

Introduction*

In 2023, Turkey is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic. As with all such important turning points, this is a time for both reflection on what has happened since, but also a discussion of what could and should happen next. Turkey was established as an heir to one of the greatest empires of its time, the Ottoman Empire. When the empire, already highly weakened, was ultimately defeated in the First World War and disintegrated, an Anatolian-based national liberation movement under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and his friends fought a war of independence and succeeded in negotiating a new treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923, that is considered as the founding document of the country. Soon after, a new republic was proclaimed on 29 October 2023. Foreign relations of the new republic in those early years of state formation were summed up by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as “peace at home, and peace in the world”.

Devastated by years of war and trying to consolidate the new state, Turkey was able to stay outside of the Second World War. Yet, faced with the Soviet threat right after the War, it joined the Western bloc and became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1952. Being a member of NATO, however, was not only a security guarantee for

Turkey, but it was also an affirmation of its foreign policy direction since the establishment of the Republic. Still, especially once opportunities emerged in the shifting global context, Turkey did not hesitate to establish a multi-dimensional foreign policy and improved its relations with several countries, including the Soviet Union.

The end of the Cold War was another turning point for Turkey’s foreign policy. In the 1990s, Turkey did not enjoy the so-called peace dividend like many other NATO members, as it began to face new instabilities and threats, especially in its immediate neighbourhoods. Turkey faced conflicts spreading in the Middle East, Caucasus, and the Balkans, and yet tried to deal with them playing the role of a stabiliser and proposing several regional initiatives for peace. This was a time when, despite the end of the Cold War, Turkey and the US renewed their partnership and cooperated in Turkey’s neighbourhoods. The decade ended with the Helsinki Summit where the European Union accorded Turkey candidate status.

In the first decade of the 21st century, Turkey enjoyed economic growth and political transformations that were reflected positively in its foreign policy. Turkey-EU accession negotiations started in 2004. Turkey began to focus on developing its economic relations

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with different countries and on its soft power to gain status, power, and influence. Since the 2010s, however, the opportunities have largely been replaced by challenges. Domestically facing increasing economic problems and political polarisation, Turkey also faced new foreign policy challenges. The Arab Uprisings in 2011-12 eventually created new instabilities in the Middle East and limited Turkey's influence. Especially the Syrian civil war exposed Turkey to an immense refugee crisis as well as various security threats. Turkey's EU process stalled due to reasons emanating from both Turkey and the EU. This period also witnessed increasing problems in Turkey-US relations characterised now by diverging interests and strategic outlooks. All these developments led to questions about whether Turkey was changing its international orientation.

Thus, Turkey celebrates its centenary at a time of great challenges and opportunities in global politics as well as in its neighbourhood. It is generally accepted today that global politics are in a period of transition. The US, which emerged as the only superpower after the end of the Cold War, has engaged in increasing competition with rising China. The US-led international order has also been challenged by Russia. As with other middle powers, Turkey has been trying to find itself a place in these shifting global politics. What makes Turkey interesting is that on the one hand, it is a member of many Western institutions. It has been a member of NATO since 1952, a founding member of the Council of Europe, and a member of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Furthermore, although its 65 years

old relations with the European Union have come to a standstill since it is still officially a candidate country. Yet, on the other hand, in a shifting global context and with claims of a post-Western world, Turkey under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) has been increasingly adopting a policy of "strategic autonomy." In that respect, it has been developing its relations with Russia and China, despite experiencing limitations in its relations with them as well. Thus, one of the big challenges Turkey faces in the coming years will be to position itself in the fast-evolving global order, using opportunities to increase its importance and influence.

Turkey has also been quite active in its neighbourhoods. Having several regional identities and sitting across different regions, Turkey has been involved in the Middle East, the Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Its increasing military power as well as economic potential have made Turkey a regional power in all these regions. Yet at the same time, Turkey is located in quite an unstable neighbourhood where frozen or active conflicts continue to create new challenges. Turkey's response to these conflicts has ranged from playing the role of a facilitator and mediator to active involvement as in the case of the Syrian conflict. Turkey has also become active in other parts of the world in recent years, especially in Africa and Latin America. This relatively new characteristic of Turkey's foreign policy attests to its rising capabilities and interest.

Today, international relations are characterised by uncertainty and instability. In such a context, the transformations of Turkey's foreign policy, its choices and positions will

have far-reaching consequences in its neighbourhood and also in global politics. Parallel to this, the scholarship on Turkey's foreign policy has become much more sophisticated and diversified in recent years. As the debates of Turkey's foreign policy both in Turkey and abroad continue, it is exciting to have this special issue of *Oasis* with contributions from

truly international scholars. I hope that this issue will contribute to a better understanding of Turkey's foreign policy, its characteristics, debates, opportunities, and challenges in Colombia, Latin America and beyond.

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