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A Forward Looking Vision for
the Balkans

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ahmet Davutoğlu was born in Taşkent/Konya in 1959. After completing his secondary education at Istanbul High School, commonly known as Istanbul Erkek Lisesi, he graduated from the departments of Economics and Political Science at Boğaziçi University, where he then went on to complete his M.A. in Public Administration and Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations. He became an Assistant Professor in 1990 at the International Islamic University of Malaysia where he established and chaired the Political Science Department until 1993. He also lectured at the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies, the Institute for Insurance and Banking and the Political Science and International Relations Department’s PhD programme of Marmara University as well as at the Military Academy and the War Academy. He was Professor of International Relations and Head of the International Relations Department at Beykent University from 1995 to 2004.

He served as Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister and Ambassador at large during the 58th, 59th and 60th Governments. He was appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the 60th Government of the Republic of Turkey on 1 May 2009. He was elected as Deputy of AK Party from Konya to the Turkish Grand National Assembly at the 2011 General Elections and appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the 61st Government.

He is the author of many books and articles on foreign policy and international relations in Turkish and English. These have also been translated into several other languages including Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, Persian, Greek and Albanian. Professor Davutoğlu is married with four children and speaks English, German and Arabic.

His publications include Alternative Paradigms (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World (K.L.: Quill, 1994), Stratejik Derinlik (Strategic Depth) (Küre Yayınları, 2001) and Küresel Bunalım (Global Crisis) (Küre Yayınları, 2002). He has pursued a multi-disciplinary approach in his work on such fields as international relations, regional analysis, comparative political philosophy, and comparative history of civilizations.

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A FORWARD LOOKING VISION FOR THE BALKANS

The Balkan region is at a historical juncture as the SEECP (South East European Cooperation Process) is soon to celebrate its 15th anniversary. It is high time for regional countries to reflect on the past 15 years and reassess the potential role this process could play in the future of the region. What was the joint vision that prompted the Balkan nations to initiate this process? What have been the achievements of the SEECP? What are the factors that render this process a vital component of regional affairs? What are the challenges that must be met for the further development of the SEECP? These are but a few questions that we, as the stakeholders in the creation of a peaceful and stable regional order in the Balkans, have to seriously ponder.

Despite the argument that the forces of globalization will reduce local differences and facilitate the emergence of a single global society, we are still living in a world of regions where local and regional processes increasingly gain prominence. The reality of regional or sub-regional cooperation has increasingly become a fact of the 21st century as many nations move towards closer cultural, economic, and political interaction, if not integration, at the regional level. The Balkan region, which traditionally has been referred to as the prototype of fragmentation and disintegration, now has a chance to emerge as yet another regional order in the making where a culture of cooperation prevails.

This essay proposes an alternative vision of furthering regional cooperation around the SEECP, based on a set of methodology and policy principles, in an attempt to stimulate a wider debate on the subject in the intellectual and policy circles in the Balkan region. In particular, this essay outlines the normative bases and policy principles for regional cooperation as the Balkan nations contemplate how to reorganize their institutional architecture in this new era.
SEEC/P: FROM THE 20th CENTURY INTO THE 21st CENTURY

Although it was established in 1996, close to the end of the 20th century, the SEEC/P has surely and confidently evolved as an organization that will live up to the unique conditions of the 21st century. It remains poised to emerge as an organization that will pave the way forward for the countries in the region as they seek to devise a new future in this region and sharply break with the mentality of the previous century, which was characterized by two world wars and numerous other conflicts. The SEEC/P provides a perfect conduit for the countries of the region in their quest to emancipate themselves from the bad memories of the 20th century and avoid the danger of being trapped in a vicious cycle of tensions, crises, conflicts, and problems that were endemic to that particular era. Such a psychological break with the past is a precondition if the regional countries sincerely aspire to see the SEEC/P evolve as a major organization that will shape the future of the Balkans.

