

Turkey in the Western Balkans: Between Orientalist Cultural Proximity and Re-Orientation of Regional Equilibria

Adriano REMIDDI

e-mail: adriano.remeddi@studio.unibo.it

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the current role of Turkey in South Eastern Europe by stressing the ongoing socio-cultural dynamics in the area. By this point of view the essay is focused on the Turkish rapprochement to the Western Balkans, former territory of the Ottoman Empire in which the orientalist fascination is still very fertile and gradually more evident in some features of the popular culture. The Turkish re-engagement in the Balkans constitutes a pillar of the Ankara's new regional policy launched in the 1990s by Premier Erdogan, who encouraged focused economic ties and implemented the strategic use of soft power. The successful return of Turkey's influence in the area, favored by a common historical and cultural legacy, may reorient the regional policies in the South Eastern Europe, weakening the European integration process and promoting Ankara as the main interlocutor for the Western Balkans.

Key words: *Turkey; South Eastern Europe; Balkans; Orientalism; Ottoman Empire; Smart power, European Union*

One hundred years ago, on August 10th 1913, the Bucharest Treaty put an end to the Balkan Wars and decreed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire [Carrié 1978, 323]¹. The Empire was further humiliated in 1920 when the Treaty of Sevres pushed Turkey back to its Anatolian borders. This caused Turkey to lose all control over the Balkan region and gradually to fall into isolation [Formigoni 2006, 259]². After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish society faced a deep cultural change. In 1923 under the guidance of Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), was established a revolutionary dictatorship that led to the proclamation of the Republic, causing a traumatic rupture with the Ottoman past through the introduction of the nation-state, the one-party system, and the westernization of culture and customs [Franzineti 2001, 36]³. Ataturk died in 1938 but the modernization process he had ushered did not immediately solve Turkey's backwardness and international isolationism; at the beginning of the 1970s, Turkey still had a planned economy based on state-owned enterprises, limited exports, and state ruled services [Cammarano, Guazzaloca, Piretti 2009, 127]⁴. In the 1980s a new economic trend was launched based on liberalism, but economic instability persisted and reached its apex during the inflation crisis that erupted at the end of the 1990s. In 2001 the breakdown seemed unavoidable and Ankara was forced to suspend control over the exchange rate, downgrading the Turkish lira by 65% of its value against the American dollar [Negri 2010, 150]⁵. Turkish economy reversed its position in the following decade; between 2000 and 2008 Turkey tripled its GDP and now is estimated to become the 16th world economy by 2017⁶. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a moderate Muslims leader holding the power for three consecutive terms since 2003, has successfully implemented the transition of Turkey's economy. From an eastern perspective, Erdogan has the merit to have reshaped Turkey's regional role, reevaluating the Ottoman legacy, promoting detente in the relations of neighborhood with the South Eastern Europe (SEE), enforcing the special ties with the Balkans and Arab countries, and inaugurating what has been defined as the "new-Ottomanism" [Quercia 2010, 119]⁷.

¹ A. Carrié, *Storia diplomatica d'Europa 1815-1968*, Bari, Laterza, 1978, p. 323.

² G. Formigoni, *Storia della politica internazionale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006, p. 259.

³ G. Franzinetti, *I Balcani dal 1878 ad oggi*, Roma, Carocci, 2001, p. 36.

⁴ F. Cammarano, G. Guazzaloca e M. S. Piretti, *Storia contemporanea dal XIX al XX secolo*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2009, p. 127.

⁵ A. Negri, *Business e corano*, in «Limes-Rivista italiana di geopolitica», 150, 2010, n. 4, pp. 147-152.

⁶ Official statistics of the Turkish Government available on the web site "Invest in Turkey"; <<http://www.invest.gov.tr/it-it/investmentguide/Pages/10Reasons.aspx>>.

⁷ P. Quercia, *E se la strategia neo-ottomana convenisse all'Italia?*, in «Limes-Rivista italiana di geopolitica», 119, 2010, n. 4, pp. 117-124.

