

Backsliding Turkey

- 1. Domestic policies;
- 2. Foreign Policy;
- 3. Relations with the EU.

1. Domestic policies

- See 2025 accession report;
- From the collapse of the Ottoman empire to Erdogan (1914-2002);
- AKP and political islam;
- Bad human rights record.



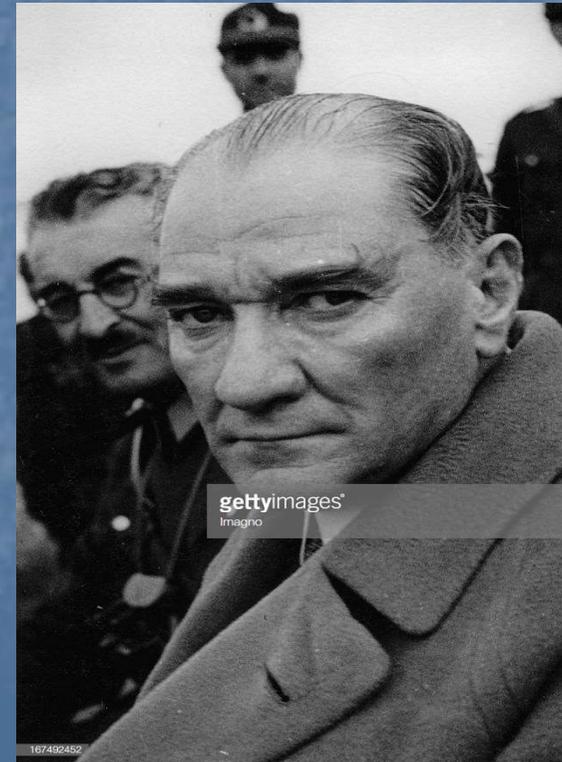
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W. & A. Johnston Edinburgh & London

« Wait
kids! To
avoid
disputes,
I'll share
the cake
for
you! »



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938)



Atatürk's century (1922-2002)

- Mustafa Kemal's personal rule (1922-1938), then Republican politicians;
- Turning the remains of the Ottoman empire into a European state;
- Secularisation of the state: end of sultan/khalife, islam under strict control;
- Transformation of society: latin alphabet, europeanisation of clothing etc...

From secularism to islamism



16/03/2026

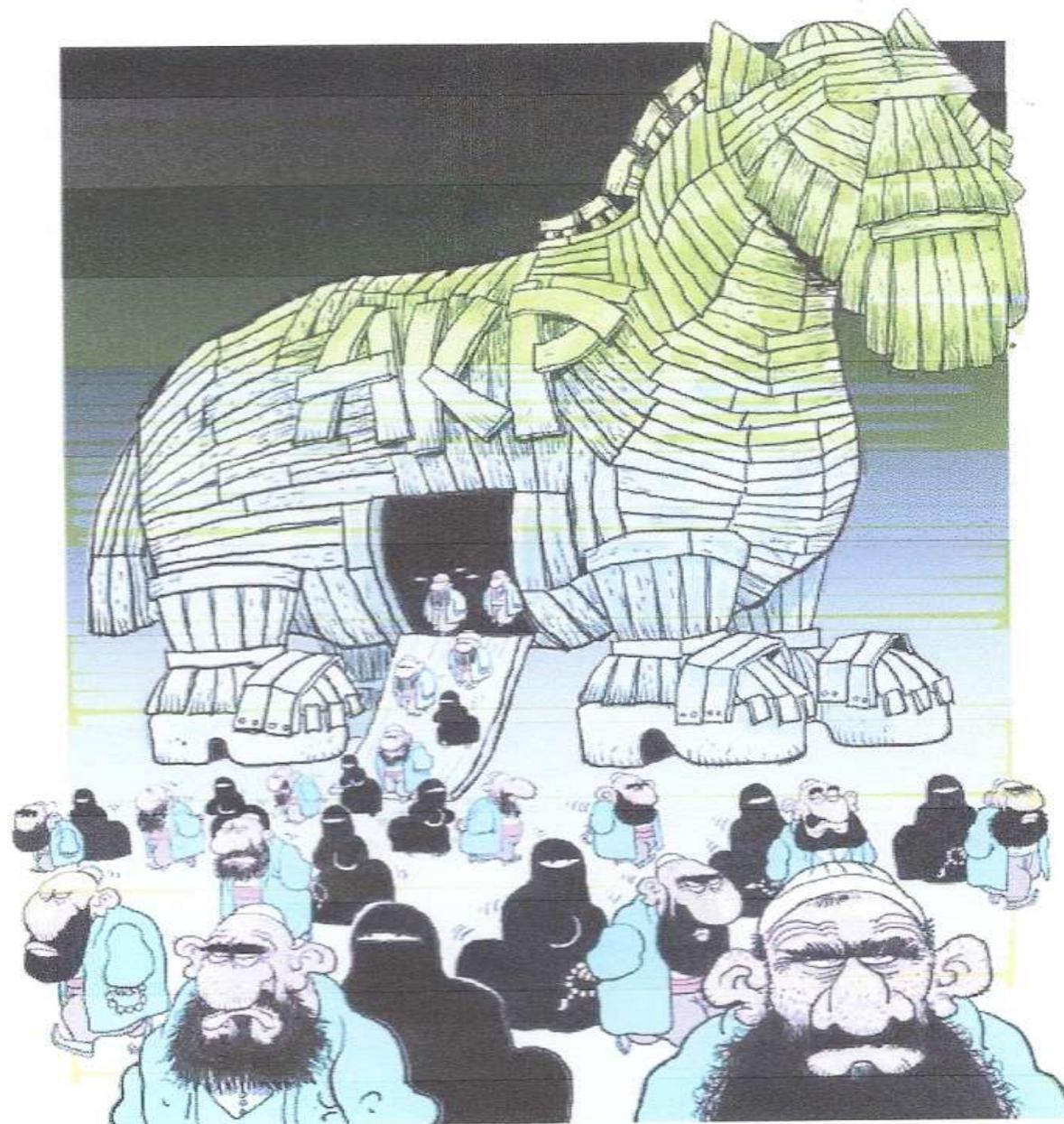


Backsliding Turkey

Brotherhood's influence & Political islam

- AKP presented itself as a conservative party akin to Germany's Christian democrats;
- AKP is taking stances that can only be explained by a proclivity for totalitarian Sunni Islamist movements;
- Its main objective is propagating political Islam of Brotherhood style (gradually imposing sharia law);
- In 2017 Turkey stopped teaching evolution at secondary schools;
- Diyanet has had its budget quadruple since 2006 to more than \$2 billion.
- Iman-hatip schools grew from 65000 students in 2002 to 1.3 million in 2022.

Moderate islamism: an illusion ?



Since 2003,
Erdoğan's
personal
behaviour is
increasingly
dictatorial and
unreliable.



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

- Born 1954 in İstanbul, much of his family hails from Rize and Georgia;
- 1969-1982: Professional football player;
- 1994-1998: Mayor of İstanbul;
- 2003-2014: Prime Minister;
- Since 2014: elected President of Turkey.

Erdoğan's views

- Studies in an *imam hatip lisesi*;
- remaining a devout Muslim with Ottoman nostalgia; close to *Ikhwan's* (Muslim Brothers' ideology) and political islam;
- Abrasive personnality, with a preference for hard power behaviour, nevertheless a shrewd politician;
- Systematic use of dramatization as a tool to increase his power.

His instruments:

- Exploiting religion for political purposes: Diyanet (religion department), SADAT (cooperation abroad), MIT (Secret Services);
- Preparing for war: high defense budget, promotion of defense industry (in particular drones), suspected of nuclear preparations, financing islamist militias.

