Religion as a diplomatic leverage against the desired “other”: The uses of religion in the Turkish-EU relations in the J.D.P. era

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Abstract
The rise to power of the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (J.D.P.) intensified the use of the religious identity in the international affairs of Ankara. Turkey’s new strategic doctrine demands an optimal use of power factors related to civilization, especially in the contacts with the neighboring Muslim /Arab states, in order to strengthen its international position. Contrary to secular governments of 1990’s, the new leadership’s concern to hide its Islamic identity in its interactions with the West is a very limited one. The J.D.P. leadership makes an instrumental use of the religious identity particularly in its contact with Europe. The posture adopted against western institutions, to which Ankara is candidate to adhere to, is revealing its policy to use religion as a diplomatic leverage in order to obtain strategic gains.

Keywords: Religion, Foreign Policy, Identity, Turkey, E.U., Muslim World.

Introduction
It is an indisputable truth that there has been a significant progress in the relations between Turkey and the European Union (E.U.) under the rule of Justice and Development Party (J.D.P.)\(^2\). Despite the improvement that took place in Turkish-E.U. relations –mostly during the early years of J.D.P.’s rule– the accession process reached a stalemate with religion constituting an important issue as far as the the direct or indirect interactions are concerned.

Turkey’s integration into the E.U. is considered as a multi-aspect confrontation for all parties involved (Billion, 2006). Cultural and identity matters in Turkish-E.U. relations, especially those linked with democratization and foreign policy have attracted much attention by the scholars (Keyman, Gümüşçü, Wood 2013; 2014; Göl, 2009; Rumelili, 2008; Öniş, 2006, 2010). Although faith has never been a criterion to the E.U. accession, religious differences have been perceived –

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\(^1\) The publication of this paper has been partly supported by the University of Piraeus Research Center.

\(^2\) The acronym of J.D.P. in Turkish is A.K.P. and stands for Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi. It is the pro-Islamic party that founded by the reformist faction of the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi), following the dissolution of the latter by the Constitutional Court of Turkey in August 2001. The J.D.P. grew soon to a mass-based party promoting its conservative orientations.
often by the Turkish leadership— as an obstacle in Turkey’s accession to the E.U. along with other factors, official or unofficial, that influence the negotiations. These factors might go beyond the Copenhagen criteria and include the E.U. institutional set-up, the member-state interests etc. (Müftüler-Baç, 2002). The western skepticism linked to the religious heterogeneity and its impact on the political relations, is not new (Der Walle, 2004) and goes back many decades ago to the first setbacks of Ankara’s E.E.C. accession bid. Other approaches, some times more optimistic or less optimistic, often expressed by political figures, focalize on the democratic reforms, the human and minority rights record, the economy etc. (Derviş et al., 2004; Ahtisaari et al., 2004 ), and tend to give lesser importance to religious factor then the expected.

Traditionally the Turkish leadership paid a considerable attention in the projection of a secular image of the state in its interactions with foreign state leaders or representatives of international institutions etc.; especially the westerners. This has been a strategic choice that aimed to emphasize the “common worldview” of Turkey with the West. Besides this effort of the Turkish leadership to focus on the fact that Turkey shares some common values as nation-state with Western countries, the promotion of the secular image would emphasize the difference of Turks with the Muslim world, an argument that could be helpful in Ankara’s effort to convince the western states.

More than a decade after the rise of the J.D.P. into power in Turkey in 2002, its leadership, whose core comes from the ranks of the political Islam, seems to have moved away from their early social conservative discourse and missed the political will to promote reformation efforts that would democratize the previously military dominated political system. The use of the religious identity has become more assertive in the conduct of the Turkish political affairs. This shift concerns not only the domestic politics of Turkey but also the international relations of the state.

The adoption of the new strategic doctrine of Turkey, which focuses on the optimal use of power factors (Davutoglu, 2001), had a noteworthy impact on the shift away from the careful policy of projecting a secular image and identity of the nation. Turkish leadership started manifesting its religious identity, while refraining to publicly denounce the secular identity of the state (Islamokemalism). This political stance is directly related to the strategic goals of the newly adopted doctrine of the state. By spreading the range of its identity, Ankara would have important political and economic benefits in the interactions of the Turkish leaders with their Eastern homologues, with whom they share common religious values. Similar references to religious identities by Turkish
leaders in the European context, where an ongoing effort of Turkey to adhere to the E.U. is taking place, is not so sure that would be equally beneficial. Nevertheless, with several occasions the leadership of the ruling J.D.P. manifested in favor of its religious identity vis-à-vis the E.U. This strategic choice, which almost simultaneously abandoned the traditional cautious foreign policy of Turkey (Mufti, 2009), aimed probably to convince the Muslim world, to whose leadership Turkey is aspiring, for its good intentions and capability to serve the common cause. Another explanation could be the will of the Turkish leadership, instead of stressing the secular character of the state, to challenge the E.U. by putting pressure on its administration and the heads of European states to accept a Muslim country in their ranks.

The question of the role that religion plays in the Turkish-E.U. relations is a thorny one. The aim of this paper is neither to study various aspects that arises from the religious heterogeneity of the Turkish candidature nor to examine the impact of these on the debate of Ankara’s accession negotiations with the E.U., issues that have already attracted researchers’ attention (Jung, Raudvere, 2008; Bogdani, 2010; Hemerijck, 2004; Yükleyen, 2009). The objective of this paper is to examine the use of the religious identity by the Turkish leadership towards the E.U. from a (neo-)realist perspective and aspires to contribute in the study of the religious factor in the interactions between Eastern and Western states to strategic ends.

The main assumption of this paper is that the Turkish leadership deliberately made an instrumental use of the religion in its –direct or indirect– interactions with Europeans in order to impose political pressure and obtain better treatment in Turkey’s E.U. accession negotiations.

In order to examine our assumption, first of all, a reference to the role of religion in international interactions will be made. An attempt to identify the place of the religion in the regional integration processes will be made, too. Second, it will be examined the identity question in Turkey in relation to its Western vocation. The needs of a new identity that the early nation-building process was addressing and the failure of this effort, which led to the emergence of the political Islam, are all important phases of the identity issue that are linked to the relations with the West. Third, the new strategic doctrine of Turkey, which determines the J.D.P. governments’ conduct towards the E.U., will be studied. The global strategic goals of Turkey will shed light to the place that holds the E.U. in the new strategic doctrine of Ankara. Finally, the role of the religion as a “diplomatic leverage” in Turkey’s interactions vis-à-vis the E.U. will be examined.
It has to be admitted that due to the ongoing E.U. accession negotiations of Turkey the results of this paper cannot be but partial and incomplete. Nevertheless, the conclusions of this work will contribute to the understanding of the political use of the religion by the Turkish leadership in the international affairs of the state.