The quintessential challenge we have to address is how to foster a joint vision that will unite the Balkan countries around common objectives as we prepare to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. Unfortunately, the 20th century was mired in negative memories and the region’s experience in this period was far from being a source of inspiration for our task of preparing for a more peaceful and prosperous future. In the first half of the 20th century, the region witnessed three wars: the Balkan Wars, World War I, and World War II. In the second half of the 20th century, there was the long Cold War. These wars, whether hot or cold, drew lines of demarcation in the region and created uncertainties, instabilities, and prejudices. These tensions, to a certain extent, survived into the post-Cold War decades and the culture of violence bred during those long decades still haunts the people of the region.

The Balkan nations are at a point of critical choice as to whether they will perpetuate the mentality of the previous decades that was based on enmity and conflict or whether they will adopt a new political language that will place an emphasis on shared destiny and cooperation. This new approach can only emerge from a shared understanding about the Balkan people’s expectations for the future of the region. More importantly, such a forward-looking vision implies that we should devote our intellectual efforts to imagine how the Balkans and the SEEC/P would look like in, let’s say, the year 2015 or 2050, instead of engaging in vicious debates on what happened in the 1950s or 1990s.

At this point, we need to pause and ask ourselves the question of what role we envisage for the region in global affairs in 2015 and beyond. Turkey’s suggestion is to approach this new era as a period of restoration, cooperation, and construction: restoration in the sense of restoring shared cultural, economic, and political ties; cooperation in the sense of developing a new spirit of joint action; and construction in the sense of a way to both overcome the legacy of the past decades and
The leaders and peoples of the Balkan region still recall the crises, among others, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. A crisis-oriented approach remains fixated on the details of these past crises as they tackle contemporary problems, and as such, they, purposely or not, constantly reproduce the negative legacy of this bitter episode in different contexts. A vision-oriented approach, in contrast, seeks to move beyond these crises and proposes to handle today’s issues with a new framework and a fresh vision.

We need to pause and ask ourselves the question of what role we envisage for the region in global affairs in 2015 and beyond.

The second methodology principle calls for adopting a forward-looking rather than a

respond to the challenges of the new decades to come. These are the preconditions to having a new atmosphere of partnership and a constructive approach for building a peaceful and prosperous era in the region.

The remainder of the essay outlines the normative bases and principles which suggest a way forward as we contemplate how to construct this new era in the Balkans. A novel approach should be based on methodology and policy principles. Here, I present three methodology and four policy principles which, in their entirety, might help formulate an approach to regional cooperation in the Balkans.

**PRINCIPLES OF METHODOLOGY**

The first methodology principle highlights the importance of having a vision-oriented approach as opposed to a crisis-oriented one.
backward-looking approach. Societies and leaders interpret and make use of history in various ways. Arguably the most dangerous way is one that conceptualizes history as a burden of the past and a hindrance for the future. It is true that history is what makes the world of today. However, as actors possessing determination and free will, we are not bound by our past legacies as we build our future. Keeping that in mind, the Balkans needs to have a view to the future rather than being captive to the past when addressing the challenges of the age.

**A vision-oriented approach proposes to handle today’s issues with a new framework and a fresh vision.**

The third important methodology principle suggests a value-based approach rather than an ideology-based approach to regional problems. A value-based vision presumes that the Balkan nations agree on certain common values, regardless of ethnic, religious, or sectarian differences. This vision stands in contrast to the ideology-based approach which essentially reproduces an ideological dogmatism reminiscent of the Cold War era or the later ethno-nationalistic ideologies that have destroyed the region with a spillover effect on the neighboring areas.

To sum up, a novel approach to regional cooperation is vision-oriented rather than crisis-oriented, forward-looking rather than backward-looking, and its understanding is value-based rather than ideology-based. These principles may serve as guiding principles for the SEECP as a forum in dealing with the issues in this region.

**POLICY PRINCIPLES**

These methodology principles should be complemented by policy principles in order to be effective in practical terms. In this category, we could include four policy principles. The first one is regional ownership and inclusiveness. Our starting premise is that this region belongs to the local peoples who have lived there for centuries and will continue to live in this region. All ethnic, sectarian and linguistic groups are an integral part of the region and will remain so in the years ahead. No one should contemplate any expulsion of a population or the exile of a single individual. The nations of the Balkan region are not only neighbors living side by side, but they also form one family with dense societal and cultural ties that bind them. This region is like shorba, and it will only taste good if salt and all the ingredients are properly there. If one takes any of these out, that shorba will be tasteless; hence, the importance of regional ownership. Serbs, Albanians, Turks, Greeks, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Croats, Romanians, Macedonians among others, will all live together in the next century, bringing their own richness to the table.

