

## Turkey and the OSCE

Turkey has been an active participant in the CSCE process from the very beginning and was one of the signers of the Helsinki Final Act. Of the Heads of State or Government who signed that document in 1975, the current President of Turkey, Süleyman Demirel, is the only one still in office. The Helsinki Final Act, which declared its main objective to be détente and rapprochement between the blocs, developed during the period 1975 to 1990 into a kind of conference diplomacy. Three groups came into being amongst the signatory States: those belonging to the North Atlantic Alliance, the members of the Warsaw Pact and the group of non-aligned states. The discussions that took place as part of the CSCE process and, hence, the criticism that was directed at existing conditions, focused during these years on the confrontation between East and West. Thus Turkey's participation, too, stood in the shadow of the confrontation between the blocs, in which Turkey functioned as an integral part of the Western Alliance. When it came to an examination of the way in which the Final Act's criteria on human rights were being observed it was the countries of the Eastern bloc which were at the centre of criticism from the western states. As a firm partner in the Western Alliance, Turkey was spared criticism on the issue of human rights. Turkey, for its part, used the CSCE process mainly as a forum for criticism of the treatment accorded to the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, and of the Greek leadership in Cyprus.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and of the Warsaw Pact, which brought the Cold War to an end, altered and enlarged the responsibilities and functions of the CSCE. The Charter of Paris, signed in 1990, and the institutionalization of the OSCE, along with the creation of a number of new bodies, took account of the new situation. Turkey played an active role in this process as well. It was among the first signatories of the Charter and is represented in the various OSCE organs. The formulation of new responsibilities and the creation of an institutionalized set of organs to work towards the Organization's objectives, along with the signing of additional agreements accompanying this restructuring, affected Turkey, and continues to affect it, in a variety of ways. For one thing, Turkey seeks to use the OSCE as a vehicle to serve its own foreign policy interests, especially those related to security. In addition, active participation in the building of the OSCE is one of Turkey's foreign policy priorities. As a result of its enlarged area of responsibilities the OSCE has in a number of respects developed into an instrument which, on the initiative of a variety of participating States, attempts to exercise influence on certain developments in Turkey, e.g. in connection with human rights and minority issues.

Until the end of the Cold War in the late eighties, Turkey fulfilled an important function, within the framework of bloc politics, as a member of the North Atlantic defence alliance. Following the Second World War NATO needed Turkey for the military protection of its south-eastern flank and as a defensive barrier between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Owing to its geo-strategic situation, Turkey was an important and indispensable alliance partner within NATO. The collapse of the Soviet Union and of the Warsaw Pact deprived this geo-strategic role, which had depended on bloc polarization, of meaning.

#### *Turkey's Foreign Policy Interests and Priorities*

For Turkey itself the collapse of the Eastern bloc had far-reaching foreign policy effects and implications. For one thing, Turkey suddenly found itself confronted with a number of new countries, some of them direct neighbours, with which relations had to be established. In some cases this entailed difficulties because the process of building a new state was accompanied by violent conflict. One example is Armenia, a country which for historical reasons has a tense relationship with Turkey. The violent and still unresolved conflict over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, in the course of which Azerbaijani territory was occupied, remains today an impediment to the assumption of normal and more intensive relations with Armenia; as a result of the deployment of Russian troops in Armenia and Georgia it has also turned into a security problem for Turkey. Additionally, the conflicts in or between the newly independent republics began to mobilize portions of the Turkish population because many people living in Turkey are descendants of refugees, particularly ones who originally came from the Caucasus. Some of these people have retained over the generations a sense of their identity - e.g. the Cherkess and the Abkhazians - and even today regard themselves as a diaspora community. In view of the violent conflicts in the Caucasus republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan and of the war in Chechnya, these people, acting as a pressure group, attempted to mobilize the Turkish public and to force the Turkish government to adopt a more active foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

Quite apart from these efforts, Turkey was forced into a generally more active foreign policy because the opening of the Eastern bloc and the rise of new states made it necessary to establish independent relations with these countries. Turkey's foreign policy with respect to the Soviet Union always stood in the shadow of NATO membership. Turkey was no more prepared for the collapse

---

1 Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien [Centre for Turkish Studies], *Das ethnische Mosaik der Türkei und interethnische und interreligiöse Beziehungen zwischen den Volksgruppen aus der Türkei in Deutschland* [The Ethnic Mosaic in Turkey and Inter-ethnic and Inter-religious Relations between Turkish Population Groups in Germany], hitherto unpublished study, Essen 1997.

of the Soviet Union and of the Eastern bloc than were its alliance partners and it had to work out ideas and plans for an independent foreign policy in the region. After recognizing the independence of the new states Turkey initiated an institutionalized form of co-operation with its new neighbours. Eleven regional countries joined the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, officially founded in summer 1992. The Cooperation, originally intended for countries bordering on the Black Sea, was joined by other countries such as Greece, Albania, Azerbaijan and Armenia which do not meet that geographic standard. Although its main objective was the expansion of economic, technical and scientific co-operation amongst the participating countries, this initiative was also meant to serve the cause of peace and stability in the region.<sup>2</sup> In fact the Black Sea Economic Cooperation has developed into an institution which attempts indirectly to take over functions related to the settlement of disputes because among its members are countries such as Armenia and Azerbaijan which are at odds with one another. Past meetings of the states belonging to the Black Sea Economic Region have been used as occasions for talks between representatives of the parties to such conflicts as well.