Democrat or sultan?



Erdogan and the
Turkish upheaval

Erdoğan's new presidential palace



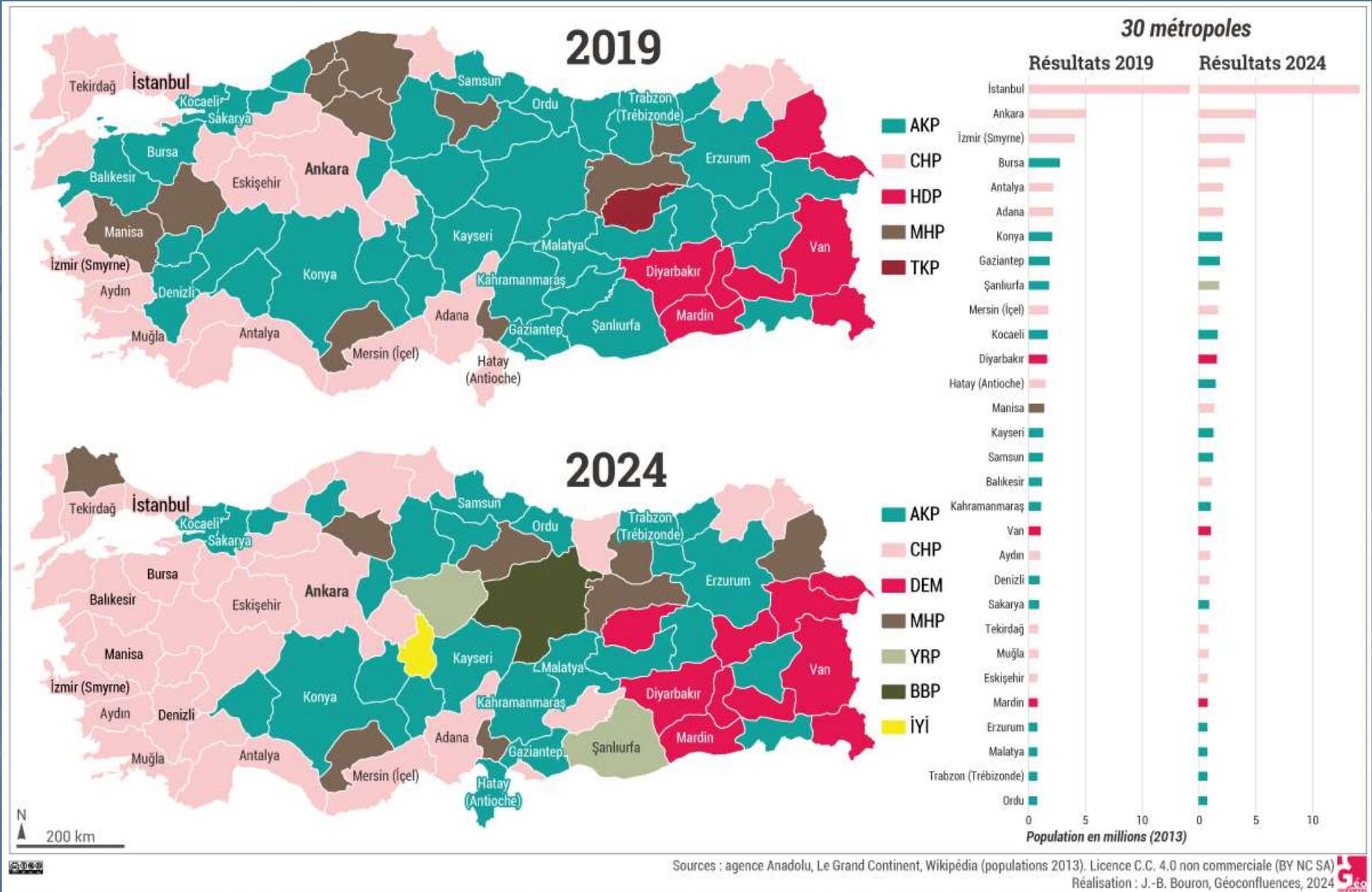
The 2016 failed « *coup d'État* »

- Erdoğan escaped (300 casualties);
- He accused the Gülen organisation, without providing convincing evidence;
- A Stalinian witch hunt followed, sending to jail 32000 suspects; more than 100000 civil servants having been sacked or suspended;
- Nearly all medias are now under strict government control;
- The Parliament is reduced to rubber-stamping Erdoğan's initiatives.

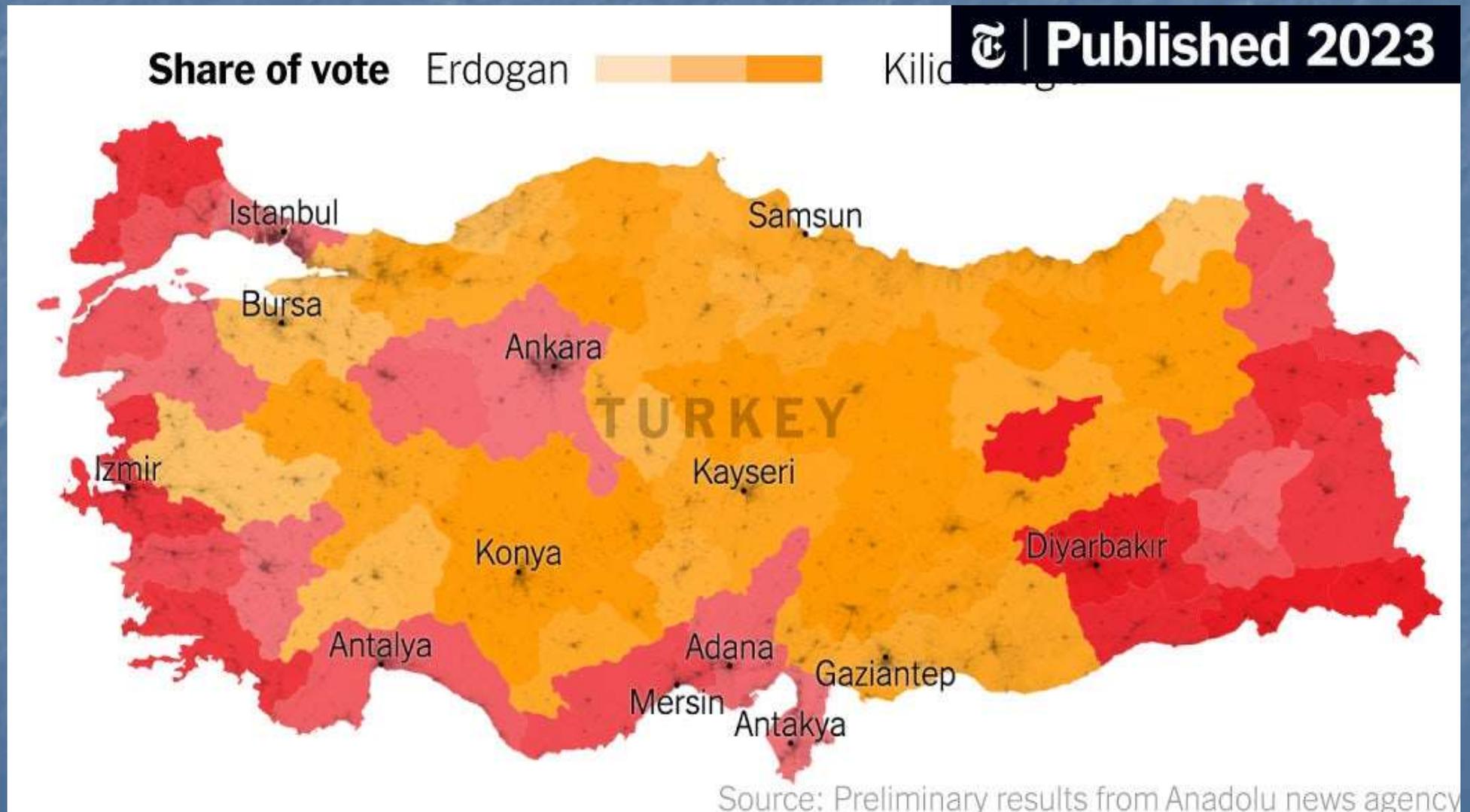
AKP = Justice and Development party



(Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) Ak = white, pure
Inspiration taken from
Erbakan, Kısakürek and
Muslim Brotherhood
ideology: « *Islam is the
solution.* »