Five centuries of ruling over the region have unavoidably left a great heritage based on cultural proximity and deep relations that Ankara can now exploit to exercise its social, political and economic weight, thereby attracting the Balkan countries into its sphere of influence, thereby and weakening their process of westernization and de-Ottomanization [Archer, 180]⁸. From the end of 14th century until the beginning of the 20th century, the Balkan Peninsula represented the core of the Ottoman Empire, the spearhead for the expansion toward Europe and the custodian of the *orientalist* legacy⁹. Because of social and family ties, after the fall of the Empire and the following Turkey's political withdrawal from the SEE, territories as a consequence of the World War I, millions of Turks, Turks-Yugoslavian and Albanians fled to the Anatolian Peninsula [Miles 2010, 183]¹⁰. However, strong cultural connections and family and clan ties survived within areas of the Balkans. [Larrabee, Lasser 2003, 94]¹¹. Part of the Bosnian middle class is still familiar with Turkish language as well as elites in the Sandzak, Northern Albania and Kosovo. According to the statistics provided by the Turkstat national agency, a Turkish minority of one million individuals still live in the Balkans, while between 15 and 20 millions of Turks with Balkan origins reside in today's Turkey¹².

Such a degree of inter-ethnic compresence has generated in the age of the Republic of Turkey that a sense of historical responsibility for the safeguard of the Muslims who stayed in the former territories of the Empire has developed [Ansaldo 2010, 38]¹³. Their safeguard is a central and urgent issue for the kemalist¹⁴ foreign

⁸ R. Archer, *Assessing Turbofolk Controversities: Popular Music between the Nation and the Balkans*, *Southeastern Europe* 36 (2012) 178–207.

⁹ M. Bakic-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalisms: the case of former Yugoslavia*, *Slavic Review*, vol 54, no. 4 (1995), pp. 917-30.

¹⁰ Miles, *Italia e Turchia insieme bei Balcani*, in «Limes-Rivista italiana di geopolitica», 183, 1999, n. 3, pp. 183-197.

¹¹ F. S. Larrabee e I. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in the age of Uncertainty*, Santa Monica, Rand, 2003, p. 94.

¹² Based on the analysis by W. Tesfa-Yohannes on the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans: “*Esing Back in: The Balkan's Re-Introduction to Turkey*” available at Wise Man Center for Strategic Studies, Istanbul; <http://www.bilgesam.org/en/index.php?view=article&catid=95%3AAnalizler-balkanlar&id=347%3Aeasing-back-in-the-balkans-re-introduction-to-turkey&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=140>.

¹³ M. Ansaldo, *E se la strategia neo-ottomana convenisse all'Italia?*, cit., p. 38.

¹⁴ The term kemalist is used to “define the ideas and principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic, are termed *Kemalism*; *Kemalism* constitutes the official ideology of the state, and endured publicly unchallenged until the 1980s. *Kemalism* proper is symbolized in the six points enumerated in the

policy that has never allowed a true disengagement from the Balkan region¹⁵. Even in the period of major disengagement of the diplomacy, as between the two World Wars, Ankara continued to play a important role in the region. The Balkan Pact, signed by Turkey, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia in 1934, represented one of the keystones for the regional reconciliation, launching the debate on the ethnic and territorial disputes [Degerli 2009, 136]¹⁶. A second Balkan pact was ratified in 1952, with the goal of preventing USSR expansion into SEE. Trade agreements between Turkey and Yugoslavia, were aimed at preserving good relations between Turkey and the region and maintaining strong ties based on the geo-strategic position and the common past [*ibid*, 138]¹⁷.

Only since the second half of the 1990's has Turkey begun to deepen a new special relationship with Balkan Muslims based on trade, investments, infrastructures, energy supply, tourism, and culture¹⁸. At the end of that decade the Balkans had become a priority for Ankara, which based its rapprochement on security, dialogue, economic integration and conservation of the multi-ethnicity, thus drawing an ambitious scenario, a common fate for the Turkish people and for all the people of the peninsula connected by the Ottoman legacy^{19 20}.

Republican People's Party Statutes of 1935; these were incorporated in the constitution of 1937, which remained in effect until 1961, then only to be reformulated with slight modifications. These six principles are republicanism, statism (in economic policy), populism, laicism, nationalism, and reformism. Together they represent a kind of Jacobinism, defined by Atatürk himself as a method of utilizing political despotism in order to break down the social despotism prevalent among the traditionally minded Turkish-Muslim population. From The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World; <<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0440#>>.