The Balkan countries constitute another geographic area which has acquired new importance in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's interests in the Balkans are extensive and varied. On the basis of almost 415 years of Ottoman rule, Turkey has historic ties to the Balkans. Even today substantial Turkish minorities live in most of the Balkan countries. Altogether there are close to two million Turks in the Balkans, the largest number - about one million - in Bulgaria, 150,000 in Greece, and 150,000 in Romania and in Macedonia. Conversely, there are large numbers of Muslims of Balkan origin living in Turkey - people who either fled or moved to Turkey during the Ottoman period and after the founding of the Turkish Republic. They are not only Turks; other nationalities such as Bosnians and Albanians are also represented. The Balkans are also important to Turkey because of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic structure of Turkey itself. Living in Turkey at the present time are more than 2.2 million Albanians, about 1.5 million Bosnians and more than 315,000 Turks who emigrated from Bulgaria to Turkey. The number of Kosovo-Albanians living in Turkey is estimated at about 400,000. All of these ethnic groups in Turkey stimulate the Turkish government to bear in mind its historic role as protective and supportive power for Muslims living in the Balkans. Turkey is deeply interested in stability in this region not least because instability there directly affects Turkish interests. Following the recognition of Macedonia, Turkish influence there has increased too. Macedonia's past is closely bound up with that of the Ottoman Empire and for

---

2 Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien [Centre for Turkish Studies] (Ed.), Schwarzmeerwirtschaftsregion SMWR - Darstellung, Entwicklung, Perspektiven sowie Möglichkeiten der Zusammenarbeit mit der EU [Black Sea Economic Region BSER - its Description, Development and Prospects, Including Opportunities for Co-operation with the EU], Op-laden 1996.

that reason there are close ties to Turkey. Macedonia, which has problematic relations with Greece, depends heavily for political support on Bulgaria and Turkey, which were also the first countries to recognize it under international law.<sup>3</sup>

Turkey also has historic ties to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 1463, Bosnia and Herzegovina had been a part of the Ottoman Empire. At first it was attached to the Province of Rumelia but in 1580 became a province in its own right, closely tied to the Ottoman Empire. Thus until its annexation by Austria-Hungary in 1908 - for more than 400 years - Bosnia and Herzegovina belonged to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup> During the war in Bosnia, Turkey undertook a number of initiatives to persuade the world community to adopt a common approach against the Serbian efforts at conquest and attacks against the civilian population. Turkey's efforts were in particular directed towards mobilizing world public opinion. Despite strong internal political pressure - including pressure from Bosnia and Herzegovina - Turkish efforts remained limited to persuading international institutions to intervene in the conflict so as to put an end to the fighting and to the attacks against the civilian population.

Special attention is paid to Turkish policy in the Caucasus. Here, Turkish policy, cautious and aimed at compromise, can be seen most clearly in connection with the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Considerable pressure has been put on the Turkish government, both by its own population and opposition parties as well as by Azerbaijan, to pursue a policy friendly to Azerbaijan. But Turkey wants to play the role of mediator in this conflict and is thus limiting its actions to the international arena, calling upon organizations such as the OSCE and the UN. It is trying to pursue this mediational role actively through its participation in the negotiations being carried on by the Minsk Group.

Turkey has common borders with Georgia, Armenia and the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan, which is a part of Azerbaijan. Georgia, too, has not been spared ethnic conflict. Apart from the dispute with South Ossetia, which seeks to join North Ossetia (part of the Russian Federation) and form an independent republic, a conflict has also broken out with the Abkhazians, who declared their independence in July 1992. Large numbers of descendants of Abkhazian immigrants are living in Turkey and the fight for Abkhazia's independence has mobilized them. They are trying to organize support for Abkhazia and to persuade the Turkish government to put pressure on Georgia.

---

3 Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien [Centre for Turkish Studies], *Die Türkei im Spiegel der jüngsten Entwicklungen in Zentralasien und auf dem Balkan* [Turkey as Reflected in the Most Recent Developments in Central Asia and the Balkans], Working Paper 9, Essen/Bonn 1992.

