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graphie historique d'une belle inspiration et bien fondée dans les sources. Sa valeur particulière est de rendre visible au public

européen une personnalité marquante et un destin insuffisamment connu.

DARKO TANASKOVIĆ, *NEOSMANIZAM. POVRATAK TURSKJE NA BALKAN*
[NEO-OTTOMANISM. TURKEY'S RETURN TO THE BALKANS]. BELGRADE:
JP SLUŽBENI GLASNIK, 2010, pp. 109.

Reviewed by Miroslav Svirčević*

No more than ten years after the death of Kemal Pasha Atatürk (1881–1938), his life's work, the Turkish secular nation state of the West-European type, has begun to be eroded through a slow but persistent and calculated revaluation of the doctrinal and ideological legacy of the former Ottoman Empire, involving the re-Islamization of Turkish society as its major ingredient. As the thin shell of orthodox Kemalism eroded, a basis was created for building a different social and political conjuncture in modern Turkey. In that way, according to many researchers concerned with contemporary geopolitical developments in the Near East and the Balkans, the stage was set for a *neo-Ottomanist* doctrine, unmistakably present in both the foreign and domestic policies of post-WWII Turkey. Because of its quite elusive features, the doctrine has not always been easy to pinpoint in Turkish politics. During the Cold War, neo-Ottomanism, being overshadowed by the prevailing ideological dichotomy marking international relations in divided Europe in the mid-twentieth century, was a marginal and almost unrecognizable phenomenon.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Communist bloc, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and communist Yugoslavia, neo-Ottomanism has assumed a clearer ideological profile, which manifests itself differently, depending on the situation, but always along the lines of the same political agenda: strengthening of Turkey's politi-

cal, economic and military influence on the countries in her "broader neighbourhood", in fact those that once formed part of the Ottoman Empire, most of all those in the Transcaucasus, Central Asia, the Near East and the Balkans. This political orientation of post-Cold War Turkey was as clearly observable under the presidency of Turgut Özal (1989–93) and Suleiman Demirel (1993–2000) as it is under Abudullah Güll (since 2007). Shaped and honed gradually, this political platform of Turkey's contains some covert components (pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism), even though Turkish statesmen generally tend to deny the presence of any trace of neo-Ottomanism in it. Yet, the facts say differently.

Neo-Ottomanism is strongly present in Turkish politics (foreign and domestic), which has recently become observable in the Balkans as well. Darko Tanasković, an eminent Serbian Orientalist and diplomat, is among the first in Serbia to offer a more comprehensive and a more sophisticated interpretation of the doctrine of neo-Ottomanism and Turkish foreign policy, presented in a recently published study symbolically titled *Neo-Ottomanism. Turkey's Return to the Balkans*. In a well-argued and convincing manner his study elucidates the strategy of Turkish diplomacy for the twenty-first century and, consequently, the roots of its current political dynamism. The study is all the more worthy of attention and care-

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ful reading as the Turkish influence on Serbia's domestic and foreign policies has become quite visible lately. It should be established, therefore, what is understood by the concept of neo-Ottomanism, what its ideological and political source is, and, finally, what the area of its impact is.

Darko Tanasković sees neo-Ottomanism as a distinctive ideological project of gradual re-Islamization of Turkish secular society and of dismantling the underlying premises of Kemalism, coupled with the marked strengthening of Turkey's international position, which is manifested in various ways, depending on the changing historical and political circumstances after the Second World War. What he recognizes as key determinants of the neo-Ottomanist doctrine are: Islamism (but also pan-Turkism), pragmatism, and the use of double standards in Turkey's foreign policy. Almost imperceptibly, but persistently and surely, they erode the country's secular system, leaving behind mere façades of the Kemalist institutions, forms devoid of substance.

