

Turkey's Foreign Policy after the November Election

[Published on 14 December 2015](#) by Alain Servantie

The 90% voter turnout at the recent parliamentary election in Turkey, held on 1st November 2015, demonstrated the political interest of the Turkish population. The voters gave President Erdoğan's party AKP (Justice and Development Party) a majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. With 49% of the total vote, an increase with nearly 9 percentage points compared to the 7th June results, it won 317 of the 550 seats in Parliament. Even AKP officials admit they were not expecting such a result after losing their parliamentary majority in the June election.

Much of the change in voting seems to have occurred at the detriment of the nationalist party (MHP: National Movement Party, minus 4.4%), opposed to negotiations with Kurds, and of the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party, which just crossed the 10% threshold needed to claim seats). The opposition parties, who together had collected nearly 60% of the vote in June, lost credibility with their failure to form a coalition government. The violence that erupted soon after the June election was blamed on the PKK and scared both nationalist and religious voters, who preferred the situation under the AKP and voted for a return to stability. The election results also show that a great majority of Kurds prefer to remain Turkish citizens and may suggest that there is less need to negotiate with the Kurdish opposition to get a constitutional reform.

OSCE observers reported that the election took place in a 'challenging security environment, in particular in the south-east, coupled with a high number of violent incidents, including attacks against party members and campaign staff, as well as on party premises (particularly of HDP), hindered contestants' ability to campaign freely. The government's seizure of critical media outlets such as the Koza-Ipek group, the disproportionate coverage given by TV stations to the AKP to the detriment of other parties and the number of criminal investigations of journalists, reduced voters' access to a broad range of information.'¹

In the context of the European panic to dry up the flow of refugees from the Middle East, Angela Merkel's visit to Turkey in mid-October and the promises she made in exchange to Turkey helping to stop the influx of refugees to Europe – were criticised as tacit support of the AKP. Western diplomats consider that 'it is probably better for Europe and the US to have a strong government in Turkey at a highly volatile time like this in the region.'

The comfortable AKP majority in the Grand National Assembly may allow President Erdoğan to carry out some internal reforms, particularly changing Turkey into a presidential regime, a profound reform which may be adopted only through a referendum.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu formed the new government on 24th November. The first measures taken targeted media and civil society organisations related to Fethullah Gülen suspecting them of belonging to the 'parallel state': journalists and lawyers were put under arrest, the satellite transmission of opposition TV channels made impossible.

In the meantime divergences between Erdoğan and Western politicians have appeared concerning the definition of terrorism. For example in its statement on the European Commission's regular report, *'Turkey expects the EU to read the realities regarding the parallel structure correctly and demonstrate the necessary sensitivity regarding this illegal structure and its activities'* the Turkish

¹ INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Republic of Turkey – Early Parliamentary Elections, 1 November 2015 STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/>

government implies that the so-called Gülenist movement (*Hizmet*) is a terrorist organisation and accuses them of masterminding a plot to overthrow the government. In Antalya, on 15-16 November, Erdoğan asked President Obama to cooperate on an alleged financing of terrorist activities through Hizmet.

Talks with Kurdish organisations had started in 2011. The Kurds made ‘proposals for constitutionalising the Kurdish identity, for the autonomy of Kurdish regions, as well as on Kurdish cultural rights, the teaching of Kurdish language at school, the status of Öcalan, and the amnesty of combatants’². The talks were suspended in October 2014, when the PYD (Kurdish party in Syria) bravely defended itself against ISIS in Kobane, and cancelled in June 2015, after the electoral success of the HDP. A ‘dirty war’ resumed, confronting the PKK and the Turkish army and police, which left several hundred people dead including 150 members of the security forces. Kurdish positions in Iraq and Syria were bombed by the Turkish air force. As long as there is a divergence of views between Ankara, Washington and Moscow on the role of Kurds in Syria, a solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey itself may be hard to reach.