1. Religion, Foreign Policy and international integration projects

The study of the political use that the J.D.P. government makes of the religion in its interactions with the E.U. necessitates a general reference to the conceptual basis of the place that holds the religion in the international interactions.

Religion as a strong system of beliefs and rituals with supernatural aspects is assumed to exercise an influence beyond the everyday life of organized communities including the inter-state affairs. Religion as an important component of the culture, along with ethnicity, history, ideology etc., may influence (Shaffer, 2006: 2-3; Fox, Sandler, 2004: 176) not only the everyday life of ordinary people, but also the political leadership that interacts with its counterparts and takes important decisions for the existence of its nation in the Westphalian nation-state based international system.

The role of the religion in the international affairs is not new (Thomas, 1995; Petito, Hatzopoulos, 2003; Thomas, 2005;). Its growing importance since the bipolar system gave rise to many academic studies treating issues such as the impact of secular policies on religion and international politics (Hurd, 2007), the identity aspects in the international interactions, the influence of the religion in the foreign policy (Warner, Walker, 2011; Dawisha, 1983), the role of Islam in the international affairs (Proctor, 1965; Piscatori, 1986), the role of religion as “soft power”, its linkage with the civilization and international conflicts (Huntington, 1996), the conflict resolution and mediation, the religious terrorism, etc.

Historical experience has shown that religion by itself is not able to play a determinant role as unique guiding principle for a state’s foreign policy even in the case of theocratie regimes. It is, thus, largely accepted that religion is only one factor between many others that may exercise a certain influence in the foreign policy decision making process. According to the realist school of international relations this is due to the research of power and material capabilities by the states in their interactions with other sovereign units or international organizations of the international system. The contradictory
character of the pursued interests, with the religious/intellectual-based interests on one hand and the material-based on the other, leaves little space for any direct influence for the religion. Instead of being a factor of influence, religion may also become a vehicle of influence in the hands of political leadership in order to attain national goals.

Another aspect of the religion as a factor of the international relations is its role on the identity formation. According to this approach, which challenges theories aiming the creation of secular societies, religion is a crucial social identity factor that contributes to the differentiation among various groups of people. In that sense religion plays a role in the formation of larger groups of incompatible identities, which is essential for the states in the international system. Furthermore, the role of the religion in the regional integration projects that aim at establishing a distinct form of political or economic union, consisting often of neighboring nations, has to be addressed. Faith based international organizations do exist in the international system\(^3\), but are rather uncommon and so does this kind of political unions. In most of the international efforts aiming at establishing a process of integration, this has been achieved without taking into consideration the religious or ethnic identities and seeking binding legal ties. The driving force behind such projects has been the common political, economic etc. gain of the participating nations.

The political communication between interacting states of the international system does not necessitate always passing through diplomatic channels (Bull, 2002: 172-173). Statements delivered by the political leadership, even though they are not always elaborated according to the diplomatic practices and manners, are considered a direct and legitimate way of communication among international actors. Nevertheless, the use of diplomatic institutions helps in minimizing frictions in the international relations (Bull, 2002: 175-176). The either intentional or unintentional disregard of the diplomatic tradition in the international interactions may create tensions between privileged interlocutors.

The use of the religion for strategic ends in the international interactions, as it is the case that Islam holds in Ankara’s foreign policy towards the E.U., necessitates a careful handling in order to avoid

\(^3\) A good example is the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation –formerly Conference– (O.I.C.), which operates since the end of the 1960’s.
unnecessary crisis that would jeopardize or at least setback the successful completion of the accession negotiations to a union or organization.

2. Turkey’s encounter with the West: the strategic choice of a modern identity
The principal aim of the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic was to succeed in the recognition of the new state as a western nation especially by the dominant western powers. The recognition as a western state was important primarily because of the existential needs of the domestic political order of the newly founded republic. The nation-building process was set up in order to keep away the new nation from the multinational empire and the Islamic past. The Islamic institutions of the old Empire were seen as one of the primary causes of the decline of the Ottoman power in Eastern Europe. Another reason related to the importance of the recognition of Turkey as a western state at that time was the post-independence worries of the leadership. The new state needed to adopt a convincing pro-western diplomatic action underlying the political ties of the Republic with the Western hemisphere. Such strategic movements could offer various advantages to the new leadership. These vary from the invalidation of any risk and challenge originating from the big western powers to balancing regional menaces coming from neighboring states. In such a way undesired experiences that the old Empire had previously faced would be avoided. The westernization policy of the new republic gained new impetus in the post-Second World War period because of the Soviet demands on the Straits and Eastern provinces of Turkey. The cooling of the relation with Moscow pushed Ankara to pursue tight security relations with the emerging leader of the Western Alliance, the U.S.A. The adhesion of Ankara to N.A.T.O. at the end of 1940’s multiplied its interactions with the western nations and institutions, thus advancing towards the fulfillment of the goal of the founding fathers.

The new national leadership’s decision to approve the adhesion to most important western institutions was purely strategic, since such a strategic movement would support the efforts of the Turkish state to identify itself with the western nations. This was basically the reason behind the urgent treatment of the question of Turkey’s accession to the E.E.C. at the end of the 1950’s by the Democratic Party (D.P.) government. The strategic target of adhesion was pursued by the leadership without careful examination of its consequences⁴. Nevertheless, the decision taken aimed to

⁴ M. A. Birand describes in detail the mobilization of the conservative Democratic Party rulers upon the unpredicted announcement of the Greek application to the E.E.C. in 1959. They were anxious about the imbalance that the Greek influence in the E.E.C. could create to the status quo between the two states. The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatin Rüştü Zorlu ordered his colleagues to prepare urgently the necessary application to the E.E.C., adding
strengthen the nation’s interests and was in line with the kemalist guidelines in internal and foreign policy issues. The kemalist tradition privileged interactions with Western states in order on one hand to minimize the incapacities of the eastern models of ruling – mainly because of the bitter experience gained during the breakup of the Ottoman state – and on the other to accomplish the transformation of the new republic according to the western patterns. The leadership was convinced that the close interaction with the western nations would serve as an effective shield to the new republic, repulsing any attack against it, thus strengthening the balance of power policy of the nation. According to this tradition, firm relations with the western institutions were perceived as an important input to Turkey’s westernization effort. Joining the E.E.C. has been viewed as an essential step towards attaining the westernization goal of the founding fathers.