¹⁵ Based on: Dimitar Bechev, "Turkey in the Balkans: Taking a Broader View", Insight Turkey, January 1st 2012; <<http://www.readperiodicals.com/201201/2572537701.html>>.

¹⁶ E. Degerli, *Balkan Pact and Turkey*, in «*The Journal of International Social Research*», 6, 2009, n.2/6.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 138.

¹⁸ From: Dimitar Bechev, "Turkey in the Balkans: Taking a Broader View", Insight Turkey, January 1st 2012; <<http://www.readperiodicals.com/201201/2572537701.html>>.

¹⁹ Minister Davutoglu describes his political theories to the press agency "Balkan Insight" April 26th 2011 available at: <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/davutoglu-i-m-not-a-neo-ottoman>>.

²⁰ From "Turkey in the Balkans: the good old days", The Economist, November 5th 2011; <<http://www.economist.com/node/21536647>>.

Turkey has promoted a wide range of initiatives in the fields of culture and education, mostly realized by TIKA, the Turkish National Agency for Cooperation and International Development²¹. Those initiatives have allowed Turkey to promote the refurbishment of the Ottoman artistic and architectural heritage across the Western Balkans, as well as the building of new mosques as a result of the engagement of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in a symbolic *reappropriation* of the Ottoman legacy of the peninsula. In the field of education, Turkish penetration in the Balkans includes the starting of primary and secondary schools particularly in those countries where the Muslim component is strongest. Turkish schooling is attractive for the locals because of its competitive standards of education, openness to all the ethnic groups, use of English language, and the promotion of values such as tolerance and brotherhood. Turkish presence in the education includes universities, funded mostly through private investments. These institutions include Epoka University of Tirana, the International Balkan University of Skopje, the International University of Sarajevo and the International Burch University in Bosnia, where the first graduation ceremony was attended by Premier Erdogan's wife, who personally awarded the diplomas²².

Ankara also applies its *soft power* on the Balkans through the foundations and cultural centers. The network of cultural centers created by the "Emre Foundation", directly connected to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is an important part of this power. The first seat of the Foundation has been settled in Sarajevo, later spreading throughout the region with centers in Fojnica, Tirana, Skodar, Skopje, Pristina and Prizren. The Emre Foundation collects public and private funds to support the restoration of mosques and madrasas in the former Yugoslavia and Albania. Besides the Emre Foundation, the Gulen Movement, among the most prominent Turkish religious movements, has reached a certain degree of influence. Being among the most prominent Turkish religious groups, thanks to the control over means of information (as for instance the daily newspaper Zaman) the Movement maintains strong links with the elite of the various countries; it inaugurated its first school in Albania in 1993 and owns more than twenty institutes all over the region. Similarly, the "Turgut Ozal Education Company" which established a network of primary and secondary schools in Albania since 1992, is expanding the Turkish reach.

²¹ Turkish cultural politics in the Balkans are described by Prof. Mesut Idriz in "*Balkans between two Worlds: Turkey and Europe*" published in the Turkish daily Today's Zaman on 9 October 2011; <http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=259260>.

²² M. Idriz, *The Role of Endowment Foundations in the Private Higher Education in the Balkans: The Case of the Minority Muslim Communities*, in «2nd International Conference on Islam and Higher Education», organized by the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS Malaysia), 2011; <http://www.iais.org.my/en/attach/2nd_ICIHE/ppts/Dr.%20Mesut%20Idriz.pdf>.

Lately, the penetration of Turkish culture in the Balkans involves some non-formal but equally strategic communication methods such as channels for the broadcasting of TV movies and series. Due to a mixture of glamour and sentimentalism that challenges the anti-Turk stereotypes, giving a more developed and modern vision of the country these shows have quickly replaced the Balkan interest in Latin-American soaps. Turkish TV series are considered as a “hidden weapon” of Premier Erdogan’s cultural policy in the region since they are successfully stimulating curiosity toward Turkey²³.