Turkish external policy: from NATO watchdog to regional soft power

Until the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the Western allies considered Turkey as a guardian of NATO’s southeastern borders against the Soviet threat and communism. Turkish politicians used to describe their country as a ‘freedom pawn’ in the mouth of a tiger. Since the Korean War and its accession to NATO, Turkey had more or less aligned its foreign policy on that of the the USA. Following the dissolution of the USSR, conservative politicians in Europe started to consider that Turkey was geopolitically less important. The Turkish refusal to take part in President Bush’s anti-Iraq coalition in 2003 was a first sign of a change in foreign policy. The incremental disintegration of the Middle East, the Caucasian conflicts, on the other hand, enhanced Turkey’s geo-strategic importance, even more than during the Cold War.³ The changes in Turkish foreign policy, since AKP took over the government, got a partially ideological justification in Prime Minister Davutoğlu’s works and speeches, but there are other aspects which have to be taken into account.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, professor of international relations, chief advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2003-09, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2014, became Prime Minister and leader of the AKP in August 2014. He wrote: “*Turkey enjoys multiple regional identities and thus has the capability as well as the responsibility to follow an integrated and multidimensional foreign policy. The unique combination of our history and geography brings with it a sense of responsibility. To contribute actively towards conflict resolution and international peace and security in all these areas is a call of duty arising from the depths of a multidimensional history of Turkey.*”⁴ When Davutoğlu became Foreign Minister, he claimed he would pursue a zero conflict policy with all neighbouring countries, implying enlarging Turkey’s presence in the regional and international scene through a reassessment of its strengths in the geopolitical environment. Part of Turkey’s strength can be attributed to its economic growth, to the reforms in the Middle East and to a decline in great power rivalry in Turkey’s vicinity. Davutoğlu and Erdoğan stress the religious commonalities with countries in the Balkans (Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo) with the Arab countries, but also with countries in Africa and in Southeastern Asia. The historical references resulted in this policy being qualified as neo-ottomanism, a description rejected by Davutoğlu who claimed that Turkey was just building ‘*diplomatic relations of equal status with any big or small country that was previously in Ottoman lands*’

However, Erdoğan’s appeal to Arab Muslims particularly in Egypt in 2011, showing Turkey as an example of a democratic Muslim country, gave him some popularity among traditional religious

² See Olivier Grojean interview in <http://arianebonzon.fr/pkk-back-into-the-unknown/>

³ See Carl Bildt, Swedish Foreign Minister, “Interview: The EU, Turkey and Neighbors Beyond”, in *Turkish Foreign Policy Quarterly*, vol. 8 n° 3, Fall 2009, p. 19-26.

⁴ See Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkish Foreign Policy and the EU in 2010”, in *Turkish Foreign Policy Quarterly*, vol. 8 n° 3, Fall 2009, p. 11-17. *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory, The Civilizational Transformation and The Muslim World* in English, *Stratejik Derinlik (Strategic Depth)*, and *Küresel Bunalım (The Global Crisis)* in Turkish.

leaders. In the Western press, Turkey was shown as a moderate Muslim country, which could facilitate peace and democracy in the Middle East. Davutoğlu thus presents relations with Muslim countries as a complement to European integration. End 2004 Turkey as a bridge between the West and the Muslim world promoted in cooperation with the Spanish Prime Minister José-Luis Zapatero the *Alliance of Civilisations*. The Alliance was launched in UN context as an answer to Huntington's famous book, *Clash of Civilisations* (1997); in 2010 an institute was founded in this context at the Fatih Mehmet Sultan University in Istanbul (2010), publishing on Islamophobia. Spanish disinterest for the project, caused by changes of government, led the *Alliance* to a standstill.

Turkey has been a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) since 1975. Some organisations of the OIC are based in Turkey: the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC). The Turk Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu was Secretary General of the OIC for ten years. The OIC adopted several resolutions supporting the Turkish Cypriot Republic or the Turkish minority in Western Thrace.

Erdoğan's appeal to Islam by, while campaigning Turkish migrants in Western European countries, Davutoğlu's advice to Turkish MPs that they should express themselves abroad as spokespersons of Islam, reflected a return to a certain pan-Islamism, close to the policy of Sultan Abdulhamid II, at the end of the 19th century. The attachment to Sunnite orthodoxy is obvious in the Turkish opposition to Syrian alawites, in the difficult relations with Iran or the support of the operations of Saudi Arabia against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Erdoğan stated that the Islamic State in Iraq was a reaction of Sunnite Arabs excluded from power by the Shi'is. Islam is painted as a means to provide a long-lasting union between all Middle Eastern peoples whatever their culture may be (this argument is particularly used towards the Kurds).