In the beginning of the new millennium the contemporary Turkish leadership made important progress towards the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. The “European Packages” aiming to adapt the Turkish legislation to the European standards, gave encouraging signs of advancement towards a more democratic and European system, but didn’t last more than a couple of years. After the general elections of 2007 the motivation of the leadership for further progress in the accession negotiations diminished due to first of all the dominant position that acquired the J.D.P. in the domestic politics, and, secondly, because of the suspension of the accession negotiations of several chapters after the demand of certain E.U. member states.

The dominant position that the pro-Islamic J.D.P. obtained in the domestic politics especially after the elections of 2007, gave its leaders the power to conduct more independent policies vis-à-vis both the reduced secular-military front in Turkey and the foreign powers abroad. It is in this context that the J.D.P. government begins to lose interest for its E.U. vocation. The outcome of the elections was in a way a definite turning point for the cautious policy pursued for decades by the Turkish diplomacy. The new strategy adopted by the leadership towards the West, which will be examined bellow, inevitably necessitates a preliminary outline of the socio-political reality within which the religious right rose to power (Toprak, 1987).

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that “Turkey should not lose Greece from sight on this matter”. The document was ready in a fortnights’ time, although the available information and knowledge on the E.E.C. was limited (Birand, 1978: 27-32).
The initial kemalist project, favoring closer relations of the Turkish nation with the West, had a significant dimension of identity politics. This ambitious nation-building policy of the 1920’s and 1930’s, which aimed to create a new ethnicity-based (Turkish) identity with western characteristics, in reality, had two contradictory dimensions, which created confusion. Despite the fact that the western orientation of the Turkish nation had been assured by the reformation efforts, the orientation of the national identity was assured through linguistic and historical reforms, which were based on myths of the pre-Islamic past of the Turks in Central Asia (Landau, 1995; Copeaux, 1997). The aim of the kemalist regime by introducing new references was to decrease any influences of the Ottoman and Muslim past of the nation, which were obviously still vivid. The transition to the multiparty system in mid-1940’s gave the chance to the religious sector of the society to express its discontent over the policies of the Republican People’s Party by supporting the opposition party (D.P.) from that moment on. The democratic constitution of 1961 offered the opportunity to all marginal political forces to claim a place in the political system through the Assembly. The religious right, after a brief cooperation with the successor of the D.P., sought an autonomous presence in the political system at the end of the ’60’s. Prominent members of this current established the first Islamic party (National Order Party/Millî Nizâm Partisi-M.N.P.) of Turkey under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. Despite the rivalry with the ultra-nationalists, he consented to collaborate with the far right movement of Alparslan Türkeş (Nationalist Action Party/Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-M.H.P.) for tactical reasons. The meager electoral results of these movements at the end of ’60’s paved the way to the project of the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis”, which was an intellectual movement aiming to merge a couple of crucial components of the Turkish identity: the turkishness and the muslimness (Landau, 1974; Çetinsaya, 1999). The experiment of the Synthesis was outlawed from the very beginning, since its core principles and values were in contradiction with the kemalist ideology of the state. However, the secular military regime that usurped the power in 1980 adopted the essential principles of the Synthesis in order to restructure the social and intellectual life of Turkey (Toprak, 1990:12). The effect of this decision was visible in the Turkish society after almost a decade. A turn towards religious conservatism of the society was an undeniable reality. This was a negative development disturbing the progress of the social and political system. During that time, the Islamic political parties expressed their aversion to Europe and rejected the idea of Turkey’s accession to the E.E.C. Instead on the contrary, their leadership proposed the creation of an ‘Islamic Common Market’. This aversion of the Islamic leadership to the E.U. lasted until the end of ’90’s. It finally changed its stance towards the West and particularly towards the E.U. only after the coup d’état of 1997. This stance became obvious following the bans of the Islamic parties that had been established
after the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi). Henceforth, the Western institutions have been considered as an important barrier to the secular government’s abuses. This situation lasted until the decline of the political influence of the military in the mid 2000’s, which permitted the pro-Islamic party leaders, who came into power in 2002, to pursue their policies without much constraints and further hesitations.

3. The New Strategic Doctrine of Turkey and relations with the E.U.

The collapse of the mainstream political parties in the elections of 2002, led to unpredicted changes in the political system. The leaders of the pro-Islamic J.D.P., which came to power, seized the opportunity to follow policies compatible to their worldviews and aspirations both in the domestic politics and the foreign affairs.

The new strategic doctrine of Turkey induced radical changes in the foreign policy of the state, though with more of a rhetoric value than substantial results. The study of the use of the religion in the contemporary Turkey-E.U. relations necessitates a short reference both to the worldviews of the scholar that conceived the new strategic doctrine of Turkey, and the doctrine itself. Such a reference would enable us to outline the general approach of the Turkish ruling elite towards the West/Europe.

The mastermind of the new Turkish strategic doctrine is Ahmet Davutoğlu, a prominent Turkish academic who entered into politics. He became famous with the work entitled “Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu” (The Strategic Depth. The international position of Turkey). In this voluminous work he promotes the idea that Ankara should follow a proactive foreign policy based on the optimal use of key factors that Turkey possesses, such as the history, geography and culture, in order to increase its power (Davutoğlu, 2001). This sort of Neo-Ottomanist policy would permit Ankara to get the most out of the influence zones of the nation, an achievement that would allow Turkey to become a respectful power in the international system. According to Davutoğlu, the achievement of such a task necessitates peace arrangements to be applied on relations with the neighbouring states as a prerequisite to the nation’s concentration on international commitments and

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5 Professor A. Davutoğlu first served as chief advisor to the Prime minister on foreign affairs issues. In 2003 he was granted the title of Ambassador and during the period 2009-2014 served as Foreign Minister – as extra-parliamentary member of the government. Following the presidential elections in August 2014, he was elected to the presidency of the ruling party (A.K.P.) and consequently Prime Minister of Turkey.

6 A proactive foreign policy identified with the former President T. Özal’s era, which had reference to the Ottoman space and culture of government (Yavuz, 2001; Çalış, 2001).
attainment of a higher status in the international system. Davutoğlu also maintains that a strategic opening towards the East, that is the Arab and Muslim world, seemed to be a good match for the implementation of the ‘strategic depth policy’. According to him, relations with the eastern nations had been neglected because of the secular policies followed by the previous regimes to the detriment of Turkey’s interests. Such an effort, Davutoğlu believes, might have positive consequences also for Ankara’s relations with the West. He suggests that Turkey’s closer ties with the eastern partners, based on the rich historical and cultural interactions and geographical proximity, would provide Ankara the necessary prestige and authority to succeed in its relations with Europe (Davutoğlu, 2001: 522-523, 776-777).

