



Approfondimento n. 12/Maggio 2021

**TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE BALKANS:  
PAST, PRESENT AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE**

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Con il sostegno di



Fondazione  
Compagnia  
di San Paolo

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## Introduction

At the beginning of the XXI century, along with the beginning of ruling of the conservative AKP party, a new era of Turkish foreign policy began.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of *strategic depth* of the former Turkish minister of foreign affairs and adviser for foreign policy to the Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, was turned into a diplomacy milestone of this country. Contrary to previous Turkish diplomacy, which was very often characterized by isolation and favouritism of safety this strategy is based on five significant points, as follows: *a) a balance between safety and freedom, b) zero problems with neighbouring countries, c) development of relations with neighbouring regions, d) multidimensional diplomacy and e) rhythmical diplomacy.* We must not forget that Turkey, as an inheritor of the Ottoman Empire has deep roots in the Balkans and we consider that this region represents one of the most important priorities of Turkish foreign policy.

### 1. What is considered the Balkans?

Throughout history, the Balkan Peninsula was named with various names which in a certain manner were depicting the reality of this region. In the ancient centuries, when the Greeks were predominant and considered as the main factor in this region, this peninsula was named as the "Greek Peninsula". After a long period, respectively in the Middle Age, this region was named as the "Byzantine Peninsula", bearing in mind the influence of the Byzantines over this territory in that period.<sup>2</sup> After the Greeks and Byzantines, towards the end of the XIV and the beginning of the XV century, the Ottoman Empire appeared on the Balkan scene, as a main military, political and economic factor, which called this region as *Avrupa-i Osmani* (Ottoman Europe) and *Rumeli-i Şahane* (Rumeli).<sup>3</sup> During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, this region was named as the "European Turkey" by the Europeans.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the XIX century, parallel with the political events on the international arena, this territory was named by the Europeans with new names, like: **Balkans** and **Near (Middle) East**, terms that within them contain subjective elements from the European aspect and perception. It should be highlighted that in the political literature, the term "Balkan" and "Balkan Peninsula" was used in year 1808 for the first time by the German geographer August Zeune.<sup>5</sup>

The Balkan Peninsula, being one of the few peninsulas of the European continent, due to its' geostrategic position which its stretching towards Middle Europe and towards the Mediterranean,

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<sup>1</sup> About the new concept of Turkish foreign policy during AKP, see: Hale, William et.al., *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP*, Routledge, London & New York, 2010, p. 119-148; Dağı, Zeynep, *AKP dış politikası*, Lotus Yayınları, Ankara 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Aydoğmuş, Fatih, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Türkiye'nin Balkanlar Üzerindeki Etkisi* (masters thesis), Y.Ü. Atatürk İlkeleri Ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, İstanbul 2009, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Aydoğmuş, op.cit., Budak, Ömer, *Türkiye'nin Dünya Ülkeleri Açısından Jeopolitik Önemi Ve Avrasya'daki Yeri*, Bilge Kitabevi, Ankara 2006, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> See Davutoğlu, Ahmet, *Stratejik Derinlik*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004, p. 121-122.

<sup>5</sup> Davutoğlu, „Stratejik Derinlik“, p. 121-122; Aydoğmuş, op.cit., crp. 4; Budak, op.cit., p. 165-166. For more detailed information about the naming of this peninsula, see: Mazower, Mark, *The Balkans from The End of Byzantium to The Present Day*, Phoenix Press, London 2001.

is considered as a vital region on the international arena. The geostrategic position of this peninsula has a role of an obstacle or a crossing between Asia and Europe and is positioned near the African continent. This peninsula has a logistical importance and plays the role based on possible military operations against the oil regions. This region had a great strategic defensive and offensive position for the war-involved parties during the wars that occurred in Middle and Eastern Europe. The Balkans also plays an important role on the European integration and unity and has a special importance for the influence of the European policy on the Mediterranean and the Middle East region.<sup>6</sup> This peninsula, throughout the history and as well today, was always attracting the interest of the great powers and factors on the international arena.

Regarding the number of countries that belong to the term Balkans, there are few opinions. According to the first opinion, the Balkan region is made of Bulgaria, Albania and all ex-Yugoslav republics. According to the second opinion, besides the other countries, this region also includes Greece, as well as Romania. According to the third opinion, besides the named countries, Turkey too is considered as a part of the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Short historical review of Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans**

### ***a) Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans until 1990***

Following few centuries of Ottoman Empire rule over the Balkan Peninsula (XIV-XIX century), the XIX and the beginning of the XX century were characterized with the withdrawal of the ottoman troops from the countries of this region. Namely, Greece got independence in 1832, followed by declarations of independence by Bulgaria and Romania in 1878. The same year (1878), Bosnia and Herzegovina changed its status from a part of the Ottoman administration became a part of the Austro-Hungarian authority, followed by an official joining to this empire in 1908. In 1912, as a result of the First Balkan War, the Ottoman authorities in North Macedonia and Albania became a part of the history. Along with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (1923), a new era of Turkish-Balkans relations has begun.

In the period between the two world wars, Turkey took an active participation in the four Balkan conferences organized in the period between years 1930-1933<sup>8</sup>, and gave huge efforts towards the development of bilateral relations with the countries of the region like Albania, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece.<sup>9</sup> In the context of the development of mutual relations and prevention of the possible influence over the Balkan countries, the countries of this region,

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<sup>6</sup> Budak, op.cit., p. 168-169.

<sup>7</sup> Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 5; Akman, Halil, *Türkiye Yunanistan Ve Arnavutluk'un Balkan Ülkeleri Ve Etnik Yapısı Üzerine Stratejik Hedefleri* (master's thesis), G.Y.T.E. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Gebze 2006, p. 5-6; Lütem, E. Ömer et. al. (ed.), *Balkan Diplomasisi*, ASAM Yayınları, Ankara 2001, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Khalilzad, Zalmay et. al., *Türk Batı İlişkilerinin Geleceği: Stratejik Bir Plana Doğru*, ASAM Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, p. 39; Lesser, O. Ian et. al., *Balkanlar'dan Batı Çin'e Türkiye'nin Yeni Jeopolitik Konumu*, Alfa Yayınları, İstanbul 2000, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> Lütem, op.cit., p. 209.

Turkey, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia, established the *Balkan pact*. This pact was not under the influence of the global factors and was considered as the first chosen pact where Turkey was participating in its' new history. The mottos of the pact, like the **Balkan belongs to the Balkan people** and **the future of the Balkans will be designed by the Balkan people** are proofs enough that depicture its' objectives. However, besides the fact that countries like Bulgaria and Albania didn't join this Pact and simultaneously the impossibility to prevent the German and Italian attacks of the country members are also some of the most important factors that influenced the shutdown of this Pact from the international arena. Also in this period, as a part of the cooperation, the countries of the Balkan Pact made the establishment of the *Balkan Trade Chamber* with the seat in Istanbul,<sup>10</sup> an act which was reflecting the level of relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries until the beginning of World War Two.

After World War Two, two world powers appeared on the international arena, the USA and the Soviet Union, who were simultaneously considered as leaders of the bipolar world. The new equilibriums of the international relations had great reflections on the Turkish foreign policy. Namely, in the post World War Two period and the hinterland, Turkey faced great changes which were considered by the Turkish authorities as threats against the sovereignty and safety of their country. In this context, the note of the Soviet Union with requests from the Turkish authorities for a change of the Turkish-Soviet border in favour of the Soviet interests and for establishment of a land and sea base on the Bosphorus was a clear indicator of the threat Turkey was facing at the beginning of the Cold War. Simultaneously, the increase of the Soviet presence in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria which was sharing borders with Turkey at the same time, as well as the facing of all Balkan countries – except Greece – with a direct influence of the Soviet Union, were representing a sufficient motive to create a new concept of the Turkish foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the above created conjuncture, Turkey began with the development of its' relations with the western countries, especially with the USA, a process that resulted with the American economic aid to this country through the Truman Doctrine (1947) and culminated with the membership of the western defence institution NATO (1952). On the other hand, in this period, as a result of misunderstandings between Josip Broz Tito<sup>12</sup> and Joseph Stalin (1948),<sup>13</sup> Yugoslavia was also under pressure from the Soviet Union, a fact that contributed for it to come together towards the western world. However, the communist arranging of this country was an obstacle for it to join NATO and benefit from the American economic aid. Under these circumstances, in 1953, in Ankara, Turkey, along with Greece and Yugoslavia, signed an Agreement for partnership and cooperation, followed by an Agreement signed in 1954 for military aid in case anyone faced an attack from any enemy countries. Despite all expectations, this new Balkan pact didn't last for long. The biggest reasons for the short life of this Pact were the normalization of the Soviet-Yugoslav relations as a result of the Soviet

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<sup>10</sup> Lesser, op.cit., p. 182-183; Saybaşılı, Kemali et. al. (ed.), *Yeni Balkanlar Eski Sorunlar*, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul 1997, p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> See: Lütem, op.cit., p. 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Josip Broz Tito, born in 1892 in Kumrovec, was a Yugoslav communist. After World War Two, where he was leading the partisan liberation movement, he became the Prime-minister and later he became the president of SFRY. He was honoured as the Marshall of Yugoslavia and the chief commander of the country. He is considered as one of the main founders of the Non-aligned countries movement and its' first general secretary. He passed away in 1980 in Ljubljana.

<sup>13</sup> Stalin was born in 1878 in the Georgian town of Gori. In the period between 1922-1953, he was on the function of the general Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Following Lenin's death, he turned into the main figure of the communist regime. He passed away in 1953.

authorities (1955), the beginning of cooperation between Tito, the Non-Aligned movement, as well as the new policy of Greece towards Cyprus. After these events took place, Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans entered a new phase which was characterized by *relative passivity*. After 1956, - the agenda of debates in the Turkish parliament about foreign policy that included the events in the Middle East and the Baghdad Pact and didn't treat the events on the Balkans in any manner<sup>14</sup>, are examples enough about the newly established situation in the Turkish diplomacy about this region.

