

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.