

## Re-thinking Turkish foreign policy in the Western Balkans

### Background and objectives

In the first of our foreign policy meeting series “Ruptures in the Neighborhood: The Impact of Turkish Foreign Policy in its Neighboring Countries and Beyond,” we will focus on the Turkish foreign policy (TFP) in the Balkans. In line with the overall goal of the series, we will aim to get an overview of TFP in the Balkans, outline the risks and opportunities it bears for Balkan countries, Turkey, and the EU, and develop political frameworks and policy proposals which would contribute to the peace, stability, cooperation, and welfare in the region. The over-arching question will be: how can German-French foreign policy react to TFP.

Global politics as well as domestic politics of the countries in the region and Europe have underwent serious changes since 2011, when we have organized a similar workshop in Belgrade with the title “The New Foreign Policy of Turkey in the Western Balkans” in cooperation with the ISAC Fund. The Syrian war and the following refugee movements to Turkey and Europe, rising right wing populism in Europe, and an economic crisis have dominated the agenda of all relevant actors. Turkey, on the other hand, has entered a political crisis roughly 6 years ago, which has resulted in authoritarianization of the regime, abandoning of the vision-based TFP and brought turbulent days with a civil war and a coup attempt, and an overall deterioration of the human rights situation.

Nowadays, as the Syrian civil war appears to be approaching its end, or at least transforms into a new phase, the refugee movement through Turkey is slowing down, and Turkish politics probably standing at the wake of a transformation, we need to rethink the political situation in order to develop effective policies.

HBS Belgrade, Istanbul, and Sarajevo offices will organize this workshop for this purpose in cooperation with Ifri and Al Sharq Forum. In the workshop, experts on the subject will come together to analyze the current political situation, and produce policy proposals for the EU, Turkey, and the Balkan states. The event is also expected to put potential 2<sup>nd</sup> channel diplomacy actors from Turkey, Balkan countries, and the EU into contact, and hence thereby enable future cooperation.

With this meeting, we aim to address the following issues:

- Analysis of the implementation of TFP in Balkans & implications for German-French and overall EU approach to Turkey.
  - Turkish cultural and development aid (TİKA)
  - The religious dimension of TFP in the Balkans under the shadows of neo-Ottomanism, Islamism, Gülenism, and anti-Gülenism
  - Is neo-Ottomanism over?
  - Turkey's role in post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina
  - Turkish role in Kosovo, Albania, Serbia (and Sandzak), North Macedonia and Montenegro
- Outlining foreign policy risks and opportunities for the peace, stability, and welfare of the region.
- Analysis of main economic dimensions of foreign policy issues.
  - Turkish investments and trade
  - Energy projects
  - EU Connectivity Agenda & Belt and Road Initiative
- EU Enlargement policies and fostering of practical cooperation (Berlin Process/Connectivity Agenda, new French Western Balkans Strategy etc) and the Balkans.
- Turkey and other third actors' influences in the Balkans (Russia, Gulf States, China)
- Refugee crisis, challenges to European migration regime, and their implications for the countries of the region.
- Developing a joint German-French approach to Turkish policies in Balkans. Chances for joint EU-Turkey initiatives.

**6 November 2019**

**Framework:** Analyses on the current political situation in the Western Balkans and Turkish foreign policy initiatives in the region

09:00-09:15

***Opening remarks***

Simon Ilse, Heinrich Böll Foundation Belgrade

Milan Pajević, ISAC Fund

09:15-09:45

***Keynote speech***

Mustafa Aydın, Kadir Has University – Turkey’s neighborhood policies: adaptation and change

09:45-11:00

***Session 1: Western Balkans and Turkey – Current situation and perspectives***

3 presentations, 15 minutes each & 30 minutes Q&A

**Moderator:** Natan Albahari, ISAC Fund

Igor Novakovic, ISAC Fund – Political and societal situation in the Western Balkans

Milan Igrutinović, Institute for European Studies – Foreign affairs of the Western Balkans: dancing around the uneven EU perspective

Oya Dursun-Özkanca, Elizabethtown College – A Changing Turkish Policy: An Overview of Domestic and International Factors

11:00-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-12:45

***Session 2: Western Balkans and Turkish foreign policy – 10 years after “Zero problems with neighbors”***

3 presentations, 15 minutes each & 30 minutes Q&A

**Moderator:** Igor Novakovic, ISAC Fund

Hamdi Fırat Büyük, BIRN – Turkey between state interest and romance: Turkey’s engagement in the Western Balkans

**Birgül Demirtaş, Turkish-German University – Turkey and the Western Balkans: Changing and Unchanging Dynamics**

**Dino Mujadžević, Humboldt University – Pro-Turkish actors and discourses in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2002-present**

12:45-14:00

Lunch

14:00-15:30

***Session 3: Turkish soft power in the Western Balkans – Culture, education, and the media in service of the foreign policy approach***

3 presentations, 15 minutes each & 45 minutes Q&A

**Moderator: Dorothee Schmid, Institute français des relations internationales (ifri)**

**Zlatko Dizdarevic, journalist and a former diplomat in the Middle East – Turkey and neo-Ottoman ambitions in the Western Balkans: Bosnia and Herzegovina, a special point on the Green Transversal Road**

**Federico Donelli, University of Genoa – Hearts and Minds: Culture for the benefit of Foreign Policy**

**Inan Rüma, Istanbul Bilgi University – Culture in service of political economic objectives of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans?**

15:30-16:00

Coffee break

16:00-17:30

***Session 4: Turkish economic approach to the Western Balkans and the role of third States***

4 presentations, 15 minutes each & 30 minutes Q&A

**Moderator: Marion Kraske, Heinrich Böll Foundation Sarajevo**

**Şerif Onur Bahçecik, METU – The role of external actors in the Western Balkans: The Case of China and Belt and Road Initiative**

**Matteo Bonomi, IAI – The economic development of the Western Balkans: the role of Turkey**

**Svetlana Cenić, Business Plus – Turkey in the Balkans:  
someone's mother, someone's stepmother, while a distant  
relative to the rest of the world**

**Mikhail Krutikhin, Carnegie Moscow Center – Turkey as a  
regional gas hub: will it work?**

19:00

Dinner

### **7 November - The synthetic part**

**Framework:** Development of strategies, policy proposals, and project ideas

09.00 Opening remarks

Kristian Brakel (Heinrich Böll Foundation Istanbul)

09.15 ***Expert conclusions and recommendations from the previous activities regarding Turkey's involvement in the Western Balkans***

Igor Novakovic (ISAC Fund)

09.45-11.00 ***The EU Integration of the Western Balkans, a chance or a challenge to cooperation with Turkey?***

With this meeting, we aim to address the following issues:

- What are the foreign policy risks and opportunities for the peace, stability, and welfare of the region considering the influences of Turkey and other third actors?
- What implications have TFP in Western Balkans for German-French and overall EU approach to Turkey?
- What are the effects of Turkish policies on the EU Enlargement process and vice versa?
- What are the main economic dimensions of foreign policy issues in Western Balkans?

- **What are the implications of the refugee crisis and the challenges to European migration regime for the countries of the region?**
- **How to develop a joint German-French approach to Turkish policies in Western Balkans? Are there chances for joint EU-Turkey initiatives?**

**Moderation: Kristian Brakel - Heinrich Böll Foundation Istanbul**