The 1960s are considered as a period when the Turkish foreign policy were facing various challenges in the international arena. Namely, besides the fact that Turkey was a target of often Soviet threats, simultaneously, its' relations with the USA were characterized with diplomatic tensions that were results of the events like the "Jupiter" rockets, the "U-2" case and the dispute about Cyprus. In these conditions, Turkey began to create and implement a **multidimensional foreign policy** that resulted with intensification and development of the political relations with Bulgaria, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Romania. In this context, we should highlight that Turkish foreign policy, through development of the relations with Yugoslavia and Romania was pretending to strengthen its position towards Greece within the equilibriums on the Balkans.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the defence and safety concepts of the Republic of Turkey (between 1945-1970), that was initially designed based on the Soviet and Bulgarian safety threats, after 1975, as a result of the events in Cyprus, along with both mentioned countries, Greece entered the list of countries that represent a threat against Turkish state interests. The 1970s represented a continuation of the multidimensional foreign policy of Turkey that was created during the 1960s. In this period, Turkey continued its' efforts for the development of relations with the Balkan countries, with the exception of Greece with whom they had tense relations. As a part of the reinforcement of Turkey's relations with the Balkan countries, in 1975, the Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel paid a visit to Sofia, where along with his Bulgarian counterpart Todor Zhivkov signed an *Agreement for good neighbourliness and cooperation*. Simultaneously, the visits of Zhivkov and the Romanian president Nicolae Ceauşescu to Ankara in 1976 are sufficient proofs that depicture the realistic picture of the Turkish-Balkans relations in the mentioned period. Also, we can claim that the relaxed relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries also continued during the 1980s until the end of the Cold War, with an exception of the traditional relations with Greece and the tense atmosphere with Bulgaria (1989-1990), which was a result of the beginning of the application of assimilative policies (1984) towards the Turkish minority in this country.<sup>16</sup>

From the above mentioned, we can make a conclusion that Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans between the two world wars was *active*. As an argument of the active policy of Turkey towards the Balkans, we can indicate the participation of this country on the Balkan conferences and the establishment of the Balkan Pact. Simultaneously, we can conclude that after World War Two, respectively during the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans went through various phases that were characterized with peculiar specifications. Namely, at the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey gave enormous efforts to come close with Greece and Yugoslavia within the Balkan Pact, which had the objective of prevention of threats and risks from the Soviet Union. However, this pact didn't provide the expected results. Also, in this period, the misunderstandings with the USA and the tense atmosphere with Greece resulted with

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<sup>14</sup> Lesser, op.cit., p. 183-184; Lütem, op.cit., p. 15; Saybaşılı, op.cit., p. 218-219.

<sup>15</sup> Lütem, op.cit., p. 16; Saybaşılı, op.cit., p. 221.

<sup>16</sup> Saybaşılı, op.cit., p. 222-223; Lütem, op.cit., p. 17.

the application of multidimensional diplomacy which, with some exceptions, resulted with normalization and relaxation of Turkish relations with most of the Balkan countries.

### ***b) Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans in the 1990s***

In conditions of the fall of the Warsaw pact and the communism – by which the world order was transformed from bipolar into mono-polar – the strategic regions like the Middle East and the Balkans were turned into a centre for application of the new Turkish strategies and policies, with the objective of preservation of Turkish state interests. As the result of the silencing of threats and risks for Turkey that originated from the Russian factor, the Turkish state, based on its' growing economy and influential army, began a new diplomatic offensive on the Balkans. One of the most influential factors that determined the Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans during the 1990s is also the strategy of the American diplomacy towards this region. Namely, the above mentioned period is a witness of the increase of the American influence as a result of the political and military interventions of this country for solving the newly formed crises and tensions. Simultaneously, the new diplomatic orientation of the newly established Balkan countries directed towards the western world, especially towards the USA, represents an additional reason for the American factorization in this region. However, in this period, besides the USA, Germany along with Russia appeared as influential factors, which through their policies and strategies were giving efforts to be factorized in this strategically and geopolitically important region. In the 1990s of the previous century, Turkish foreign policy had common strategic interests with the American foreign policy towards the Balkan region. The rapprochement and matching of common interests of these two countries on the Balkans were determined by series of factors. As the first factor that contributed for the rapprochement of these policies were the aspirations of the newly established Balkan countries, which exactly through a development of their relations with Turkey – which had traditional strategic relations with the USA – were also aiming to develop their relations with the leader on the international arena. Also, the strategy of the Americans for their factorization through exploitation of the religious, cultural and historical connections of Turkey with this region is considered as a second factor on the road of rapprochement of mutual policies for preservation of their state interests. Also, the problems on the relation European Union – Turkey, the removal of Turkey from the European plans regarding the safety of the continent and the rivalry between Europe (Germany) within NATO were additional reason for intensifying of cooperation between Turkey and the USA in the Balkan region.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the American foreign policy towards the Balkans, as a second influential factor in the last decade of the last century that determined Turkish diplomacy towards this region was also Greece. Namely, Greece through its' lobby group in the USA, which had important reflections on the State Department decisions, through its' position in the pan-orthodox policies in this region and with its' deepening of relations with Russia, Armenia, Iran and Syria, with the aim of weakening the position of Turkey, had important effects on the flows of the Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans.

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<sup>17</sup> See: Lütem, op.cit., p. 23-24.

As a result of the mentioned conjuncture in the 1990s, Turkey gave enormous efforts towards the development of its relations with the Balkan countries, especially with Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania. Also, in the mentioned period, Russia efforts for its renewed factorization on the Balkans through policies of Slavism and the Orthodox religion and the Turkish and Muslim minorities that possess history of few centuries in this region can be named as some of the most influential factors that gave significant contribution to the Turkish strategies for this region.<sup>18</sup>

## Turkish-Bulgarian relations

With the end of the Cold War, Turkey faced one of the biggest challenges of its foreign policy towards the Balkans. Namely, in 1989, the assimilative policy of the Bulgarian authorities towards the Turkish community was on a culmination point, which began in the middle of the 1980s and was characterized by persecution or forced eviction of the members of this community from their century old hearths. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1989, along with the departure of Todor Zhivkov from the presidential position and when Petar Mladenov came to rule, a new era of Bulgarian policy towards the Turkish minority began. Mladenov, who supported the democratic reforms of the country, was also an initiator of the process of normalization of the state policies towards this ethnic community, whereby the Turkish-Bulgarian relations entered a new positive phase,<sup>19</sup> so that, through the change of the Bulgaria regime, the Turkish ethnic community that numbered 800 000 citizens, after 1990 under the leadership of Ahmet Doğan, established the Political movement for rights and freedoms, which started representing the interests of this community in the Bulgarian parliament as the third political power. This event, along with the new foreign policy towards Bulgaria, which insisted to normalize the relations with the neighbours for easier integration in the western institutions, gave an additional impulse to the process of development of Turkish-Bulgarian relations in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> Along with the normalization of the Turkish-Bulgarian relations, as a result of the change of regime in Bulgaria, both countries signed series of agreements as a part of the development of mutual relations. In this context, in 1991, the "Sofia agreement" was signed, and in 1992, the "Edirne document" was signed, which are considered as very important agreements for cooperation in the area of military education between the two countries after the democratic reforms of Bulgaria. Also, according to these documents, both countries were obliged to stop the military manoeuvres up to 15 kilometres from the mutual borders. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1992, the Agreement for partnership, good neighbourliness, cooperation and safety was signed, which gave additional contribution on the road for the development of mutual relations. The same year, Turkey highlighted its support for the membership of Bulgaria in the NATO alliance, followed by the important role in the coming years in the process of its membership in this alliance as a full member (2004). In this period, the military cooperation between the two countries was reinforces through the mutual military exercises within the NATO programme Partnership for Peace. In the 1990s, the Turkish-Bulgarian relations are characterized through the formalization of the mutual cooperation against the activities of the terrorist organization PKK. Namely, in that direction, in 1995, the Agreement

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<sup>18</sup> See: Lüttem, op.cit., p. 24-28.

<sup>19</sup> Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p.78, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Kır, Alpaslan, *Türkiye'nin Makedonya Politikasının Balkan Politikası İçerisindeki Yeri (master's thesis)*, H.A.K. Stratejik Araştırmalar Enstitüsü, İstanbul 2008, p. 4-30; Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 79.

for fight against trade of drugs and terrorism was signed. In this context, in 1998 in Turkey, an Agreement for fight against terrorism, organized crime, narcotics, money laundry and trade with people and weapons was signed between Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria, which had the aim of prevention of the activities of the PKK.<sup>21</sup>

## Turkish-Albanian relations

During the 1990s, Turkish-Albanian relations also entered a new phase that was characterized by development of the mutual relations in the political, economic and military spheres. In this period, the change of the regime in Albania and the factorization of Turkey in the Balkans after the elimination of the conjuncture of the Cold War were giving a special contribution of the process of development of the mutual relations. It should be highlighted that within the plan for reinforcement of relations between Turkey and Albania, in June 1992, an Agreement for friendship and cooperation was signed. One month later, Tirana and Ankara signed an Agreement for military cooperation which gave an additional impulse to the mutual relations. Within this agreement, Turkey took over an initiative for modernization of the Albanian army and specialization of Albanian military personnel for the needs of Albania. Also, in November of the same year, these two countries signed an Agreement for military and defensive-technological cooperation. In the period of the 1990s, a great contribution for the strengthening of the mutual relations was the Turkish support for Albania's membership in regional and international organizations,<sup>22</sup> like, for example, the membership in the Organization for economic cooperation in the Black Sea and in the Organization of the Islamic Conference.<sup>23</sup> In 1995, Turkish-Albanian relations were facing the challenge of the growing influence of the Greek policy towards Albania. Namely, since that year, by using its EU membership and by increasing its economic influence in Albania,<sup>24</sup> Greece was turned into an important factor in this country, which brought damage to the strategic interests of Turkey in this region. It should be highlighted that the factorization of Greece in this country, besides others, was also a consequence of the efforts of the Greek diplomacy for weakening the strengthened Turkish positions in the Balkans, a process that was damaging the Greek strategic interests. Besides the Greek challenge of the Turkish-Albanian relations, the same year in New York, the presidents of the two countries, as well as the ones of North Macedonia and Bulgaria, agreed to build the East-West road, also known as the Corridor-8, whose construction was predicting improvement of the transport between the mentioned countries.<sup>25</sup> It should be highlighted that an important moment for the Turkish-Albanian relation was the decision of the Turkish state to send 779 Turkish soldiers in Albania as a part of the Overtime and limited international defence power (ALBA), which was established through a decision of the Security Council of the UN, with the objective of breaking the unrest in this country that happened as a result of the banking scandal.<sup>26</sup> In 1998, the presidents of the general headquarters of both countries signed a protocol that was foreseeing modernization of

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<sup>21</sup> See: [www.tasam.org/](http://www.tasam.org/) 14 September 2012; Kır, op.cit., p. 4-31.

<sup>22</sup> About international organizations, see: Tonovski Gjorgji, *International organizations*, European University, Skopje 2006.

<sup>23</sup> See: [www.tasam.org/](http://www.tasam.org/) 14 September 2012; Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 81; Kır, op.cit., p. 4-29.

<sup>24</sup> See: Kır, op.cit., p. 4-16.

