Section G

Turkish and Muslim Minorities in A. Davutoğlu's Geopolitical Thought

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I. Principal tenets

Ahmet Davutoğlu aims to set the theoretical premises for Turkey's geopolitical upgrading and "strategic renewal", so that the country's "strategic depth" comes to the forefront [1]. Davutoğlu's geopolitical perception is dominated by two tenets: the notion of "geopolitical depth" and the notion of "geographical centre" [2]. It would be useful in this respect to outline these two geopolitical tenets, before discussing a crucial issue, i.e. the geopolitical and strategic importance attributed by Davutoğlu to the Turkish and Muslim minorities.

The tenet of the so-called "geopolitical centre" derives from the view, as well as the belief, that Turkey is the geographical centre of three successive geographical zones: (a) of the near land basin (in Turkish: "yakin kara

havzası”), which includes the Balkan peninsula, Middle East and Caucasus; (b) the near maritime basin (in Turkish: “yakın deniz havzası”), which is delimited by the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Adriatic Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; and (c) the near continental basin (in Turkish: yakın kita havzası”), an area delimited by Europe, Northern Africa, Southern Asia, and Central and Eastern Asia [3]. Consequently, for Davutoğlu, Turkey should fully perceive its central geographical location and design its foreign policy, in a manner consistent with and in favour of its aims and interests in these three geographical–geopolitical zones.

The tenet of modern Turkey's “strategic depth” is inextricably linked to the tenet of “geographical centre” and is based on the view that Turkey has the following valuable advantages in its geographical area: (a) it is a geographical and a geopolitical centre and, hence, it has a geographical depth; (b) it is a historical centre and therefore it has a historical depth; (c) it is a cultural centre for the surrounding areas, owing to its linguistic, religious and cultural ties and affinities and can therefore exercise a strong geocultural influence on its periphery; and (d) it is the centre of energy transit routes and can therefore exercise geo-economic influence [4].

It is worth noting in this respect that the basis of Davutoğlu's geopolitical thought is the importance that he attributes to the “stable data” (in his words) of a state's power and influence: geography, history, population and civilisation [5].

II. The Turkish and Muslim minorities as a tool of geopolitical influence and power for Turkey

The population factor is of particular importance for designing Turkey's foreign policy and geopolitical influence, particularly on the periphery of the country's near land basin. In this paper, we shall examine the geopolitical importance and the possibilities attributed by Davutoğlu to the Turkish and Muslim minorities outside Turkey, as well his suggestions for exploiting their potential by Turkey.

It must be stressed that the geopolitical and geostrategic role of minorities (Turkish and/or Muslim) is seen as a result of the geographical depth, the historical depth and the cultural depth (Turkish language and culture, Islamic re-

3 Ahmet Davutoğlu, Stratejik Derinlik ..., op.cit., 118.
4 Konstantinos Gogos, Turkey and ..., op.cit., 187–188.
5 Ahmet Davutoğlu, Strategic Depth ..., op.cit., 48–58. Such data is complemented by “dynamic data”: economy, technology and military capability. See ibid., 58–65.

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ligion) of the Ottoman empire and of modern Turkey. Davutoğlu makes very frequent use of the qualifiers “Turkish”, “Ottoman” and “Muslim” to characterise the minorities, or even their identity, origin, culture or religion.

Ahmet Davutoğlu believes that the Ottoman empire was aware of the importance of the Muslim populations living within its boundaries, and sought to utilise this fact as a geopolitical advantage: “Abdul Hamid II, on the one hand, perfected the balancing policy using delicate and flexible diplomacy and, on the other, attempted to create an international Hinterland based on the Muslims from colonies, who lived within the boundaries of the Ottoman state, so as to enhance the advantages of such a balancing policy” [6].

Moreover, Davutoğlu attributes this kind of geopolitical perception to the Young Turks, as well: “During the rule of Union and Progress, the notion of Hinterland was restated on the basis of Turkism, while the idea of Islamic Union continued to be used as a means of tactics against the colonialists. For this reason, significant effort was put so as to maintain the relationship between the two above-mentioned elements” [7]. At this point, it is acknowledged that the Muslim and Turkish populations outside the Ottoman empire were both important and valuable. Moreover, the Turk scholar considers that the Treaty of Lausanne has harmed the interests of the Turkish Republic in relation to the Muslim minorities outside the borders of the state:

In foreign policy terms, the Islamic identity was abolished, together with the policies for which it was believed that they had magnified the controversies between the Ottoman state and the Western colonialist empires. This resulted in the collapse of the state, while in terms of interior policy, the founding elements of the state, forming a majority, were identified as bearers of the Islamic identity moving around the axis of religion, by recognising the status of minority only to the non-Muslim populations of the new state [8].