Tanasković suggests that the re-Islamization of Turkish society forms an integral, and important, part of neo-Ottomanism. Turkey is fertile ground for the process, because the secular system functioning there for several decades lacks the necessary and widespread social support and legitimacy. This has been strongly felt in this part of the Balkans, notably in the project of radical Islamization of Bosnian Muslims presented in Alija Izetbegović's *Islamic Declaration* of 1971, which, among other things, harshly criticizes Kemal Pasha's secular system as a "European plagiarism" which turned Turkey into a second-rate country with little authority on the international scene.

As the Kemalist system in fact does not mirror Turkish political reality, the legal and political position of the armed forces is markedly emphasized insofar as they are authorized to intervene should

they assess that the government is violating the secular character of the state. Islam, however, is so deeply rooted that it has never ceased being a key factor of personal and collective identity among the masses, and providing the guidelines for social life. Tanasković goes on to analyze the other two elements of neo-Ottomanism, and finds that the doctrine is increasingly reflected in everyday life and forms the backbone of Turkish diplomacy.

Political practice in Turkey (and in some other Muslim countries) has shown that the implementation of the Western notion of parliamentary democracy sooner or later leads to (pro)Islamist forces coming to power in spite of the country's constitutional secularism, a high level of secularization in public life and the powerful position of the army as the only reliable keeper of Kemalism. This means that the achievements of Kemalism are in fact quite fragile and that the secular system can only be maintained through some kind of dictatorship under the guise of parliamentarianism and modernity. But, even as they dismantle secularism, Turkish politicians will never admit it publicly, nor will they renounce Kemal Pasha Atatürk and his achievements. Even less so before Western politicians, in whose eyes Turkey (as a NATO member) remains the most dependable partner among Muslim nations and the best example that the West-European ideas of modern democracy are implementable in a Muslim state. But, Tanasković suggests, the greater the number of Atatürk's pictures hanging in Turkish offices, the less Kemalism in Turkish public life.

Finally, the neo-Ottomanist doctrine in Turkey's foreign policy is characterized by the use of double standards, which depends on concrete political interests. For instance, Turkey invaded northern Cyprus, an internationally recognized country, and recognized the self-proclaimed state of Kosovo.

The slowly crystallizing neo-Ottomanist political doctrine was given its theoretical grounds and coherence by the incumbent head of Turkish diplomacy, Ahmet Davutoglu, in his book *Depth Strategy: International Position of Turkey*, published in 2001, practically the manifesto of Turkish foreign policy at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Tanasković suggests that Davutoglu's concept of *strategic depth* is introduced as a key concept of his neo-Ottomanist theoretical paradigm. The concept implies the *historical* and *geographical depth*. As the only legitimate successor to the history and geography of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey possesses a huge political potential. She sits at the heart of the Eurasian geopolitical space, and as such has for centuries been a factor in all major developments spilling over from the Near East into the Balkans and beyond, into the Catholic and Protestant regions of Europe. Accordingly, Davutoglu (and other proponents of the doctrine) refuses to put up with the clichéd description of Turkey, especially popular in Western scholarship and publicist writing, as a "bridge between Europe and the Near East". In his view, rather than a "bridge", Turkey is the "heart" of Euroasia, its natural centre which, owing to her great historical and geographical depth, is going to play a pivotal role in stabilizing the political and economic situation in a vast area from the "Adriatic Sea to Central Asia", as Suleiman Denirel used to put it. Turkey, Davutoglu goes on to say, possesses all necessary social potentials for playing such a role on a fundamentally changed international scene: a democratic system, a young and dynamic population, a formed civil society, stable middle classes, a market economy, and a very respectable scientific and technological infrastructure. These potentials oblige Turkey to abandon her passive foreign policy and become instead the architect of a new political and

economic conjuncture, reappraising her cultural and historical heritage and the advantages of her geographical position.