<sup>25</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-29, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 81-82; [www.tasam.org/](http://www.tasam.org/) 14 September 2012; Kır, op.cit., p. 4-30.

one military base and construction of a Military-naval academy by Turkey in Albania.<sup>27</sup> From the above mentioned we can come to a conclusion that along with the change of the regime in Albania, Turkish-Albanian relations entered a new phase that began to differ through development of the political and economic relations and strengthening the military cooperation between the two countries. Although since 1995, Greece started to balance the Turkish influence in this country through its economic and political trump cards, the 2000s, which will be analysed further in this study, are witnessing new equilibriums, on a global and the regional level, which are of a great benefit for the Turkish strategic interests for the Balkans and the country itself.

## Turkish-Macedonian relations

North Macedonia<sup>28</sup> is considered as a very important country for the strategic interests of Turkey in the Balkan region, because of the Turkish and Muslim segment of the Macedonian society. Besides this, also the geostrategic position of this country has a special importance for the Turkish strategies for the Balkans. The Turkish-Macedonian relations have deep historical roots that origin since the time of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled this country for approximately five centuries. Along with the independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991, Turkey was one of the first countries (immediately after Bulgaria) which accepted the independence of this country. Also, it should be highlighted that Turkey was the first country that opened its embassy in Macedonia. All these attitudes of Turkey towards the newly established country, besides the real, they also had a symbolical importance, because they were depicting the level of relations between the two countries.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the newly established country was facing series of challenges. One of the most important challenges was the Yugoslavia crisis which at any moment could carry serious military implications in this country too. In this context, the former president of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, with the aim of prevention of further spread of the war on the territory of this country, requested from the UN to send military forces at the Macedonian-Serbian border. This request was accepted, followed by the process of sending 300 international soldiers under the command of UNPROFOR under the UN, with the objective of putting the Macedonian-Serbian border under control. Within the mentioned international forces, although in a symbolic manner there were a certain number of American soldiers, whereby the American diplomacy was highlighting the support for keeping the sovereignty and integrity of Macedonia,<sup>29</sup> an act that was coinciding with the strategies of Turkey, which since the very beginning of the independency was on the side and the interests of this country. One of the most important spheres of cooperation between Turkey and Macedonia during the 1990s was defence. In this context, an Agreement for military education and cooperation was signed between the two countries in 1994, whereas in 1995, an Agreement for defensive industry and cooperation was also signed. Within the mentioned agreements, Turkey offered a huge support for modernization of the Macedonian army. Simultaneously, as a result of the signed agreements, Turkey donated 20% of its military aircraft of American origin F-5.<sup>30</sup> These agreements are only a small part of

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<sup>27</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-30; [www.tasam.org](http://www.tasam.org) / 14 September 2012.

<sup>28</sup> We should highlight that the name North Macedonia began to be used as a result of the Prespa Agreement signed between Greece and Macedonia in June 2018.

<sup>29</sup> See: Kır, op.cit., p. 4-23.

<sup>30</sup> [www.tasam.org](http://www.tasam.org) / 14 September 2012

thirty agreements signed between the two countries until 1995. In the period 1994-1995, when Macedonia was under an economic siege of the Greek embargo, Turkey was one of the important economic supporters of this country, a fact that depicts the level of relations between the two countries in the above mentioned period.<sup>31</sup> However, in 1995, with the signing of the temporary agreement with Greece, the Turkish-Greece relations recovered a process that made contributions towards relative weakening of the Turkish factor in this country until the beginning of the 2000.<sup>32</sup>

## Turkish-Greece relations

Although Turkey along with Greece is a member of the NATO alliance, the problems between these two countries in the past, as well as during the 1990s were representing a great challenge for the mutual relations. Namely, the dispute about the Cyprus Island, the claims of the Turkish side about alleged assimilation of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace and misunderstandings regarding the Aegean Sea in this period were considered as the main challenges in the process of further development of the mutual relations. Besides the above mentioned disputes, also an additional contribution for regression of the Turkey-Greece relations in the period of the 1990s were the events like the Kardak crises (1996)<sup>33</sup>, the efforts of Greece for dislocation of the S-300 rockets in the Greek part of Cyprus (1997) and the arrest of the leader of the PKK terrorist organization, Ocalan in Kenya, immediately after he came out of the Greek embassy of this country, an act that was interpreted as an argument for the Greek support of this organization. We should highlight that despite the ultranationalist policies of Greece 1989-1995, which caused isolation and weakening of the Greek policy in the Balkans, nevertheless along with the moment when Kostas Simitis came to rule, a new era of Greek diplomacy towards this region began, which was characterized with strengthening of the positions of Greece. The most important trump cards of the Greek diplomacy in this period on the road of its factorization were its' EU membership, which was a main state priority for all countries from the Balkan region, and increased Greek investments in the region.<sup>34</sup> In this context, after 1995, the factorization of the Greek state in the Balkans was damaging the Turkish strategic interests in this region, especially its interests in Albania and North Macedonia.

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<sup>31</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-23; Akman, op.cit., p. 234.

<sup>32</sup> See: Akman, op.cit., p. 234.

<sup>33</sup> In 1996, two small uninhabited islands (ridges) in the Aegean Sea, which are called Kardak by the Turkish, and Imia by the Greeks, were the reason for a crisis between Turkey and Greece. The beginnings of this crisis are dating since 1995, when Greek commandos set the Greek flag on the island, followed by both of countries' fleets to surround the island from two sides. After these events, the Turkish Prime Minister Ciller ordered the Turkish army to set the Turkish flag, followed by a night operation of the Turkish commandos, who managed to go through between the Greek military ships and set the Turkish flag on the above mentioned ridges. After these events, the American president Clinton initiated intensified diplomacy to solve the crisis, followed by normalization of mutual relations. For more detailed information regarding Turkish-Greek disputes in the Aegean Sea, see: Aydin, Mustafa (et. al), *Turkish-Greek relations*, Routledge, London 2004.

<sup>34</sup> See: Kır, op.cit., p. 4-32, 4-33; Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 82.

## Turkish-Romanian relations

The Turkish-Romanian relations, unlike the ones from the Cold War period, where both countries belonged to different pacts, during the 1990s, with the change of the regime in Romania, these relations entered a new phase which was characterized with development in numerous spheres, especially in the area of economy. In 1991, Turkey and Romania signed the Agreement for friendship and cooperation, which, along with the act of joining of the Romanian state in the Organization for economic cooperation in the Black Sea, gave a huge impulse to the process of development of mutual relations.<sup>35</sup>

We can consider as the main determinants of the Turkish-Romanian relations during the 1990s, the Turkish investments in Romania, its' joining in NATO and the increase of the PKK activities in this country. In the context of Turkish investments in Romania, we should highlight that during 1995, the number of Turkish companies was 4000, whereas in 1996 the Turkish companies, after Italian and German companies, were on the third place of the highest numbers of foreign companies located in this country. In 1997, Turkish companies were on the top of the list with active companies in Romania. The size of the Romanian market, in comparison with other Balkan countries (about 22 million populations) and the government reliefs provided for foreign investors were considered as an important factor for the increase of the Turkish economic presence in this country.<sup>36</sup> Besides the mentioned factors, simultaneously, the destabilization of Yugoslavia during the same period, which represented a process that contributed for its bypass by investors, can be considered as an additional reason for the concentration of Turkish business activities exactly in this Balkan country. Besides the economic relations, the growing activities of the PKK in Romania can be considered as one of the most important factors that determined Turkish-Romanian relations during the 1990s. Namely, PKK managed to find in Romania a safe nest for safe implementation of its activities, having in mind the fact that this country now is considered as a place where various criminal activities are intertwining on the European continent. When the terrorist organization PKK was on the Romanian list of terrorist organizations (1998), this organization became a mutual target for Turkey and Romania as well, which once more confirmed the positive mutual relations.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the process of Romania's entrance in the NATO alliance is considered as a vital one in the context of the development of mutual relations, bearing in mind the fact that the integration of the Balkan countries in this institution represented a top priority of the Turkish diplomacy.

## Turkish-Croatian and Turkish-Slovenian relations

One of the most important events during the fall of Yugoslavia was the declaration of independence by Croatia and Slovenia on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1991. This act was followed by an intervention of the Yugoslavian army against these countries, which lasted approximately for a year in Croatia and less than one week in Slovenia. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1992, as a result of political pressure by Germany, which had strategic interests in this part of the Balkan Peninsula, the countries of the European Union accepted the independency of the mentioned countries,

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<sup>35</sup> Akman, op.cit., p. 231; Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 84.

<sup>36</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-32. See: Akman, op.cit., p. 230.

<sup>37</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-32.

followed by the recognition of independency of these countries by Turkey as well on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1992. During the war in Bosnia, Turkey gave great efforts in the direction of finding a mutual acceptable decision for overcoming the crisis between the Croatians and the Bosnians. Also, the Turkish state played a vital role for a ceasefire between the mentioned countries (1993) and was a mediator in the process of the Washington Agreement, which resulted with the establishment of the Bosnian-Croatian federation.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, as far as the development of Turkish-Slovenian relations during the 1990s, it should be highlighted that Slovenia has represented a vital country for Turkish foreign policy. In this context, Turkey gave significant efforts on the road of integration of this country in the NATO alliance, an act that contributed towards deepening of the bilateral relations. Besides the political and military cooperation, the economic cooperation between the two countries represented an important segment in the mutual relations. Namely, the geostrategic position of Slovenia played an important role for the entrance of Turkish export in the European trade market.<sup>39</sup> From the above stated, we can conclude that the 1990s represent a period when Turkish foreign policy supported the process of independence of Croatia and Slovenia through recognition of the independence of these two countries, which was followed by development of the economic relations too.

### **Turkish-Yugoslav (Serbian) relations**

One of the most important factors that determined the direction of the Turkish-Yugoslav (Serbian) relations during the 1990s is the act of recognition of the independence of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia by the Turkish state (6<sup>th</sup> February 1992), followed by a start of a new era of Turkish-Serbian relations, which was characterized by political crisis.<sup>40</sup> The conflict on the territory of Yugoslavia during this period contributed towards regression of mutual relations. The Turkish support towards Bosnia and Herzegovina during the conflict gave an additional impulse for tightening of these relations. By signing of the Dayton Agreement, the Turkish-Yugoslav (Serbian) relations entered a new phase where they decided to raise the bilateral relations on a level of embassies, an act that contributed towards normalization of mutual relations.<sup>41</sup> Simultaneously, besides the conflict in Bosnia, also the Kosovo issue played a vital role in the determination of the Turkish foreign policy towards Yugoslavia (Serbia). However, unlike the war in Bosnia, where Turkey was supporting the independency of the country, the attitude of the Turkish state about the Kosovo issue was that this problem represents an internal matter of Yugoslavia and a permanent solution should be found, by respecting the territorial integrity of this country.<sup>42</sup> The stance of Turkish foreign policy towards the Kosovo issue during the 1990s, which primarily respected the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, was based on the fact of the existence of the Kurdish issue in the internal political scene of the Turkish state. Namely, through eventual support for secession of Kosovo from Yugoslavia, the Turkish authorities had fears from its implications on the Kurdish issue which represented a serious threat for the territorial integrity of the Turkish state. However,

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<sup>38</sup> Kır, *op.cit.*, p. 4-18; Akman, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>39</sup> Akman, *op.cit.*, p. 233-234.