The nations of the Balkan region are not only neighbors living side by side, but they also form one family with dense societal and cultural ties that bind them.

Regional ownership and inclusiveness does not mean that there will never be any disagreements, but a family approach essentially requires that the countries of the
The second policy principle is regional re-integration. The 20th century was a century of division. In order to normalize the region to conform to the spirit of the time, policy makers should have the determination to turn the 21st century into a century of re-integration in the Balkan region. Instead of micro-level division, we need to bolster macro-level integration. On this point, having political dialogue is of paramount importance. There should be bilateral and multilateral high-level political dialogue mechanisms that meet on a regular basis, similar to the European Union’s mechanisms. Instead of having one annual summit, the region should manage crises with the spirit of a family. Just as nobody can deny his or her brother or sister, we cannot simply turn our backs on each other and go about our own ways. What we need to develop are more regional initiatives to strengthen cooperation and develop ways and means to resolve problems. In this sense, we could call the trilateral mechanism between Turkey, Bosnia and Serbia a historic step. Nobody could even have imagined in the 1990s, for example, that Turkey and Serbia would be working together now. Similarly, there is the Turkey, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina trilateral mechanism, in addition to a Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria one. The initiation of such bilateral, trilateral or other multilateral processes would pave the way for wider regional initiatives, which could be the leading focus of the SEECP forum.

Policy makers should have the determination to turn the 21st century into a century of re-integration in the Balkan region.
SEECMP might hold two or three summits, supported by a number of relevant bilateral mechanisms and permanent committees. One possible example is the Turkey-Greece High Level Strategic Council Meeting. In the 87 years prior to the establishment of that council, Turkey and Greece had signed only 35 agreements. Yet in one day, on May 15, 2010, Turkish and Greek authorities signed 25 agreements and there was a joint cabinet meeting with all the ministers around the table. This was beyond imagination just five or ten years ago. Turkey and Greece will continue to hold joint cabinet meetings co-chaired by the two prime ministers.

The region’s past was immersed in the history of the wider European continent and its future will still be in Europe.

Deepening economic interdependence is important for regional integration. In that respect, the RCC (Regional Cooperation Council) provides an important forum that needs to be strengthened. A fresh approach to regional integration requires a new look at the role of the cities in the region. Many cities have suffered from the divisions imposed upon the region throughout the course of history. For example, Thessaloniki was previously the center of economic activity in Eastern Europe, serving as the gateway to Eastern Europe throughout the centuries. It was similar to Edirne, Adrianopolis, of Turkey, in this respect. While Thessaloniki was the port for the entire Balkans, today it is an important city of only Greece. Skopje’s situation is no different. Now, those cities are far past their magnificent days. These cities could thrive and prosper again if the region prioritizes economic re-integration and removes barriers to closer interaction. We need regular airline connections, convenient highways, and high-speed trains, for example, in the Balkans, so that these communities can be better linked with each other.

Another area where re-integration is long overdue is in cultural and intellectual interaction. Let’s state the obvious. More cultural and intellectual interaction is a sine qua non for any regional cooperation process. Unfortunately, some of the intellectuals in the region are more narrow-minded and inward-looking than the ordinary people; these intellectuals are provoking hostile sentiments that might fuel hatred. In order to eradicate the barriers erected by cultural prejudices, there needs to be more interaction in fields such as cooperation and exchange programs between universities, as well as between educational and research institutions. Only then can we lay a solid foundation for bolstering the regional integration.

The Balkans has the potential to present a model of cultural co-existence which may set an example for other Europeans in dealing with the issues of multiculturalism.

