

## GEOPOLITICAL STAKES AND GAMES ON THE NORTH-WEST – SOUTH-EAST AXIS (WESTERN WORLD – TURKEY)

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**Abstract.** This study is an attempt to operationalise the concept of “geopolitical axis” by crystallising an analysis applied to the relations between the Western World and Turkey and making use of a new approach philosophy: from the geopolitics of the “*spheres of influence*” to the geopolitics of “*axes*”. The results of this research prove this semantic-conceptual translation and the redefining of geopolitical analysis: the old *traditional alliances* (I’m either with you or against you) have been replaced by *strategic partnerships* (membership in several territorial structures and centres of power and positioning on as many geopolitical axes as possible, respectively the shift from “either-or” to “and-and”). The case study emphasises the geopolitical stakes and games on the North-West – South-East Eurasian regional axis, pointing out Turkey’s alignment or seesaw in regards to the Western world.

**Keywords:** *geopolitical axes, North-West – South-East axis, Western world, Turkey, European integration*

### Introduction

The accelerated power mutations generated on the world map over the course of the last two decades and the reconfiguration of the international relations system have led to the update of the analysis instruments and also to the optical change regarding the philosophy of the geopolitical approach. If for more than half a century the “nation-state” held the “first page” of studies and researches, speeches and approaches, and the permanent rapport in terms of “power” was done through “spheres of influence”, the end of the Cold War and the globalisation phenomenon have set the world on a dynamic course, difficult to quantify in trends and scenarios or forecasts. The “nation-state” is no longer the only “player” on the world scene, being joined by a multitude of other non-state actors (TNCs, NGOs, regional blocks and other structures and organisations) aiming for as much, or even more power, generating complicated models of geopolitical configurations, which has led to the necessity of a new approach: analysis not in light of *spheres of influence*, currently rather restrictive, but of *geopolitical axes*.

This approach allows a geopolitical actor multiple memberships: to situate himself, at the same time, in the “camp” of several centres of power, but on different axes of interest and power. It is the case of Turkey, for example, this research pointing out the fact that if during the Cold War Turkey was considered an element in the Western sphere of influence (USA’s pawn in proximity to the ex-USSR), the collapse of the “bipolar world” has redefined this country’s role as a geopolitical pivot: simultaneously, Turkey enlists on an American axis of interest in at least three directions – the Balkans, the Caucasus area and the Central-Asia region –, on an Islamic axis of interest (pursuing its regional interests), on a double axis of geoeconomic interest with Russia and the European

Union (teetering between the two based on the geopolitical context; for example, Turkey has shown interest in joining the EU, but there were no fewer situations when Moscow and Ankara have shared the same point of view in regard of the Western world) etc.

### **Defining the North-West – South-East geopolitical axis**

*The North-West – South-East axis* has been (re)activated with the “collapse of Yugoslavia”, a process which set fire to the Balkan powder keg for more than a decade, the external trigger being the crumbling of the bipolar world order and the fall of the Soviet Empire. It is a regional axis which together with other three – *the West-East axis, the rivers and waterways axis, the seas and straits axis* – represent the main geopolitical axes that define the Eurasian geopolitical system.

The two continental axes (West-East and North-West – South-East) shape the interests of several *poles of power*: on the one hand of the Western world (USA and the EU) which represent the common origin of the two axes, and on the other hand of Russia and Turkey.

Making a parallel between the two we can notice some similarities. The first and most important is that both are major geostrategic pivots between the two continents, Europe and Asia, aiming to further strengthen their role as Eurasian players (not only European or only Asian). Both Russia and Turkey have European and Asian interests, and both of them represent to the Western world ways of accessing the Asian area, primarily the (energy) resources there: the first one for Central Asia (where Russian interests are strongly felt due to their history and Turkish ones due to their cultural heritage) and the second one towards the Near and Middle East.