<sup>40</sup> After the recognition of the independency of the mentioned four countries by Turkey, the Serbian (Yugoslav) authorities decided to withdraw the ambassador in Ankara.

<sup>41</sup> Akman, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> Aydoğmuş, *op.cit.*, p. 84; Akman, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

along with the beginning of the Kosovo conflict (1998), the normalized political relations between Turkey-Yugoslavia faced a new challenge. As a result of this conflict, the NATO alliance decided to perform a military intervention against Yugoslavia<sup>43</sup>, with the aim of prevention of violence against Kosovo civilians performed by Serbian military and paramilitary forces. In this military operation, Turkey played an active role, which resulted with repeated tightening of the mutual relations.<sup>44</sup> However, with the normalization of the situation in Kosovo, the Turkish-Serbian relations entered a new phase which was characterized by development and deepening of the political, economic and cultural relations.

### Turkish-Bosnian relations

With the declaration of independency of Bosnia and Herzegovina by president Alija Izetbegovic (1<sup>st</sup> March 1992), a bloody war started that brought enormous human and material damage to this Balkan country. Globally observed, the attitude of the international community towards this was a passive act that contributed for the increase of the number of victims between the civilians. The passive attitude of the international community actors about this war was based on few factors. Namely, the passivity of the foreign policy of the European Union towards this conflict was based on the diversity of the state interests of the countries that were making this community and on the attitude of the country members of the Union which considered that this crisis represents an internal issue of Yugoslavia. Simultaneously, the Russian Federation in the post-soviet period was facing internal political and economic problems, a conjuncture which wasn't allowing this country to play an independent active role during that war. Globally observed, during the war, Russian attitudes were in accordance with the ones of the western countries. Besides internal political, economic and social problems, the policies of the pro-western Russian minister of foreign affairs Andrey Kozirev were also giving additional impulse to the pro-western orientation of the Russian diplomacy towards the war in Bosnia. However, besides the above mentioned, mutual values with the Serbians, as well as Slavism and the Orthodox religion were representing a stimulus for passive support of the Serbian attitudes and acts in the war. The opposition against the air bombing of Serbian targets by western forces is a great example of that. On the other hand, in the first period of the war, the USA strategy on the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not foreseeing some military operation, but only diplomatic efforts to stop the war, because of the fact that according to the American authorities, the problem was not happening on European territory, therefore the Europeans were supposed to deal with it themselves. Simultaneously, at the beginning of the war, the American public opinion was not informed enough about the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, hence the lack of pressure by the

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<sup>43</sup> About the *humanitarian intervention* and international relations/international law, see: Welsh, M. Jennifer (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention And International Relations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004; Chesterman, Simon, *Just War Or Just Peace? Humanitarian Intervention And International Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001; Murphy, D. Sean, *Humanitarian Intervention: The United Nations In An Evolving World Order*, University Of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1996; Simms, Brendan et.al. (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, Cambridge University Press, New York & Cambridge, 2011; Weiss, G. Thomas, *War And Conflict In The Modern World: Humanitarian Intervention*, Polity Press, Malden & Cambridge, 2012; Orford, Anne, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights And The Use Of Force In International Law*, Cambridge University Press, New York & Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Akman, op.cit., p. 232-233.

American people on their political authorities for stopping the military activities in this country.<sup>45</sup> Under these circumstances, when the Balkans was surviving the greatest conflict after the end of World War Two, through its dynamic foreign policy which appeared after the end of the Cold War, Turkey began to take its position in the Balkan equilibriums, respectively in the war that was ongoing on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this newly created conjuncture, which was very important for this region, through several diplomatic segments, the Turkish state played a vital role in the process of ceasefire in this Balkan country, so that on the 5 May 1992, the Turkish minister of foreign affairs, Hikmet Çetin, in his letter directed to the UN Security Council, was highlighting the need for taking necessary steps towards the recognition of the independency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and providing its sovereignty and territorial integrity. As another activity of the Turkish diplomacy within the UN for stopping the war in this Balkan country, we can also refer to the Turkish support of the Resolution 757 which was foreseeing strings of sanctions against Yugoslavia with the aim of stopping military activities. One of the most important incentives of Turkish foreign policy for ceasefire in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the issuance of the Security Council “Excise Plan” (August 1992) regarding the measures needed to be undertaken for a quick stop of the war. This plan was foreseeing undertaking direct steps on the road towards establishing peace in this country. Namely, through this plan, the Turkish state handed a request for trial and punishment of the individuals who were applying force against the people in Bosnia, securing the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians, closure of camps that were under control of the Serbian forces and stopping the military embargo against the Bosnians. According to this Turkish plan, in case of non-fulfilment of these conditions, a new phase should have been following, which was foreseeing a military intervention. It should be highlighted that this plan, as well as other plans of the international community (Vance-Owen plan, Owen-Stoltenberg plan and the safe regions plan) didn’t manage to stop the military activities against civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>46</sup> Besides diplomatic efforts within the UN institutions, Turkish authorities also gave efforts through the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Council of Europe for maintaining the stability and provision of territorial integrity of this Balkan country. Turkish diplomacy also had a role in the membership of this country in the international OSCE institution as a full member 29 April 1992). The Turkish state also played a vital role in the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution (31 March 1993), which was foreseeing a flying ban over the airspace of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, in this international action, Turkey participated with approximately 18 military F-16 aircraft. Simultaneously, the Turkish navy was a part of the group of international war ships that were observing the implementation of the embargo in the Adriatic Sea.<sup>47</sup>

The Turkish state, besides its international efforts within international institutions and organizations (UN, OIC and EC), it also had mutual activities with the United States towards establishment of peace and stability in this Balkan country. For implementation of this objective, besides the USA, Turkey also gave its effort in the road of the establishment of the federation consisted by the Bosnian and Croatian people. The idea for the foundation of this federation was realized through the Washington Agreement (24 February 1994), an act that represented a key moment in the equilibriums of the war. However, besides all efforts of the international community to stop the war through various diplomatic activities, as well as condemnations, forming safety zones, decisions for the application of embargo and forming banned flight zones,

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<sup>45</sup> Kir, op.cit., p. 4-19.

<sup>46</sup> Kir, op.cit., p. 4-21.

<sup>47</sup> [www.tasam.org](http://www.tasam.org) / 14 September 2012; Akman, op.cit., p. 231; Kir, op.cit., p. 4-20.

the Serbian side was strengthening its positions by the day. The Srebrenica genocide, the events in Sarajevo and the overrun of 70% of this country's territory – an act which was representing a vital step towards the forming of Great Serbia – increased the possibility for international military intervention with an objective of putting an end to the war, so that the international community led by NATO, on 31 August 1995 started an air operation with the objective of attack on Serbian positions. As the result of this international air operation, the Serbian side was forced to sit at a negotiating table, along with Bosnians and Croatians for a ceasefire and establishment of peace. The negotiations for establishment of peace and the future of the Bosnian state were developed in the American city of Dayton, following by the obligation to sign the Dayton Peace Agreement (October 1995) by all three conflicted involved sides, which was signed in the French capital on the 14 December the same year. After the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended, in December 1995 in London, a Peace Implementation Conference – PIC was held, which was endeavouring to monitor and control the stabilization process and maintenance of peace in the post-war period in this country. The executing committee of this conference, with 55 countries involved, was consisting of the USA, France, Italy, Japan, European Council, Russia, Germany, Canada, EU Presidency and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which was represented by Turkey itself, a fact that proves the activity of Turkish diplomacy in this complex diplomatic process. Simultaneously, we should highlight that Turkey participated actively with one brigade in the international forces called UNPROFOR, which were led by the UN and had the objective of maintenance of peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, along with the forming of the IFOR (Implementation Force) command,<sup>48</sup> which was under the leadership of NATO and had the objective of keeping peace and stability in the post conflict period, Turkey, with approximately 1500 soldiers played an important role in keeping peace and stability of this Balkan country. Simultaneously, within the American strategy for assisting the Bosnian army, the Turkish state has obliged itself since 1996 to educate Bosnian military cadres (consisting Bosnians and Croatians) in Turkish military schools according to NATO standards, an act that contributed towards further improvement and strengthening of the military skills of the newly established Bosnian army.<sup>49</sup>

## **Turkey and regional economic and political initiatives**

In the 1990s, the Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans, besides through the development of bilateral relations, was also different through the support of various initiatives, which aimed to strengthen relations of the countries from this region. Turkey, as a country that pretended to factorize itself in this vital region, gave significant effort for implementation of the objectives of the newly created initiatives, with the objective of strengthening the stability and peace in this unstable region. The Turkish state played an active role in the Central European Initiative (CEI). This initiative which included members like Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Greece and Turkey had an objective to capacitate the countries from the region for their more successful integration in the European Union. After the end of the Cold War, Turkey was also the initiator of the Economic cooperation of the Black Sea. This initiative for mutual cooperation of the region was signed in Istanbul (June 1992) and had the primary objective to strengthen the economic relations between the member countries and to give contribution towards the

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<sup>48</sup> These forces were renamed in 1997 in SFOR – Stabilization Force.

<sup>49</sup> [www.tasam.org](http://www.tasam.org) / 14 September 2012; Akman, op.cit., p. 231; Kır, op.cit., p. 4-22.

maintenance of peace and stability in the region surrounding the Black Sea. Besides Turkey, the other member countries of this initiative were Russia, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Romania and Ukraine. Simultaneously, countries like Greece, Egypt, Israel, Netherlands and Slovakia had the status of observing countries.<sup>50</sup> Besides the two mentioned initiatives, during the nineties of the last century, Turkey also took part in the Southeast Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI), initiated by the USA (1996). In this initiative, besides Turkey, the following countries took part: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Moldavia, Slovenia, North Macedonia and Greece. The aim of this initiative was strengthening of economic relations between the countries from this region and their support in European integrations. In 1998, Turkey was the host of two meetings of a high level of the countries members of this initiative.<sup>51</sup>

During the 1990s, Turkey appeared on the Balkan scene, not only as an active participant in the political and economic initiatives, but also as the initiator of the idea for establishment of Balkan Peace Corps, respectively, the Southeast Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG). This brigade was established in 1998 in Skopje, as a part of the meeting of the defence ministers of Southeast Europe countries. The member countries of this initiative are the following: Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Italy and Albania. USA, Slovenia and Croatia were countries with the status of observers. The top priority aim of this initiative was contribution for strengthening the stability in the region and development of neighbour relations.<sup>52</sup>

### Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans at the beginning of the XXI century

The new proactive and multidimensional concept of Turkish diplomacy was based on the diplomatic strategies of the ruling AKP party, which were created by the former Turkish minister of foreign affairs and prime minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu.<sup>53</sup> The appointment of Davutoğlu at the most important functions of Turkish foreign policy during the 2000s had great significance for the efficient application of his doctrine, known as the strategic depth doctrine. This new vision of Turkish foreign policy in the 2000s, which was mainly based on the strategic depth doctrine, had and still has important reflections on the diplomatic activities of this country in international equilibriums. The Balkan Peninsula, which is an important segment of the Turkish hinterland, can be considered as one of the most important regions where political, economic and cultural effects of the new vision of the Turkish diplomacy are reflected.