Kemal Kirişçi notes that Davutoğlu's presentations neglect one of the main factors of change for Turkey: the country has become a trade country, a process which started during the reign of Turgut Özal, prime minister and president of Turkey in the 1980s, and furthermore encouraged by the customs union concluded between Turkey and the EU in 1996. The export-oriented liberal policy has become a major consideration driving Turkish foreign policy. Strong business interest groups are increasingly able to access the government as well as foreign policy decision-makers shaping and influencing Turkish foreign policy.⁵ Particular concerns were expressed on economic relations with Russia following the downing of the Sukhoy in Syria.

One should not forget the role played by the head of the National Intelligence Organisation (Turkish: Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı- MIT), Hakan Fidan. A former officer, Fidan wrote a PhD thesis on Intelligence: *'Intelligence and Foreign Policy: A Comparison of British, American and Turkish Intelligence Systems'* (1999). As head of MIT since 2010, Fidan negotiated the liberation of the hostages taken by ISIS in the Turkish consulate in Mosul in June-September 2014, as well as with PKK representatives and Öcalan.

Will the AKP victory bring changes in Turkey's foreign policy? The reappointments of Davutoğlu as Prime Minister and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu as Foreign Minister are a sign of continuity. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, known to be close to President Erdoğan, was the spokesman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2010-2011, Minister for European Affairs in 2013-2014, Foreign Affairs Minister in 2014.

EU and NATO: is Turkey withdrawing from its Western commitment?

The European Union

When meeting the Vice-President of the European Commission Frank Timmermans, on 10th November, Davutoğlu reaffirmed that 'Full integration with the EU is and will remain the priority'. However, President Erdoğan has fixed 2023 – the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Republic – as a target for accession⁶, which in other words means that there is no hurry for reforms. Turkey received a comparatively better progress report in 2015 from the Commission than in former

⁵ Kemal Kirişçi The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, n° 40, 2009, p.29-57.

⁶ Speech at IKV, 9 May 2015.

years. The report, in the opinion of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was written ‘in the light of Turkish recommendation’ (sic)- which means balancing criticism with a long-term description of progresses, and the press statement describes a Europe in multiple crises, needing close cooperation with Turkey⁷. In other words, the report avoided strong criticism on recent negative developments in the area of freedom of expression or rule of law.

The conclusions of the EU-Turkey Summit that took place in Brussels on 29 November 2015 were limited: regular Summits twice a year, comprehensive regular political dialogue meetings; opening negotiations on only one chapter in December 2015 ; negotiations on visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens in the Schengen zone by October 2016 *once the requirements of the Roadmap are met*. The EU has committed itself to provide 3 billion euro to help Turkey deal with Syrian refugees. The EU and Turkey agreed to implement a Joint Action Plan aimed to bring order into migratory flows and help to stem irregular migration. Formal negotiations on upgrading the Customs Union may be launched towards the end of 2016.

Both sides will have to prove that accession negotiations can resume on a genuinely healthy basis. President Erdoğan still remembers that EPP spokespersons (Elmar Brok chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the EP) had suggested that a ‘special relationship’, a ‘privileged partnership’ including Turkey in a Neighbourhood Policy directed towards countries excluded of accession, should be applied rather than full membership; and in 2007 French president Sarkozy proposed the Union for the Mediterranean as an alternative to accession, as a gadget to keep Turkey out of the Union. Such policies pushed Turkey to embark on a less and less Western oriented foreign policy. A full association of Turkey to EU Neighbourhood policy could have built on the bridge capacity of this country with the region. ENP and Turkey’s neighbourhood policy coincide in goals and scope but diverge in means and methodology. The special relationship proposed contributed to Turkey’s rejection of this policy.⁸ So far, Turkey appears unwilling to fully comply with the EU framework on public procurement, due to osmosis between public procurement and political financing⁹, as well as to approximate its legislation on state aids and social issues. Most of the ‘chapters’ blocked so far depend on Cyprus’ veto and lifting the veto of this country depends on progress on the reunification of the island.

In March 2014, the World Bank issued a report suggesting an updating of the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU, which could pave the way to EU integration. The Customs Union has so far an asymmetrical structure, which runs at Turkey’s disadvantage as far as it concerns commercial relations with third countries. The coverage of the extended Customs Union still has to be agreed: Turkey would like to be better associated to commercial negotiations and to migration management, but seems reluctant to discuss liberalisation of services.