Another important aspect that determines Ankara’s policy towards Europe is the philosophical basis of Davutoğlu that shapes his understanding of the Western and Eastern political traditions and dictates the strategy that should be followed. According to him, the outcome of the interactions between the Western and the Eastern traditions is influenced by fundamental elements not necessarily in a positive way. More precisely Davutoğlu’s argument is that “conflicts and contrasts between Islamic and Western political thought originate mainly from their philosophical, methodological and theoretical backgrounds rather than from mere institutional and historical differences” (Davutoğlu, 1994: 2). In a previous study entitled “Alternative paradigms. The impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory”, Davutoğlu explores questions such as “how” and “through which processes” the alternative conceptions of the world affect political ideas via a set of axiological presumptions. In this work he focuses on the intellectual and doctrinal mechanisms of Muslim consciousness and Western political traditions, which serve to compare the impact of Western philosophy and theology on Western political theories with the “transcendental supremacy of the Islamic doctrinal science [...] over political thought through an all-inclusive jurisprudential scheme”. (Davutoğlu, 1994: 2-3). More precisely, he aspires to find the reasons behind the difference between the two axiological presuppositions and how this difference affects political theories (Davutoğlu, 1994: 3). In the case of the Islamic paradigm, as Eric Edelman and his colleagues underline in their study on the roots of the contemporary Turkish foreign policy, Davutoğlu stresses the point that the political relevance of the “chain of existence” is expressed by the Islamic concept of tawhid, the uniqueness of God (Edelman, 2014: 25; Davutoğlu, 1994: 47-49). This concept, according to them, plays a key role in Davutoğlu’s worldview. The hierarchy between God, Man and Nature, he supports, is an ordering principle of conduct for each entity of the structure. As far as the case of the “western paradigm” is concerned, he claims that the Enlightenment, which
differentiated the sources of knowledge (the revelation and the reason), led to the prevalence of the latter (Edelman, 2014: 25; Davutoğlu, 1994). As a matter of fact, he supports that the faith is subject to the human reason and is enabled to rule the society and the polity, which according to him created a crisis in the western paradigm (Edelman, 2014: 25-27; Davutoğlu, 1994). These differentiations between the aforementioned paradigms, according to Davutoğlu, are not of metaphysical order but of political one. In that sense any effort trying to transplant the western civilization to an Islamic nation is bound to fail for an additional reason, the fact that it is not taking into account the desires and needs of the society. In connection to this, he formulates the most ambitious argument: that the emergence of the Islamic caliphate is a response to the Western states effort to impose their paradigm onto the Muslim world (Edelman, 2014: 25; Davutoğlu, 1994). Such an axiological perception of the fundamentals of the two traditions in turn may influence the general context within which interactions between states and polities take place.

There is no doubt that for Turkey, as A. Davutoğlu noted in 2009, membership in the E.U. [...] is the strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era [...] (Davutoğlu, 2009:13). An early approach to this idea can be found in the book ‘Strategic Depth’, where Davutoğlu recognizes the strategic necessity to maintain a close relation with the E.U. and avoid any confrontation with it (Davutoğlu, 2001: 522), therefore diminishing also the risks of a heavy dependence on U.S.A. Davutoğlu, being conscious of the various methodological difficulties, attempts an analysis of the Turkish-E.U. relations. In the relevant chapter Davutoğlu acknowledges the fact that the diplomatic relations are based purely on interests but recognizes the difficulty to avoid the influence of the historical, cultural and psychological factor on the decision making process in the Turkish-E.U. relations (Davutoğlu, 2001: 503). It is mainly these factors that intervene and shape the competitive or cooperative image of the “other”, while keeping a positive or neglected image of the “we”. Davutoğlu stresses both the historical and cultural factor in the Turkish-E.U. relations, since they intervene in the decision making process and generate a series of reservations. According to him “an introvert stance” of Brussels towards the Turkish adhesion is due to the priority to the legacy of the Holy Roman Empire that the enlargement policy of E.U. gives and tries to restore via economic and political means (Davutoğlu, 2001: 534). In line with the above, he underlines the contribution of the ancient civilizations, such as those that flourished in Asia Minor, to the European one, implying that the achievements of the Western civilization could not be attributed uniquely to Western European nations (Davutoğlu, 2001: 536). Furthermore, he notes that the study of the European History remains incomplete if the history of the Ottoman state, which influenced the
European developments, is ignored (Davutoğlu, 2001: 537). At that stage one can identify the allusion to the differences between the religious community based ‘millet system’ of the Ottomans and the nation-state system established by the Westphalian state-centric system, that contributed to the crystallization of the idea of the “other” and the “we” in the minds of Western Europeans and Turks alike. According to Davutoğlu Ankara’s E.U. bid suffered from the mutual “luck of confidence”, which is a result of a lengthy process of construction of a rather “negative” image of the “other” (Davutoğlu, 2001: 539). Davutoğlu also supports that the effort to maintain the traditional identity of E.U., which is based on that of the Holy Roman German Empire (sic), would jeopardize the “principle of pluralism” of that the Europeans promote (Davutoğlu, 2001: 544-546). Since the cultural factor is a crucial element that influences the decisions of the policy makers it comes forward every time the negotiations suffer a setback. Thus, according to Davutoğlu the Turkish-E.U. relations would be a major test for both the “pluralist project” of Brussels and the Ankara’s capacity to deploy its “cultural experience” (Davutoğlu, 2001: 543-544).

4. Religion as a “diplomatic leverage” in the Turkish-E.U. Relations
The Europeanization efforts undertaken by the ruling J.D.P., as soon as it rose into power in 2002, led unexpectedly to the improvement in the Turkish-E.U. relations. The political will for democratization of the legal and political structures of the state had cultivated expectations for bridging the gap between Ankara and Brussels. Although these attempts were coming paradoxically from a pro-Islamist conservative party, the progress made in a couple of year’s time was more than promising.