In Davutoğlu's geopolitical thought, maximum attention is paid to Turkey's “near land basin”, because it includes the countries and regions sharing common borders with Turkey or being located in its neighbourhood [9].

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6 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth* …, op.cit., 120.
7 Ibid., 121.
9 The following extract is indicative: “Turkey will be in a position to reinforce its international position and to create its proper zone of influence in the next century, only if it manages to unite its rich historical experience and its geopolitical and geo-economic capability with an effective and consistent renewal of its interior policy”. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth* …, op.cit., 137.
pondingly, attention is paid to the role and the geostrategic value of the Turkish and Muslim minorities that are located in this basin [10].

In this context, special reference is made to the area of Caucasus, to the Balkans (including Greece) and to Cyprus. On the other hand, the scholar does not forget to mention the Muslim minorities located in Western Europe.

II.1 Cyprus

The geopolitical importance of Cyprus for Turkey is huge. Davutoğlu stresses that the Cyprus issue relies on two axes for the Turkish side: the axis of “geographical location” and the “social axis”, in other words the issue of the protection of the Muslim Turkish community of Cyprus. We should stress Davutoğlu’s words in relation to the axis of the Muslim Turkish minority of Cyprus, as this axis “emanates from Turkey’s historical responsibility to consolidate the security of the Muslim Turkish community of the island and it is an axis with a social character. Following the reduction of the territories of the Ottoman state, one of the main parameters of the Ottoman-Turkish foreign policy has always been the security and the continuity of the Muslim elements that remained on the abandoned territories. The eventual formation of a wave starting from a region, because of Turkey's incapability or impotence, and expanding into other regions, necessitates a state of general alert and vigilance. Any weakness that might arise in relation to the security and the protection of the Turkish community in Cyprus entails the risk of diffusion, by waves, into Western Thrace and Bulgaria, or even into Azerbaijan and Bosnia. For this reason, the protection of the Turkish Muslim community in Cyprus is very important, not only in terms of this community, but also for the future of other communities, which are Ottoman residues” [11]. Evidently, Davutoğlu's geopolitical thought is focused not only on the Turkish-Muslim community of Cyprus, but also on the communities which Turkey purports to protect, in the Balkans and in Caucasus.

10 “Turkey, which is considered the heir of seven hundred years of accumulation of the Ottoman state, is still perceived as being the political centre for the human element of the near land basin. The fact that the Ottoman residues that are located in the near land basin see Turkey either as a power capable of protecting them in situ, or as a ultimate asylum, to which they will resort in order to confront an eventual cleansing operation leave Turkey in front of new regional missions, directed by the parameter of History”. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Stratejik Derinlik …, op.cit., 143.

11 Ahmet Davutoğlu, Strategic Depth …, op.cit., 278–279.
II.2 Caucasus

Davutoğlu maintains that two countries are particularly significant for Turkey's foreign policy in the area of the Balkan peninsula and Caucasus: Albania and Azerbaijan: Turkey's relations with these two countries determine Turkey's greater influence in the area. He stresses the following in particular:

As is understandable, the Armenian–Azeri conflict produces results far beyond the expected limits of a simple dispute, and directly determines the integrity and stability of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a strategic ally of Turkey, in Caucasus generally and in Southern Caucasus in particular. If it is necessary to make a comparison, from the perspective of peripheral ties, as long as Azerbaijan does not acquire a stable and powerful position in Caucasus, and as long as the same holds true for Albania in the Balkans, it would not be feasible for Turkey, neither to increase its importance in these two regions, nor to develop policies for the Adriatic and the Caspian Seas, both located within its greater maritime area and its sphere of influence [12].

Davutoğlu's geopolitical stance denotes also the importance of Muslim Bosnia for Turkey's foreign policy, as well as the geostrategic and diplomatic conflicts which the scholar considers as developing in the region:

The relations of alliance, which Turkey developed with Bosnia and Albania, could be developed efficiently to such a degree, as to preclude the formation of an opposite coalition by Bulgaria and Greece. In this sense, it would be valuable to establish alliance relations with Azerbaijan, because it would be able to activate alternative foreign policy options, which would deter the formation of a competitive coalition between Russia, Armenia and Iran, so that these options can simultaneously become the basis for the development of an extensive oil policy [13].