4 On this see Aydin Baybuna, *Die nationale Entwicklung der bosnischen Muslime. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der österreichisch-ungarischen Periode* [The National Development of the Bosnian Muslims, with Special Consideration Given to the Austro-Hungarian Period], Frankfurt/Main 1996.

Developments in the Caucasus and Central Asia are of the utmost importance for Turkey. Instability in these regions has serious consequences for Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Close co-operation with these countries, both bilateral and multilateral, and their admission into the OSCE do indeed give Turkey certain instruments for contributing to a settlement of the conflicts.

### *Turkey's Security Problems*

One of Turkey's central concerns in participating in the OSCE has to do with the relationship with its northern neighbour, Russia. One cause of friction between Russia and Turkey is the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) which was signed in 1990 and entered into force in 1992. The terms of the CFE Treaty specify, among other things, the numbers of conventional forces in the Caucasus. But Russia, instead of making the reductions called for, has in recent years increased its forces by stationing new troops. As early as October 1993 Russia declared that it would not observe the ceilings laid down in the CFE Treaty.<sup>5</sup> The pretext put forward by the Russian side was that conditions had changed, as exemplified by the conflict in Chechnya. In the Russian view, the terms of the Treaty apply only to "normal" conditions, and these did not pertain. For that reason Russia has for a number of years been calling for revision of the Treaty or of its relevant provisions. Turkey, for its part, has rejected for security reasons the deployment of Russian units in the Caucasus republics of Armenia and Georgia, which is based on treaties signed in the CIS framework (in the case of Georgia, not until after that country's adherence to CIS). As for Armenia, an agreement was reached and implemented to build a military base in Gumri and Ararat, i.e. in the immediate vicinity of the Turkish-Armenian border. At the present time there are almost 20,000 Russian soldiers stationed in the three-country triangle of Turkey-Armenia-Iran.<sup>6</sup> After the signing of Georgia's instrument of accession to the CIS, agreement was also reached on the deployment of Russian troops there. According to the agreement there were to be five garrisons and, in addition, Russian units were to be stationed in three Georgian harbours. Altogether 5,000 Russian soldiers were to be stationed in Georgia.<sup>7</sup> In this disagreement over the CFE Treaty Turkey's efforts to ensure observance of the treaty provisions were without effect. The West's initial reaction to the Russian demand for revision was to argue that the Treaty as it existed offered the possibility of flexible interpretation, i.e. of altering the size of conventional forces. Thus the West contributed to Russia's non-observance and de facto violation of the CFE Treaty and accepted its de-

---

5 Cf. Bilge Nur Criss, *Between Discord and Cooperation: Turkish-Russian Relations after the Cold War*, Ebenhausen/Isartal 1996, p. 13.

6 Cf. the news *Rusya'ya AKKA tavizi yürürlükte*, in: *Yeni Yüzyil* of 17 May 1997.

7 Cf. the news *AKKA Rus tehdidinde*, in: *Zaman* of 6 November 1995.

mand. Of course this Western willingness to compromise has to be seen against the background of NATO's eastward enlargement. The objective of incorporating former Warsaw Pact countries in the Western defence alliance forces the West to make concessions to Russian security interests in other areas, in this case at the expense of the security interests of other countries.<sup>8</sup> The modified version of the flank rules, which permits the "temporary stationing" of Russian forces on the southern flank, came into force in May 1997. Turkey had to agree to this change even though it is opposed to Turkey's security interests. Azerbaijan and Ukraine also accepted it, although at the last minute and even though both countries still oppose it. Given the security interests of both Russia and Turkey, the diplomatic skirmishing over the CFE Treaty is bound to go on for the time being because Russia views the concessions as inadequate and is still calling for a complete revision of the Treaty.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Turkey's Position within the OSCE*

Since the end of the Cold War OSCE activities have emphasized certain matters which were also evident in the restructuring process leading from CSCE to OSCE. Along with mechanisms for conflict prevention and settlement, which were regarded as particularly important owing to numerous violent conflicts, human rights violations and the curtailment of fundamental rights such as for instance freedom of opinion received greater attention. These were matters for which the former Eastern bloc had earlier been criticized but after the beginning of the nineties other countries began to receive public attention as well. Various member countries of NATO and, in particular, the Scandinavian countries began to criticize the human rights situation, limits on freedom of opinion and the treatment of minorities. For a number of years now Turkey has also been a target. Thus there have been repeated efforts within the OSCE and its bodies to have OSCE mechanisms look into the human rights situation in Turkey. In March 1994 the Scandinavian countries called upon Turkey to set in motion on its own initiative the OSCE mechanism contained in the document of the Moscow Meeting on the human dimension by inviting an examination of the accusations in regard to human rights. In July of the same year, at the meeting of the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly in Vienna, there was a demand that the Moscow Mechanism be set in motion and a "fact-finding mission" sent to Turkey. The Turkish side rejected both of these initiatives. In December, Switzerland entered a motion calling for the despatch of a group of experts to Turkey. This motion was not acted on, however, owing to insufficient support from other