The widespread popularity of these phenomena seems actually to give evidence to the idea that the *Orientalism* implemented from outside finds fertile ground inside to Balkan societies²⁴. The concept of *Orientalism*²⁵ and its perspectives in the SEE are in fact inescapably related with the legacy left by five centuries of Ottoman rule over the region. Despite the process of westernization undertaken in the 20th century and the efforts to pursue the integration into the European Union, *Orientalism* in the Balkans is reemerging today as a contemporary force. Turkey, the gateway to the East, has recently reproached the countries of its former empire, exercising its still deep socio-cultural influence, one century after its relative disengagement from the region. This may help explain the success of this kind of popular culture, so linked with the oriental patterns. This success seems to prove the existence of a vibrant curiosity toward the *orientalist* component in the region, a purely local phenomenon in the Balkans, a sort of “self-implemented fascination” sometimes defined as *Ottomania*, a growing interests for all what is related to the Ottoman style or, more simply, with a certain depiction of that style in contemporary Turkey. This phenomenon is acquiring a certain relevance because it is helping to reverse the negative reputation conferred on the Ottoman rule²⁶.

²³ Cigdem Bugdayci “*The soft power of Turkish television*”, South East Time, August 23rd 2011;
<http://turkey.setimes.com/en_GB/articles/ses/articles/features/departments/society/2011/07/23/feature-02>.

²⁴ John Peet “*The trouble with Ottomania*” The Economist, November 22nd 2010;
<<http://www.economist.com/node/17493321>>.

²⁵ The term Orientalism describes the idea by which *Occident* has depicted Oriental cultures and societies as different and exotic. This concept implies that Western paradigm is considered as intellectually and developmentally superior with respect to the Eastern one. The word Orientalism has been coined by Edward Said’s book “*Orientalism*” published in 1978 by Pantheon Books, New York.

²⁶ Ottomania is a neologism. Menekse Tokyay describes it in “*Ottomania on the Rise of Turkey*” published on South East Time, 18 October 2011;
<http://turkey.setimes.com/en_GB/articles/ses/articles/reportage/2011/10/18/reportage-01>.

Turkish economic performance as a key asset to the spread the socio-cultural influence

In addition to *soft power*, Ankara, due to its astonishing economic performance, is successfully promoting itself as a main actor on the Balkan scene. Turkish competitiveness indeed allowed for the increase of investments (from 30 millions of dollars in 2001 to about 180 millions in 2010) and trade (from 2,9 to 18 billion just in 2010)²⁷. Because, since 2000, the Turkish economy and cultural reorientation to the SEE has mainly involved countries with Muslim majorities, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Albania and Kosovo became the gateway for the Turkish influence over the whole region²⁸. According to data provided by Ankara's government, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) is the main destination of Turkish private investments in the Balkans²⁹. After the end of Yugoslav wars Turkish overall export quickly increased by 875%, ranking Turkey as fourth national partner of BiH. The banking sector paved the way for the private investments through the establishment of the Turkish Ziraat Bank Bosnia (Tzbb) in 1997, the first foreign bank in the country. Turkish penetration in BiH includes media and press by way of the national press agency Anadolu, established in 1920 by Kemal Ataturk, which inaugurated its first regional office in Sarajevo³⁰.

The cooperation with Albania is more complicated though just as fruitful. Despite the disagreement over the Ottoman past (according to a certain stream of thought the Ottoman rule is the main cause of the backwardness of Albania, which could have aspired to be among the developed countries of Europe³¹), Turkey is now

²⁷ From "*Western Balkans: is Turkey back?*" by Loic Poulain and Akis Sakellariou, published on April 25th 2011 by Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington; <<http://csis.org/print/30115>>.

²⁸ From "*Turkey's Balkan Shopping Spree*" by Lavdim Hamidi, published on December 7th 2010 on the press agency Balkan Insight web site; <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/turkey-s-balkan-shopping-spreed>>.

²⁹ Official statistics of the Turkish Government available on the web site: <<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=AL®ion=9>>.

³⁰FromAnsaMed;
<http://ansamed.ansa.it/ansamed/it/notizie/stati/turchia/2012/03/12/visualizza_new.html_130980911.html>.

