

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.

Balkan Futures: one year on

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It is most gratifying to write on the progress of the Balkan Futures research programme after the first article in last year's *Heritage Turkey*. The past year has seen lots of activity and the following article will endeavour to give a quick summary of the key developments and events that were held and are being planned, especially the principal workshops, the research project of the Balkan Futures Research Fellow and the next steps down the road for the programme. The Balkan Futures research programme is jointly run with the British School at Athens (BSA) with the collaboration of the Ecole française d'Athènes (EfA). It is funded by the British Academy, and the London School of Economics is also affiliated to the programme. It is a three-year research programme that concentrates on themes of inter-regional development and cooperation in the Balkans. The project also encompasses a more specific focus on Greece and Turkey, examining their roles and interests in a region where they have historically played major roles in shaping social and collective identities.

Workshops

The time frame of Balkan Futures envisages three central workshops to be held within the duration of the research programme, although lots of complimentary events have also been held in the past year on both sides of the Aegean. The first of the workshops, titled *Rethinking Turkey's Current Role and Engagement in the Balkans*, focused on the multifaceted nature of Turkey's contemporary engagement and role with the Balkans and was held in Ankara on 16–17 April. The workshop was divided into three central panel sessions which looked at different aspects

of this relationship, such as Turkey's regional foreign policy and external relations, the economic interactions between Turkey and the region and, lastly, questions and themes of civil society and identity that are influential in Turkey's relations with the region. The participants, who came from a selection of Balkan member-states and beyond, presented intriguing insights on these themes from a variety of angles.

The workshop's opening event featured Turkey's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Naci Korum, and Tim Judah, a veteran journalist whose coverage of the Balkan region is well-known and respected. It attracted a large audience of around 100 people which included members of the diplomatic representation of over 20 countries, including the ambassadors of Australia, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro. The audience also included many members of Turkish governmental ministries, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as academics, scholars and researchers from Turkish universities and think-tanks. A reception at the British Embassy was also organised on the evening of the 16 April as part of the workshop.



Deputy Foreign Minister Naci Korum speaking at the workshop held in Ankara

Although Turkey's historical link to the Balkans is a much-covered field, especially in the year of the centenary of the Balkan Wars, the topic of its contemporary regional presence and engagement is quite specific. As such, the workshop was one of the first to look at this topic in such multifaceted depth, from a variety of different subjects and themes and bringing together a diverse mix of researchers from different disciplines and backgrounds. This is important as one of the central aims of Balkan Futures is to generate new research networks focusing on the Balkans. The workshop was co-organised with and held at the premises of USAK (International Strategic Research Organisation), an internationally renowned think-tank that concentrates its research on international affairs and foreign policy. This proved to be a very fruitful union, and USAK's focus on issues of foreign relations and good links with Turkish state ministries were helpful in ensuring the participation of some of the main speakers. Due to the interesting nature of the subject matter, the wide range of participants and the large and distinguished audience that the workshop attracted, it also managed to garner quite a lot of very positive media coverage. This included coverage in various publications such as the English-language daily *Today Zaman*, the current affairs magazine *Aksyon* and a large section in USAK's monthly journal, *Analist*, that also featured interviews with individual participants. In addition, Channel 24 and the news portal Haberler covered the event and there were short reports on TRT Radio, TRT Türk, TRT English and Anadolu Ajansı.

Overall, Rethinking Turkey's Current Role and Engagement in the Balkans was a fantastic start to the planned series of Balkan Futures workshops. We are now planning the second official workshop, which is to be held in Athens at the beginning of March 2014 at the BSA and EfA. It will examine the historical evolution and development of state welfare and public services and other public agencies across the Balkans. These include *inter alia* public institutions that deliver healthcare, education and welfare services, as well as banking and financial agencies. This focus will be set within the broader interaction between citizens' changing expectations of their states and the evolution of state duties. Therefore, the workshop will map the route by which public institutions arrived at their current form. The era from the Ottoman period to the emergence of independent states, the communist era, the post-Cold War period and the era of EU membership will all be examined; these periods have each had a significant influence on the development of particular institutions in the Balkans. By tracing historically dependent processes and evolutionary paths between and among these periods, the workshop will assess how contemporary institutions and structures in the realm of public and welfare services and delivery have emerged, developed and gained (or not) legitimacy and public acceptance. This thematic focus will enhance current understandings of the challenges and issues faced by contemporary public institutions in the

region. In turn, it connects with themes of political, economic and social crises against a background of demographic and environmental concerns.

The last workshop in the official series of three will be held in winter 2014/2015. As with the second workshop, it will also take place in Athens, with the BSA and EfA acting as the main hosts. This time the subject will be an evaluation of the regional role of Greece within the Balkans, as well as internal developments within the country over the past five years, and will cover the scope and nature of its foreign policy aims in the Balkans, trade relations and the current role of the EU in this context. Prior to the onset of the economic crisis, Greece, the first EU member from south-eastern Europe, was a key actor in the region economically, politically and culturally. As such, the workshop will take place against an open and dynamic background as the economic crisis affecting Greece is still unfolding.

Research Fellow

Apart from the events mentioned above, another key plank of the project is the appointment of a Research Fellow for the three-year period of the programme. This appointment connects with the principal objective of Balkan Futures – the production of new research by a new generation of scholars in the field of Balkan regional studies. Dr Özge Dilaver Kalkan was appointed in June 2012, and is carrying out a research project titled 'The Bridge with a Closed Gate: Modelling Trade, Mobility and Barriers Between Istanbul and Thessaloniki'. The project, known as BETWEEN – IT, aims to study important characteristics of the trade flows and economic mobility between Thessaloniki and Istanbul, focusing on the socio-economic contexts and geographical patterns of these interactions. The project also aims to build state-of-the-art agent-based computer simulation models that will enable scenario analysis and projections of the research findings into the future. The project employs grounded simulation, which is a mixed-method research design that Özge developed during her PhD. It starts with studying a social phenomenon, paying particular attention to interactions, institutions and the way individuals make sense of the 'rules of the game' in a particular socio-economic context. Selected findings of the fieldwork are then simulated with agent-based models in order to explore patterns emerging from these rules and contexts under different scenarios. Agent-based modelling is a research approach that generates a high number of virtual objects representing social and economic actors. The model is then used for studying the interactions between these actors and the societal outcomes of these interactions.

Therefore, reflecting back on the past year, Balkan Futures has taken off as a multi-pronged research programme, picked up speed and is now in full flight.

http://www.bsa.ac.uk/pages/balkans.php?cat_id=104