The good level of relations with the E.U. has been aided also by the diplomatic efforts of J.D.P. to mediate or support western allies and friends in crucial security and cultural issues. The pro-Islamic J.D.P. government, for example, despite the crisis with the U.S.A. over Iraq war in 2003, assumed the continuation of the already existing Turkish political and military commitments in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime. It didn’t obstruct the nomination of former Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin (S./C.H.P.) as N.A.T.O.’s Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan in 2004, nor did object the takeover of the military command of I.S.A.F. by Turkey for a second mandate in February 2005 (Turkish F.A.M. – Press Conference, 9/2/2015). The J.D.P. government was eager to participate also in the diplomatic initiatives of the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to establish an ‘Alliance

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7 In March 2003 the Turkish National Assembly (T.B.M.M.) had refused the deployment of U.S. troops against Iraq through the Turkish soil.
8 The first was in June 2002.
of Civilizations’ (A.C.) on July 2005\(^9\). Turkey participated in this project, which aimed at exploring the polarization between contemporary societies and cultures and recommend an appropriate action plan, as co-sponsor with Spain, an E.U. member-state. The cooperation with Madrid on cultural issues within the context of the A.C. became more visible due to the Danish cartoon crisis of January 2006, when, in an effort to contribute in the de-escalation of the crisis, the Turkish Premier, R. T. Erdoğan, co-signed an article with his Spanish homologue, L. R. Zapatero, calling all parties to calm and respect (The New York Times, 5/2/2006). This role of mediator between East and West was convenient to J.D.P. since the Turkish Republic was promoted at the post-Cold war era, both by Ankara itself and its allies, as the ideal model of democracy for the Muslim states\(^{10}\). Following an accommodating foreign policy in cultural and security matters, the J.D.P. had almost insured the projection of a very positive and inclusive image, willing to participate in the cultural harmony and coexistence. This constructive attitude, combined with the efforts of harmonization of the Turkish legal and the political system, was more than supportive for the E.U. accession process of Ankara if we judge from the positive annual Progress Reports of the European institutions. Turkey’s pro-Islamic government surprisingly had already manifested the necessary will in domestic and foreign affairs in order to meet the criteria set by the E.U. and to make the accession process work. The commitment to this process was a sign that the government desired to take steps forward in order to approach the European “other” and integrate with it.

This promising progress of Turkey slowed down since important obstacles and developments occurred after the Ankara Agreement of 2005, according to which Turkey was committing itself to recognize the Republic of Cyprus, an E.U. member-state, in order to fulfill its accession obligations. Instead the J.D.P. followed a policy giving the impression of moving away from its E.U. adhesion goal. Ankara afterwards, put off the recognition of Nicosia, requested a definite accession date from Brussels, pressed time and again for the abolition of visa for its citizens etc., demanding political concessions from the E.U., a development that created tension on the accession negotiations. French President’s N. Sarkozy’s proposal for a special status for Turkey, possibly within the ‘Union for the Mediterranean’ deteriorated the relations. The progress signed in the domestic politics and the

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\(^9\) This project was in line with the previous initiatives taken by Ankara, such as the organization of the “OCI-EU Joint Forum on Civilization and Harmony: the Political dimension” on 12-13 February 2002 (U.N., A/56/830, 15/3/2002).

\(^{10}\) In relation to this, it has to be noted that the leadership of the J.D.P. was against in principle to the projection of Turkey as an example of “moderate Islam”, since according to their convictions this characterization is not corresponding to Islam (Milliyet, 22/8/2007).
economy, along with the positive outcomes of the implementation of a restless and multidimensional foreign policy, aiming to advance the national interests, consequently contributed to the self-confidence of the Turkish leadership.

The diplomatic impasse encountered in the Turkish-E.U. relations the second half of 2000’s led Ankara to pay more attention to relations that have been cultivating as part of the multidimensional foreign policy that has been designed by the J.D.P. From a very early stage the J.D.P. government followed close relations also with the East, more precisely with the Muslim world. The strategic opening towards the Muslim and Arab states is not new and has been pursued by the previous secular regimes, too, ever since the Cold-war era. In contrast to the modest successes of the previous strategic openings, the J.D.P. as pro-Islamic political party was in a privileged position to make a significant progress in the Turkish-Muslim relations both in bilateral and multilateral level. The increased involvement of Turkey in the reformation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (O.I.C.) in order to be able to meet the challenges of the post-9/11 attacks in Manhattan, combined with the secular character of the Turkish Republic, permitted to the J.D.P. government not only to advance its political, diplomatic and economic relations with the states of the O.I.C. but also to occupy a very good position within the leading states of the Muslim world. This success, which is attributed to the dynamic efforts of the Turkish diplomacy, paved the way to a more committed policy towards issues concerning the Muslim world.

11 The ruling J.D.P. won the parliamentary elections of 2007 with 46.5% increasing its percentage by 12.3% since 2002, and improved its economy, although remained vulnerable to global trends as it is the case of the crisis of 2008-2009, by increasing impressively its GDP annual growth. According to the Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey, the country’s average annual GDP growth for the period 2002-2013 was 4.9%. According to the “World Development Indicators” of The World Bank, Turkey’s GDP growth was as high as 8% in 2005, 7% in 2006, and 5% in 2007. After having decreased to -5% in 2009, Turkey’s GDP annual growth returned to high scores in 2010 with 9% for two consecutive years.

12 In fact İsmail Cem, the Foreign Minister of the former coalition governments, had also tried to put in practice a strategic opening towards Latin America, Asia, Africa etc.

13 In ‘60s, after the notorious U.S. President Johnson’s Letter, Turkey attempted a strategic opening towards Arab world for political reasons (Billion, 1997: 68-75). This opening took an economic dimension in ‘80s following the adoption of a new economic model based on exportation (İlkin, 1993).

14 The first sign of the upcoming improvement of these relations was the successful attempt of Turkey to elect his candidate, Prof. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, in the head of the General Secretariat of the O.I.C. in 2004. The previous secular coalition government of Turkey had also attempted to elect its candidate, the Amb. Yaşar Yakış, to the head of the General Secretariat of the O.I.C. in 2000, without success.

15 Such issues are the Palestinian question and the fate of those living in Gaza strip, the Afghan-Pakistani and the Israeli-Syrian reconciliation, the fate of the Muslim communities in the Balkans and the Far East, the Islamophobia in Europe, the economic development of the underdeveloped Muslim states etc.
The Palestinian question and the situation in the Gaza strip offered to the J.D.P. leadership the opportunity to address these issues and convince the Muslim leadership for their pure intentions. When Ankara’s mediation efforts between Israelis and Syrians failed, the J.D.P. leadership was free to reformulate its policy towards Israel from 2009 onwards. In a continuous effort probably to gain the political and economic support and also the favor of the Muslim and Arab world, the J.D.P. leadership intensified the tension first in the World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland) in 2009, and secondly, a year later with the occasion of the Gaza flotilla incident. The immediate results of this crisis were a serious aggravation of the Turkish-Israeli relations, which put an end to the most criticized by the Arabs strategic alliance between the two states, and an amelioration of the Turkish-Muslim relations.