II.3 Balkans

Particularly with regard to the Balkans, Davutoğlu maintains that the complex ethnic and religious structure of the region is a factor directly affecting the policies in the region and beyond [14]. He makes a particular reference to the

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12 Ahmet Davutoğlu, Strategic Depth …, op.cit., 207.
13 Ibid., 231.
14 Ibid., 454.
Bosnian Muslims: he sees them as “Ottoman residues”, and defends them against their opponents both in the region and internationally [15].

As pertains to the Balkans, Davutoğlu starts his analysis by placing emphasis on the Ottoman period and the Ottoman administration of the region. He considers the Balkans of the 19th cent. to be part of the “Ottoman geopolitical axis” of influence and the latter, in turn, to be part of the competition with two other geopolitical axes: the “Orthodox–Slavic” axis and the “Roman–German” one.

In Davutoğlu’s view, the Muslim Albanians and the Bosnians were identified with the Ottoman civilisation [16], and with the Ottomans’ Islam [17]. Con-

15 “While Serbia and Croatia have strengthened their position as unified states, the future of Bosnia–Herzegovina, where the Muslims are a majority, has depended on the peace ensured by a vaguely formulated agreement. This situation entails new risks in general for the Muslim minorities of the Balkans, particularly for the Bosnians. The Ottoman residues of the Balkans, instead of being disoriented by the optimistic peacemaking rhetoric, are obliged to be vigilant vis–a–vis the said dangers, now more than ever, and to ensure the military power, the strategic activity and the diplomatic supremacy that will substantiate the now vague content of this agreement. The painful experiences during the war in Bosnia bear proof to the fact that the most important element, which is bound to ensure the existence of Bosnia, beyond any international effort and peace talks, is the will of the Bosnians to achieve political independence and the factual confirmation of this will through military power”. Ibid., 464–465. At another point, he refers to “ethnic cleansing”: “The non–return of any of the Bosnians (Muslims) to the city, but their return to the suburbs of Srebrenica, which before the war was almost exclusively Muslim, and where the most merciless ethnic cleansing in world history took place, brings to the surface of discussions the issue of the legitimisation of the ensured regime through the Dayton agreement”. Ibid., 459.

16 “In the context of the European diplomacy of the 19th cent., the said [world–wide] antagonism brought about the conflict of three historical heritages, of which two are developing and one is receding. One of the fields of influence is the heritage of the Holy Roman–German empire [...]. The second is the Orthodox–Slavic field of influence, which reflects the ideal of the Russians’ third Rome [...]. The Ottoman axis, receding vis–a–vis the above–mentioned two developing axes, was relying in the North on the historical Polish policy and in the South on the infrastructure of authentic Balkan tribes, such as the Bosnians (Muslims) and the Albanians, who were identified with the Ottoman civilisation. The balanced English policy had set as its target to create interim political formations, between the German and the Slavic elements, similar to those in former Yugoslavia”. Ibid., 474.

17 “Since the time when the Ottoman state dominated in the Balkans, the traditional Ottoman–Turkish Balkan policy had two basic support groups: the Bosnians (Muslims) and the Albanians. These two endemic tribes in the Balkans favoured Is-

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sequently, this view orients the reader towards concluding that, nowadays, it is imperative and indispensable for Turkey to pursue a conscious and friendly policy vis-à-vis the Albanians and the Bosnians. Besides, this is imposed also by the conflicts in the Balkans, because, as he remarks, “the Balkan crises has been almost transformed into an operation for exterminating the Islamic and Ottoman identity in the region. This is clear in the recent crises in Bosnia and in Kosovo” [18].

What is clear in this context is the aim to exercise geopolitical influence, grounded on the common cultural Ottoman heritage and on the common religion (Islam). In this sense, the scholar attributes particular importance to the existence and political support of the Muslim state formations, and of the Muslim communities in the Balkan peninsula.

Turkey's involvement in the matters of concern for the Muslims of the Balkan peninsula can ensure significant geopolitical gains for Turkey. Davutoğlu maintains that:

In a juncture where the (Muslim) Albanians and Bosnians do not enjoy stability and influence in the Balkans, it is not possible for Turkey to feel comfortable in Eastern Thrace and in Anatolia. For Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina still holds the place of an advanced political, economic and cultural outpost, extending well into Central Europe, while Albania constitutes the barometer for Turkey's Balkan policy. If Turkey fails to provide support to the cause of stability and security of Albania in the Balkans, it is impossible for Turkey to exercise permanent influence in the region.

As stressed above, Albania and Azerbaijan hold similar positions, in terms of the role they play in Turkey's policy in the Balkans and in Caucasus respectively. [...] Albania has a considerable weight for Turkey's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Adriatic, as does Azerbaijan for the policy related to Caspian Sea.