In a recent article, entitled “Turkey – Eurasian geostrategic pivot”, the prominent geopolitical analyst and author general Gheorghe Văduva said: *„In the huge Eurasian platform there are two countries with an excellent geographic position (...): Russia and Turkey. The first is of an unfailing span, the largest country in the world, in terms of territory and geopolitics, which includes almost everything that is stable and natural, with unsuspected, even mysterious, resources, from the European and Asian continents. The other is an essential country, one of synthesis. The first – the huge Russia – is a generator of force, resources and potential. The other – the blasphemed, controversial and isolated Turkey – is becoming more and more (...) a space of exceptional geopolitical and geostrategic value. (...) Russia and Turkey. Once enemies, possible partners today. Two countries that come from the lineage of two great empires and represent two great civilisations. We’re talking about the Slavs, that are part of the European complex of civilisations, and the Muslims, that generate one of the most interesting philosophies of existence and human knowledge on the planet. Each of the two countries has its distinct and special role in the configuration and reconfiguration of the European, Asian, Eurasian and even global security environment, if we take into account the fact that the Eurasian platform (...) holds planetary supremacy in terms of territory, resources and population.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe Văduva (2008), *Turcia – pivot geostrategic eurasiatic*, in „Geopolitica”, year VI, nr. 25, „Turcia – puncte eurasiatică”, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 19.

Turkey managed to do what Russia didn't: interior restructuring, reforming the Ottoman Empire, or how Brzezinski (2006) put it, "historically self-defining", a process possible because of "a mass of determined reformers and the Western world's final receptivity"<sup>2</sup>.

There are differences, however, between the poles of power of the two axes: Russia does not expressly desire an alignment with the Western world, still pursuing its own path ("to be like the Western world", in terms of modernisation and standard of life and society practices, but to "distinguish ourselves from them"), while Turkey aims to become part of the Western world, adopting values, institutions and western practices, pursuing integration in the European Union, but not in any way. "*Turkey is not a manoeuvrable and malleable country. Turkey does not play as others want her to play. It manifests, in geostrategic problems, a stern, dignified and stable position, and even if it's not a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it does not accept to not be taken into account when the subject concerns its values or vital interests. It exercises a sort of **natural veto right** in international relations in matters that concern or involve it.*"<sup>3</sup>, stated, very plastically, but also rational and unchallengeable Gheorghe Văduva (2008), in the afore mentioned article.

Regarding the nature of the North-West – South-East axis, it is enlisted in the multidimensional valences of a composite type axis: it is a geopolitical axis, mainly, because it is shaped on the western intention to gain access to the ex-soviet space of Central Asia using a Europeanised Turkey (as an alternative to Russia), but also a gateway towards the Muslim world and the extremely complicated and sensitive Near and Middle East; it is a geostrategic extension axis of the European Union, on the same grounds, if Europe wishes to become a main international actor in this future multi-polar world that is taking shape, especially through the emergence of new poles of power that tend to become global, mainly the Asian ones – China, India, Japan, but also Indonesia, in several geopolitical models and configurations; it is also a geoeconomic axis (the Western world pursuing access to the huge energy resources of the Middle East, and, more recently, of the Caspian region and Central Asia, through Turkey, but also to markets with considerable potential for growth); it also brings together the cultural valences, representing a cultural and civilisation rift between what is known as the Western world and the Islamic world (that wishes to modernise itself, but not to westernise, as many of these countries' leaders claim in their speeches).

The multiple dimensions of the analysed axis individualise as many **types of power** that manifest across it: political, military and economic power.

### **Turkey – geopolitical pivot**

The end of the Cold War meant from a geopolitical point of view a loss of interest of the Western world in Turkey, the implosion of the USSR no longer insuring its status as "key element of American geostrategy and the only Black Sea country, ally of the

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<sup>2</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski (2006), *Triada geostrategică. Conviețuirea cu China, Europa, Rusia*, Ed. Historia, București, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Gheorghe Văduva (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 19-20.

Western powers”<sup>4</sup>. This fact leads to the inversion of positions: from the passive position of “protected child” of the Western world, Turkey became incredibly active, courting the EU and using to a maximum the “vacuum of power” created by Moscow’s recoil in the two “Balkan” regions: “Europe’s Balkans” (or the traditional ones) and “Eurasia’s Balkans”<sup>5</sup> (the Caucasus and Central-Asia regions).