³¹ M. Idriz, *The Role of Endowment Foundations in the Private Higher Education in the Balkans: The Case of the Minority Muslim Communities*, in «2nd International Conference on Islam and Higher Education», organized by the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS Malaysia), 2011; <http://www.iais.org.my/en/attach/2nd_ICIHE/ppts/Dr.%20Mesut%20Idriz.pdf>.

considered as a friendly nation by 75% of Albanians³². Mutual economic interest have further contributed to overcoming the historical Albanian mistrust toward Turkey, which is rapidly becoming one of the main partners of Tirana due to relevant investments (40 million of dollars between 2002 and 2010) and the overall Turkish export to Albania that increased by 260 % since 2001³³. Turkish-Albanian socio-cultural cooperation is strong as well. The TIKA seat in Tirana leads ambitious projects such as the main blood bank of the country and the first children dialysis center. TIKA is also involved in the building of the Bektashi Community Center and in the refurbishment of historical heritage. Moreover, Turkish schools are becoming increasingly popular, registering more than 3000 students each year³⁴. Among the first-build institutes, is the “Mehmet Akif”, established in 1993 and lately renamed “Turgut Ozal college” in 2008. At university level, the Turkish presence in Albania involves the already mentioned Epoka University inaugurated in 2007 and the Beder University, which hosts the first department of Islamic Studies in the Balkan region³⁵.

The relations between Turkey and Kosovo are based on a common sense of brotherhood due to the more than 20,000 Kosovo Turks living in the youngest republic of the former Yugoslavia³⁶. Currently, Turkey is the sixth largest economic partner of Kosovo. Turkish exports to Kosovo reached 294 million³⁷, investments amounting to one billion of dollars³⁸. Turkey is also very proactive in the education

³² The survey has been led by the Gallup Balkan Monitor; <<http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>>.

³³ *Ibid.* The main exported Turkish products to Albania are: iron and steel (43,6 million), textiles (22,8 million); cereals (20,5 million); electrical machinery (18,8 million) clothing (17,6 million).

³⁴ From Altin Raxhimi, “*Albanian Muslims Grapple with Religious Identity*”, published on December 1st 2010 by Balkan Insight; <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanian-muslims-grapple-with-religious-identity>>.

³⁵ M. Idriz, *The Role of Endowment Foundations in the Private Higher Education in the Balkans: The Case of the Minority Muslim Communities*, in «2nd International Conference on Islam and Higher Education», organized by the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS Malaysia), 2011; <http://www.iais.org.my/en/attach/2nd_ICIHE/ppts/Dr.%20Mesut%20Idriz.pdf>.

³⁶ Official statistics of the Turkish Government available on the web site; <<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=KOS®ion=9>>.

³⁷ Official statistics of the Turkish Government available on the web site; <<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions®ion=9>>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

and cultural sector³⁹. Since 2000, the “Mehmet Akif College” was inaugurated as the first private school to be established after the war. Ankara is also supporting the building of Ljppan campus by investing over 100 million euro to develop the infrastructure. Concerning tourism, President Erdogan involved himself in a promotional campaign aimed at restoring the cultural heritage of Kosovo under the supervision of TIKA. The national agency is engaged in the refurbishment of old Ottoman sites and the mosques in Prizren and Pristine including the great mosque named after to the Sultan Mehmet Fatih⁴⁰.

The Turkish penetration into the Western Balkans does not exclusively involve countries with Muslim majority. Ankara has established special relationships with Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia, states in which the Muslim component respectively amounts to 33,3%, 17,7%, 3,2% and 1,3%⁴¹. Among these countries, Macedonia is historically the most interconnected with the Ottoman past. Ataturk lived in Bitola, in southern Macedonia, attending military academy between 1896 and 1899 [Larrabee, Lesser 2003, 94]⁴². Today at least six million Turkish people have Macedonian origins and in Macedonia there are about 77,000 Turks. Strong economic relations were quickly established after the recognition of Macedonia’s independence. During the last decade Turkey invested in 91 million dollars in Macedonia, while exports grew by 232%. The main cooperation projects involve the infrastructure: the Turkish company Tav will take over the management of the country’s two airports, in Skopje and Ocrida and will lead the construction of a third airport in the city of Stip by 2018⁴³.