The future of Bosnians and Albanians is the key to the Balkans, both from a geocultural and a geopolitical point of view. In the context of the slippery and changing regional relations in the Balkans, a stable factor and the most important strategic priority for Turkey, is the issue of maintaining the territories and of consolidating the security of the above-mentioned communities, which are

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Ibid., 476.
18 Ibid., 475.
Ottoman residues and link their fate with Turkey’s regional power and significance. For Turkey, this is not only a burden and a responsibility to fulfil, but it is also the most significant means for creating a field of action in the Balkans. The zone extending to the North–west, through the Bihac–Central Bosnia–Eastern Bosnia–Sandžak–Kosovo–Albania–Macedonia–Kirtzali–Western Thrace ends in Eastern Thrace and, from the viewpoint of Turkey, has the character of a vital artery for its Balkan geopolitics and geo–culture” [19].

Furthermore, Davutoğlu considers that the Balkans is a field of antagonism whose main actors are the Serbs and the Greeks against Turkey, using the “anti–Ottoman and anti–Turkish picture” [20]. Following this, the Turk scholar specifies the priorities of Turkey’s foreign policy: protection of the Muslim populations of the Balkans, and of their cultural identity, enhancement of social infrastructures, facilitation and increase of communication among them [21]. He also stresses the need to strengthen Albania, as well as the role of the Albanian populations outside the borders of Albania. Davutoğlu maintains in this respect that the Albanian minority in FYROM offers Turkey the possibility to intervene, in favour of the Albanian population [22].

Moreover, he maintains that, in this way, Turkey can confront an eventual coalition between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, which “will have as a consequence the increase of pressures on the strategic zone, an issue of vital importance for Turkey in the region, the dissolution of Macedonia [sic] and the collapse of Turkey’s relations with Bosnia and Albania. For this reason, Turkey’s relations with Bulgaria have to develop both on a bilateral and on a multilateral level. Also, if it were possible to establish a bilateral committee for supervising the Balkan issues, a constant control of Bulgaria’s intentions would necessarily be established through this committee” [23].

The aim being to increase Turkey’s influence and involvement in the Balkan peninsula, Davutoğlu proposes to promote and implement policies related to minority issues and rights, which he denotes as “policies surrounding the re-

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19 Ibid., 476–477.
20 Ibid., 475. He writes as follows: “Turkey is obliged to juxtapose, in a cautious manner, the elements of worldwide antagonism in the region, to the anti–Ottoman and anti–Turkish picture that is being redressed in the Balkans, mainly by the Serbians and the Greeks. There is also need to create the diplomatic and actual means ensuring Turkey’s intervention in the region. Denial of the political and culture and of the institutions inherited from the Ottoman state create a serious deadlock, from the perspective of the implementation of the Balkan policy. Our historical and whole–hearted proximity to the Bosnian (Muslim) and the Albanian element is known to all. However, there is no international legal instruments expressing these feelings”.
21 See: ibid., 478.
22 See: ibid., 480–481.
23 Ibid., 482.
gion”: the establishment of some kind of a small Balkan UNESCO for protecting the “Ottoman–Turkish cultural heritage” or for promoting “the cooperation for ensuring the cultural and educational rights of ethnic communities with different cultural backgrounds in the context of the Balkan states. Such an agreement can serve as an appropriate basis, mainly for Kosovo and Western Thrace”, as well as the formation of areas of economic collaboration and common interests [24].

In conclusion, the strategic and geopolitical significance of the Balkans is obvious: “Let us not forget that the fate of the Ottoman state was sealed in the Balkans. If Turkey is unable to exercise influence outside its borders in the Balkans, it will not be in a position to play an active role, either in international relations in general or in regional balances. [25].

II.4 Western Europe

Davutoğlu refers also to the Muslim and Turkish communities that have been formed and are developing in Europe, and in the West in general. He anticipates that Turkey might enjoy some strategic gains from its relation and contact with the Turkish–Muslim and Muslim communities of Western countries. Davutoğlu holds “Turkey is perhaps first on the list of countries that will be influenced positively by the demographic changes taking place in favour of the Muslim minorities in Western countries. The increase of these communities in Western countries and the exploitation of the undoubted cultural, political and economic influences, are a source of significant possibilities for Turkey, given the important Turkish human element in these countries. On the contrary, their inappropriate exploitation is a force that can be turned against Turkey, at any given moment. Turkey can be earnestly represented, culturally and politically, by cultivating a stance that will not alienate it from the elements of this demographic change” [26].

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24 Ibid., 482–483.
25 Ahmet Davutoğlu, Stratejik Derinlik …, op.cit., 322.
26 Ibid., 263.