Turkey’s geopolitical complexity is overwhelming, urging some analysts to remark: „*From a [geo]political analysis point of view, Turkey appears as a problem state: a state tackled by any international relations specialist, based on the certainty that there will always be something there to comment or analyse, so that in relation with Turkey, no analyst will appear to the uneducated public as dunce. (...) Actually, the elements that allow any international politics analyst to appear <<competent in regards of the Turkish dossier>> from an internal point of view are: geographic location, population and religion ... (more precisely, tensions in relation with the role of religion in the Turkish society). An eventual speech based on these themes would use big concepts and names: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Bosfor, straits, laic society, army, Islamism, terrorism and, imperatively, the Kurds. The external element is connected to a hope or wish of the Turkish state to be integrated in a supra-State organisation: the European Union*”<sup>6</sup>. ... And we could also add: the interests in the Balkans, the Turkish space which extends towards the Caucasus and Central Asia, the games with Russia, the problematic neighbours from the Middle East and so on.

Indeed, the geographic and geopolitical position of Turkey is a spectacular one, a myriad of subtitles that accompany the titles of articles published about this country (or keywords in content), shaping its status of “joint” or “geopolitical pivot”:

- Eurasian geostrategic pivot<sup>7</sup>, connecting Europe (through the Balkans) with Asia (through the Caucasus and the Middle East);
- A bridge between the Euro-Atlantic space (NATO) and the Turcophone states (Caucasus and Central Asia)<sup>8</sup>;
- Joint between the Orient (Asia) and the Western world (Europe)<sup>9</sup>;
- An important “voice” at the interface between Christianity and Islam, “interlocutor” and „ambassador” for the two worlds<sup>10</sup>;

<sup>4</sup> Oleg Serebrian (2006), *Geopolitica spațiului pontic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Ed. Cartier, Chișinău, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> The collocation was used by Brzezinski in „The Grand Chessboard”, shaping a region of political instability and the desire to oppose regional domination by any of the players involved (vacuum of power), but, at the same time, almost inviting the mix of international actors (power absorption), in which the author includes nine countries (practically, an “extended Eurasian Balkan area”): the three trans-Caucasian republics and the five Central Asian republics, plus Afghanistan – see Zbigniew Brzezinski (2000), *Marea tablă de șah. Geopolitica lumilor secolului XXI*, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, București, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Marius Văcărelu (2008), *A conduce Turcia*, in „Geopolitica”, year VI, nr. 25, „Turcia – punte eurasiatică”, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Gheorghe Văduva (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Vasile Simileanu (2008), *Turcia – punte între spațiul euroatlantic și statele turcofone*, in „Geopolitica”, year VI, nr. 25, „Turcia – punte eurasiatică”, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> Marcela Săgeată (2006), *Lumea islamică: o rețea dinamică de sisteme*, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 54 and Radu Săgeată (2008), *Turcia – articulație între Orient și Occident*, in „Geopolitica”, year VI, nr. 25, „Turcia – punte eurasiatică”, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 51.

○ “Divide” between the “Islamic fundamentalism” and “European secularism”<sup>11</sup> etc. etc. etc.

Due to this special position, acquired from the Middle Ages and maintained, after the spatial recoil of the Ottoman Empire, to the current core, Turkey has always found itself in the plans that represented geostrategic visions both on the relation West – East (Western world – Russia), as well as on the relation North-West – South-East (Western world – Middle East), but also being a two-way corridor through which westernisation entered in the Orient and Islam entered in Europe.

Also because of the geopolitical and geographical evolution, the post-imperial Turkish state is still in a process of redefining its own identity, Brzezinski (2000) identifying three directions in which Turkey is currently heading: “*modernists would like to see it become a European state and therefore they look to the West; Islamists look to the Middle East and to a Muslim community, thus looking towards the South; and nationalists with historical inclination, that see in the Turkish populations, in the Caspian Sea Basin and Central Asia, a new mission for a Turkey that would dominate the region, therefore looking towards the East*”<sup>12</sup>.