---

8 On this cf. the news AKKA tatismasi gündemde, in: Milliyet of 20 October 1996.

9 Cf. the news in Rusya'ya AKKA tavizi yürürlükte, in: Yeni Yüzyıl of 17 May 1997, p. 13.

OSCE States. Another initiative along the same lines which was undertaken in April 1995 by several OSCE participating States met with rejection by the Turkish government. In May 1995 a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly under the leadership of Willy Wimmer visited Turkey in response to an invitation from the then President of the Turkish National Assembly, Hüsamettin Cindoruk. The delegation wrote a moderate report, emphasizing that Turkey had granted it facilities which exceeded those required by the Human Dimension Mechanism. This report was adopted at the fourth session of the Parliamentary Assembly in Ottawa in July 1995. But continuing accusations about human rights violations and curtailment of freedom of opinion led to a decision at the next session in July 1996 in Stockholm which called upon Turkey to ask for the despatch of a commission and invite the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to visit Turkey so that the accusations about human rights and the observance of OSCE rules could be investigated on the scene. Turkey rejected this initiative, arguing, among other things, that the Parliamentary Assembly is not recognized as an official organ of the OSCE. The question of human rights violations and the situation of the Kurds were once again discussed at the OSCE Conference in Vienna. At this conference, which took place in November 1996 and focused on human rights, a report by Amnesty International was presented which took Turkey to task for still lacking adequate mechanisms for protecting human rights against excesses by the state security forces.<sup>10</sup> To forestall further initiatives of this kind Turkey took the lead in December 1996 by inviting a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly under its Chairman, Javier Ruperez, to visit.<sup>11</sup>

#### *The OSCE's Functional Significance for Turkey*

For its part, Turkey strives in a number of fields to collaborate within the OSCE and make active use of the Organization. A variety of initiatives have been involved, especially co-operation in the fight against terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and weapons smuggling. As a result of Turkey's efforts a number of new provisions on co-operation in these areas have been included in OSCE documents. For example, at Turkey's instance the concluding declaration of the OSCE Summit in Lisbon in December 1996 contained such a passage.<sup>12</sup> As an OSCE participating State Turkey endeavours to collaborate actively in the fields of conflict settlement and mediation. Examples are the OSCE Missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Georgia, as well as involvement in the Assistance Group to Chechnya, where Turkey was represented by delegates and also took

---

10 Cf. Yalçın Dogan, İnsan haklar Fıriçin ayaklanma, in: Milliyet of 16 November 1996.

11 Information of the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

12 Cf. Ergun Balci, AGIT Zirvesi'nin ardından, in: Hürriyet of 7 December 1996.

part in the joint negotiations. Turkey is also participating in the negotiations on the Karabakh issue, which are conducted by the Minsk Group. Turkish activities in OSCE mechanisms have included sending observers to elections in participating States and taking part in a delegation to Albania in connection with the unrest there in March 1997.

Most recently Turkey has been concerning itself more intensively with the problems of migrant workers in the various European receiving countries. The number of Turkish migrants in the various EU states is approximately three million. Most of them - more than two million - live in the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>13</sup> Turkish migrants and those from other non-EU countries must contend with numerous problems in Europe, among them their legal status, racist tendencies, xenophobia and discrimination. With regard to the legal situation, Turkey is trying to have European citizenship granted to citizens of non-EU countries. At OSCE meetings Turkey has, for example, presented examples of non-observance of decisions of the European Court of Justice on migrants' rights. This initiative resulted in the inclusion of appropriate provisions in OSCE documents. The situation of migrant workers in European receiving countries was one of the main subjects dealt with at the OSCE Conference held in November 1996 in Vienna. Turkey's efforts played a role there. It was an active participant and continues to work to improve the situation of migrant workers in Europe. The reforms which Turkey aims at and urges on others are steps to improve the legal situation of citizens of non-EU countries. Along with the granting of European citizenship to migrants from countries outside the EU, Turkey calls for their right to participate in local elections and the conferral of active and passive voting rights in elections to the European Parliament. Turkey was involved in the CSCE process from the beginning and has remained an active participant since the restructuring. Although there are problems and frustrations in some areas such as the human rights situation in Turkey or the inadequate attention to its security interests, Turkey, for its part, makes active and successful use of its OSCE membership, as is made clear by the example of the situation of migrant workers in the EU.

---

13 The two-million figure was passed back in 1995. Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien [Centre for Turkish Studies] (Ed.), *Der Studienauswahlprozeß bei türkischen Bildungsinländern an Hochschulen des Landes NRW* [Course Selection Among Turkish Students from Local Homes at Universities in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia], Opladen 1996, p. 11.