Another important issue related to J.D.P.’s efforts to develop closer links with the Muslim world with a strong domestic policy aspect is the Western states perception of the Easterners, which are related both with the challenges facing the Arab and Islamic world, especially in the Middle East, and Turkey’s E.U. accession bid. The J.D.P. leadership from the mid-2000’s onwards committed itself – in accordance with its ambition to lead the Muslim world– to the support of O.C.I.’s efforts to take appropriate measures in order to address the defamation attempts of the Muslim faith mostly in the Western and non-Muslim states, a phenomenon called Islamophobia. Soon after the 3rd Extraordinary Summit of O.C.I. in Mekka in December 2005, which decided the creation of an observatory that would take action against the defamation of Islam, the J.D.P. leadership has subscribed in the efforts against the defamation campaign and plays since then an active role. The Turkish Premier, R. T. Erdogan raised the issue of Islamophobia often in official bilateral or multilateral contacts, stressing the fact that Islamophobia should be considered as “a crime against humanity”, too. In order to attract the attention and convince his counterparts for the unfairness that the Muslim faith suffers, he attempts to draw parallels between Islamophobia and other forms of prejudice or discrimination that have been criminalized in Western states. These are, for example, laws considering anti-Semitism to be a crime against humanity or bills outlawing the denial of the

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16 The article 1.VII of the “Ten Year Program of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21st Century” of the O.C.I., adopted in the 3rd Extraordinary Summit in Mekka in December 2005, stipulates measures of combating Islamophobia. One of the actions to be undertaken is the creation of an observatory (VII.2) documenting the insults against the Muslim faith. (O.I.C., 2005) The “Islamophobia Observatory” is operational since 2007.

17 An early reference to Islamophobia of the Turkish Premier in connection to anti-Semitism is that during the visit to White House in October 2006 (Fletcher, 2006; Sabah, 2006).
Armenian genocide. The latter case is rather uncommon since it combines issues that touch sensible political issues of national and historic character for Turkey. Consequently, the Turkish Premier did not hesitate to denounce “the mentality that lies behind the law, an undeniable racist approach. For this reason it is not a matter that concerns only Turkey and France but an issue related directly to Europe, to the European Union” (Constantinoff, 2012), blaming not only the French lawmakers with racism, but holding also co-responsible the entire E.U. for the bill. Furthermore he urged the French (and European) leaders that “Turkey is not a country that will remain silent and succumb to the insidious rise of Islamophobia and racism in Europe” (Constantinoff, 2012), implying that Turkey is a powerful state that will not tolerate expressions of Islamophobia in Europe.

The aforementioned efforts of R.T. Erdogan to advocate in favor of the objectives set by the O.I.C. have been multiplied following the anti-government riots and plots in 2013, which damaged the image of the J.D.P. leadership and driven it away from the E.U. and the democratization efforts. Independently from the obstacles that Turkey met in its E.U. accession process, the revelation of the December 2013 scandals constitute a turning point for the democratization process of Turkey. Although the progress that has been made in many thorny issues, such as the Kurdish question that after the “democratic opening” of 2008 had reached to a level of conclusion of a “peace process” agreement with the leaders of the Kurdish movement in April 2013, the fear to be weakened by competitive fractions within the Turkish political Islam and the loss of the dominant position in the domestic politics led the J.D.P. leadership to make a definite turn towards authoritarianism. Henceforth, it resorted to nationalist and extreme arguments with reference to national issues, often reversing the reality and redirecting the accusations for non-compliance with the European standards to Westerners, in order to rally the Turkish public opinion around the J.D.P. and consolidate its power.

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18 The Turkish Premier accused France for Islamophobia and Europe for racism because of the bill criminalizing the denial of the Armenian genocide in France (Constantinoff, 2012). The bill was rejected by the Constitutional Court later in the same month due to objections deposed by the opposition.

19 The image of the J.D.P. has been shaken first by the Gezi Park events of June 2013, and then by the corruption scandals of December 2013. The latter were the most troublesome for the government. Erdogan accused the Gülen movement whose members allegedly hold high positions in the Turkish judiciary and the police, for instigating the prosecution of family members of Ministers on charges of bribery (Demirtaş, 2013).

20 It is interesting to note that during the corruption scandal of December 2013 the Turkish Minister of E.U. Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, rejected E.U. criticism and suggested that Brussels suffers from “preconceived convictions” and urged it to be more “vigilant” in its comments (Spencer, 2013).
This tendency of the J.D.P. leadership to dominate the political system aggravated as soon as R.T. Erdogan became the first popularly elected head of state in mid-August 2014. His goal to change the constitution in order to adopt a western type presidential system, perceived by his opponents as an intrigue to increase the executive powers of the presidency in the detriment of the legislative. The way he handled issues such as the succession in the head of the J.D.P., the conduct of the foreign and security policy etc., offered strong arguments about his hidden ambitions, since he did not respect the impartiality of the presidential office. The criticism of E.U.’s higher officials to Ankara concerning the state of democracy and the freedom of speech in December 2014 was perceived as interference to the President and at the same time offered him the opportunity to retaliate using the argument of Islamophobia as a last resort. R.T. Erdogan suggested in a harsher tone that E.U. takes care of its own weaknesses for what he said was the “increasing Islamophobia”, implying that the policies of Brussels were not coherent with the declared core values of the European Union\(^\text{21}\).

The “Charlie Hebdo” attacks in Paris in January 2015 and the tension created in France increased the anxiety of the Turkish leadership, which in accord with its commitment to the leadership of the Muslim world, hold an ever more anti-Western discourse. The Turkish President not only reiterated the usual anti-Western arguments but also accused Westerners of racism and hypocrisy for their stance over the attacks in Paris and for their failure to condemn anti-Muslim attacks in Europe\(^\text{22}\). Moreover, he denounced Israeli Premier’s participation in the solidarity rally, accusing him of implementing policies of state terrorism against civilians in Gaza\(^\text{23}\). Similar statements have been delivered by the Turkish Premier, A. Davutoglu, too\(^\text{24}\) (RT, 2015; Al-Jazeera, 2015). Turkish leadership’s strategy was to protect the Muslim world by counteracting the negative effects of Paris attacks on it or to channel the attention and the rage of the international public opinion away from Paris towards the Middle East. By inverting the context and shifting the victim’s identity from West

\(^{21}\) During a symposium R. T. Erdogan made the following statement: “We are not Europe's scapegoat, we are definitely not a country that Europe can point its finger at and scold. Instead of criticizing us, Europe should find a solution to increasing racism and Islamophobia.” (Reuters, 2014).