In the evolution of the relations between Turkey and the Western world we can identify several stages:

a) *the stage of initial relations* that would correspond to the breakthrough of Turkish populations in Asia Minor and the Black Sea basin (VI<sup>th</sup>-XI<sup>th</sup> centuries), which practically meant the dehellenisation of the Black Sea.

b) *the imperial stage (1299-1923)*, spanned over more than six centuries, which meant the *expansion on the European continent and the conquest of Byzantium*, from which moment on, the Turkish presence will be customary in the Western world's problems. The key element of this stage will be the conquering of the Byzantine capital, known in history as “the fall of Constantinople” (May 29<sup>th</sup> 1453), the artisan of this victory being Mehmet the 2<sup>nd</sup> (who also tried the resistance of the Romanian medieval principalities either directly or through his vassals, the Tartar populations). The culmination of the Empire's expansion is achieved during the reign of Suleiman the 2<sup>nd</sup> (1520-1566), surnamed “the Magnificent”, who reaches the heart of Central Europe, at Vienna's gates.

c) *the Kemalist stage or Turkey's Europeanisation/ Westernisation stage*. It is defined by the “Kemalist revolution” or the national rebirth movement led by Mustafa Kemal (1919-1922), surnamed „Atatürk” (the father of the Turks), as a result to losing all the territories at the end of the First World War, after the Treaty of Sèvres with the Allied powers. Atatürk revolutionises from the ground up Turkey's political institutions, “destroying the empire's resistance pillars”<sup>13</sup>: abolishes the institution of the sultan and secularises Turkey (abolishing the caliphate, the main source of religious authority).

<sup>10</sup> Silviu Neguț (2008), *Turcia/Imperiul Otoman – o mare putere*, in „Geopolitica”, year VI, nr. 25, „Turcia – punte eurasiatică”, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Cristian Barna (2008), *Turcia, la cumpăna dintre fundamentalismul islamic și secularismul european?*, in „Geopolitica”, year VI, nr. 25, „Turcia – punte eurasiatică”, Ed. Top Form, București, p. 129.

<sup>12</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> Silviu Neguț (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 84.

The “six Kemalist arrows” – populism, republicanism, nationalism, secularity, etatism and reformism – have meant much more than the czar’s, Peter I, similar “revolution” in Russia<sup>14</sup>, replacing the multinational empire with a republic based on a homogenous nation state<sup>15</sup>.

d) *alignment stage* with the Western world, began after the Second World War, against the soviet communism, as “an Eastern bastion of the containment policy”<sup>16</sup>, preventing Russia’s expansion towards the hot seas (Peter the Great’s dream): the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Table no. 1 The Western world and Turkey between “balancing” and “alignment”

AXE'S POLES		ALIGNMENT	BALANCING
Western world	EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- NATO</li><li>- American military bases</li><li>- Intention to join the EU</li><li>- Fighting international terrorism and organised crime</li><li>- Preventing the proliferation of organised crime</li><li>- The energy problem (the BTC oil pipeline and the BTE gas pipeline, Nabucco and Trans Caspian gas pipeline projects)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The European Union's repeated refusal to accept Turkey as member</li><li>- Bluestream gas pipeline (alignment with Russia)</li></ul>
	USA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The interdiction to use its air space in order to attack Muslim countries</li></ul>
Turkey			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Supporting Muslims in the Bosnia-Herțegovina, Kosovo and Macedonian dossiers</li><li>- The Islamic axis: Albania – Kosovo – Bosnia</li><li>- The minorities problem in Bulgaria</li><li>- The Greek problem: the Cyprus dossier, territorial litigation over the problem of the continental plateau of the Aegean Sea, the minorities problem</li></ul>

after Neacșu and Diaconescu (2010)

Turkey joins, one after another, the Western structures: founding member of the Council of Europe (1949), becomes full member of NATO, in 1952, the only Islamic country in the world with this status, then OECD (1961) and OSCE (1973). In several stages it was a member in the UN Security Council (1951-1952, 1954-1955 and 1961).

<sup>14</sup> Mustafa Kemal, as Peter I, banned the wearing of the red fez (a symbol of religious traditionalism); ended traditional education (abolished separated religious schools and colleges, secularising public education) and religious ministries and tribunals; implemented a new legal system based on the Swiss Civil Code; replaced the traditional Islamic calendar (monthly), with the solar, Gregorian one; reformed the Turkish orthography, by adopting the Latin characters, thus cutting off the young generations from the vast and traditional Arab literature and knowledge and supporting the learning of European languages.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Huntington (1997), *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*, Ed. Antet, Filipeștii de Târg, p. 209.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, p. 210.

