

CONCLUSION

When we come to evaluate Turkey's record in the 1990s and the country's prospects for the 2000s there are several "No"s and "If"s that we will mention and elaborate on. In addition, the trend by which Turkey is described in numerous publications during the 1990s necessitates clarification. Since the end of the 1980s new opportunities have indeed been opened for Turkey, new crossroads have emerged, new encounters and contacts created. Seemingly, they project a Turkey that is an emerging multiregional power for the foreseeable future. Definitions of Turkey as the rising "Middle Eastern power," "the Central Asian pivot," the "multi-regional power," or even as the emerging "regional super-power" as *Time* magazine had used (see the Help Wanted "Ad," at the beginning of Chapter 1), are to be found in many publications.¹ We, too, we have used this terminology when we came to describe the country's status, performances and prospects. However, a clear warning should be attached to these definitions. Turkey will *not* be the said power *if* it means clashes and confrontations and wars, be it with Russia, Iran, Muslim radicalism, excessive Arab nationalism, ethnic forces, etc. It is hard to recall a power that occasionally does not need to resort to forceful means and weapons.

Notwithstanding territorial disputes, water conflicts, ideological strife, and other disagreements, Turkey enjoys a unique and enviable situation in which no one dares to antagonize it. This is not something to depreciate, bearing in mind neighbors like Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Turkey has used the waning of the cold war and the opportunities opened to it thereafter to weaken its internal and external adversaries and to secure its military and economic capabilities. The country should be readier now to cope with its internal problems, described so cruelly and in an un pitying way by President Demirel (see the quotation in the Introduction to this book.) Furthermore, Turkey's leadership, so much yearning for and thinking of the future that awaits the country in Western Europe – in spite of waves of setbacks, rejections, alienation and ambivalence – has done its utmost *not* to get embroiled in Asian, Balkan, Middle Eastern, or Mediterranean complexities. There is hardly a chance that Turkey would become an active or a warring party in these crises. The country has not fought a war on its territory since the 1920s – a status on a par with only a handful of states. It would be pure imprudence to deviate from this record and to find itself mired in the eastern or Balkan squabbles when its declared visions are far away in the West.

The Turkish encounter with the Caucasus and Central Asian Turkic peoples has aroused emotions, hopes and plans for a different future in which Turkey

is at the center of a revived Pan-Turkism world. Certainly, emotions and hopes exist, perhaps even thrive but, again, one should expect very cautious Turkish behavior. The Turkic world is wrought with ethnic conflicts, other actors are meddling in its affairs, wishing to reap political hegemony, cultural benefits and economic and energy gains. And Turkish nationalism – which was extricated, molded and refined from the ethnic hodgepodge that characterized the Ottoman Empire and which intermittently still needs to prove its prevailing character among Turkey's own fifty or more ethnic groups – might face grave risks. Turkish nationalism that politically, culturally, and socially faces challenges but nevertheless aspires westwards, will be reluctant to be the Turkic ethnic and cultural pivot, let alone its police force. "We are not going to build an Eastern alternative" declared President Demirel, emphasizing the direction that Turkey had *no* intention of taking (see Chapter 4, p. 114).

Internally, too, there are "not"s and "if"s. Turkey's Islam is more Turkish than Pan-Islamic. A declared Muslim politician led the country – appointed, ruled, and ended his tenure through democratic and parliamentary procedures. True, Necmettin Erbakan stayed in office for less than a year, and the democratic procedures were of the Turkish democratic kind in which the military is the shield defending democracy. Still, neither the country's politics nor its ambience were Islamically altered when Turkey chose a Muslim politician for Prime Minister. Predictions are a precarious business; still, Turkey is *not* going to be Islamized *à la* Iran, Algeria or Afghanistan. Neither does the Turkish military consider itself permanently superior to the civil echelons. On the contrary, when during the Gulf crisis there were deep conflicting views between the Turkish executive and the Turkish Chief of Staff, it was the latter who handed in his resignation, *not* the other way round. Similarly, open involvement of the military in governmental decision-making procedures *à la* September 1980 coup is a precedent that would not recur. In 1997, when the military intervened in what eventually brought about the resignation of the Prime Minister, it was through a covert procedure, actually a minor move if compared with the coup of 1980. When the watchful eyes of the EU look for excessive influence by the military in Turkish politics, one could predict that the Turkish democracy is practically safe from overt military interventions.

The early years of the twenty-first century saw two crises and one ray of hope. The economic crisis that erupted in 2001 spoiled many efforts to buttress the Turkish economy and the country's currency. In its turn the economic and fiscal depression led, in 2002, to the collapse of the coalition government that had ruled Turkey since April 1999 – a relatively long period for a Turkish executive – and to a new round of general elections, held in early November 2002. The reforms that the Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted in August 2002 are a great leap forward. The death penalty was abolished, Kurdish education, television, and language courses were made legal. Among the adopted fourteen principles of the reform package, the Turkish parliament left the death penalty for times of war only. (No executions have been carried out in Turkey since

1984, though the death penalty was still legal.) Television broadcasting in languages other than Turkish were made legal. Private schools will be able to use languages other than Turkish. Freedom of expression will prevail with no punishments for criticism against the military, the state, the parliamentary system, the government, the legal system, or Turkish identity. Laws and rules related to freedom of gathering, assembly, and demonstration, will become more lenient. The reforms are indeed wide: right-wingers and nationalists termed them as pure betrayal, a reward to terrorism. Still, it has been a huge leap forward, made with an eye to the EU: the reforms were practically the EU stipulation to start accession negotiations with Turkey.

Future developments will tell whether these Turkish moves will be reciprocated by Europe and the West. If positive, Turkish society will become more pluralistic, open, and liberal minded. If negative, radicalism, introversion, religionism, and excessive nationalism will rule the day in Turkey. Time will tell.

Note

- 1 See for instance Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci (eds), *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.