In the area of foreign security and defence policy, the 2015 Commission report notes that *‘Turkey is moderately prepared as regards the alignment with the EU ... Some progress was made as the political dialogue between the EU and Turkey on foreign and security policy continued to intensify. Turkey maintained its policy on Syria, supporting the opposition and providing vital humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees. It has continued to participate actively in civil and military crisis management missions [EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia Herzegovina and EULEX Kosovo]. An importing development was the development of the dialogue on counter-terrorism, with Turkey joining the international coalition against Da’esh. In the coming year, Turkey should in particular: align itself more closely with EU declarations and Council decisions. Regarding the common foreign and security policy, Turkey aligned itself, when invited, with 16 out of 40 EU declarations and Council decisions (40 % alignment, against 29 % during the reference period of the 2014 Progress Report).’*¹⁰ 29% alignment was one of the lowest levels of alignment on EU positions, revealing the distance still to be covered.

Cyprus

⁷ Press Statement on the 2015 Progress Report on Turkey, Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs.

⁸ See Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, “EU, Turkey and Neighborhood Policies”, in *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 8, n° 3, Fall 2009, p. 73-82.

⁹ TÜSIAD, A new era for the Customs Union and Business World, October 2015

¹⁰ EU Regular report 2015, 4.31

Following the rejection of the Kofi Annan reunification treaty of the island by the Greek Cypriot community in 2004 and the accession of a divided Cyprus to the Union, in July 2005, Turkey signed a protocol extending its Association agreement to the ten new EU members, but at the same time issued a declaration saying that its signature did not mean it had recognised the Republic of Cyprus. Therefore, eight negotiation chapters were blocked; on the other side, Turkey blocked increased cooperation between EU and NATO, going beyond the 'Berlin plus' arrangements, involving all EU Member States. Negotiations between the two communities on the island for a comprehensive settlement are proceeding. *'Turkey supports a comprehensive settlement based on political equality and bi-zonality. The EU will be able to contribute to a comprehensive settlement if it abandons its biased point of view,'* states the Foreign Ministry. In 2010, Davutoğlu wrote: 'the EU should not allow bilateral issues to hold back the accession negotiations.' Such a statement seems to forget that negotiations are not between the EU as such and a third country, but between the Member States and the candidate country. Furthermore, the settlement should foresee the implementation of the EU principles, i.e. freedom of establishment and movement. Some recuperation of properties lost by the Greek community or compensation in line with the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights and the fate of the presence of the Turkish army on the island are crucial issues in the negotiation. A settlement would give more weight to Turkish foreign policy in the region and permit a substantial progress in EU-Turkey relations.

A solution in Cyprus may pave the way for improving relations with Greece, as far as it concerns in particular the dispute on the Aegean. While sometimes, the situation of the Turkish (Muslim) minority in Western Thrace or in Bulgaria is used as an instrument, the continuous closure of the Orthodox Chalki Seminar on Heybeli Island, in Istanbul, remains a thorn in the relations between the two countries.

USA/ NATO

Turkey-US relations have been tested in recent times about their different approaches to ISIS. Turkey is a (tepid) partner in the coalition against ISIS and since July 2015 allows the United States to use Incirlik Air Base, near Adana, to bomb ISIS. Yet tensions between the two governments stem from the difference of treatment of the People's Defence Units (YPG), the military branch of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is supported by the USA.

On 24th November, Turkey informed the Allies about the downing of a Russian Air Force plane violating Turkish airspace, but did not refer to article 5 of the NATO Treaty. Secretary-General of NATO, Stoltenberg, called for further contacts between Ankara and Moscow, calm and de-escalation. Diplomacy and de-escalation are important to resolve this situation, he stated, the common enemy should be ISIL.

Regional issues: Middle-East

As a regional power promoting peaceful conflict solutions, in the years 2005-2009, Turkey acted as a broker between Israel and the Hamas, between Israel and Syria and also in the relations between Israel and Iran. The Arab revolutions progressively led to changes: in 2011, Turkey was initially opposed to an intervention in Libya, where the Turkish economic presence was important. Turkey supported the revolution in Egypt and in Syria. The recent G-20 summit held in Antalya on 15-16 November was an opportunity for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to give the impression of returning to the world scene as a regional player. Differences on Syria with Russia and the US, however, prevented that his appearance could be considered a success; no new steps could be announced.