The last dimension pursued by Turkey is joining the EU, interceding with it since 1959 when it applied for associated membership status to the European Economic Community and later, in April 1987, requested to join but was delayed.

e) *Post Cold War stage, between balancing and alignment with the Western world* (Table 1). USSR's implosion somewhat diminishes, at first, the Western world's interest for Turkey, the idea of it being a "link" in the containment of soviet Russia disappearing.

„Rejecting Mecca and being rejected by Brussels”, to use Samuel Huntington's words from the „Clash of Civilisations”, Turkey becomes an active pylon of expanding its influence on three sub-axes: *Balkan* (supporting the Islamic dimension of this axis, crystallised through the support given to Kosovo Albanians, Macedonians and Bosnians), *Caucasian* and *Central-Asian* (recreating a geostrategic turcophone space of economic and cultural cooperation, otherwise known as a “soft pan-Turkism”).

But the biggest challenge, as a geopolitical stake on the *North-West – South-East axis*, remains Turkey's – “Europe's Muslim cousin” – acceptance in the European Union.

### **Geopolitical stakes and games on North-West – South-East axis**

There are two dimensions regarding Turkey's acceptance in the European community:

- an official one, EU reclaiming the low level of economic development, comparative with that of the ex-communist countries in Central or Northern Europe (although, in full economic recession generated by the international financial crisis in 2008 that still currently continues, Turkey's economy has registered “abnormally” high growth rates for the current context, values reaching 10% per year), to which we can add the aspect of human rights (especially regarding the Kurdish populations, “honour crimes”, freedom of speech) and

- a less official one that would include the following issues:

- Greece's strong opposition (it has numerous geopolitical “dossiers” open with Turkey, such as: the Cyprus problem, the territorial litigation over the continental plateau of the Aegean Sea and frontier controversies, the minorities problem etc. to remind only the most important);
- The Muslim culture, Turkey being a secular state, but with a population caught between the Islamic fundamentalism, traditional (especially in rural areas from Anatolia) and the westernisation of its concept of religion – remaining in the private space as an individual and personal option;
- The geographic size (it would become, due to its territory of 783 562 km<sup>2</sup>, the largest in the EU, surpassing France, and through its population of over 72 million people, it would be second, after Germany), triggering economic emigration at an unprecedented scale (Europe is always impregnated with considerably large Turkish communities, such as in Germany, or other Muslims);
- The “domestic” policy, some weak points being corruption, the legal system (in which there have been identified several structural and procedural problems) and the army's influence, these holding an important place in the society, a reminiscence of the Kemalist state organisation: strengthening the army's authority over the society, the army being the guardian of secularisation and modernisation;

Or, to summarise all of the above, in Samuel Huntington's words, "*Turkey is too poor, too populated, too Muslim, too rigid, too different from a cultural point of view, too thick*"<sup>17</sup>.

➤ The fragmented position of the other EU members;

There is also a distinction: the official position of an EU member regarding Turkey's admission and that country's citizens' perception regarding the matter. There are situations in which both positions (of the authorities and citizens) are identical, or opposite. A simple analysis was done by a Turkish research collective<sup>18</sup>, under the aegis of the Centre for European Studies that synthesises, for 2009, these positions among the EU members.

Thus, several directions take shape:

- ✓ Strong opposing countries – some of the founding or older members that see, at most, a "privileged partnership" with Turkey, rather than it a member of the Union (France, Germany, Austria, Denmark).
- ✓ Strong supporters – at the opposite spectrum are the Mediterranean countries, except Greece, that see the admission of the "Muslim cousin" as an important economic opportunity: Italy, especially, Spain; also in this category we can include Great Britain, but mostly due to the traditional cooperation of Turkey with USA.
- ✓ Countries in which the authorities back up admission, but the public opinion is against – in this category are the Northern countries (Sweden, for example).
- ✓ Countries that back up EU's expansion "out of principle" – the countries in Eastern Central Europe fall into this category, the ones that joined in the last two enlargement stages (2004 and 2007), that have a positive attitude regarding EU expansion towards Turkey, either because of direct geopolitical vectors (Romania's case), or a neutral attitude (Poland's case), adepts of another philosophy in terms of the expansion direction due to their own strategic interests.
- ✓ Countries with a divided position, between "yes", "no" and "I don't know" – Belgium, Netherlands, Czech Republic (the last one invoking to the level of collective memory, the geographic position and non-tradition regarding Turkish or Muslim immigration).
- ✓ Countries with which Turkey has older historical controversies – Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, the first two officially supporting, somewhat, Turkey's admission in the European Union, but with a strong public opposition on different grounds (most important being the historical and geographical ones – "Turkey does not belong to Europe", fulfilling the migration issue), while the last one is divided at an opinion level, on the three answer categories – "support", "oppose" and "don't know" – with a mention, however: the third of the indecisive or "negativist" ones is a bit higher than the one that supports expansion towards the Bosphorus shores.

