

TURKEY'S ROLE IN POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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My comments will basically incorporate into the discussion insights from the 'globalist' perspective in the field of international relations. Based on that perspective, I will argue that the process of political dialogue in the Near East and the Mediterranean region should be contextualized within the changing global and regional environment.

It seems that there is an urgent need to change the patterns of dialogue in this region. As is well known, there was not much dialogue in this region during the Cold War years. Rather than dialogue, the region witnessed polarisation along the lines of the East-West conflict as well as a major regional tension, ie. the Arab-Israeli conflict. If there existed any dialogue, it was mainly in a state-centric form, that is between the governments of the region. With the end of the Cold War, patterns of dialogue have been gradually changing in the international system. Since the East-West divide is no longer relevant, we are witnessing the emergence of new tendencies of regionalism affected by changes in the global system. In this new regional orientation, security considerations have become more complex and multidimensional and linked to economic, political and cultural factors. We also witness increasing ties not only between governments, but also among non-governmental actors which lead to rise of the so-called 'trans-national relations'. As a result of such global and regional changes, there is more potential for economic and political co-operation in the world and more specifically in our region.

Briefly, it seems to me that the emerging patterns of political dialogue in this region should be based first at on broader global and regional dynamics rather than on old Cold War state-centric patterns. Second, these broader global and regional contexts require us to think about economic and political issues together rather than separately as in the Cold War years. Third, there is more room for economic and political co-operation in the regional context and these two forms of co-operation should be linked to each other. And last, regional issues should be thought of in relation to the changes in the global system, and regions should be linked to the global system. If there is an increasing divergence between global dynamics and regional developments, this may result in the marginalisation of that region in the world system. Within that context, it should be pointed out that it is rather critical that the Eastern Mediterranean-Near Eastern region should be linked to the European and the global system.

Based on these introductory comments, I would like to suggest that, to be effective, Turkey's role in political dialogue should take into consideration changes in the broader regional and global context and promote new patterns of economic and political co-operation in the region.

Turkey may have three crucial roles in new patterns of political dialogue in the region. First, Turkey may promote economic co-operation within the region as well as help in linking the region to the European and global patterns of economic interaction. As is known, Turkey has increased its economic ties with the Middle Eastern region since 1980 and has important trade relations with many Middle Eastern countries. Thus, Turkey has expanded its traditional security concerns in the region with new economic relations in the last fifteen years. However, these trade relations are in need of supplementing by investment links which should incorporate joint ventures between Turkish and other Middle Eastern investors and include European and international ones as well. Turkey, with its dynamic spirit of entrepreneurship, may be useful in the creation of increasing ties of economic co-operation in the region. One should also take into consideration the customs union agreement between Turkey and the European Union. This agreement will bring Turkey's economic structure closer to the European Union. Turkey's experience in the process of customs union could be also useful for other countries in the region. As is well known, the aim of the Barcelona process is to create a free trade area in the Mediterranean region and establish new links of economic co-operation with the European Union. Similarly, Turkey with its long history of economic ties with

Europe may be helpful in creating this climate of economic co-operation in the Mediterranean-Near Eastern region. As dialogue on economic issues develops, particularly among the non-governmental private actors, this may also lead to an environment more conducive for the process of political dialogue in this region.

Second, Turkey may be useful in increasing the institutional links of this region with Europe and the global system and in promoting political dialogue in international institutions on regional issues. With the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed the proliferation of institutions dealing with the issue of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Not only is the European Union increasingly involved in this process, but also NATO and even the OSCE are. It is crucial that this proliferation should not result in competition and the overlapping of similar functions in these institutions, but lead to complementarity in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. In this climate, there is an increasing need for co-ordination among these institutions on the issue of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. As Europe wants to extend its institutional mechanisms into the Mediterranean, Turkey's role and experience in the institutional structure of the West could be quite useful. Turkey is a full member of several of Western-European institutions, such as NATO, OSCE, OECD and the Council of Europe, as well as an associate member the European Union and West European Union. Turkey is also a member of some of the important 'Eastern' institutions such as the Islamic Conference Organisation and the Economic Co-operation Organisation. With this important institutional experience Turkey could help in enhancing the process of political dialogue between these institutions and the Mediterranean-Near East region. Turkey may be quite useful in bringing regional issues onto the agenda of these institutions. During the Cold War years, Turkey's representation in these institutions did not serve such a purpose when these institutions and Turkey were under the influence of the East-West conflict. But in the post-Cold War international system, as Turkey's regional orientations are becoming more important and as she develops more regional links, she will bring regional concerns more onto the agenda of Western European institutions. This development will be important because Turkey is one of the few countries of the region which has representation in most of the Western European institutions. Since the role of international institutions is crucial in the enhancement of political dialogue, Turkey's role may be quite functional. Through such attempts, Turkey may be able to help in the creation of an environment that is conducive to political co-operation, not only in the region but also between regional actors and international institutions. Such attempts may also supplement Turkish efforts in the promotion of economic co-operation in the region.

Third, Turkey may try to promote a new idea of 'regional governance' based on a process of regional co-operation. In the Cold War years, the Mediterranean-Near East region was so much under the influence of the East-West conflict, that it was not possible to have much regional co-operation among the countries. With the end of the Cold War, there is a potential for more co-operation among regional actors and they should take full advantage of this new climate. Basically speaking, the idea of regional governance should be at first based on increasing economic co-operation. Next, economic co-operation among non-governmental actors, should be particularly promoted. There is an urgent need to establish joint ventures among entrepreneurs in the region. Then, if economic co-operation is to lead to political co-operation, it has to be accompanied by increasing institutionalisation. Last, there is a need for an exchange of information, ideas and knowledge on regional issues between regional universities and research institutes to create an environment conducive to economic and political co-operation. It should be underlined that research institutes and universities of the region should develop their areas of specialisation on regional matters and issues of regional co-operation and share this knowledge with each other.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that Turkey's role should be the promotion of the process of political dialogue which was initiated in the Barcelona meeting. With the Barcelona meeting, we witnessed the emergence of a new process in the region. The Mediterranean, which was separated into its West and East, is now thought of as a whole. In addition to that, the Mediterranean region is linked to Europe and framed within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Furthermore, security issues are interconnected with economic, political and cultural issues. In short, political dialogue is thought of as part of a more comprehensive process of dialogue within the region and not only between governmental actors, but also among non-governmental actors. Turkey should promote this process of comprehensive dialogue and help in the creation of new patterns of regional co-operation in the Mediterranean.