Syria

Until 2011, Turkey had a good relationship with Syria: joint military exercises took place in 2009; Turkey lifted visa requirement for Syrian travellers.

The main change happened after the rebellion started in Syria, when Erdoğan supported Western views that Bashar al-Assad should step down, a position he maintained at the Antalya G-20. His position, however, rules out a Kurdish autonomy in north-eastern Syria, which would become a model of Kurdish self-rule and a magnet for Turkey's own Kurdish population. Ankara is still trying to achieve that the Kurdish Democratic Union Party and its military wing, the People's Protection Units, are listed as terrorist organisations because of their links to the outlawed PKK, against the opposition

of the USA and Russia who consider them as partners in the fight against ISIS. In August, Erdoğan warned Kurds not to seize Jarablus, a town on the Turkish border that ISIS had been using to resupply with weapons, materials and recruits necessary for its subsistence. Considering that the PKK/PYD is the biggest threat to Turkey and that ISIS can be a useful counterforce reflects an ambiguous attitude since the negotiations to liberate the Turkish consulate in Mosul. Delivery of weapons to Syrian opposition groups was reported both by CHP representatives and by the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, whose director, Can Dündar, was jailed, indicted for ‘treason’. Allegations of training of fighters in Turkey were published. Oil from ISIS is carried to Turkey in trucks belonging to the Çalık Holding, according to Russian reports. *Turkey’s actions are de facto protection of Islamic State*, said Russian Prime Minister Medvedev. *‘This is no surprise, considering the information we have about direct financial interest of some Turkish officials relating to the supply of oil products refined by plants controlled by ISIS.’*¹¹ However, the Turkish Foreign Ministry comments the Commission 2015 regular report as follows: *‘While it is significant that the report has underlined that the PKK is a terrorist organisation, it appears that the decisive steps taken by Turkey in its fight against the PKK, DHKP-C, Da’esh and other terrorist organisations without discrimination have not been comprehended well enough by the EU....’*

Recent events showed that Turkey supported the Turkmen, a Turkish-speaking minority in Syria and Iraq, involved in the Free Syrian Army, in cooperation with Turkish intelligence. They had ‘freed’ a mountainous area close to the Turkish frontier, north of Syria, above the Latakia harbour. Davutoğlu accused the Russians of hitting Turkmen targets in the region where the Russian plane was downed, instead of fighting against Da’esh, and accused the Russians of ethnic cleansing in Syria. Observers see the downing of a Russian plane on 24th November as the end of the grand coalition against ISIS promoted by President Hollande. Apparently, the USA, Turkey and France, who supported the rebellion against Bashar al-Assad from the beginning, seem to realise that they have opened a Pandora’s Box, now they wonder how to close it again.

According to the UNHCR, Turkey is the biggest refugee-hosting country in the world today, with 2.5 million Syrians and Iraqis.¹²

Iraq

In 2003, Turkey opposed the US intervention in Iraq, which led to the autonomy of the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Strong economic ties progressively developed between the KRG and Turkey, the main route for Turkey’s oil exports and its major trade partner.

The coordination of attitudes vis-à-vis ISIS is difficult as Turkish fighter jets conducted intensive air bombardments of the PKK inside Iraqi Kurdish territory. The deployment of Turkish tanks towards Mosul beginning December led to a strong reaction of the Iraqi Prime Minister. KRG President, Barzani, on a visit in Ankara on 10th December proposed to act as an arbiter between Baghdad and Ankara.

Egypt

In September 2011, Erdoğan, who tried to present the AKP regime as a democratic model for Muslim countries, was met by enthusiastic crowds in Cairo. Egypt became a chief destination for Turkish companies investing abroad. When the Morsi regime was overthrown in 2013, Turkey supported opponents of el-Sissi, hosting meetings of the Muslim Brotherhood. Both countries recalled their ambassadors, downgraded their diplomatic relations and reduced economic cooperation. In April, Egypt refused to renew a regular ferry service operated between Iskenderun and Port Said, providing a lifeline for Turkish exporters to the Gulf since the wars in Iraq and Syria blocked existing trade routes. A visit by the Chairman of Turkey’s Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), Rifat Hisarciklioglu, to Cairo Nov. 7-9, was widely seen as a positive step toward mending fences between the two countries.