Regarding the Turkish public opinion dynamic of perception in terms of admission, an analysis published in spring 2009, in the University of Koç in Istanbul, shows: a negative dynamic of public opinion favouring admission, from 70% in 2004 to

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Huntington (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>18</sup> Sait Akşit, Özgehan Şenyuva, Çiğdem Üstün (2009), *Turkey Watch: EU Member States' Perceptions on Turkey's Accession to the EU*, Zeplin İletişim Hizmetleri Ltd. Şti., Ankara ([http://sinan.ces.metu.edu.tr/dosya/turkey\\_watch\\_en.pdf](http://sinan.ces.metu.edu.tr/dosya/turkey_watch_en.pdf)).



49% in 2008<sup>19</sup>. A more pronounced decline, to 44% was registered in 2006, due to the “gas war”, in its two regional versions: Eurasian (Russia cuts gas transport for Ukraine and, implicitly, EU) and Asian (Iran cuts gas deliveries to Turkey, using more and more in internal consumption, a result of president Mahmud Ahmadinejad’s radical position regarding the nuclear problem, also inviting harsh sanctions from the international community); as such, Turkey imports more and more gas through Bluestream (the Russian-Turkish gas pipeline beneath the Black Sea), and because of the increase in dependency on Russian natural gas, one can notice a diplomatic rapprochement between the two countries, at Europe’s expense (Turkey continuously protracting, at that time, the signing and participation in the Western gas project – Nabucco), a fact immediately reflected in the public’s opinion.

The stakes and opportunities that both of the two actors – Turkey and the European Union – foresee in finalising the process of admission teeter between costs and benefits, from a geopolitical point of view being obviously, at least at a theoretical level, a potentially greater interest from the EU, due to Turkey’s pivot role and diplomatic gateway to Central Asia, geographic proximity to hydrocarbons basins (Persian Gulf and Caspian basin) and its NATO member status. Thus:

*A) The stakes, interests and impact on the EU from Turkey’s accession perspective*

There are voices that invoke the fact that Turkey, in the near future, taking into account the emergence of new regional international actors, will become indispensable to the European Union, if not for political reasons, certainly for geostrategic and geoeconomical ones. To this end, Turkey, as the whole Pontic region, is at the crossroads of Eurasian regional geopolitical axes which confer it a special geostrategic value matching its role as “geopolitical joint” and not to mention that it is situated on the energy resource flow, indispensable for Europe.

Turkey’s accession can establish an example for democratisation for other problematic countries, thus the EU would be able to create a precedent for other situations (not infrequently have the North-African countries come into question). As a result of the possible and probable accession, “*Turkey will help ease the conflicts between civilisations. As a future EU member state, Turkey will be defined as an anchor of the European Union’s democracy, through which values such as democracy, freedom and human rights principles will be spread in that region.*”<sup>20</sup>, as the Portuguese minister of agriculture, Carlos da Costa Neves (2004-2005) declared during café-debates on European policies, organised by the NGO “Friends of Europe”.

In the current geopolitical context, with the emergence of energy intensive economies (China, for example) that target the Caspian region, having access to that area is crucial.

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<sup>19</sup> Eda Bektas (2009), *Turkish Political Parties: EU Integration Process*, Koç University, Istanbul, p. 8 (<http://www.kocjeanmonnet.com/media/EU%20research%20pape-Eda%20Bektas.pdf>).