\(^{22}\) Some excerpts of the Erdogan’s statement to which we are referring have as follows: “The West's hypocrisy is obvious. As Muslims, we've never taken part in terrorist massacres. Behind these lie racism, hate speech and Islamophobia […] Please, the administrations in those countries where our mosques are attacked need to take measures. […] Games are being played with the Islamic world, we need to be aware of this” (Bektaş, 2015).

\(^{23}\) The excerpts have as follow: “How can a man who has killed 2,500 people in Gaza with state terrorism wave his hand in Paris, like people are waiting in excitement for him to do so? How dare he go there? […] You should first give an account for the children and the women you have killed.” (Bektaş, 2015).

\(^{24}\) Some excerpts from the statements have as follow: “We would expect the same sensitivities to be shown to attacks on mosques or Islamophobia […] Turkey’s stance is principled and we will keep up this attitude” (RT, 2015).
to East, the aim was to avoid the identification of the attackers within the Muslim world. Nevertheless, the formulation of this sound argument has been done in a manner that unleashed a hegemonic or at least negative stance in the Turkish-E.U. relations.

During his visits in Europe at the aftermath of the solidarity rally, Davutoglu defended the point of view that Europeans themselves have to change attitude in order to improve the relations between Muslims and Europeans. In a conference, for example, organized by the “Friends of Europe” in Brussels, A. Davutoglu almost blamed European leaders for covert ‘discrimination’ against Turks and a hegemonic approach towards them, whose roots can be detected according to him in the mentality of the Holy Roman Empire\(^25\) (Gotev, 2015).

The speech delivered by the Premier A. Davutoglu to the Turkish immigrants in Zurich ten days after the Paris attacks, illustrates the approach of the Turkish leadership to the Turkish-E.U. relations, the importance that gives to the national characteristics, and the place that Ankara claims for the Muslim faith in the united Europe. In an effort to boost the moral and the confidence of the Turkish community abroad, who were expected to vote soon for the first time in the general elections of Turkey, Davutoglu expressed his determination to successfully pursue Ankara’s E.U. bid. In Turkish Premier’s words:

“Despite the obstacles, despite the prejudices, despite all provocation Turkey is determined to pursue its E.U. [accession goal] […] Since our brothers and sisters are representing here our culture, our customs, our language, our religion; since there are 45 million Muslims in Europe, then Turkey will certainly become a part of the E.U. Be assured that one day we will adhere to the E.U. We won’t implore, we won’t beg, we will not expect any special privileges. We will adhere with pride; with honor. We will adhere to the European Union with our religion, our language, and our customs. My honored [compatriots] in Zurich, in Switzerland, is it possible to obey all over the world, while you are [displaying such a] proud [attitude] in the heart of Europe? You are experiencing our culture in Europe without a moment of hesitation; how could we dare to concede even a small piece of that culture? How could we dare to obey? With Allah’s consent we will not obey […] We are the descendants of the valiant [defenders of the] Dardanelles, who have taken the risk to death for the sake of the faith, but have not obeyed.”\(^26\) (A.A., 2015)

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\(^{25}\) According to the Turkish Premier, he gave the following answer to a question that he has received from an European leader, during the Republican march against terrorism in Paris, on “How Europeans should act to approach Turks”: “Nobody can tell me ‘we Europeans’ and ‘you Turks’ […] But we are part of European history. And we are part of contemporary Europe. There are 45 million Muslims living in Europe and more than 6 million Turks. […] We have to have an inclusive European identity. But if you have a Holy Roman- German- Christian type of understanding, then Europe has ended, sorry”. (Gotev, 2015)

\(^{26}\) The translation of the excerpt from the original (in Turkish) belongs to us.
Davutoglu confirmed that Ankara was willing to adhere in E.U., but did not hesitate to draw the image of the neglected European nation, that have confronted prejudice and been ill-treated, championing in this way the idea of the national pride (A.A., 2015). Davutoglu stated that the Turkish nation is *de facto* part of the Europe and as a proud nation it does not expect any kind of privileged treatment. This statement makes allusions also to a hierarchical type of relation, which is flatly rejected, according which the role of the superior in the hierarchy is attributed to Europeans, while the role of the inferior in the hierarchy to Turkey. Despite all this, Davutoglu affirmed that the nation is able to adhere to the E.U. with all the elements that its identity carries. In other words, the Turkish leadership having perceived the E.U. demands for progress not only as obstacle or provocation, but also as undeclared request for change, excludes any kind of compromise on the core values of its identity on the accession negotiations with Brussels. Being the leader of a pro-Islamic party in power and being challenged by the secular opposition, Davutoglu could not but stress the place of the religious element of the Turkish identity in the accession negotiations. Following the excerpt of his discourse, where he highlights the importance of the Muslim faith for its government:

“[W]e have conveyed the message that we will hold our head up and stay against any kind of racism. I address to you once again from Zürich. Islam is Europe’s primary religion (sic) and such it will remain. From Andalusia to Ottoman Empire, the masjids and mosques that cover the Europe[an space], [...] and were introduced here along with the call to prayer (ezan) by this valiant people, who with their holy march reached these places from every corner of Asia Minor half a century ago, will be absolutely protected. We will continue to fight against those hands trying to harm them. I kiss the forehead of my brothers that introduced the Takbir (lit.: Allah is great[er], fig.: the Islamic faith) to Zurich. [...]. Peace be upon the first generation of expatriates, who, although they came to these lands with wooden suitcases and poor, they preserved their faith proving the richness of their soul. [...]. They were such blessed people that when they immigrated to these lands from Asia Minor and Rumelia they planted a seed, which with Allah’s permission will rise at the centre of Europe, and grow big as a platan tree, [bearing] justice (sic). Nobody will be able to prevent it.”27 (A.A., 2015)

In this part of his speech Davutoglu continues to elaborate the idea of the national pride, but insists on the important place that the religion holds in the identity of the Turks. A significant number of religious connotations can be also detected. First of all, he confirms that Islam is an important religion of the European continent and assured that it will continue to be. Then, he honors those who centuries ago left Asia Minor and having settled down in Europe they created religious places. At this point one can observe the imminent references to the Ottoman Empire and the role it played in the spread of Islam in Europe. Following, he ensures his audience that his government is the guarantor of the mosques in Europe, implying that Turkey would react to any kind of attack they might receive.