According to the new concept of the Turkish foreign policy, Turkey, as the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire, is obliged to protect the interest of the **Turkish and Muslim minorities** in this region.<sup>54</sup> Erdoğan's meetings with religious and political leaders of the Turks during the visit of Western Thrace (region in Greece) in 2010, the intensifying of the support of municipalities from Turkey towards the Turkish and Muslim municipalities in the Balkans, Davutoğlu's activities for

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<sup>50</sup> Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 91-92.

<sup>51</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-27.

<sup>52</sup> Aydoğmuş, op.cit., p. 88; Kır, op.cit., p. 4-28.

<sup>53</sup> In this instance we must mention that as a result of internal political misunderstandings between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, the prime minister Davutoğlu at the time resigned from his function prime minister of the government formed by the AKP on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2016, nevertheless his vision in practice still remains as a pillar of the new Turkish proactive diplomacy towards the Balkans.

<sup>54</sup> Davutoğlu, „*Stratejik Derinlik*“, p. 123.

stopping the tensions in the Sandzak area (region in Serbia) and his meetings with representatives of the Islamic religious community, meetings with political leaders and non-government sector in North Macedonia, are only some of the numerous events which depict the intensity of the implementation of the new vision of the Turkish diplomacy.<sup>55</sup>

Simultaneously, according to the new concept of the Turkish foreign policy based on Davutoğlu's strategic depth doctrine, Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans is supposed to **balance the strategies** of international factors like USA, EU, Japan, China and Russia, towards this region. In this context, according to this vision, Turkey is obliged to strengthen its bilateral relations with the Balkan countries, especially with the ones that are members, or are claiming to become a member of NATO, with the objective of strengthening the Turkish position within this defence and political organization. The unreserved support for the Romanian and Bulgarian membership (2004) and the countries members of the Adriatic group (2008)<sup>56</sup> are some of the most important reflections of the new Turkish policy towards this region.<sup>57</sup>

The principles of the new concept of Turkish foreign policy like **safety for everyone and giving preference to dialogue for solving crisis** also had their own reflections on the Turkish diplomacy in the Balkan region. Namely, Davutoğlu, as the minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Turkey, gave great effort for surpassing the misunderstandings and strengthening the relations and the dialogue between the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian parties. For the implementation of this objective, Turkey initiated several meetings, some of them like the Istanbul Summit (2010), where under the patronage of the former Turkish president Abdullah Gül, the presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia participated. These meetings initiated by the Turkish diplomacy had their reflections on the events in the Balkans, so that, as a result of Turkish diplomatic efforts, in March 2010, the Serbian parliament adopted a declaration by which it condemned the Srebrenica massacre and also the Serbian president Boris Tadic, along with the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and the Turkish minister of foreign affairs Davutoğlu, participated at the anniversary of the massacre in the above mentioned town.<sup>58</sup> The Turkish proactive and multidimensional foreign policy in the Balkans is in harmony with the foreign policy of the USA towards this region. Turkey and USA are advocating for a peaceful and stable region where dialogue and cooperation between countries will be encouraged. For the realization of this objective, Turkey and USA are supporting the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkan countries.

At the beginning of the XXI century, the Turkish proactive and multidimensional foreign policy had and still has important reflections on the relations between Turkey and Kosovo. According to this new foreign strategy, Turkey should create policies in the Balkan region that will

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<sup>55</sup> About bilateral meetings, see: [www.bim.org.mk/](http://www.bim.org.mk/) 11 September 2011; [www.zaman.com.tr/](http://www.zaman.com.tr/) 16 May 2010; [www.hurriyet.com.tr/](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/) 11 July 2010; Ali, Muhamed, "Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrinin Balkanlara Yansımaları", *Balkan Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Bursa, 2010, v.1, no.2, p. 151-152; Davutoğlu, „Stratejik Derinlik“, p. 154.

<sup>56</sup> It should be highlighted that, beside the enormous support of Turkey along with the USA for Macedonia's membership in NATO during the Bucharest Summit (2008), as a result of the name dispute, Greece achieved to block the road for full membership of the Macedonian state in this defense political organization. After the signing of the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia, this country became a full member of the NATO alliance in 2020.

<sup>57</sup> [www.al.com.mk/](http://www.al.com.mk/) 16 May 2010; [www.mfa.gov.tr/](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/) 16 May 2010; Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrinin Balkanlara Yansımaları“, p. 151-152; Davutoğlu, „Stratejik Derinlik“, p. 123, 237-239.

<sup>58</sup> Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrinin Balkanlara Yansımaları“, p. 152-153; [www.stargazete.com](http://www.stargazete.com/) /26 April 2010; [www.ntvmsnbc.com/](http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/) 7 August 2010; [www.hurriyet.com.tr/](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/) 11 July 2010.

equilibrate the policies of international factors like the USA, Japan, Russia, EU and China. Simultaneously, according to this vision, the Turkish state should enforce its relations with the potential countries candidates for membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures and support the Muslim and Turkish components of the countries in the Balkan region.<sup>59</sup> The mentioned segments of the new Turkish foreign political vision are also reflected on the real Turkish-Kosovo political situation. Namely, in the last period we are witnessing a growing positive trend in the mutual relations and simultaneously a strengthening of the cooperation between the policies of the USA and Turkey towards this country,<sup>60</sup> in a manner that Turkey, like other western factors, USA, EU and NATO, supported the Plan of Marti Ahtisaari that was delivered at the UN Security Council (26 March 2007) regarding the Kosovo status. However, with Russia and China's opposition of this plan, as well as their support of the Serbian stances from their side, on the 17 February 2008, the Kosovo authorities declared one-sided independency.<sup>61</sup> Immediately after the independency declaration, USA and Turkey were at the top of the list of countries that recognized the independency of the youngest country in Europe. Besides that, Turkey recognized the independency of the newly established country, it also took activities for the increase of the number of countries who recognized Kosovo's independency. Erdoğan's speech at the UN General Assembly (September 2011), through which he invited the member countries of the organization to recognize Kosovo's independence, the activities of the Turkish diplomacy within their relations in the Arab League, in the Organization of Islamic Conference and in NATO, contributed towards the increase of the number of countries who recognized the independency of this country. These are few examples about the commitment of Turkish diplomacy for support of the Kosovo positions from the international community.<sup>62</sup> Simultaneously, the opening of the first diplomatic mission of Kosovo in Ankara and the intensification of mutual visits of the political elites of the two countries is a proof enough about the level of mutual relations.<sup>63</sup>

Besides the domain of policies, similar as during the NATO alliance military intervention (1999), as well as the post-war period (during the 2000s), Turkey played an active role also in the defensive-security sphere in Kosovo, by joining the NATO forces on the 5 June 1999 with KFOR troops that counted 984 soldiers<sup>64</sup> who, besides having the main objective to maintain the peace and secure the border of this country, had and still are contributing for the decrease of ethnic problems and surpassing the problems of the local population in the domain of education, health and culture.<sup>65</sup> In the period from May to September during the same year, the Turkish state was a part of the Observing Mission of OSCE in Kosovo through 3 military personnel. Also, besides the G7 countries, Russia, Greece, China and Netherlands, Turkey also took active

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<sup>59</sup> See: Davutoğlu, „Stratejik Derinlik“, p. 123, 237-239; Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrin Balkanlara Yansımaları“, p. 151-154.

<sup>60</sup> Tayyar, Arı, personal interview, 12 December 2009.

<sup>61</sup> See Kır, op.cit., p. 4-44.

<sup>62</sup> See: [www.milliyet.com.tr](http://www.milliyet.com.tr) / 11 July 2010.

<sup>63</sup> See: Ali, Muhamed, „Refleksionet e Vizionit Davutogllian Në Marrëdhëniet Turko – Kosovare“, paper presented at the 6-th Annual Meeting of Institute Alb – Shkenca, Faculty of Law University of Prishtina, Kosovo, October, 2011. Only within one month, Kosovo has been visited by three Turkish deputy prime ministers and two Turkish ministers, a fact that indicates the level of the bilateral relations between the two countries.

<sup>64</sup> During 2008, the number of Turkish soldiers in Kosovo was 752, out of the total of 16000 NATO soldiers. See: Kır, op.cit., p. 4-43.

<sup>65</sup> Zaman, Fuat, *Kosova'nın Türkiye Açısından Stratejik Önemi (master thesis)*, G.Y.T.E. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Gebze, 2006, p. 62.

participation in the group called Friends of Kosovo, formed by the UN General Secretary, which had the objective of adoption and coordination of the decisions regarding the future of Kosovo.<sup>66</sup> Republic of Turkey, as a part of the civil authorities of the UN, UNMIK<sup>67</sup> had sent 207 civilian police officers. Since May of 2005, the Turkish state is participating with 128 civilian police officers and 79 observers, as a part of the UNMIK – CIVPOL Police Forces. Since May 2007, the Turkish army took over the command over the southern forces of Kosovo during the following year.<sup>68</sup> From the information given, one can conclude that Turkey, besides the political sphere, through UNMIK, KFOR and OSCE, has also played an active role in the domain of defence and safety, which makes it one of the most active international factors in this country.

