



On Monday 21 March 2022, former Greek Prime Minister's security advisor Alexandros Diakopoulos took part in the penultimate conference of the 2022 cycle of the Chair of Great Contemporary Strategic Issues. Drawing on his previous experience in the Greek Navy, Vice-Admiral Diakopoulos proposed to revisit Turkish strategic and political interests in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. According to Admiral Diakopoulos, since Recep Tayyip Erdogan became President of Turkey in 2014, Turkey has developed a "revisionist policy" aimed at regaining a zone of influence in the Mediterranean Sea comparable to that of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey relies both, and jointly, on an increasing militarisation of its foreign policy and on its special relationship with Russia; the objective being, on the one hand, to modify to their advantage an international order dominated by the West, and to insert Turkey as a key player in the region.

Turkey seized the strategic window of opportunity left by the West in 2013: the United States, by refusing to intervene in Syria, allowed regional powers such as Turkey to fill a strategic vacuum in the region. We then witnessed a mobilisation of military policy in favour of a strengthening of Turkish foreign policy in the Mediterranean, the Middle and the Near East. According to Admiral Diakopoulos, by intervening four times in the Syrian conflict, from 2016 to the present, Turkey is not only asserting itself as a new security provider in the region, but also as an indispensable intermediary of the European Union by exploiting the issue of Syrian refugees. Moreover, it allows Ankara to perfect its "drone diplomacy" by demonstrating the effectiveness of its low-cost Bayraktar drones in military operations.

Turkey shares many similarities to Russian foreign policy; both rely on a critique of a law-based international order and a militarisation of their foreign policy. Furthermore, M. Diakopoulos warns of an illusory conflict between the two countries. Despite appearances, in the Libyan conflict, Turkish military support for the Government of National Accord (GNA), unlike that of Russia, allows both countries to legitimise the presence of their mercenaries in the region, and thus to take over the US bases in Libya. Moreover, the asymmetry between the political cultures of the two countries is striking and the revisionist rhetoric employed by both leaders calls for concrete military action, according to our

speaker. For Russia, this includes the invasion of Crimea and then of Ukraine. As for Turkey, it is the development of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine (Mavi Vatan) and its exercises in the Mediterranean Sea.

From 2008 to 2021, the Turkish Navy undertook seven denial of access manoeuvres against European ships, such as on 10 June 2020, against the French frigate Courbet. For the Admiral, these manoeuvres are inseparable from the Mavi Vatan doctrine, which states that the Ottoman Empire has collapsed due to the loss of its naval power and must therefore regain the capabilities of a deep-sea navy. Furthermore, Erdogan is showing, with this doctrine, that on the one hand he does not recognise the continental shelf of the Greek islands in the region; as seen by the November 2019 agreement with the GNA, Turkey established a new maritime border with Libya irrespective of the UN Law on the Sea. And on the other hand, Erdogan seems to have fully integrated the strategic pivotal role of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea in the global economy. Indeed, if Turkey succeeds in taking control of this maritime zone, it will have at its disposal the control of the flow of goods between Europe and Asia, as well as numerous gas and oil deposits in the region. Moreover, this doctrine is a break from that of former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who favoured the Anatolia region as a hub for global trade. Consequently, Vice Admiral Diakopoulos reminds us that the large-scale exercises carried out by the Turkish Navy in the region - entitled Mavi Vatan 2020/2021 - are scare tactics used against the Europeans.

Alongside its special relationship with Russia and the militarisation of its foreign policy, Turkey is seeking to establish a permanent place in the international diplomatic landscape. For our speaker, its maritime pressures in the Mediterranean Sea should not obscure the impact of Turkish soft power in Africa. Indeed, Erdogan is taking advantage of European colonial history, especially France's, to regain diplomatic and cultural influence on the African continent – as observed with the expansion of Turkish embassies since 2003 and of the Maarif Foundation for African mosques. The combination of political Islam and realpolitik allows Ankara to increase its political influence to the detriment of Europeans; it benefits from an overreliance between our societies on migration and energy issues in particular. Finally, Vice-Admiral Diakopoulos concludes by stating Turkey's ambition is strategic autonomy, an objective not unlike that of the European Union...