<sup>20</sup> \*\*\* (2004), *Turkey’s EU end-game?*, European Policy Summit, 17 iunie, Bruxelles, p. 16 ([www.friendsofeurope.org/Portals/6/Documents/Reports/2004\\_EPS\\_TurkeyEUEndgame.pdf](http://www.friendsofeurope.org/Portals/6/Documents/Reports/2004_EPS_TurkeyEUEndgame.pdf)).

Counterarguments to the debate whether the EU has any advantages for including Turkey are more oriented in the direction of the historical past and the negative perception of the Ottoman Empire for Europe's tradition (the European collective memory still keeps alive the memory of Turks' presence in Central Europe, at Vienna's gates or conquering Buda), but also in a cultural direction, claiming the fear for the beginning of Europe's "Islamisation" and a demographic direction (which would influence Turkey's vote in the EU, a matter hard to accept by many old members of the European Union).

To synthesize, there are two main aspects regarding the European Union's interest to accept Turkey as a member:

- Without Turkey's support, the geopolitical construct of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century desired by the Western world (USA and the EU) cannot be created, nor complete and protected against threats.

*„Europe, as part of the Western world, is becoming increasingly vulnerable to instability, demographic expansion and Middle East religious radicalisation”*<sup>21</sup> emphasised Ognyan Minchev (2006), in a study under the aegis of the Institute for International and Regional Studies in Sofia.

The West needs solid and strong guarantees to control areas of great interest at which Turkey can provide access, such as the Middle East and Central Asia. Turkey would be the main pawn in the development of the "chess game" on the Eurasian board;

- Geopolitical and geostrategic access to the Eurasian region cannot be accomplished by the sole use of military or political instruments that might prove successful only on a short term. Westernisation of the above mentioned regions – the Trans-Caucasian countries, and the ones in Central Asia and Near and Middle East, can only be economic. The European micro-scale lab – Belgium (in spite of the political crisis of the last few years and its regionalist tendencies), Switzerland and so on – or the macro-scale one – the European Union civilisation project –, represent successes in harmonising controversies and cultural differences, through economic development.

#### *B) The stakes, interests and impact on Turkey from the accession perspective*

One of the most relevant Turkish interests as member of the European Union is that of its need to be Westernised, no longer wanting to be seen as an Asian state (in the derogatory connotation of this collocation and not in its identity meaning), but as a European one, after the EU countries' model.

However, besides the interests that refer to the Turkish state's image in international context, there are objective interests that refer, for example, to Turkey's economy. The rate at which Turkey attracts foreign capital and DFIs is dropping which directly leads to an economic and monetary instability. The explanation of its low yield can be found in Turkey's macroeconomic instability.

Accession to the EU brings with it an easy way for Turkey to access European structural funds and therefore, a forecasted economic growth that would directly increase the Turkish citizens' standard of living. But in order to be accepted in the EU, the "Eurasian" candidate needs a working market economy, competitive with the rest of the EU members, something Turkey wished to achieve after joining the EU, not before.

<sup>21</sup> Ognyan Minchev (2006), *The case of Turkey in the EU*, Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, p. 4 ([http://www.iris-bg.org/files/The%20Case%20of%20Turkey%20in%20the%20EU\\_eng.pdf](http://www.iris-bg.org/files/The%20Case%20of%20Turkey%20in%20the%20EU_eng.pdf)).

With everything that's happening in its economy, Turkey has expressed a firm position that it will continue to fulfil its contractual obligations, for a fluid negotiation between the two parties involved, according to the well known Latin proverb "pacta sunt servanda" (conventions must be respected).

In spite of the downward trend of the public opinion's dynamic that is positive towards Turkey's accession to the EU, nevertheless, for the Turkish society, Europe represents and symbolises a high standard of living, towards which it aspires. To the bottom of things, Hüsamettin İnaç emphasised (2004) „*Turkey's feeling of membership or non-membership to the EU has a tendency to determine Turkey's identity in a civilisation context. Thus, it is true that the European Union becomes a standard for most of the Turkish social segments*”<sup>22</sup>.