On the other hand, during the 2000s, the Turkish-Macedonian relations are characterized with development and continuous deepening of mutual political, economic and cultural relations. The new concept of the Turkish proactive and multidimensional diplomacy, before all, is based on equilibration of other international factors in this Balkan country. In this context, in the last period, Turkish diplomacy is making great efforts for deepening of mutual relations. In order to reach this aim, the Turkish foreign strategy is foreseeing support of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of every Balkan country, among them North Macedonia as well. Within the support of the Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations of North Macedonia, along with the USA, Turkey offered great support for the full membership of North Macedonia in NATO at the NATO Summit held in Bucharest (2008).<sup>69</sup> However, the Greek veto stopped the efforts of the USA and Turkey on the road for a soon integration of this country in the mentioned military-political organization. At the same time, the stance of Turkey regarding the Macedonian-Greek name dispute was in interest of the Macedonian side, so that on few occasions the Turkish authorities highlighted the support of the Macedonian stances within this bilateral dispute. During the visit of the Turkish minister for Euro-Integrations Egemen Bağış<sup>70</sup> to Skopje, he highlighted Turkey's support of the Macedonian stance regarding the name with the following words: „...**I came in the great Macedonia, to Alexander's grandchildren...**“.<sup>71</sup> In this context, the support of the Turkish lobby in the USA about the positions of the Macedonian side for the name dispute must not be forgotten. The cooperation of the Turkish lobby with the Macedonian lobby in the USA about the mutual aims, among which the support of the position of the Macedonian country regarding the name dispute, is a typical example of the above mentioned.<sup>72</sup> Simultaneously, the cooperation between Turkey and North Macedonia in the Process of Cooperation of Southeast Europe countries and the Council for Regional Cooperation, represent an important factor for development of mutual relations.<sup>73</sup> We shouldn't forget the factor of religion (Islam) of a part of Macedonia's population and the factor of the Turkish ethnic minority, which represents a significant segment in the

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<sup>66</sup> Tangör, Burak, *Avrupa Güvenlik Yönetişimi Çerçevesinde Kosova, Bosna Ve Makedonya Krizleri Ve Türk Dış Politikası* (PhD dissertation), G.Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Ankara 2007, p. 257.

<sup>67</sup> UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

<sup>68</sup> Tangör, op.cit., p. 258- 259.

<sup>69</sup> Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrinin Balkanlara Yansımaları“, p. 151-154; Tayyar, Arı, personal interview, 12 December 2009. See: [www.utrinski.com.mk/](http://www.utrinski.com.mk/) 5 March 2011; [www.vest.com.mk/](http://www.vest.com.mk/) 3 April 2008; [www.novamakedonija.com.mk/](http://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/) 3 April 2008.

<sup>70</sup> He was born in 1970 in the Turkish town of Bingol. He has a Master's in public administration. Since 2002, he is a member of parliament from the AK party and is considered as one of Erdoğan's closest associates.

<sup>71</sup> [www.time.mk/](http://www.time.mk/) 25 March 2011.

<sup>72</sup> See: [www.utrinski.com.mk/](http://www.utrinski.com.mk/) 25 March 2011; [www.dnevnik.com.mk/](http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/) 25 March 2011.

<sup>73</sup> See: [www.mfa.gov.tr/](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/) 11 September 2011.

determination of Turkish-Macedonian relations.<sup>74</sup> Besides the political, the defence-safety aspect also represents a significant segment of the Turkish-Macedonian relations. These relations, same as during the period of the 1990s, are characterized with development and mutual cooperation. The defence-safety support of Turkey towards North Macedonia continued after the signing of the Ohrid frame agreement, which put an end to the 2001 conflict. Namely, in the post-conflict period, as a part of NATO alliance mission, Turkey played a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of the peace and stability in this country. Through the NATO forces mission, Turkey had an active role in the disarmament of the KLA (UÇK) members in the **Essential Harvest** operation, a process which began on the 15 August 2001 and lasted for one month. Also, from the 27 September 2001, the members of the Turkish military forces actively participated in the **Amber Fox** mission. This mission began as a result of a resolution of the UN Security Council, with the objective of continuing the presence of NATO forces and to assist the international observers in this country. After the two above mentioned security missions of NATO, the Turkish army was also active in the mission called Allied Harmony, which lasted until the 31 March 2003. After it took over the safety role of NATO by the EU, the Turkish country participated through their members and military forces in the **Concordia** and **Proxima** missions, which lasted until the 15 December 2005.<sup>75</sup> In the last period, we are witnessing the support of the Turkish army towards the army of North Macedonia through donations of military resources and specialization of Macedonian officers in Turkey.

Simultaneously, we should highlight that even at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Turkish-Greek relations are characterized with series of challenges. The claims of the Turkish side for apparent assimilation of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace, the misunderstandings about the Aegean Sea, the dispute about the status and the future of the Cyprus Island are still considered as the main challenges to the mutual relations. Besides the mentioned disputes, an additional contribution for regression of the Turkey-Greece relations in the last period is the signing of the Agreement between Turkey and Libya about the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>76</sup> in 2019 and Greece's policies against the interests of the Turkish state through deepening of its' relations with the regional factors. The Turkish foreign policy after 2002 also have important reflections on the bilateral economic relations of this country with the countries from the Balkan region. As a result of the new concept of the Turkish diplomacy, which – **perceives the functional and active economy as a prerequisite for successful foreign policy**<sup>77</sup> – mutual economic relations are deepening by the day and are moving towards an upper line parallel with the political relations. The direct Turkish investments in Albania are reaching 2.5 billions of dollars.<sup>78</sup> This statistics are showing us that, besides the excellent Turkish-Albanian political relations, the bilateral economic relations are still under the expectations. At the same time, Turkey is at the 11<sup>th</sup> place of the biggest foreign investors in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>79</sup> This statistic proves the

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<sup>74</sup> In my opinion, assigning the Day of Turkish language, Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha as public holidays in the Republic of Macedonia is a positive step on the road towards deepening of Turkish-Macedonian relations.

<sup>75</sup> Kır, op.cit., p. 4-82.

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2020/01/08/turkey-libya-maritime-deal-upsets-mediterranean-energy-plan/?sh=5c2699226bee> / 25 April 2021.

<sup>77</sup> See: Davutoğlu, „*Stratejik Derinlik*“, p. 123-124; Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrinin Balkanlara Yansımaları“, p. 154.

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/ekonomi/bakan-cavusoglu-turkiyenin-arnavutluktaki-yatirimi-25-milyar-dolar-389985.html> / 25 April 2021.

<sup>79</sup> [https://www.itohaber.com/haber/guncel/210320/bosna\\_hersek\\_le\\_hedef\\_2\\_milyar\\_dolarlik\\_ticaret.html/](https://www.itohaber.com/haber/guncel/210320/bosna_hersek_le_hedef_2_milyar_dolarlik_ticaret.html/) 25 April 2021.

importance of strengthening the bilateral economic relations which is not on the desired level, bearing in mind the fact that bilateral political relations are considered as highly developed. According to the volume of investments, tourism is considered as the main branch of Turkish investments in Croatia, while Turkish investments are increasing by the day in Serbia and Bulgaria.<sup>80</sup> The relations between Turkey–Kosovo during the 2000s are witnessing growth on mutual economic relations and increase of Turkish economic investments in this country. Participation in public tenders for the Morina-Merdar motorway and the concession of the Prishtina airport are some of the most famous business activities of Turkish businessmen in this country.<sup>81</sup> Also, the foundation of the Trade Chamber Turkey-Kosovo (2008) and the organization of the Turkish-Kosovo economic forum (2010) in Istanbul are proofs enough that depicture the positive trend of the economic relations Turkey-Kosovo.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, besides the strengthened mutual relations in the domain of politics and security, in the recent period Turkish-Macedonian relations are also characterized with deepening of economic cooperation, which in recent years was not at the same level as the political relations.<sup>83</sup> As a part of strengthening of the bilateral economic relations, in 2009 in Istanbul, the business forum Turkey-North Macedonia was held, where high representatives from the political and economic authorities of the two countries took part. At the same time, we should highlight that in North Macedonia, more than 100 small and middle companies with origin from Turkey are active. In this context, we should highlight the investment by TAV for building and reconstruction of the airports in Skopje and Ohrid, Cevahir Holding’s investment for the building of few high-rise buildings in Skopje, the investment of Limak group and other announced investments.<sup>84</sup> Also, as far as economic relations between Turkey and Balkan countries are concerned, it is very important to highlight that in the recent period, as a result of the new vision of Turkish diplomacy, the economic relations of Turkey with countries from the Balkan region are moving upwards. However, the world economic crisis that originates since 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic, which appeared in 2020 and is still lasting had and it still has negative reflections on these relations. Simultaneously, bearing in mind the volume of the Turkish economy and the level of political relations between Turkey and Balkan countries, we can claim that the level of bilateral economic relations is under the expectations and under the mutual capacity.

Besides the political and economic reflections, the new proactive and multidimensional foreign policy of Turkey also has cultural and educational reflections on the Balkans. Namely, in the recent period, Turkey is also active in the domain of restoration of Ottoman historical works and foundation of educational institutions, from the primary up to high-education ones. As examples of the interest of the Turkish state for investment in the domain of historical work of the Ottoman

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<sup>80</sup> See: [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr) 11 September 201.; Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrinin Balkanlara Yansimaları“, p. 155. The total amount of Turkish investments in Bulgaria is evaluated at approximately one billion dollars.

<sup>81</sup> See: Ali, „Refleksionet e Vizionit Davutogllian Në Marrëdhëniet Turko – Kosovare“, [www.ambasada-ks.net/tr](http://www.ambasada-ks.net/tr)

<sup>82</sup> [www.mfa.gov.tr/](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/) 6 August 2011.

<sup>83</sup> In 2009, Turkey was on the 7<sup>th</sup> place on the list of countries Macedonia was importing from. See: Ali, Muhamed, „AK Parti Dış Politika Vizyonu Bağlamında Türkiye – Makedonya İlişkileri“, *Paper presented at the International Conference on Past, Present and Future of Turkish – Albanian – Macedonian Relations In Collaboration with Ankara Center for Thought and Research and International Balkan University*, Skopje, Macedonia, 27-29 May 2011.

<sup>84</sup> See: Ali, „AK Parti Dış Politika Vizyonu Bağlamında Türkiye-Makedonya İlişkileri “; Ali, Muhamed, “Turkish – Macedonian Relations in The Context of Foreign Policy Vision of Ak Party” in Idriz, Mesut et.al. (ed.), *Turkish, Albanian, Macedonian Relations: Past, Present and Future*, ADAM – ACTOR, Ankara, 2012, p. 199-215.

Empire is the restoration of the Mihrab at the Stone Bridge, the restoration of the Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Hatuncik Mosque (all in Skopje), the bridge in Mostar, the Maktul Ibrahim Pasha Mosque (in Razgrad), the Fatih Kanuni Mosque (in Kyustendil), the Gazi Mehmet Pasha Mosque (in Prizren), the Ethem Beg Mosque (in Tirana) and many other religious and historical monuments. Simultaneously, the foundation of cultural centres known by the Yunus Emre name in few Balkan cities (Belgrade, Skopje, Prishtina, Tirana, Prizren etc.) and the strengthening of relations between Turkish and Balkan municipalities through twinning and organization of various cultural manifestations in some cities in the region with mutual organizations are examples that depict the interest of Turkey for investment in the domain of the culture in the Balkans.