In other words, Davutoglu believes that Turkey should no longer be a peripheral nation whose political role amounts to being a "bridge" between civilizations. Rather she should pursue an active foreign policy and become a centre of political decision-making. In order to achieve that, she needs to construct a new identity, suited to her new and ambitious role in the vast space of Eurasia. Breaking with the foreign policy of Kemalist Turkey, Davutoglu proposes partnership with the major powers (USA, EU, Russia, China) and the renewal of her sphere of influence, which happens to coincide territorially with the major provinces of the former Ottoman Empire. In that context, the domicile Muslim population of certain regions will serve as the "building material" for constructing Turkey as a new regional and global power.

It has already been said that the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Near East and the Balkans are the regions where contemporary Turkey is interested in renewing her political, economic and even military influence. Especially important among these is the Balkans, as it has always been the oft-questioned basis of "Turkish Europeanism". In his analysis of this aspect of the neo-Ottomanist doctrine, Tanasković takes a look at a very important essay of the Turkish political scholar Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay, "We already are Europeans". The essay suggests that the war in Bosnia in the 1990s was not triggered by strife between Christians and Muslims, nor was it a war of civilizations in Huntingtonian terms, but that it in fact was the most serious attempt in modern history to drive Turkey out of Europe and into the East, to which she has never belonged and which she has always considered irrelevant. The essay makes plain that the neo-Ottomanists are in the process of constructing a new

identity for Turkey, mostly along the political and cultural lines of the former Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. For them, the Balkans is the primary sphere of influence, and their activities will be largely devoted to settling Balkan political issues, of course, in accordance with the interests of modern Turkey. It is indicative in that sense that official Turkey sees Serbia as a "neighbouring country".

Reminding his readers of the fact that the post-Ottoman period saw systematic obliteration of the Ottoman cultural legacy in the Balkan countries, which Turkey, weak as she was at the time, was unable to counter, Davutoglu emphasizes that the process was the most vigorous in Greece and Bulgaria. That is why — the "Turkish Kissinger" goes on to say — it is necessary for Turkey to focus on two vital and traditional linchpins of the Turkish Ottomanist or pan-Turkist Balkan policy: the Bosniaks and Albanians. As they form the human basis for Turkey's regenerated political and economic power, she should do whatever it takes to satisfy their political appetites. A strong Albania and a centralized Bosnia-Herzegovina, to which now an independent Kosovo should be added, are a priority of the Turkish agenda, because that is the only way for her to curb the influence of other powers in the region: Russia (through the Serbs and, possibly, Bulgarians) and Germany (through the Slovenes and Croats). The arc stretching from Bihać in the west, across central and eastern Bosnia, Stara Raška (Sandžak), Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia and Kardzhali to Thrace is, for Davutoglu, a vitally important corridor to Turkey. Assuming that the Serbian goal in the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo was to sever that corridor, Davutoglu believes that it is vital to renew it. Otherwise, he argues, the Bosnian Muslims will be left exposed to the assimilatory influence of Croatia, while those in Sandžak and the Albanians in Kosovo will be left exposed to the influence of Serbia.

How carefully designed Turkey's long-term foreign-policy approach to the Balkans is may be seen from the section of Davutoglu's book elaborating on the three concentric geopolitical circles within which Turkish influence of different depths and intensities is supposed to be exerted. The first is the so-called *Inner Circle*, which encompasses Kosovo and Metohija (and thus Serbia), Albania and Macedonia; the second is the *Middle Circle*, encompassing Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina; the third, *Outer Circle*, encompasses Croatia, Hungary and Romania, and is not of primary interest to Ankara.

What is of central importance to Turkey is that Albania and the entire Albanian ethnic corpus should be as strong as possible. Albania must not be allowed to remain a weak and undeveloped country because, in that case, Italian and Greek presence would grow stronger, thereby countering Turkish political ambitions and interests in the region. Davutoglu is acutely aware of the complexities and contradictions involved in Albanian-Macedonian relations, and of the risk that their straining might open the way to Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian influences on a politically divided and, effectively partitioned, country such as Macedonia. Therefore, he argues, Turkey should give a boost to the shared state and help create the conditions for the Albanians to be able to fully exercise their human rights in order that the integrity of this unstable country should be preserved.