Instead, the political parties' opinions are essential: the Left's and the Right's views are rather radical, these being against Turkey's accession to the EU because they consider that Turkey must be independent from an economic point of view, to follow the principle according to which etatism in business is essential and last but not least, it hovers the certainty that accession must be rejected due to the imperialist and supra-national character that would affect Turkey's long term interests. This "collective mentality" leads to the opinion that Europe wishes to become the hegemonic power and that it needs Turkey in order to be successful. On the other side of things are modernists that look to the West.

Also, the Turkish Islamists are sceptic because they consider that the European Union wishes Turkey to become a member in order to erode the Turkish state's relations with the Middle East or the Balkans region, the main fear of these groups being the loss of Turkey's identity, in the conditions in which the EU is seen as a supra-state organisation with a double-standard. For Islamic groups it is very clear that the desired "Westernisation" is a threat to the Turkish people's religious and cultural values.

The feelings harboured by these groups that do not consider Turkey's accession to the EU a sufficiently high stakes, can be integrated in one word: euro-scepticism (a growing phenomenon in Turkey as we previously pointed out).

Table no. 2 Turkish political spectrum opinion structure based on the attitude and behaviour induced by Turkey's accession to the EU

	<b>Europhiles</b>	<b>Europhobes</b>
<b>Euro-optimists</b>	Euro-enthusiasts	Euro-pragmatics
<b>Euro-pessimists</b>	Euro-sceptics	Euro-repulsives

after Kopecky and Mudde (2002)

If Turkey, at the end of negotiations, receives its membership status, it can be considered a victory for the Western world, for establishing an "anchor of democracy" in a highly radical Islamic world. However, if Turkey doesn't find itself in the position of new EU member at the end of negotiations, the failure of Western democracy is obvious

<sup>22</sup> Hüsamettin İnaç (2004), *Identity Problems of Turkey during the European Union Integration Process*, in „Journal of Economic and Social Research”, Vol. 6, Nr. 2, p. 35 (<http://www.fatih.edu.tr/~jesr/jesr.inac.pdf>).

and can have as repercussions the appearance of feelings of dissatisfaction both in the West as well as on the Bosphorus shores, the new atmosphere being able to generate the emergence of a strong anti-European feeling.

### Conclusions

Practically applying the concept of *geopolitical axis* in the case study centred on the *North-West – South-East Eurasian geopolitical axis* has led to the following conclusions:

- *A deepening of the concept of “geopolitical axis” is required;*

This concept carries a special ability to explain many of the new geopolitical paradigms and the mutations suffered by global and regional geopolitical systems, especially in the context of multiple actors and power challengers on the “grand chessboard”. In the same context, taking into account the multiple membership of a geographic region to different territorial structures (the same region can form, at the same time, a trans-border region, a Euro-region, submit to the sovereignty of a nation state, but also to supra-state structures – regional blocks or associations of regional blocks), the concept of “geopolitical axis” offers the possibility to constantly evaluate the geopolitical significance of a place/territory. By means of the current case study, Turkey’s Eurasian valences can be best explained and nuanced by placing it on geopolitical axes that converge in the Pontic region and that shape the basic structure of the entire Eurasian regional geopolitical system.

- *The North-West – South-East axis has been (re)activated with the collapse of the communist system and the USSR’s implosion and is a composite type of axis;*

The symbolic 1989 moment (the fall of the Iron Curtain) has had as effects: thawing of the East, setting the Balkans on fire and reinvigorating the Turkish-Islamic factor in the region. The multiple interests of the Western world, Turkey and Russia have also shaped the complexity of the axis: the North-West – South-East axis is a geopolitical axis, mainly because it is individualised on the intention to geopolitically integrate the Balkans; at the same time it is a geostrategic expansion axis of the North Atlantic structures (NATO – the case of the South-East European countries and the EU, especially for Turkey); with the above mentioned in mind we can also shape the military component (the emergence of new allied bases) and the economic one (absorption in the Union’s common market); thus, it is also a geoeconomic axis (the Caspian energy projects).

- *The geopolitical stake of the North-West – South-East axis is represented by Turkey’s, a pivot country, accession to the European Union.*

Turkey is a geopolitical pivot, being the joint between several regional systems and having the potential to generate for each and every one of those stability or instability. On Turkey’s accession depends the activation of a North-South geopolitical fault, this being the key to the Balkans’ security, as well as a step forward to stabilising the Near and Middle East.

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