The Turkish *soft power* in Macedonia is very relevant in the education, with the establishment of several braches of the Yahya Kemal Colleges and the foundation of the International Balkan University, personally promoted by Premier

³⁹ M. Idriz, *The Role of Endowment Foundations in the Private Higher Education in the Balkans: The Case of the Minority Muslim Communities*, in «2nd International Conference on Islam and Higher Education», organized by the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS Malaysia), 2011; <http://www.iais.org.my/en/attach/2nd_ICIHE/ppts/Dr.%20Mesut%20Idriz.pdf>.

⁴⁰ From “*Turkey and Kosovo build educational ties*” by Muhamet Brajšhori, published on June 28th 2011 by South East Time; <http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/06/29/feature-03>.

⁴¹Based on the CIA World Fact book statistics; <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>>.

⁴² F. S. Larrabee e I. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in the age of Uncertainty*, cit., p. 94.

⁴³ From “*Turkey's TAV to Modernise Macedonia Airports*” September 3rd 2008, published by the press agency Balkan Insight; <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/turkey-s-tav-to-modernise-macedonia-airports>>.

Erdogan. Finally, TIKA is restoring of the Ottoman heritage in Macedonia, including historical mosques, Turkish baths, old bazaars and the national museum of Bitola.

However, the greatest evidence of the Ankara's return to the Balkans is represented by the new relationship with Serbia, new regional partner despite the small size of its Muslim minority mostly concentrated in the Sandzac. The turning point of Turkish penetration into Serbia occurred in October 2009 with the state visit of President Abdullah Gul, the first official to travel to Serbia in 23 years. The cold relations (mainly due to the Turkish recognition of Kosovo) represented a great chance to verify the new regional foreign policy of Erdogan based on openness the dialogue. The ratification of the "Declaration of Peace and Stability in the Balkans", signed in Istanbul by Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia on April 24th 2010, is considered a true success for the Turkish diplomacy which contributed to increase the prestige of Ankara and its influence over the region⁴⁴. Turkey has extended its approach to Serbia through cultural means, with to particular stress on the preservation of artistic heritage. Although Serbia had been part of the empire from 1521 to 1860, only a small part of the Ottoman cultural heritage survives today because of the removal of monuments and buildings after the end of the Ottoman occupation to weaken the *orientalist* features in the country. For this reason, the Turkish Embassy in Belgrade together with TIKA are funding the restoration of symbolic sites of interest like the fortress of Novi Pazar or monuments as the one in the city of Niš, built to commemorate the Cegar battle of 1809, first Serbian insurrection against the Ottoman rule⁴⁵.

A further confirmation of Turkey's "pan-Balkan" strategy and its beyond an exclusively Muslim perspective on the region is the deepening of relations with Montenegro and Croatia. Regarding Podgorica, Ankara's approach was proactive since the beginning with the recognition of the independence of Montenegro in June 2006. The value of trade of Turkey with this young republic increased by 237% from 2006 to 2010; direct investments amount to 11 million dollars, concentrated in the infrastructure and transports, such as the building of Bar-Belgrade highway, a vital corridor for Montenegro's economy. In 2007 TIKA established a branch in Montenegro, which has invested over 6 million dollars for restoring Ottoman heritage and to promote tourism to Turkey.

In Croatia, despite being a deeply Christian-Catholic country very tangentially linked to the Ottoman influence, Turkish socio-cultural penetration successfully grew after the end of the conflicts in Yugoslavia when Ankara

⁴⁴ A report on the Summit is available on the official web page of the South East European Cooperation Process; <<http://www.seecp-turkey.org/icerik.php?no=60>>.

⁴⁵ From "Turkey Breathes New Life Into Serbia's Ottoman Relics", by Gordana Andric, published by Balkans Insight, December 10th 2010; <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/turkey-breathes-new-life-into-serbia-s-ottoman-relics>>.

established economic ties which allowed the import from Turkey to increase by 700% in the last 5 years ⁴⁶.