The third policy-relevant principle is the importance of taking the European integration process into account. Obviously, the region’s past was immersed in the history of the wider European continent and its future will still be in Europe. Given the tight coupling of their destinies, the future of Europe will also be
The Balkans has the potential to present a model of cultural co-existence which may set an example for other Europeans in dealing with the issues of multiculturalism. Despite the bitter experience of the 1990s, multiculturalism as experienced and practiced in the Balkans over the centuries is authentic in the sense that it reflects the diversity of the region. It is not only a recent by-product of the imperative conditions triggered by migrations; Balkan multiculturalism is mainly a culmination of the authentic historical experience that has accumulated over centuries. The multiculturalism in Paris, London or Berlin is the result of migration, which has hence resulted in reactionary and, to a certain extent, defensive opposition by some. The Balkan region reflects many valuable practical lessons and has a great potential to contribute to the shaping of the European cultural sphere.

The fourth policy principle necessitates the development of a common stance and shaped by the future of the Balkans. The EU should continue its efforts to become a more multicultural and economically competitive, as well as politically and strategically relevant, actor on the world stage. Although a stable and prosperous Balkans is likely to be a microcosm of the EU, the perception is unfortunately different. Many Europeans think that the Balkan region is a burden on the EU. The peoples of the Balkan region should work together to show their European partners that the Balkans is indeed not a burden but instead a valuable asset that can contribute to European culture more than any other region in Europe. It is in the hands of the policy makers of the region to make the Balkans a center of attraction for the EU and an area of mutually-beneficial economic interaction. 

Policy makers need to adopt a new vision in tune with the spirit of the 21st century as they devise solutions to regional problems.
position in regional and global organizations. In the United Nations, there are currently no intra-Balkan consultation mechanisms; this needs to be addressed urgently. On certain issues there is room to promote an intra-Balkan dialogue, which would make it easier to form joint positions. Also in NATO such dialogue and consultation mechanisms would bear much fruit. In NATO, for instance, we should spend more effort thinking about questions such as this: how can the Balkan countries come together in NATO to discuss and promote the membership of other Balkan countries? The granting of Membership Action Plan (MAP) status for Bosnia-Herzegovina last year is a good example in that all Balkan countries supported this initiative. Although it has not yet been fulfilled, it is still a positive step forward.

Another issue concerns representation in the global economic and financial institutions, especially at a time when the region is facing the negative implications of the international financial crisis. Turkey is a G-20 country. As the only Balkan country in the G-20, it could represent the interests of the Balkans there. A new understanding of solidarity, consultation and development of joint projects in these global forums will positively affect regional cooperation in the Balkans and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

This year and the coming years will be a historic turning point for the development of a new approach to regional cooperation in the Balkans. The Serbian presidency of the SEECP, after the successful presidency of Montenegro, will be a great opportunity to engage in a renewed debate on how to further the institutional architecture of regional cooperation in the Balkan region. The ideas and principles put forth in this essay, drawing on both methodology and policy principles, are a modest attempt in this direction and could very well be expanded with relevant intellectual and policy insights from other stakeholders in the region. The thrust of the discussions in this essay is that policy makers...
need to adopt a new vision in tune with the spirit of the 21st century as they devise solutions to regional problems.

_We could declare 2012 as the year of the Balkan Peace in the 21st century_

For its part, Turkey is willing to make several concrete contributions. For one, we could undertake a joint project to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Balkan Wars. I could see us developing certain projects under the broader theme of “From the Balkan Wars to the Balkan Peace.” We could declare 2012 as the year of the Balkan Peace in the 21st century. Another major step in the direction of creating a new future for the region would be to establish a group of ‘wise-men’ that will assess the challenges of the 21st century and develop proposals for the improvement of regional cooperation.

It has been called only a ‘process’ up until now, but probably it is high time to deepen the institutional architecture of the SEECP so that it moves beyond a mere consultative forum or process. It needs to have a more institutionalized structure to be sustainable and effective. In that respect, one mandate of the group of wise-men, to be composed mainly of intellectuals, politicians, or diplomats from all member countries, could be to suggest ways to devise new institutional frameworks for the SEECP to guide the work of policy makers in the region.
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