Presidential elections 2023



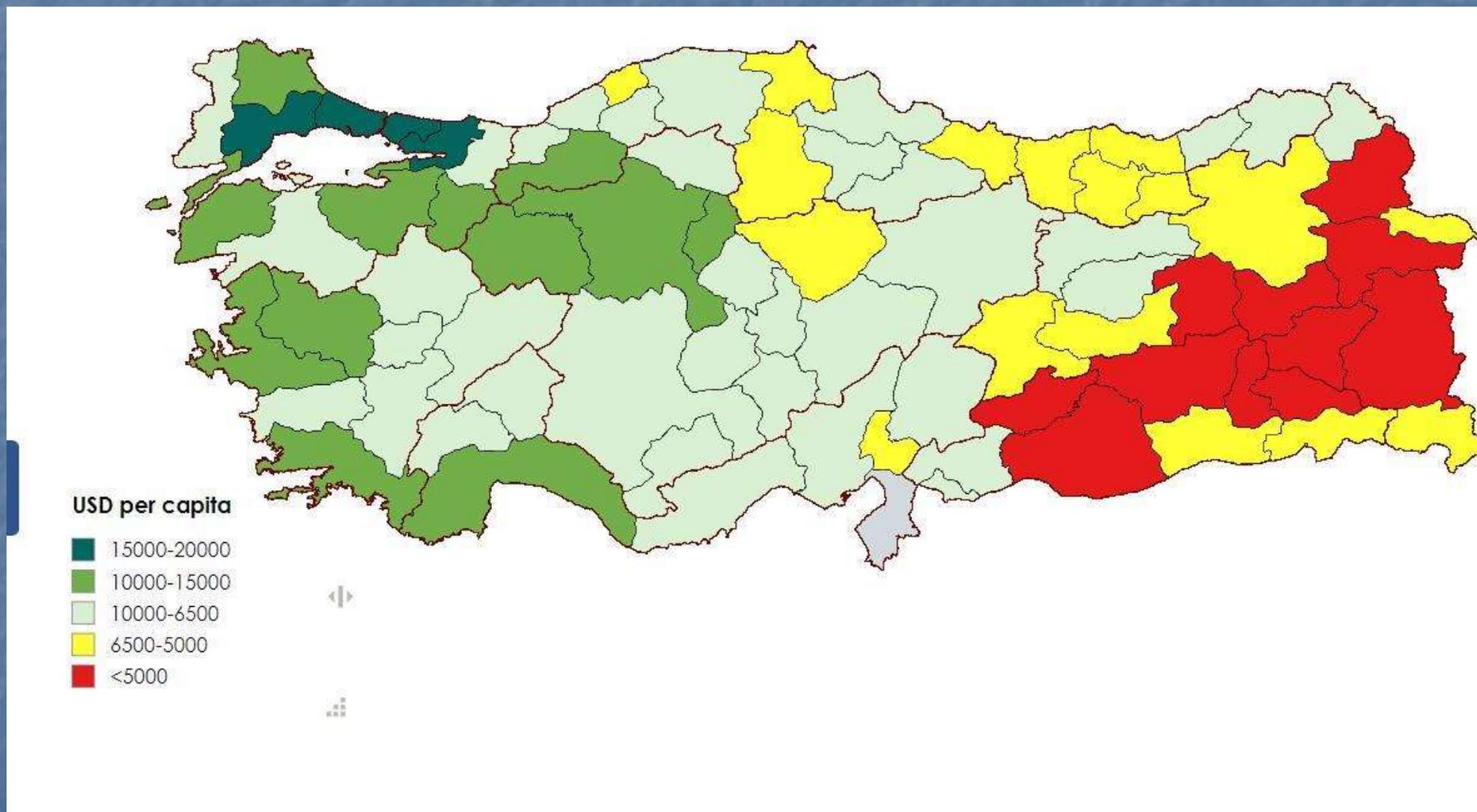
Very bad human rights record

- *Freedom House* : 33/100 classified as “not free”,
- *Reporter without borders*: 29,4/100, 159th out of 180 countries; 90% of national media under government control, many jailed journalists;
- Widespread corruption: 34/100, 107th out of 182 countries, according to *Transparency international*.

Structural economic problems

- After decades of steady growth, Turkey's economy is in crisis, not by international conspiracy, but by a long series of misguided choices of public spending (massive construction boom), credit policy, interest rates and a severe lack of credibility (large borrowing in foreign currencies, politicised monetary policy).
- With no oil and gas, low savings in relation to GDP, the country is permanently in need of daily short-term borrowings and long term foreign direct investment;
- Capable technocrats have increasingly given way to inept cronies and corrupted yes-men.