Tactical priority in Turkey's approach to the second geopolitical circle is to respond actively and timely to any intention of these nations to establish closer mutual cooperation and agreements, and by initiating counter-agreements to ensure that the balance of power is not disturbed to the detriment of Turkey and her Balkan protégés. It should be noted that Davutoglu does not question the alliance be-

tween Belgrade and Athens, but rather takes it as a political fact which is not susceptible to political influence. What is politically feasible, however, is to ensure that Sofia remains outside of that alliance. He fears the possibility and overtly suggests a proactive approach aimed at binding Bulgaria to Turkey as closely as possible. How successful Turkey has been in this may be seen from the fact that all unsettled disputes between Bulgaria and Turkey (and they are not few) were somehow pushed aside to help Bulgaria join the European Union in 2007, with the generous help of the Turkish minority party in Bulgaria, whose leader, Ahmet Dogan, was almost unfailingly a desirable political partner for all Bulgarian parties. Moreover, Bulgaria recognized independent Kosovo, her representative "bravely" defended Kosovo's right to independence before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and her political leaders keep encouraging Albanian-Macedonian cooperation. It seems self-evident that Bulgaria's motive in all that is to profit, at least partially, from the current geopolitical situation in the Balkans, notably in eastern Macedonia.

It may be added in conclusion that major powers, most of all the USA, Great Britain, France and Germany, do not appear to have anything against this turn in Turkey's foreign policy. Nor does Russia seem to mind, while China appears to ignore it altogether. The view is often heard that Turkey (as a NATO member) is merely a regional instrument in the hands of the USA and Great Britain, doing nothing else but fulfilling their political demands, while being permitted in return to "impose peace and order in her own backyard". The view is a far cry from the truth. It is true that Turkey acknowledges the interests and demands of the Anglo-Saxon nations. At the same time, however, she is ready to confront them if that is what her own strategic political in-

terests require. Turkey will never sacrifice them to please her patron overseas. It is in that context that some interesting political moves of the Turkish government, which came as an unpleasant surprise for the USA, should be looked at: the recall of the Turkish ambassador to the USA "for consultation" after US Congress passed the resolution terming the persecution of the Armenians during the First World War as a genocide; the straining of relations with Israel over the position of the Palestinians in Gaza; support extended to the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (overtly hostile to the USA); and joining Russia's project for a southern gas pipeline. All this shows that Turkey strives for an independent foreign policy and that such a trend should be expected in the future.

This is the central question for Serbia's national policy and diplomacy at this point. Concluding his analysis of Davitoglu's *depth strategy*, Tanasković stresses that the neo-Ottomanist aspect of Turkish foreign policy should not be looked at from a moralizing perspective, which is only prone to obscure what lies at the core of things. Neo-Ottomanism is neither good nor bad in itself. It may even have some degree of legitimacy. If it is all right for Germany to protect the interests of the Croats and Slovenes, and for Russia those of the Serbs, then why, Tanasković reasonably asks, would it not be all right for Turkey to claim the right to protect the interests of the Bosniaks and Albanians? This is a legitimate analogy to draw. Neo-Ottomanism, therefore, should not be denounced ahead of time. Serbia needs to take it into account as a political fact, and to strive for the maximum possible gain at the minimum possible loss in her relations with the new Turkey. Whether she will be successful depends most of all on her ability to recognize her own vital interests as well as the limits of her own strength. This requires a tremendous amount of

political realism and pragmatism. Should she be successful in coping with realities, she might achieve significant benefits. Should she fail, she will have no other to blame but herself, given that the picture of relations among major powers in the Balkans is completely clear. It is Serbia's

call now, and we can only hope that she will act prudently and timely. The complexities of the modern world made plain in Tanasković's remarkably inspiring book invite the reader to further and profound reflection.