In the recent period, Turkey has also begun an educational invasion in the Balkans. Namely, in recent years, besides the increase of the number of Turkish colleges throughout the Balkan countries, we are simultaneously witnessing foundation of new high education institutions (like the International Balkan University in Skopje, the International University of Sarajevo etc.),<sup>85</sup> a fact that proves the proactive and multidimensional policies of Turkish diplomacy in this strategically vital region.

However, one of the latest and most complicated challenges of Turkish diplomacy in the Balkans and the relations between Turkey and the countries from the region is the issue of the Gülen movement. The above mentioned movement began its' activity in this region at the beginning of the 90's and this activity resulted with the establishment of more primary and high schools in the Balkan countries and two universities in Tirana (Epoka and Bedr Universities) and one in Sarajevo (International Burch University). Besides education, they were and still are very active in the business, media and non-governmental organizations area. We should remind that the Gülen movement used to have support from the Turkish state. This support began to become more intense especially after AKP party came to rule in Turkey. However, after the unsuccessful coup d'état in Turkey that happened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, the Turkish authorities declared this movement as one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations that endanger the security in Turkey under the accusation that exactly they are behind the unsuccessful coup in the country. After this date, the issue of the Gülen movement became one of the biggest challenges in the relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries. As a result of the above mentioned, the Turkish authorities requested from Balkan governments extradition of the members of this organization and closing down of their institutions which were active in this region, a request that turned into one of the biggest challenges in the relations between Turkey and some countries from the region, like Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia etc.

As a result of the above mentioned, through its' Maarif foundation, Turkey decided to begin a new educational offensive in the Balkans by founding new Turkish educational institutions in some countries in the Balkan region, starting from primary school, up to universities (like the example of Maarif – New York University in Tirana), with the aim of turning them into an alternative of educational institutions controlled by the Gülen movement.<sup>86</sup> In the recent period, Turkey has an intensified activity in the sphere of religion and religious education in the Balkans. Many students from Balkan countries are studying at theological universities in Turkey and

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<sup>85</sup> Ali, „Stratejik Derinlik Doktrini Ve Bu Doktrin Balkanlara Yansımaları“, p. 155-156; [www.balkanpazar.org/](http://www.balkanpazar.org/) / 7 August 2010.; [www.restoraturk.com/](http://www.restoraturk.com/) / 7 August 2010.; [www.yapi.com/](http://www.yapi.com/) / 7 August 2010.; [www.tika.gov.tr/](http://www.tika.gov.tr/) / 12 May 2012; Kır, op.cit., p. 4-95.

<sup>86</sup> See <https://turkiyemaarif.org/> / 24 April 2021.

simultaneously, the Turkish Diyanet plays an active role in the deepening of Turkey's relations with the Muslim population in this region. The Turkish support in the sphere of religious education is welcomed by the Balkan countries, having in mind the fact that exactly the authorities from the region are facing returning fighters from some military zones in the Middle East.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, although the illegal immigration from Asian and African countries towards Europe is lasting for a while, the refugee crisis that erupted in 2015 caused important implications in Europe, Turkey and the Balkans. The Balkan countries are transitional countries for asylum seekers, a fact that is causing huge financial burden for the countries of the region. Basing on this reality, Balkan countries are giving enormous importance to the dialogue and cooperation with Turkey regarding the issue of illegal migration. As an example of the above mentioned fact, we can mention the signed agreement between Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria in 2015 regarding handling the challenge of illegal migration.<sup>88</sup> During the period of Covid-19 pandemic, Turkey provided medical aid for countries all over the world, including Balkan countries in their fight against the pandemic. After a request from the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov on the 11 March 2020, Turkey sent medical aid to neighbouring Bulgaria and one month later, on the 8 April 2020, Turkish military aircraft landed in five different Balkan cities to deliver the medical aid to Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ekinci, Uğur Mehmet, "Türkiye Balkanlar İlişkileri", *SETA Analiz*, İstanbul, 2017, no. 204, p. 12. [https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/05/Analiz\\_204.pdf](https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/05/Analiz_204.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> Ekinci, Op.cit., p. 12-13.

<sup>89</sup> Lika, Idir, "Turkey's Corona Diplomacy in the Balkans", *SETA Analysis*, İstanbul, 2020, no. 64, p. 9, <https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2020/07/A64En.pdf>

## Conclusions

Before the analysis of Turkish foreign policy towards this region, we came to a conclusion that Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans between the two world wars was active. As an argument for the active policies of Turkey towards the Balkans we mentioned the participation of this country in the Balkan conferences and the creation of the Balkan Pact. Simultaneously, we came to the conclusion that during the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans went through various phases that were distinguished through unique specifications. At the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey invested great efforts for rapprochement with Greece and Yugoslavia within the Balkan Pact, with the aim of prevention of threats and risks from the Soviet Union. However, this pact didn't provide the expected results. After this period, misunderstandings with the USA and the tense atmosphere with Greece resulted with application of the multidimensional diplomacy, which, with some exceptions, resulted with normalization and relaxation of Turkish relations with most of the Balkan countries. With the end of the Cold War period, Turkey faced a political gap in the Balkans, which was followed by creation of new policies and strategies. During the 1990s in the Balkan scene, besides establishment of active bilateral political relations and participation in political-economic initiatives (Central European Initiative, Economic Cooperation in the Black Sea and the Initiative for Cooperation in Southeast Europe), Turkey also appeared as the initiator for the idea of founding Balkan peace corps (Southeast Europe Brigade – SEEBRIG).

The Balkan Peninsula can be considered as one of the most important areas where political, economic and cultural effects of the new vision of Turkish diplomacy, based on the **strategic depth** doctrine, are reflecting. According to the new vision of Turkish foreign policy, Turkey, as the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire, is obliged to protect the interests of the Turkish and Muslim minorities in this region. According to this new concept, Turkish diplomacy in the Balkans should equilibrate the strategies of the international factors and Turkey is obliged to strengthen its bilateral relations with the Balkan countries, especially with those that already are or are pretending to become a member of NATO, with the aim of strengthening of the Turkish position within this defence-political organization. The principles of the new concept of Turkish foreign policy, like **security for all** and **giving advantage to dialogue for solving crisis** also had their reflections on the Turkish diplomacy in the Balkan region. We can conclude that in the recent period, Turkey's political and economic relations with the Balkan region countries are moving upwards. However, the world economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have had and still are having negative reflections on these relations. Having in mind the volume of the Turkish economy and the level of political relations between Turkey and Balkan countries, we can claim that the level of bilateral economic relations is under the mutual capacity. Besides the political and economic reflections, the new proactive and multidimensional foreign policy of Turkey also has cultural and educational reflections in the Balkans. Namely, in the recent period, Turkey is active in the domain of restoration of Ottoman historical monuments and foundation of educational-schooling institutions, from the primary up to the high education ones. On the other hand, we have highlighted that one of the most important and most complicated challenges of Turkish diplomacy in the Balkans is the Gülen movement issue. After the unsuccessful coup d'état in Turkey that happened in 2016, Turkish authorities proclaimed the movement as one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations that are endangering Turkey's security under the

accusation that exactly they are the ones behind the unsuccessful attempt for a coup in the country. After this date, the issue of Gülen movement turned into one of the biggest challenges in the relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries. As a result of these events, through the Maarif foundation, Turkey decided to initiate a new educational offensive in the Balkans by establishing new Turkish educational institutions in some countries of the Balkan region from primary schools up to universities, with the aim of offering an alternative to the educational institutions controlled by the Gülen movement. Turkey has intensive activity in the sphere of religious education in the Balkans. Many students from the Balkan countries are studying at the theological universities in Turkey and simultaneously the Turkish Diyanet is playing an active role in the deepening of Turkey's relations with the Muslim population in this region.

We have highlighted that although the illegal migration towards Europe lasts for a while now, nevertheless, the refugee crisis that erupted in 2015 caused important implications in Europe, Turkey and the Balkans. Balkan countries are transitional countries for the asylum seekers, a fact that causes huge financial burden for the countries in the region. Basing on this reality, the Balkan countries are giving huge importance to the dialogue and cooperation with Turkey regarding the issue of illegal migration. Simultaneously, it shouldn't be forgotten that during the period of Covid-19 pandemic, Turkey secured medical aid for the Balkan countries in their fight against the pandemic.

It should be emphasized that Turkish presence in the Balkans and the success of this presence is depending on series of factors, the perception of Turkey as a success case of developed country, in particular on the process of Turkey's integration in the EU and its' relations with global and regional factors which are involved in the equilibriums of the Balkan region. The domestic reforms as well as the dynamics of the process of integration of this country in the EU is also directly connected with the level of factorization of this country in the region. Namely, the biggest successes of Turkish diplomacy in the Balkan region were during the period when the Turkish state was progressing fast in the process of EU integration, as the result of applied political, legal and economic reforms in the Turkish state and society.

In this regard, in order to further favouring Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans, also as an ally of Europe in the stabilization process of the area, we believe it is important the adoption of a new constitution that will be in line with all democratic values of the EU and will replace the 1982 constitution, which was passed as a result of the military coup. The adoption of the new constitution, in addition to further democratizing Turkish society, would increase bilateral relations between the Balkan countries and Turkey, and would harmonize EU-Turkey policies towards this region. Moreover, Turkey should increase its efforts in fighting against various underground organizations and against these structures; freedom of speech should be distinguished from illegal activities. One of the most criticized aspects of the Turkish government's fight against underground structures is the detention of some journalists on the pretext of their involvement in a conspiracy against the Turkish government. Facing the dark past would result in the deepening of EU democratic values in Turkish society and state, which would lead to the factorization of Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans. Apart from the political issues, Turkey should deepen its economic relations with the Balkan countries and should continue its cooperation and to harmonize its foreign economic policies with the EU's policies in the Balkans, an act that could result in the further factorization of Turkish diplomacy in the region. Hence, the Turkish government should strengthen its integration process into the EU as this process is considered as a vital step for the democratization and development of the Turkish state and society. In other words, Turkey's EU integration should be a single strategic goal, with

no alternative, and membership in this organization would mean factoring the Turkish state outside its borders, including the Balkan region. Nevertheless, Turkey with its democratic and secular system and the Muslim identity of its population, might be representing a model for many countries of the Islamic world, and on the other hand by being considered as a key ally of the West, it can play a vital role in the process of decreasing the side effects of Islamophobia and theories of the clash of civilizations.

Simultaneously, it should be highlighted that regression of relations with global factors like the USA, EU and regional factors like Greece, that are involved in the equilibriums of the Balkan region, already has and will have in the future serious implications for the volume of success and Turkish presence in this region.