Regional disparities 2019



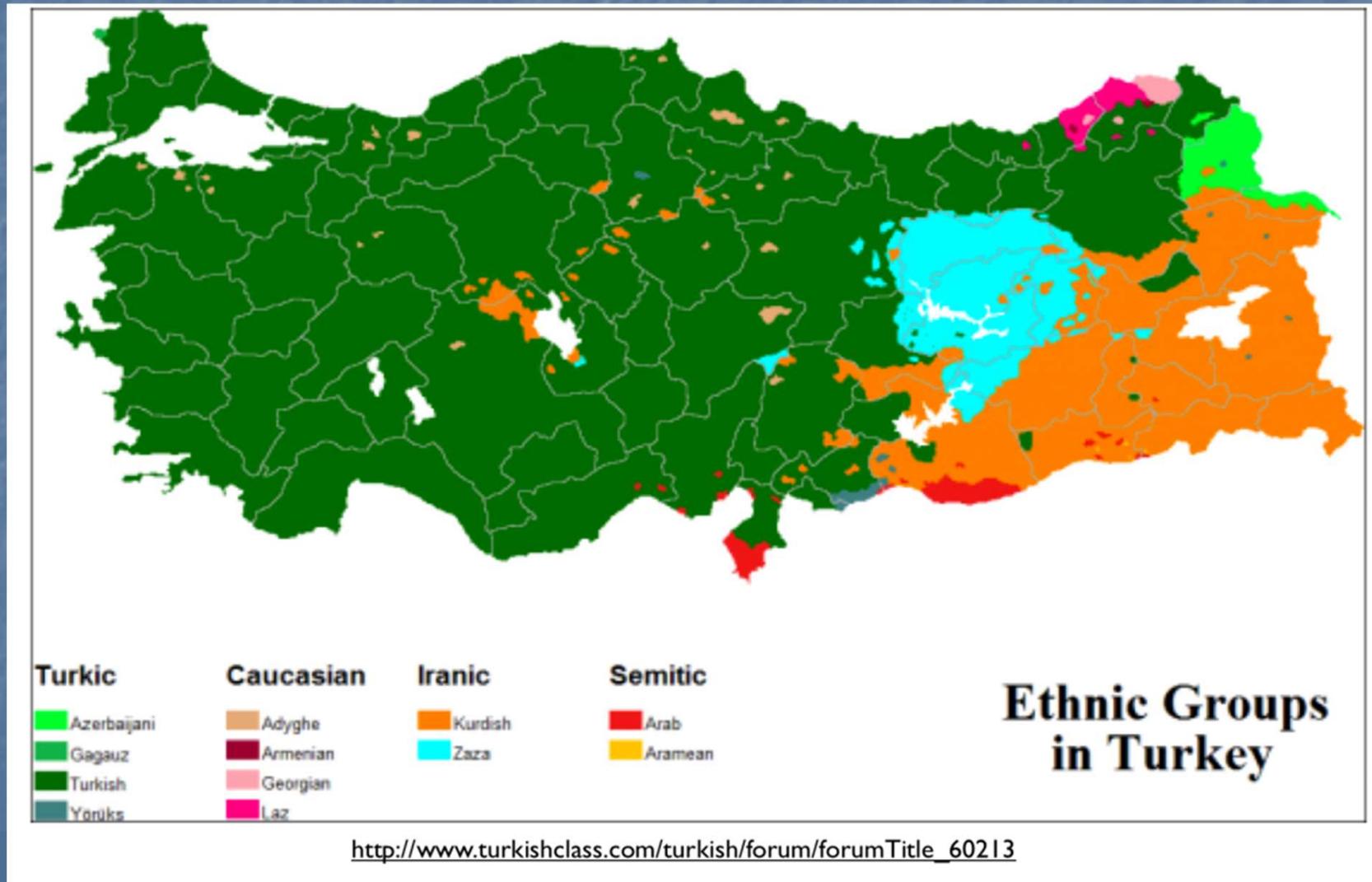
Regional disparities to be tackled

- Regional policy is lacking both at national and local levels;
 - They express many aspects of Turkish backwardness and over centralisation;
 - For many years, lagging behind provinces have been neglected;
- => Reducing regional imbalances must be a priority, in particular in the Kurdish provinces.

Minority rights: biased views

- Inside: minorities enjoy very limited rights: for years, no recognition at all, except for 3 non-moslem communities, but restrictively implemented);
- Outside: strong demands for Turkish minorities abroad: equal partnership or independence for Turkish Cypriots, special status for Turkmens in Northern Iraq, etc...

Permanence of the Kurdish problem



Nearly 20 millions Kurds in Turkey

- The existence of a Kurdish minority has been denied for years (Kurds were just « *mountain Turks* »);
- Thanks to EU pressure, some basic cultural rights (language) were granted but not really implemented;
- Since 2016, taking advantage of the failed coup, the Turkish state is again repressing the Kurds.

No recent progress

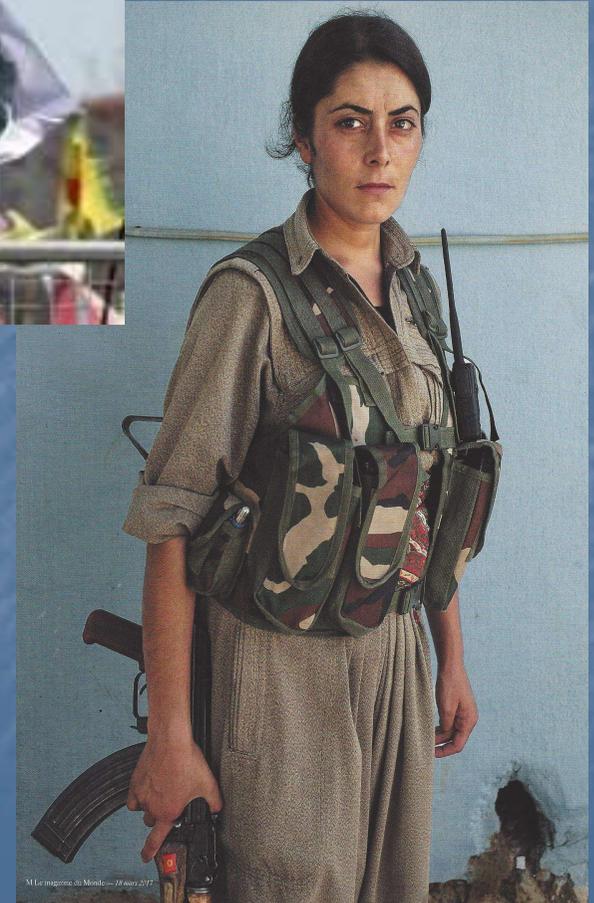
Dealing with the Kurdish problem, making peace with the PKK and its subsidiaries, has implications with other delicate issues:

- No catching up process of lagging behind regions, as it requires the establishment of an efficient regional policy;
- Lack of decentralisation, Turkey being one of the last great country without regions;

Backsliding at national level means also lack of freedom at provincial and local levels, in particular in Kurdish areas .

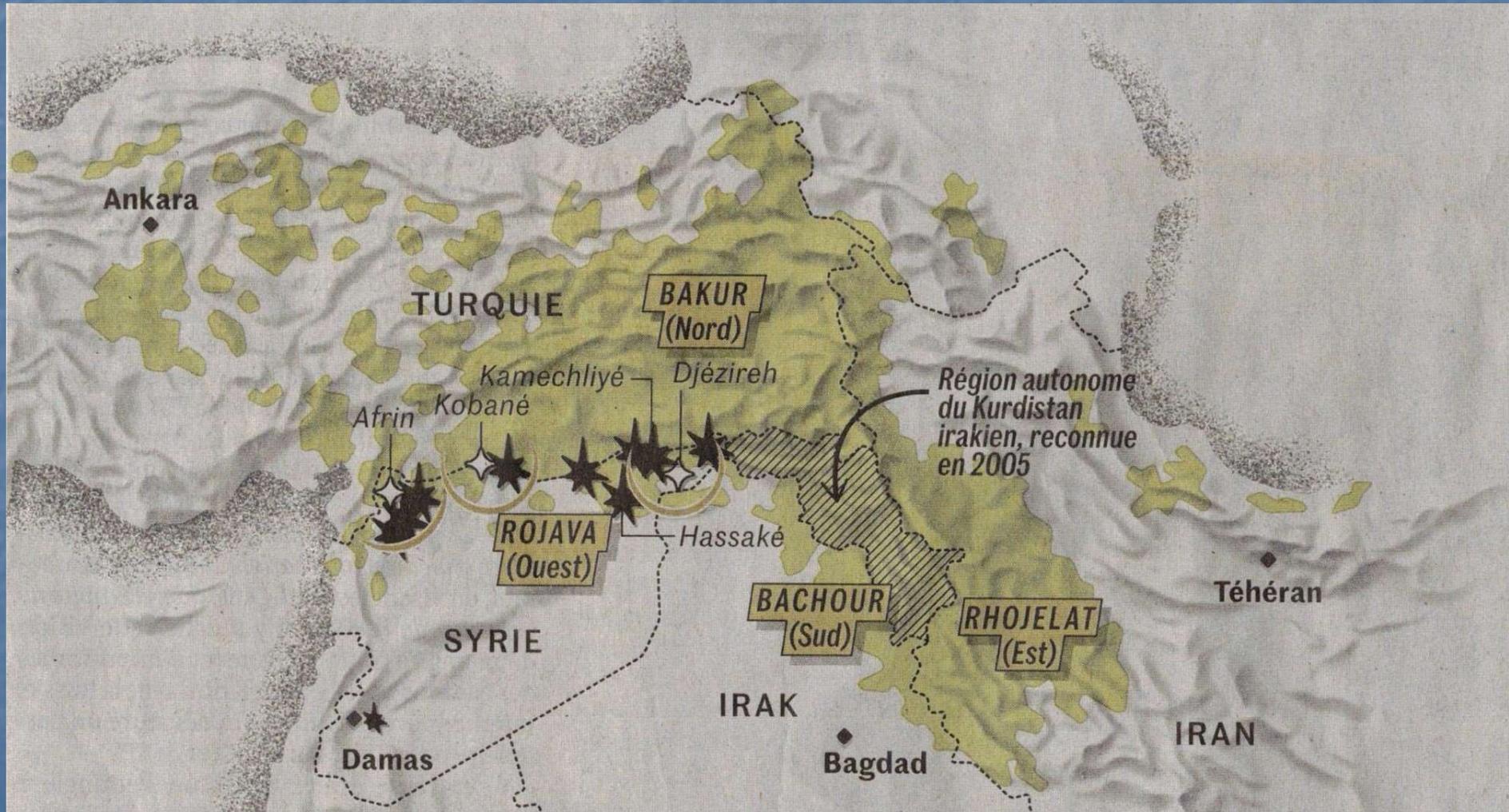


PKK: freedom fighters or terrorists?





