

MIGRATION, MINORITIES & REGIONAL IDENTITIES

Turkey and the Black Sea region are located between different geographical regions such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Their location perforce constitutes them as a physical bridge and has traditionally pitted them at the crossroads between different historical forces and empires. This was as much a feature in prehistoric and historic times as in the contemporary era, when trans-boundary migration remains an important domestic and international concern. The interplay between these diverse historical forces and migratory patterns has been a significant factor in shaping the region's domestic and social make-up over time. It has played an important role in forming cultural identities whether at individual, regional, national or supra-national level. Simultaneously, these processes in relation to migrant communities have also influenced the neighbouring areas around Turkey and the Black Sea region. This Strategic Research Initiative aims to promote research interests across different academic disciplines that pertain to the themes of migration across time in Turkey and the Black Sea coastal region.

As part of its focus on contemporary aspects of Turkey, over the past couple of years the Institute has been involved in two significant and exciting research initiatives which promise to generate new knowledge and insights regarding Turkey's emergence as an increasingly significant regional and international member of the international community. On the Cusp: States that Straddle is concerned with the field of international relations and the role of countries that cannot be placed easily into one regional category or another. Balkan Futures concerns itself with the development and contemporary history of the Balkan region, with a particular emphasis on Turkey and Greece.

Balkan Futures

Marc Herzog | British Institute at Ankara

The Institute has become centrally involved in a new long-term project over the past year: the Balkan Futures research programme. This is a very ambitious endeavour, funded by the British Academy, which is being jointly run with the British School at Athens (BSA) with the collaboration of the École française d'Athènes (EfA) as a key partner institution. The London School of Economics is also affiliated to the programme.

Balkan Futures aims to foster new research in the area of Balkan regional studies and examine inter-regional development and cooperation in southeastern Europe during a period of crisis rather than consolidation within the European Union (EU). Through assessment of the processes and trajectories of regional interaction and development over the past 10–20 years, the project aims to define potential areas for future policy-making and research. A particular focus will be Balkan perceptions of the region, examining how the region has changed since the collapse of communism. The increasing relevance of the EU *vis-à-vis* the development of internal state structures and institutions

will be assessed, as will inter-state relations and the management of trans-boundary issues. In the current atmosphere of political and economic crisis within the EU, it is also of interest to look at constructions of identity and self-image, given the rise of nationalism and the political right in many states in the region.

The project also encompasses a more specific focus on Greece and Turkey within the context of the Balkans, examining their roles and aspirations in the region, and their bilateral relations which historically have played a major part in shaping Balkan political identities. Due to the Ottoman legacy, Turkey is historically tied to the Balkan region. The collapse of the Ottoman empire at the end of World War I and the reluctance of the early Turkish Republic to involve itself actively in its neighbouring regions dampened this connection. This development was furthered by World War II and the onset of the Cold War, during which Turkey became a staunch NATO member. Thus the country was excluded from the region until the dropping of the iron curtain in 1989. Since then, the level of Turkish involvement in the region at political, economic and socio-cultural levels has risen steadily and Turkey has emerged as a major regional actor.

At the same time, Turkey and the Ottoman legacy have also been present in debates on Balkan identities and nation-building narratives among many of the countries in south-eastern Europe in which it figures as the main historical ‘other’. Until the debt crisis and resulting tension with key EU member states, Greece, the oldest EU member (and the earliest independent nation-state) in southeastern Europe, aspired to increase its political and economic influence in the region. The crisis has altered the balance of power, and its impact on Greek society, politics and economic concerns will be examined in terms of Greece’s regional and supra-regional attachments in the Balkans, keeping in mind potential future scenarios such as an exit from the Euro zone or a debt default. How it will seek to position itself as the crisis unfolds will be a matter of great interest and will impact on debates concerning the development and international orientation of the region.

A primary objective of the Balkan Futures programme is to foster new research and to support a new generation of scholars who focus on this field. As part of this aim, a three-year post-doctoral research fellowship has been established and awarded to Özge Dilaver Kalkan. She will conduct her research on the evolution and particular nature of trade links between the regional economic hubs of Thessaloniki and Istanbul. In that sense, the project hopes to create a wide-ranging and interactive network among the academic community that can support researchers and facilitate widespread dissemination of the research findings of the three-year project. In order to encourage and create these links, the programme will organise three separate multi-day workshops. The first, to be held in Ankara in spring 2013, will concentrate on the contemporary role of Turkey within the region. This part of the programme will also attempt to link to the notion of the cusp state, by looking at Turkey as major regional actor which is simultaneously also seen as an outsider by many in the Balkans. The other two workshops will be held in Athens, at the BSA and EfA, and will look more generally at the Balkan region as well as Greece’s contemporary links to it.



On the Cusp workshop 2012, Ankara

On the Cusp: States that Straddle

Marc Herzog | British Institute at Ankara

On the Cusp is a research project in the field of international relations led by Philip Robins of Oxford University and funded by a major grant from the British Academy. It also involves other institutions such as the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, the Netherlands Higher Education Council in Ankara (NIHA) and the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. On the Cusp is partly based on a research article that Dr Robins wrote in 2006 (‘The 2005 Brismes Lecture. A double gravity state: Turkish foreign policy reconsidered’ *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33.2: 199–211) which dealt with the conventional characterisation of Turkey being located between major regions of international politics and how this affected Turkish foreign policy. A state that is geopolitically clearly part of a region may be expected to assume the behaviour that is dominant among its neighbours, both functionally and normatively. The European Union and the Middle East offer good examples of groups of states with unified behaviour. In Turkey’s case, its particular geographical placement has led it to adopt approaches that mix regional norms and political cultures. Philip Robins argues that this need not just be seen as detrimental for the conduct of an effective foreign policy. Instead, ‘the double gravity of Turkey’s normative geography’ may have provided the country’s foreign policy with skills and resources that have served it well in its emergence as an influential multi-regional actor. This article constitutes the initial source for the later development of the On the Cusp research project.

Extending the focus of this initial work, the project seeks to examine country cases in the international system, such as Turkey, which cannot easily be assigned to one region or another and are therefore treated as ‘outsiders’ or ‘deviants’ in the literature of international relations. In addition to looking at how Turkey’s foreign policy is influenced by its condition of being part of several regions simultaneously, the research project also seeks to open up new dimensions of understanding in the scholarship of international relations regarding countries in a similar position to Turkey. This project therefore presents an exciting opportunity to contribute new theoretical insights at a broad level to international relations scholarship.

A first major workshop was held at METU in Ankara in March 2012. The opening event was chaired by Sir David Logan, the Chairman of the Institute, and featured presentations by Şafak Gökçürk, the head of policy planning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yaşar Yakış, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, as well as David Gardner, the international affairs editor of *The Financial Times*. The three-day workshop brought together a highly diverse group of international scholars to discuss approaches to and ideas on the concept of the cusp state in international relations. Apart from Turkey, other cases included Brazil, Iran, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Taiwan and Ukraine. A second workshop will be held in October at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice.