

UNFULFILLED DREAMS AND DASHED HOPES: TURKEY'S RETURN TO THE MIDDLE EAST

On the 10th of November, Global Governance had the great opportunity to host a Global Conversation on Turkey's situation in the Middle East landscape. The host was Ilter Turan, president and professor of Political Science in the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Bilgi University.



The conference was mainly based on historical facts and how they had strongly contributed to the political situation during the years. To start off, nowadays Turkey is living a period of instability and confusion, and the historical facts considerably contributed to the current situation, and this is probably the reason why the host wanted to focus so much on that specific field. The country is often mentioned in the latest news, as it is involved in a military oppression in Syria, and with difficult attempts it is trying to bring peace, collaborating with Iran, Russia and Iraq, furthermore negotiating with the first two and Qatar. The current president Erdogan is trying to get more and more power by acting in a way more similar to a dictator than as a prime minister, he is applying censorship to its state, by limiting liberty of opinion; unfortunately, we didn't talk much about it, apart from some question asked by the students, more focused on how Turkey would get rid of him. Regarding the current developments, after the abolishment of the caliphate, the ministry of foreign affairs tried to keep Turkey away from the Middle East matters, aiming to build a Nation-State and distinguish itself among the countries around. Though, the real reason why they were not interested in getting involved in the Middle East affairs was due to its imperial past.

Another significant step was signed in the aftermath's World War II, when colonial powers reduced their presence in the Middle East. According to Ilter Turan in 1980 Turkey was signed by two relevant facts: the domestic one, through which Turkey dropped the import down and focused on export due to the impossibility of financing the import, and the second one, and the starting of exports to the Middle Eastern countries.

After the end of the Cold War the international environment definitely changed, there were regional issues, Turkey had always had a competitive relation with Iran, and after the revolution the Iranians tried to export as much as they could, creating a competition of leadership in the area; the conflict with Syria continued as it claimed certain territories and Turkey responded building some constructions at the Euphrates. In that occasion, the Kurdistan Workers Party born, supported by popular masses of the south-east. Concerning the Iraq situation, Turkey had always conducted military operations in the north of the country, while with Egypt it continued to hold the regional leadership.

A new political scenario was opened with the creation of a new political party in the 1970s, where political parliaments joined, sometimes banded by the Courts for using

Islamic religion in State matters, in the same years, in 1973, there was the petrol crisis, and because of that Turkey had to reconsider her development economics.

Regarding the parties' matter, those "National saving parties" started succeeding in 2002 when AKP achieved the political power, however, without doing any radical change in Turkish foreign policy; Turkey had the resources and by the time it became a political leader, after 2007 AKP took the power with a greater majority, and that was the year when Turkey started to become an "honest broker" in the region of the Middle East, gaining better relations with Syria and Israel; It was only in 2010 with the Arab spring, that Turkey broke its relations with Syria and supported the local actors against Assad, becoming more and more radical. Assad had a very strong support in Syrian society, and Iran and Russia unexpectedly assisted his government.

The last part of the conversation was focused on the migrations' matter, a significative aspect of the developments that are infecting the current Turkey, even though they are more the consequences than the causes of the administration.

Turan affirmed that Turkey didn't expect such a big exodus of refugees leaving its territory, therefore every politics were shaped by single individuals and not by a mutual consent, and moreover, no matter what politics people supported, they were all against this immigration. From a question proposed by a student, we focused on the relationship between Greece and Turkey in the migrations' landscape. In both directions there is a relatively little flow between the two countries; indeed, the most pressing migration concerns for both Greece and Turkey is that of the clandestine migrations and asylum-seekers. This is also shared by other EU countries, which see both Greece and Turkey as primary transit routes for illegal migration to northern Europe.

If we want to compare the modern Turkey to the one of 2007, we could say that is more influential in the division and there are more difficulties in the regions, moreover, it is exposed to the security of the challenge due to the Islamic state. After the discussion, a debate was opened and some students focused their questions on how will be its relationship with the EU, and what will be the future of this country. "Will the Turkey ever enter the EU?". In the last years, despite the country have satisfied some requisites to join the European Union, according to Juncker (European's Union president), it seems to go back and to have interrupted the approaching process to the Western countries because of the new government's policy.

The conference was concluded with a significative question: what will be the future of this country in twenty years? The professor nicely answered that maybe he is not going to see that period changes, but one day Turkey will hopefully turn back to its normal democratic position.

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