A nation without a state



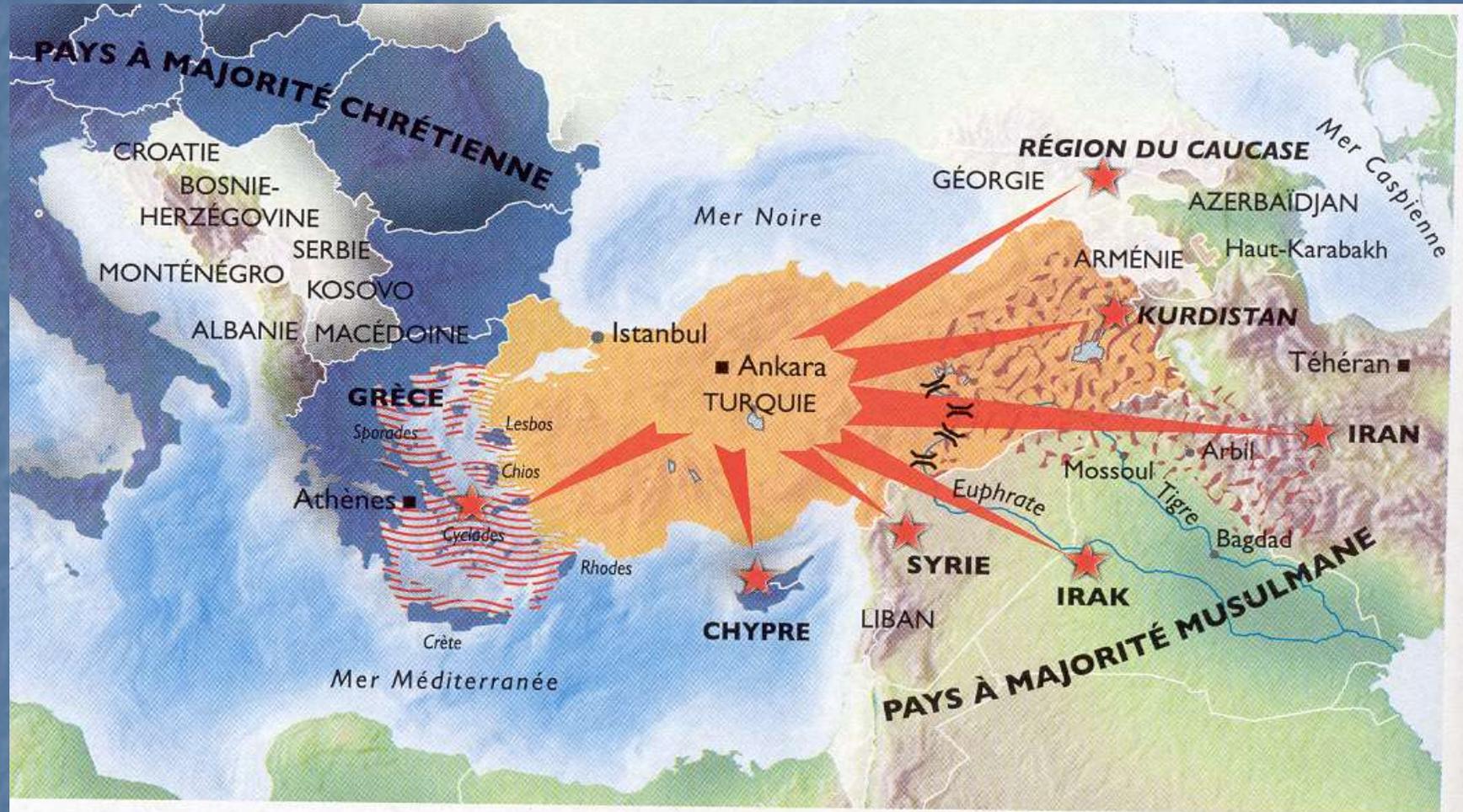
2. Turkey's new Foreign policy

- Erdoğan's views: Turkey should develop pan-sunni solidarity and focus on its Eurasian dimension;
- Awkward delivery mechanism through hard power behaviour: « only problems » instead of « zero problem »);
- Bad neighbourhood policies: spreading Kurdish problem, refusing to end occupation in Cyprus, denying Armenian genocide, .

The nationalist background



Poor neighbourhood relations



-  Pays de l'Union européenne
-  Points de contentieux impliquant la Turquie
-  Principal foyer de population kurde
-  Territoire maritime grec
-  Territoire maritime turc

Kurds: international implications

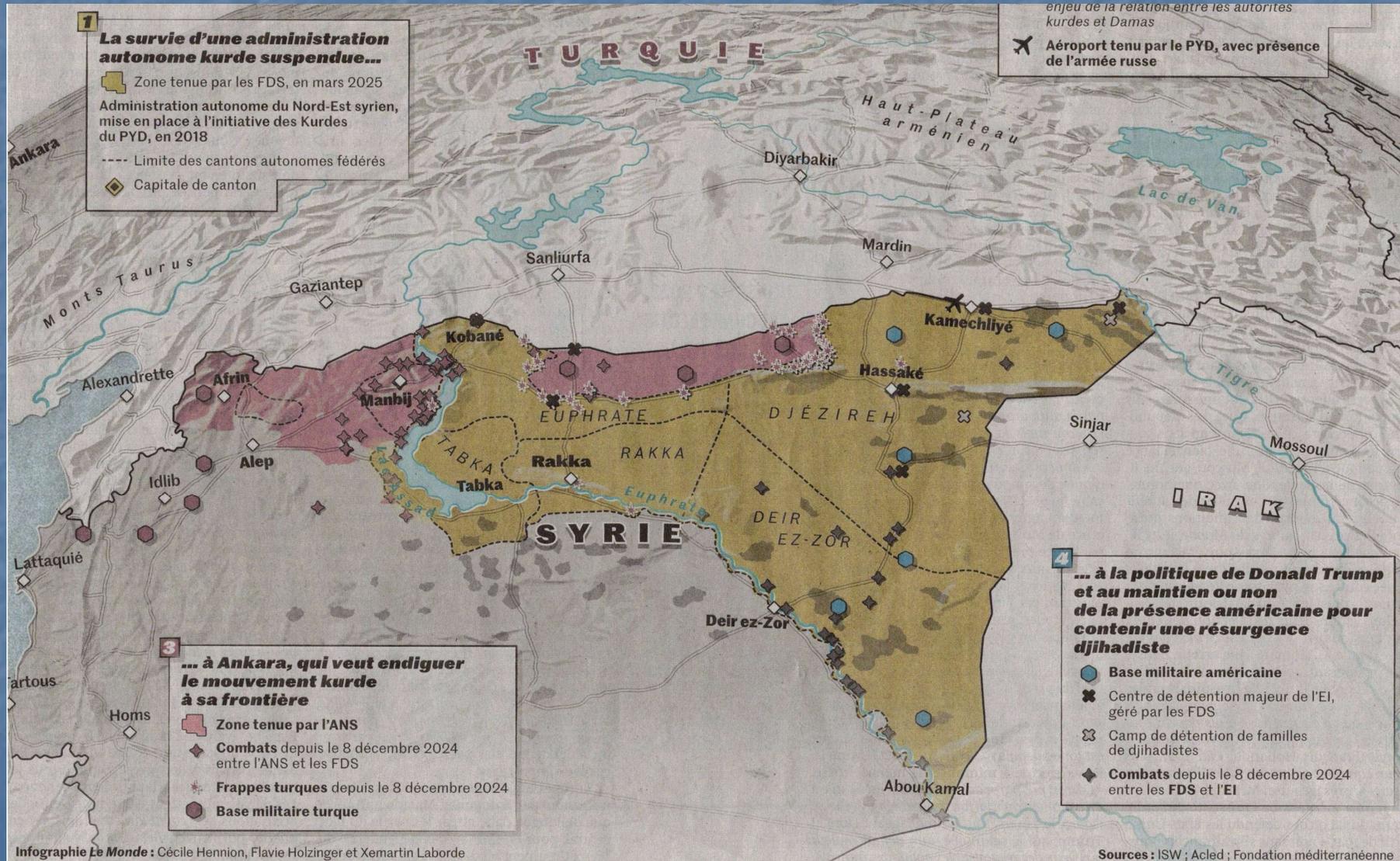
The evolution of the Kurdish problem is increasingly impacting neighbouring Kurdish communities:

