the Turkish Model for a detailed discussion on the Turkish model.

<sup>3</sup> Turkish Daily News, 14 Oct. 1999

<sup>4</sup> Milliyet, 9 Nov. 1999

<sup>5</sup> Turkish Daily News, 8 Dec. 1996

<sup>6</sup> Turkish Daily News, 15 Nov. 2000

<sup>7</sup> See EU General Secretariat's web page at <[www.euturkey.org.tr](http://www.euturkey.org.tr)> for a detailed analysis of the reforms. Among other things, the reform package addresses controversial issues such as broadcasting and education in mother-tongues, including the Kurdish language.



<sup>8</sup> According to the statistical information provided by the State Planning Institute, an overwhelming portion of the foreign aid provided between 1992-1996 was devoted to economic assistance category (80.5%), followed by humanitarian aid (14.2%), technical aid (4.3%) and cultural aid (0.9%)

<sup>9</sup> Devlet Planlama Teskilati (State Planning Institute), Report published in March 1998.

<sup>10</sup> For details on Official Turkish Foreign Grants see State Statistics Institute's report at <http://www.die.gov.tr/TURKISH/SONIST/UHYAS/07082001.html>

<sup>11</sup> Hellenic Resources Network 20 Feb. 1997.

<sup>12</sup> See Türk Dis Politikasi -Cilt II, p.386, for the number of Turkic students receiving education in Turkey. Detailed information is also available at Turkish Ministry of Education <[www.meb.gov.tr](http://www.meb.gov.tr)>.