¹¹ David L. Phillips COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS, Research Paper: ISIS-Turkey Links.

¹² A World Humanitarian Summit should be held at the level of Heads of State and Government in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016 and deal with the refugee issue.

Iran

Turkey, who — in contrast to western allies — opposed an embargo on Iran, mediated to get a nuclear deal with this country. Davutoğlu views Turkey as becoming an ‘energy corridor’ for eastern oil. The return of Iran on the international scene is particularly important, but the alignment of Iran with the Russian policy on Syria is a matter of concern.

Israel

The Turkish-Israeli entente in the 1980’s is far away. Before becoming foreign minister, Davutoğlu was a leading actor on behalf of the Turkish government during the shuttle diplomacy for the settlement of the Gaza conflict; Turkey’s mediation temptatives between Israeli and Hamas, and between Israel and Syria, were brought to an end by the Israeli intervention in Gaza. Following the *Mavi Marmara* incident in May 2010, relations with Israel have remained strained. Turkey continues to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza and kept open communication channels with both Fatah and Hamas.

Russia and Caucasus

Under President Özal, in 1992, the establishment of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was hailed as encouraging regional interdependence between countries that had remained separated by the Cold War. Özal also worked hard to open up export markets for Turkey in the former Soviet Union; the reference to a common language and culture with Azerbaijan and Central Asian Republics was used for developing relations.

Turkey remained neutral in the Russia-Georgia conflict and cautious in the Ukrainian crisis, although not recognising the annexation of Crimea where a Tatar community lives. However, on Crimea and events in eastern Ukraine, Turkey did not adopt the EU restrictive measures related to this crisis, thus avoiding import restrictions from Russia. Relations between both countries developed through economic cooperation: Russia was the biggest source of Turkish imports in 2014, some \$25 billion or 10 percent of the total, mainly gas. Turkey exported \$6 billion worth of goods to Russia in 2014, 4 percent of all exports, 4,5 million Russian tourists visited Turkey in 2014, and several billion \$ Turkish investments were made in Russia, not to forget the the South-Stream gas pipeline project, where Gazprom is expected to invest 10 billion \$.

After a Russian plane was downed, on 24th November, President Vladimir Putin said that downing a Russian plane was ‘a stab in the back, carried out by the accomplices of terrorists.’ Restrictions on imports from Turkey were immediately applied. Sanctions may affect the Russian construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. The Russian government warned against tourism to Turkey, and most major Russian tour operators stopped selling vacation packages. Official contacts were suspended.

Armenia

The border between Turkey and independent Armenia has been closed since 1993. In 2008, President Gül visited Armenia in an effort to restore the dialogue. An agreement was signed in Zurich in 2009, at the instigation of the USA, establishing diplomatic relations and foreseeing the opening of the border; but none of both countries ratified it. Azerbaijan is opposed to such an agreement, as long as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not solved. In April 2015, the Turkish Prime Minister again offered his deep condolences to the descendants of the 1915 events. However, the Turkish authorities keep denying that what occurred was genocide.

Conclusion

Some Turkish analysts and international observers believe the AKP has little reason to change its policies after obtaining a strong mandate from the public. Erdoğan will be uncompromising on Syria and opposed to el-Sissi. Others, however, think the mandate will provide Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's government room to act more pragmatically on issues like Syria, restore ties with Egypt and help finding a solution for Cyprus.

According to Ahmet Sever, former President Abdullah Gül considered that three issues should be tackled in priority to improve Turkey’s international situation: the Cyprus question, relations with

Armenia and the Kurdish issue¹³. These three issues are still pending. Commentators consider that the positions Turkey took so far on Cyprus, Syria, and Egypt isolated the country, distancing itself from Europe and NATO. The 29 November Summit with the EU has been qualified a step to re-energise the EU-Turkey accession process. Real progress may well depend on real peace advances in the area.

¹³ Ahmet Sever, *Abdullah Gül ile 12 Yıl* (12 years with Abdullah Gül), Istanbul, 2015.