- PKK (very close to Turkey's) supports Syrian Kurds in north-eastern Syria;
- autonomy (not far from independence in Iraq), with explicit support and significant economic benefits for Turkey;
- Continuous brutal repression in Iran.

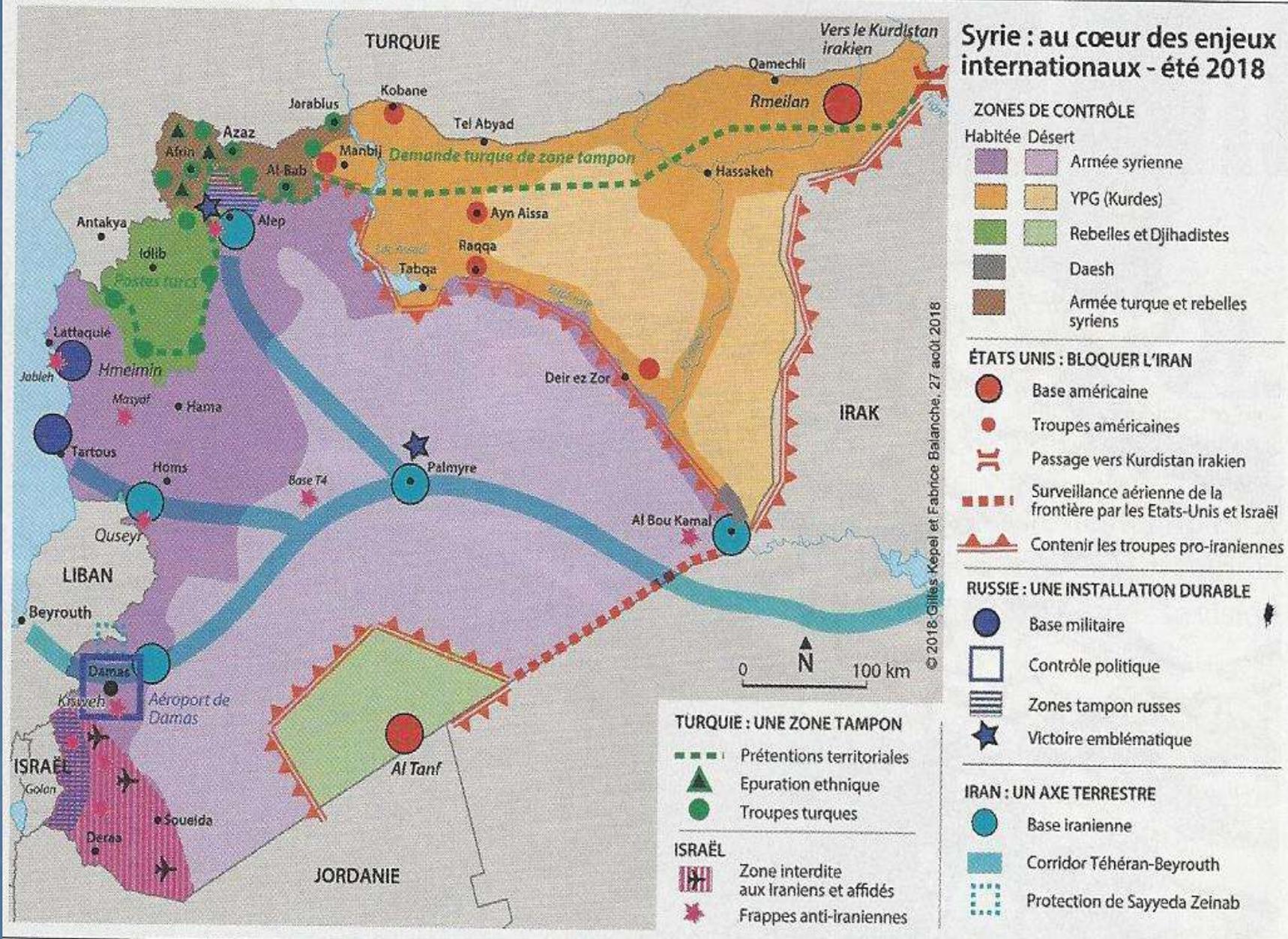
Betraying Syrian Kurds

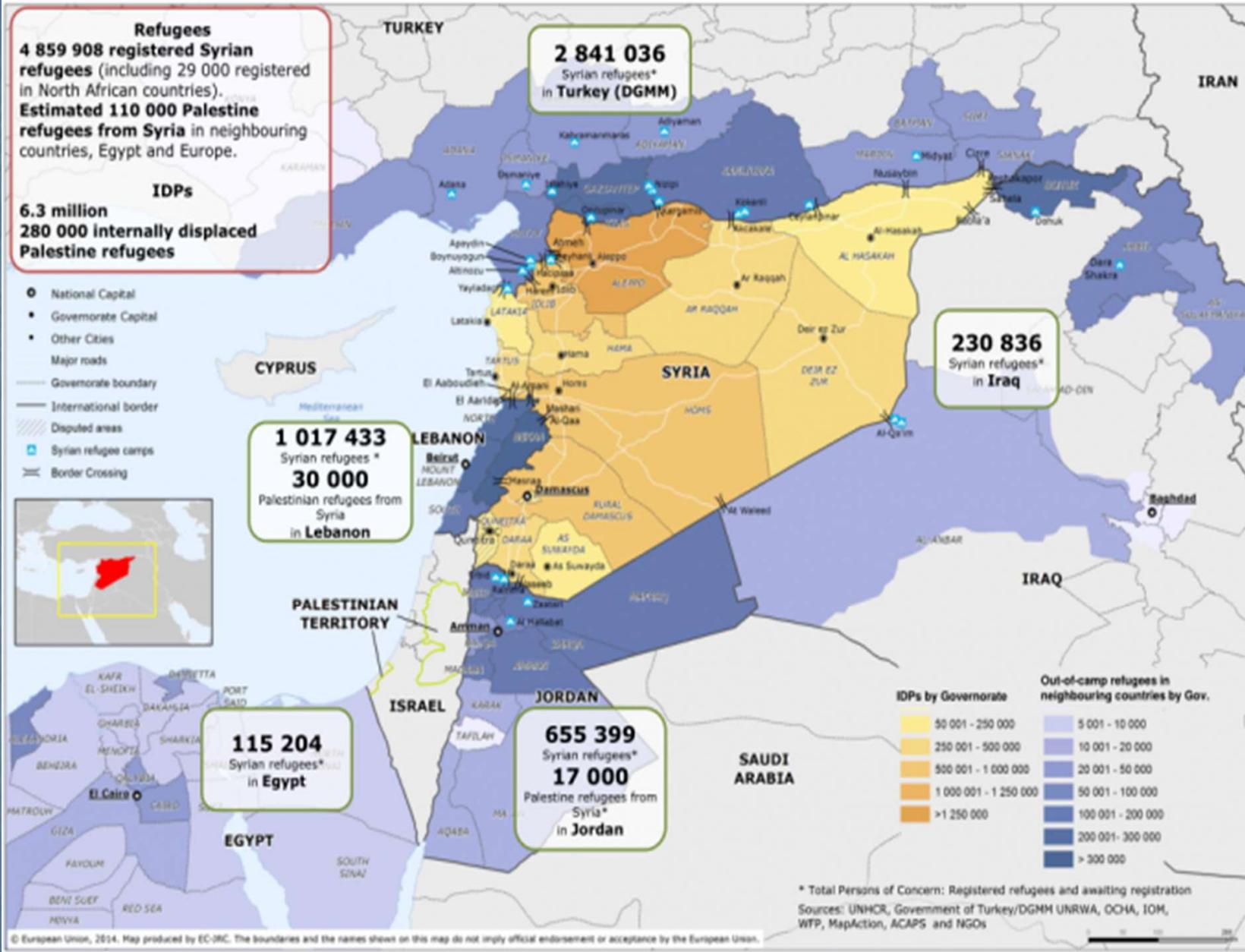


Turkey's ambitions in Syria



Syrie : au cœur des enjeux internationaux - été 2018





Armenia: the end of Nagorno Karabakh autonomy (2020- 2022)



Nagorno-Karabakh



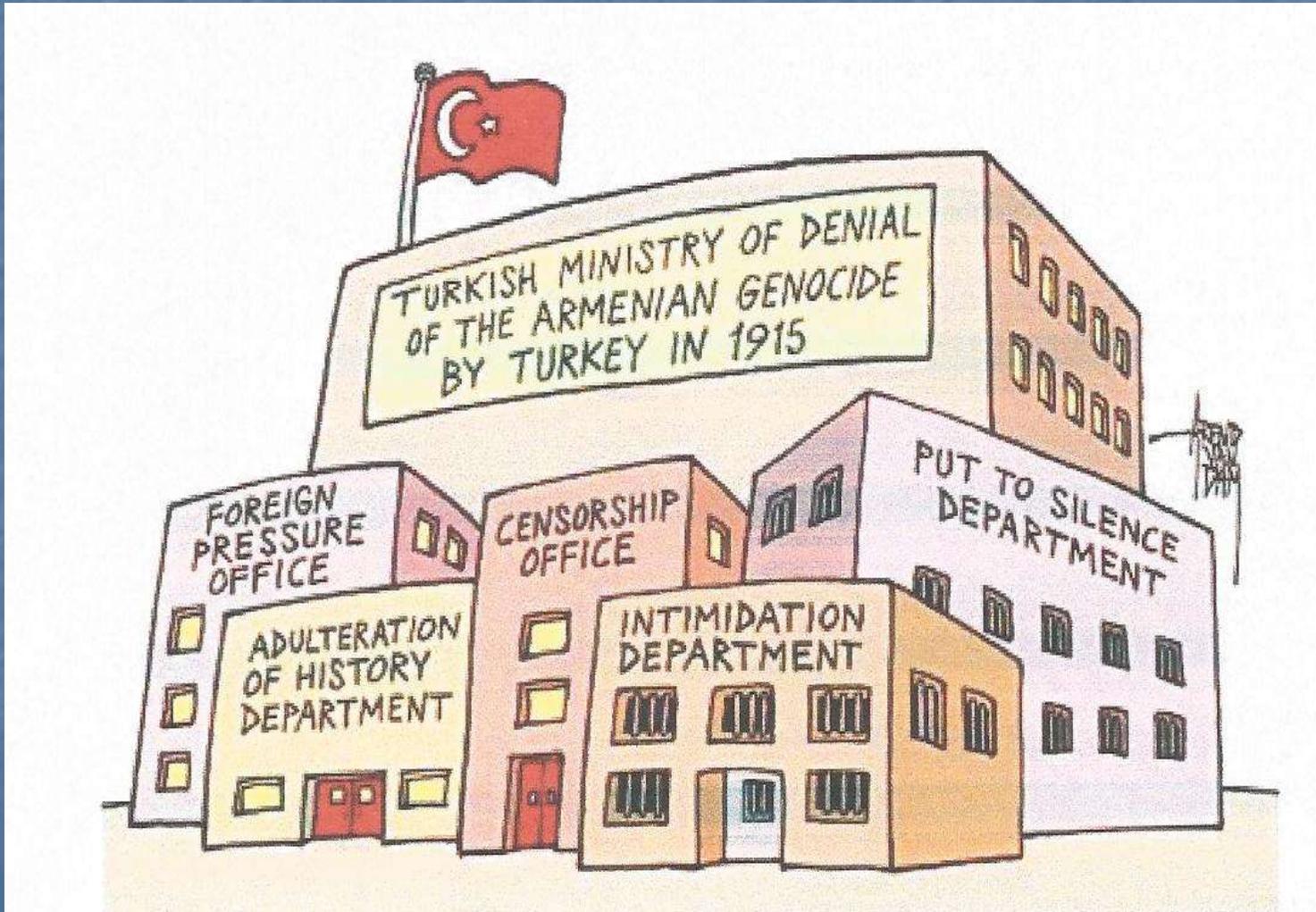
Armenia: the genocide heritage

- The Armenian tragedy has been qualified as genocide (UN human rights Commission 1985);
- For Turkey, there was no genocide. Erdoğan in 2009 : « *It is impossible for us to accept a thing which did not exist* ».
- Although using the term of genocide for the Turkish Cypriots, the Chinese Uigurs and the Palestinians, Ankara is opposing any sign of its recognition, even in foreign countries;
- 34 countries have recognised genocide, 3 countries are in denial (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Pakistan).

Genocide denial

- The genocide denial is heavily impacting on European opinion's attitude towards Turkey (unlikely acceptance of negationism, in particular in Germany);
- To make matters worse, Turkey has bound itself in supporting Azerbaijan against Armenia;
- Armenians suffered from a new ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabagh.

A doubtful priority for Turkey's Foreign policy



Turkey's « Weltpolitik »

- Aiming to become a key player in the global geopolitical game, in particular on Mideast issues.
- Practising foreign policy on sectarian criteria in supporting Muslim Brothers;
- Courting Turkish and Arab opinions in supporting Hamas and bashing the US & the EU;
- Showing that Turkey is no longer obeying Washington's orders.

Contributing to NATO « brain death »?

- The S-400 Russian purchase and Turkey exclusion from the F-35 programme;
- Turkey's previous blackmailing of Finland and Sweden applications;
- Turkey is blocking NATO/EU cooperation, because of its refusal to recognise Cyprus' legal government;
- Weak reactions from NATO Sec Gen.

USA: from appeasement to confrontation (or the reverse?)

- There is a growing awareness of Turkey becoming « *a dubious partner* »;
- US attitude balances between complacency (« *play nice with Turkey* ») and realism (supporting the Syrian Kurds against Islamist terrorism).