## Appendix

### *A: COVID-19 medical supplies sent by Turkey to Balkan countries (March-May 2020)<sup>90</sup>*

Country	Type of Medical Supply			
	Protective Masks	Protective Suits	Protective Goggles	Covid-19 Test Kits
Albania	75,000	2,000	2,000	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	50,000	1,000		1,000
Bulgaria	50,000	1,000	1,000	
Kosovo	50,000	1,000		1,000
Montenegro	50,000	1,000		1,000
North Macedonia (2 times)	125,000	3,000	2,000	1,000
Serbia	100,000	2,000		1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>500,000</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>5,500</b>

### *B: Economic and trade relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries in the last two decades*

#### 1. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Albania (in millions US dollars)<sup>91</sup>

Year	Export	Import
2000	61,31	2,80
2001	73,21	3,62
2002	79,76	3,97
2003	114,43	4,58
2004	161,03	15,53
2005	191,14	16,24
2006	213,44	12,50
2007	294,50	23,84

<sup>90</sup> Lika, Op.cit., p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/ALB/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021. Also see [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr).

<b>2008</b>	305,73	36,69
<b>2009</b>	273,10	4,69
<b>2010</b>	241,06	86,85
<b>2011</b>	270,63	125,91
<b>2012</b>	255,94	98,98
<b>2013</b>	266,54	82,39
<b>2014</b>	318,54	96,28
<b>2015</b>	287,39	49,57
<b>2016</b>	304,65	20,60
<b>2017</b>	387,11	24,16
<b>2018</b>	408,97	22,16

2. **Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina (in millions US dollars)**<sup>92</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2000</b>	26,69	7,50
<b>2001</b>	27,58	4,92
<b>2002</b>	42,90	6,30
<b>2003</b>	63,23	8,34
<b>2004</b>	99,90	11,41
<b>2005</b>	127,95	15,34
<b>2006</b>	153,99	9,35
<b>2007</b>	445,17	21,46
<b>2008</b>	572,34	24,54
<b>2009</b>	226,56	52,05
<b>2010</b>	224,29	72,32
<b>2011</b>	268,94	90,25
<b>2012</b>	251,52	111,64
<b>2013</b>	274,08	124,33
<b>2014</b>	322,02	171,42
<b>2015</b>	292,47	250,08
<b>2016</b>	308,96	288,29
<b>2017</b>	348,61	268,97
<b>2018</b>	420,43	241,22

<sup>92</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2006/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/BIH/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021. Also see mfa.gov.tr

3. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Croatia (in millions US dollars)<sup>93</sup>

Year	Export	Import
2002	42,87	9,39
2003	85,60	16,7
2004	118,06	35,23
2005	168,00	85,60
2006	213,20	60,20
2007	355,52	77,43
2008	328,67	105,66
2009	214,70	107,38
2010	249,14	211,34
2011	241,81	310,96
2012	200,57	209,76
2013	201,59	193,26
2014	287,40	136,88
2015	251,63	135,19
2016	277,92	133,51
2017	313,83	216,86
2018	404,74	188,72

4. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and North Macedonia (in millions US dollars)<sup>94</sup>

Year	Export	Import
2001	89,81	9,12
2002	101,31	14,91
2003	122,71	27,34
2004	148,63	51,93
2005	162,48	52,08
2006	171,81	55,95
2007	271,74	55,81
2008	296,17	29,71
2009	283,46	39,87
2010	262,62	52,39

<sup>93</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/HRV/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021. Also see [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr).

<sup>94</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/MKD/Product/all-groups/> / 23 april 2021. Also see [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr)

<b>2011</b>	298,86	91,96
<b>2012</b>	274,49	103,22
<b>2013</b>	293,97	81,51
<b>2014</b>	347,96	79,19
<b>2015</b>	324,63	80,90
<b>2016</b>	378,00	82,58
<b>2017</b>	360,25	101,14
<b>2018</b>	396,96	107,93

**5. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Serbia<sup>95</sup> (in millions US dollars)<sup>96</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2001</b>	81,00	7,00
<b>2002</b>	121,00	11,00
<b>2003</b>	184,68	29,99
<b>2004</b>	210,94	87,39
<b>2005</b>	255,98	96,67
<b>2006</b>	354,83	51,09
<b>2007</b>	595,52	73,75
<b>2008</b>	737,52	66,85
<b>2009</b>	584,54	66,07
<b>2010</b>	600,11	123,13
<b>2011</b>	620,49	223,40
<b>2012</b>	635,65	214,63
<b>2013</b>	719,64	261,90
<b>2014</b>	782,06	286,68
<b>2015</b>	733,25	246,16
<b>2016</b>	842,39	296,74
<b>2017</b>	987,85	422,88
<b>2018</b>	1.168,84	335,68

<sup>95</sup> I would like to highlight that this country while between 1992-2003 has been named like Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, between 2003-2006 has been named as State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

<sup>96</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2008/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/SER/Product/all-groups/> / 23 April 2021. Also see [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr).

**6. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Montenegro (in millions US dollars)<sup>97</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2006</b>	7,75	0,76
<b>2007</b>	19,86	0,15
<b>2008</b>	48,49	1,33
<b>2009</b>	26,48	5,84
<b>2010</b>	27,17	6,21
<b>2011</b>	26,96	14,58
<b>2012</b>	29,13	17,93
<b>2013</b>	29,14	11,51
<b>2014</b>	35,03	7,37
<b>2015</b>	38,30	8,00
<b>2016</b>	51,80	23,36
<b>2017</b>	60,08	24,08
<b>2018</b>	79,51	14,21

**7. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Kosovo (in millions US dollars)<sup>98</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2010</b>	150,36	9,35
<b>2011</b>	184,45	7,83
<b>2012</b>	199,88	11,38
<b>2013</b>	204,92	7,39
<b>2014</b>	238,26	10,36
<b>2015</b>	252,28	9,21
<b>2016</b>	288,48	7,63
<b>2017</b>	292,62	7,17
<b>2018</b>	336,53	8,35

<sup>97</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/MNT/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021; also see mfa.gov.tr

<sup>98</sup>

[https://askdata.rks.gov.net/PXWeb/pxweb/sq/askdata/askdata\\_External%20trade\\_Yearly%20indicators/tab02.px/table/tableViewLayout/?rxid=f89166dc-7d99-4e30-86a7-ce5e6344a83e/](https://askdata.rks.gov.net/PXWeb/pxweb/sq/askdata/askdata_External%20trade_Yearly%20indicators/tab02.px/table/tableViewLayout/?rxid=f89166dc-7d99-4e30-86a7-ce5e6344a83e/) 23 April 2021.

**8. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Romania (in millions US dollars)<sup>99</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2002</b>	560,43	656,56
<b>2003</b>	873,34	955,97
<b>2004</b>	1,235,48	1,699,55
<b>2005</b>	1,785,40	2,285,59
<b>2006</b>	2,350,47	2,668,98
<b>2007</b>	3,644,16	3,112,75
<b>2008</b>	3,987,47	3,547,82
<b>2009</b>	2,201,93	2,257,96
<b>2010</b>	2,599,38	3,449,19
<b>2011</b>	2,878,76	3,801,29
<b>2012</b>	2,495,42	3,236,42
<b>2013</b>	2,616,31	3,592,56
<b>2014</b>	3,008,01	3,363,23
<b>2015</b>	2,815,64	2,599,85
<b>2016</b>	2,671,24	2,195,72
<b>2017</b>	3,139,18	2,480,19
<b>2018</b>	3,876,70	2,445,21

**9. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Slovenia (in millions US dollars)<sup>100</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2002</b>	68,86	56,99
<b>2003</b>	102,58	93,02
<b>2004</b>	188,55	203,22
<b>2005</b>	332,40	217,86
<b>2006</b>	417,72	201,81
<b>2007</b>	485,76	232,31
<b>2008</b>	648,70	243,62
<b>2009</b>	595,00	249,57
<b>2010</b>	356,50	291,31
<b>2011</b>	617,47	348,93

<sup>99</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2002/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/ROM/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021.

<sup>100</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2016/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/SVN/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021.

<b>2012</b>	548,31	311,87
<b>2013</b>	666,16	304,25
<b>2014</b>	742,81	301,86
<b>2015</b>	810,46	343,78
<b>2016</b>	927,48	296,05
<b>2017</b>	1,158,25	381,44
<b>2018</b>	1,430,31	316,89

**10. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Greece (in millions US dollars)<sup>101</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
<b>2002</b>	582,81	323,93
<b>2003</b>	920,40	427,74
<b>2004</b>	1,170,83	594,35
<b>2005</b>	1,126,67	727,82
<b>2006</b>	1,602,58	1,045,32
<b>2007</b>	2,262,65	950,15
<b>2008</b>	2,429,96	1,150,71
<b>2009</b>	1,629,63	1,131,06
<b>2010</b>	1,455,67	1,541,59
<b>2011</b>	1,553,31	2,568,82
<b>2012</b>	1,401,40	3,539,86
<b>2013</b>	1,439,06	4,206,52
<b>2014</b>	1,536,65	4,043,83
<b>2015</b>	1,400,56	1,860,93
<b>2016</b>	1,427,20	1,187,05
<b>2017</b>	1,662,63	1,833,06
<b>2018</b>	2,089,30	2,104,38

<sup>101</sup><https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/GRC/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021.

**11. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Bulgaria (in millions US dollars)<sup>102</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
2002	378,11	506,74
2003	621,68	689,46
2004	894,32	959,47
2005	1,179,31	1,190,07
2006	1,568,00	1,663,42
2007	2,060,17	1,951,65
2008	2,151,53	1,840,00
2009	1,385,54	1,116,90
2010	1,497,38	1,702,53
2011	1,622,77	2,474,62
2012	1,684,98	2,753,64
2013	1,971,24	2,760,30
2014	2,040,15	2,846,18
2015	1,676,14	2,254,15
2016	2,383,49	2,142,52
2017	2,803,18	2,773,12
2018	2,670,53	2,501,39

**12. Economic and trade relations between Turkey and Romania (in millions US dollars)<sup>103</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>
2002	560,43	656,56
2003	873,34	955,97
2004	1,235,48	1,699,55
2005	1,785,40	2,285,59
2006	2,350,47	2,668,98
2007	3,644,16	3,112,75
2008	3,987,47	3,547,82
2009	2,201,93	2,257,96
2010	2,599,38	3,449,19
2011	2,878,76	3,801,29

<sup>102</sup> <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/BGR/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021.

<sup>103</sup> <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/ROM/Product/all-groups/> 23 April 2021.

<b>2012</b>	2,495,42	3,236,42
<b>2013</b>	2,616,31	3,592,56
<b>2014</b>	3,008,01	3,363,23
<b>2015</b>	2,815,64	2,599,85
<b>2016</b>	2,671,24	2.195,72
<b>2017</b>	3.139,18	2,480,19
<b>2018</b>	3,876,70	2,445,21

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