Turkish penetration and perspectives of the regional policies

The foreign policy instituted by Erdogan has been able to take advantage of the breakup of Yugoslavia and of the dissolution of communist regimes in the Balkans in order to deepen its presence in the region. The result has been, in this last decade, the increase of common trade by 533% and of direct investments by 530%⁴⁷. Despite the great relevance of this statistical data, Turkey addresses to the region only 6,7% of its total export while the imports amount just to the 3,4% because, after all the population of the Balkans represents only 1/3 of that of Turkey and the regional markets are not particularly fertile and attractive economic grounds if compared to the European's⁴⁸. It is therefore clear that the Turkish return in the region is based on deeper ambitions beyond the economy. Turkish regional policy may be considered an extension of its *smart power* in the Balkans, the merging of its role as a of strong NATO member with the implementation of a wide network of cultural and socio-economic cooperation which, moving from the common Ottoman past and *Orientalism*, is aimed at expanding the Turkish influence and legitimacy over the area.

The concept of *smart power* coined by Joseph Nye in 2003⁴⁹ seems to be perfectly applicable to the current Turkish-Balkan relations. In order to grow its position of most credible western ally in the Near East, and become a bridge between the Orient and Occident, Turkey could not have avoided extending its influence to the Balkans with which Turkey has undoubtedly established the best relations from the foundation of the kemalist republic [Petrovic, Reljic 2011, 170]⁵⁰. It is even true that Turkey cannot realistically think of enlarging, undisturbed, its penetration into the Balkans and aspiring to completely reorient the political perspectives of the region [*Ibid*, 170]⁵¹. Ankara actually has to face the current European ambitions of

⁴⁶Official statistics of the Turkish Government available on the web site;
<<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=HR®ion=9>>.

⁴⁷ Official statistics of the Turkish Government available on the web site;<<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=HR®ion=9>>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ From “*Get Smart Combining Hard and Soft Power*” by Joseph S. Nye, available at:
<<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65163/joseph-s-nye-jr/get-smart>>.

⁵⁰ Z. Petrovic e D. Reljic, *Turkish Interests and Involvements in Western Balkans*, cit., 170.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 170.

the area, because Brussels is still the main external partner for the governments of the Balkans countries⁵². The European Union and the integration process give wider guarantees if compared to the Turkish diplomacy and from this point of view, the Western Balkans would have a great deal to lose in case of the worsening of the relation with the EU, with which the regional countries have established higher political-economic interests respect to what Turkey has offered⁵³.

At any rate, should the path of the Balkan countries toward the European integration slow down, the weight of common history, ethno and religious ties, cultural legacy and economic attraction may make the reorientation to Turkey much more attractive with respect to the expectation to become members of the European family, especially if the slowing down of the integration process will be shared by Ankara, whose candidacy seems to have reached a deadlock⁵⁴. In such circumstances Turkey may definitely increase its influence over the region, awakening the pro-European movements and strengthening the local eurocepticism⁵⁵. Ankara may have the ability to achieve this outcome. Through diplomatic initiative and mediation, *hard* and *soft* power, economic appeal and its orientalist fascination, Turkey, the door to the Orient, has already become an essential interlocutor for the regional equilibrium and development. If Erdogan's foreign policy will keep on exploiting its cultural assets as a regional *passepartout*, Turkey may soon acquire a dominant position for the future of the Balkans, Asia of Europe and essential mosaic tile for the great ambitions of the "new-Ottomanism"⁵⁶.

⁵² Data from the Gallup Balkan Monitor survey on the Popularity of EU in Western Balkans; <<http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>>.

⁵³ In 2010 Europe has been the main trade partner of the Balkan countries with 40 billion euro compared to 18.4 billion traded with Turkey. Western Balkans export to EU 64,5% of their production, importing from it 61,3% of good which enter the region: <<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/balkans/>>.

⁵⁴From "EU-Turkey Association Council Brussels" available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/114363.pdf>.

⁵⁵ From "Ahmet Davutoglu, a cavallo tra due mondi" by Adrian Cioroianu, published in Romanian daily *Adevarul* on May 14th 2010 and available on Presseurope.eu; <<http://www.presseurop.eu/it/content/article/251491-ahmet-davutoglu-cavallo-tra-due-mondi>>.

⁵⁶ From Sedat Laciner, "Turgut Ozal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Ozalism" published on The Turkish Weekly March 14th 2012; <<http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/333/turgut-ozal-period-in-turkish-foreign-policy-ozalism.html>>.

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