27 *Idem.*
Finally, he praised the immigrants and reassured them that their sacrifices as members of the Muslim community abroad are much appreciated and time will come that they will be rewarded. This assertive stance of the Turkish Premier has a slightly challenging character in the sense that the J.D.P. government draws its red lines beyond which is determined not to make concessions, while remains committed to the European accession process.

Statements made by the President Erdogan during his visit to the Horn of Africa at the end of January 2015, shed light to another aspect of the Turkish stance on this matter. The Turkish President affirmed that Ankara follows a specific strategy concerning the E.U. accession negotiations. President Erdogan admits also that Turkey has been testing Brussels’ limits –that is its strengths and tolerance– towards a country that belongs to another culture, it has a distinct language, national feelings and religious consciousness. The following is an excerpt from the statement of Erdogan:

“The E.U. is an ongoing process for us now. They may or they may not accept us to the E.U., it doesn’t matter. Right now we are pursuing our efforts according to our plan. We are testing Europe. Could Europe absorb (sic) a country whose people are Muslim? Will Europe accept it [in its ranks]? Are you [Europeans] for Islamophobia or against? You have to receive Turkey in the E.U. Otherwise […] there is a thesis [which says that] the E.U. is a Christian Union. [The rejection of Turkey] would mean the validity of the thesis. But the admission of Turkey [in the E.U.] would mean the invalidation of this thesis. Turkey is a member of the N.A.T.O., the O.E.C.D., and of many other organizations. Why don’t you admit it in the E.U.? This means that the [root of the] problem is different. Turkey now is a strong country. If you see Turkey as a country that will come begging to your door, [be advised that] it is [no more] a country that will come to beg to your door. Turkey is a country that [can depend on itself]. It is determined. If they admit it into the E.U. as it is, it’s fine. In case they don’t admit it, Turkey will [decide for its own fate]” 28 (Zaman, 2015)

The Turkish President having admitted that Turkey is testing the E.U. leadership, he reiterates his well known position on the religious issue. He poses the question whether Brussels is ready to accept a country with Muslim population in its ranks. He repeats also his position on Islamophobia demanding that it is clarified whether E.U. denounce it or not. The most astonishing part of the statement though is the assumption that the rejection of Turkey by the E.U. on the basis of its faith, would mean, according to Erdogan, that the thesis that E.U. is a Christian Union is valid. In other words the President follows a strategy that is prone to blackmail. He is indirectly abusing the E.U. by putting it labels such as “Christian Union” and stating that in case of a rejection Turkey will hold a proud stance and will decide for its own fate.

28 The translation of the excerpt from the original (in Turkish) belongs to us.
From the above we can deduce that the strategy that the J.D.P. leadership has chosen on the usage of the religion in the Turkish-E.U. affairs varies according to the phase. The closer to the opening of the accession negotiations, the more careful the use of the religious question, while the further in time from the opening of negotiations the more aggressive its use becomes. After a brief transition period at the beginning of the assumption of the power, the J.D.P. becomes more concerned about the use of its religious identity in its relation with the West in general and with the E.U. in particular. It gets used to cope with the secular opposition and explores ways to externalize its identity. Following, it uses the religion as a shield, a sort of auto-protection mechanism, in order to dismiss criticism. Next, it starts using the religion as a hegemonic tool in order to claim restoration of injustices or to put an end to double standards. Finally, it is used also as a battering ram aiming to blackmail the interlocutors. It is also interesting to note that the Turkish leadership has alienated the E.U. They perceive the E.U. decision makers no more as partners, allies or friends, and approach them as being less friendly to Ankara’s national interest, less honest, less determined to take steps forwards in Turkey’s accession bid etc., images which can be barely distinguished from an adversary. What Turkey could expect from such an increase of tone, especially by accentuating the religious character of the regime, is unclear. Most probably it would be using all these technically created tensions as an asset in the next stages of the negotiations, while benefiting from the interactions with the Muslim world.

**Conclusion**

The rise to power of a strong pro-Islamic party in Turkey signaled transformations not only in its domestic politics, which is a development to be expected, but also changes in the traditional cautious and secular foreign policy of Ankara. The Neo-Ottomanist leadership that assumed the rule in 2002 pursues since then an ambitious strategy in order to make of Turkey an emerging power that will have a say in the world affairs. Religious affairs are placed high in its agenda both in its domestic and foreign affairs, since it is considered as a crucial factor of power. This led the J.D.P.’s leadership to research new international partners, turning away Ankara’s exclusive attention from its interactions with its western allies.

The strategy that the J.D.P. government has chosen is one that developed throughout years in parallel with the ongoing accession process to the E.U. and aims to specific strategic gains. The development of close interactions with the Muslim world, included the assignment –real or imagined– of its leadership vis-à-vis the West, would be of economic and political benefit to Ankara. These
interactions, which are in accord with the new strategic doctrine of Turkey (Davutoglu, 2001), would strengthen Ankara’s position in the negotiations with the E.U. The attention manifested to the oil rich Arab and Muslim world does not mean that the new leadership is not interested of adhering to the E.U. Quite the opposite. The J.D.P. government is very much interested to adhere to the E.U. as a full-member state. Yet, it wishes to ‘re-negotiate’ the terms of the adhesion, since itself is not ready to make any sort of concessions, both for considerations related to the domestic and foreign affairs politics. It would like to attain a more ‘decent’ adhesion to the E.U., that is with the lesser possible concessions in national sovereignty and identity issues. In order to achieve this goal the Neo-Ottomanist leadership makes use of the religion as an instrument, as a diplomatic leverage, in the service of the national goals of Turkey. In this way, it expects to embarrass and force the E.U. to loosen the adhesion criteria, whether these are the official ones or not. In order to be more efficient, the J.D.P. leadership very often prefers to convey its messages through channels of public diplomacy, which means that when addressing to national audiences on issues related to the E.U. adhesion and the religion, the tones are raised. This assertive stance of J.D.P. aiming to challenge the E.U. to change its attitude is risky and could lead to misperceptions that could trigger a crisis, holding Ankara away from its desired “other” for an additional time.

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