Declining American support to Turkey

- For long, the US pretended to need Turkey, because of paramount geopolitical considerations;
- Importance of arms sales (F-16) and also CAATSA sanctions (F-35);
- Previous support from US & UK to Turkish accession to the EU;
- US growing isolation in the Mideast makes it vulnerable to Ankara's blackmail.

Downgrading US-Turkey alliance

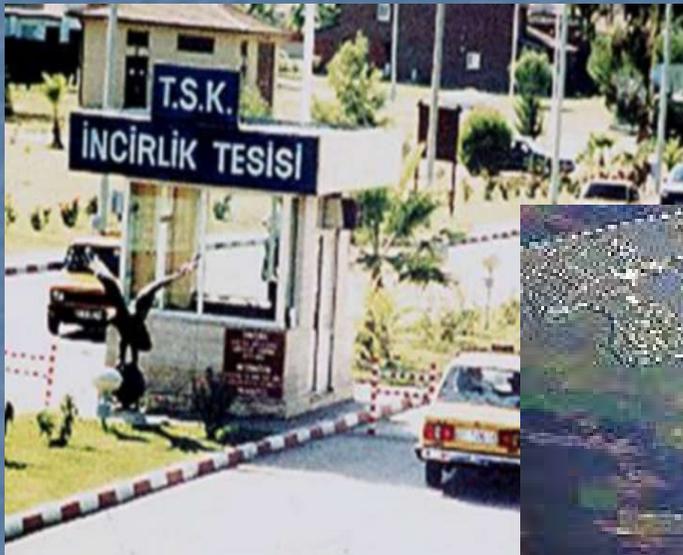
Turkey is now considered as a « *a bad ally* ». However, the US remain hesitating between:

- bribing Turkey (still hoping for the return of the « *prodigal son* »);
- moving to a tougher policy (with Israeli support).

Will Trump support Erdogan again ?



Does the US army need Incirlik ?



Erdoğan & Putin



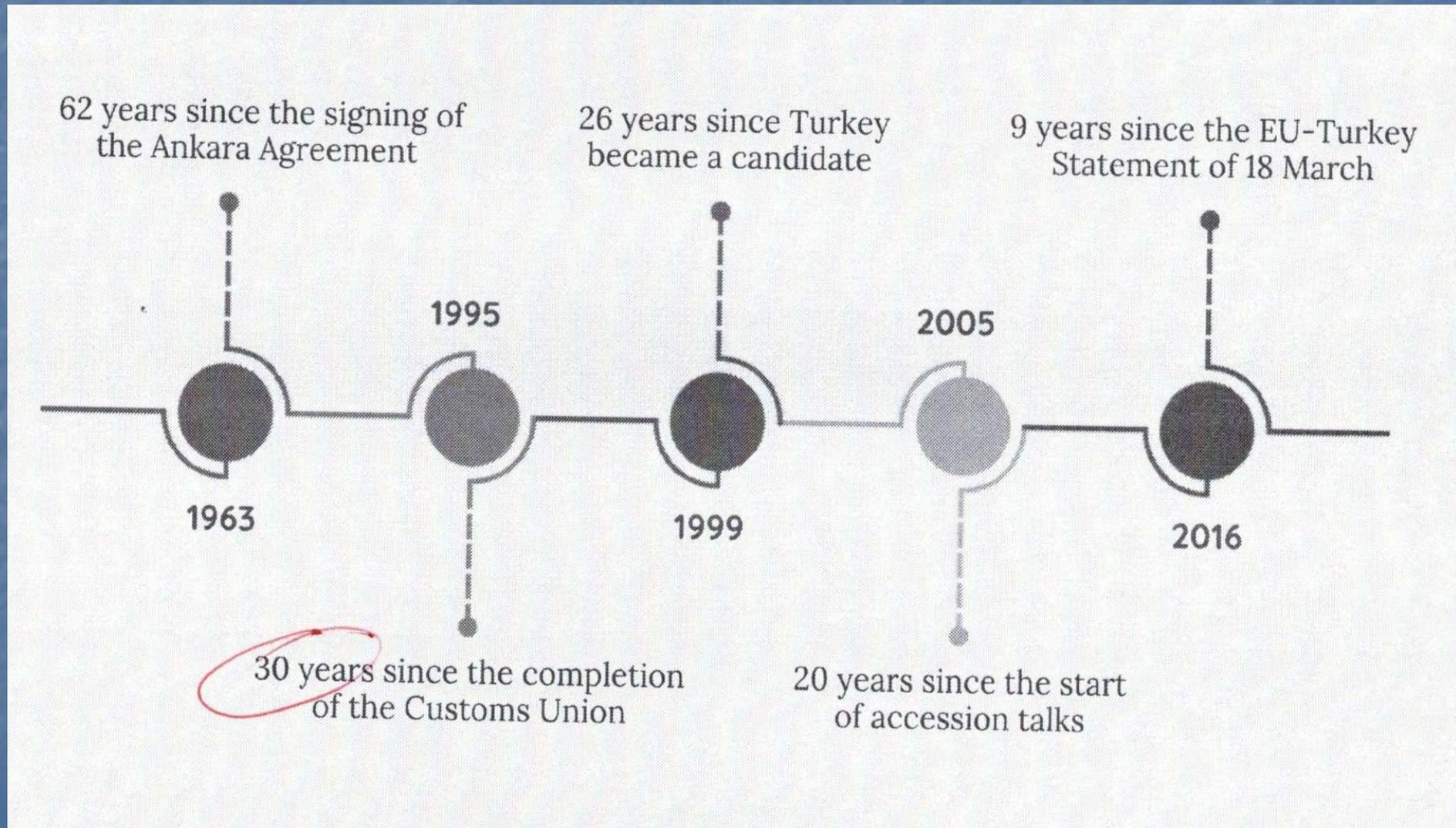
With China

- As Moscow, Beijing is benefitting from Erdogan's balancing policy and the deterioration of his relations with the West;
- In the Turkish army, contrary to the previous NATO educated generation, several generals promote an «*Eurasian policy* » between East and West;
- Erdoğan has realised that his support to the Chinese Uigurs is not compatible with his ambitions to join the Shanghai group.

3. EU-Turkey Relations

- The end of the accession dream;
- Difficult relations with several member states (Cyprus, Greece, France, Germany);
- Gunboat diplomacy on energy issues;
- The migration blackmail;
- The terrorist issue.

An eternal candidate?



Fake negotiations ?

- October 2005: the British Presidency opens the accession negotiations;
- December 2006: as Turkey refuses to fulfil its commitment regarding the extension of the Customs Union Agreement, *de facto* suspension of the negotiations (8 chapters frozen);
- All Commission's regular reports criticize Turkey's inadequate preparations and human rights backsliding (see NGOs' records).

Who is responsible ?



Does the EU want Turkey in?

- EU opinion is increasingly hostile: historical reasons, Turkey too expensive, AKP and Erdoğan's behaviour;
- Rather positive at once, governments have been increasingly reminded not to neglect their people's opinion;
- External factors (islamism, immigration pressures, terrorism) have a growing and negative impact on the Turkish application.

Turkey's negative image

- Unlike other candidates, a number of factors, old and new, have fed anti-Turkish feelings;
- Public opinion has stronger reservations in member states having a Turkish minority (Germany, Austria, Netherlands, France);
- Turkey has made no efforts to improve its image in Europe (even the contrary with Erdoğan's electoral trips to the EU).

Turkey is bargaining instead of complying



Turkey's awkward negotiation tactics

- Turkey doesn't accept the rules of the game and presents itself as a victim of European islamophobia;
- Turkey tried unsuccessfully to extort permanent derogations to the *acquis*, in particular in the sensitive area of political criteria;
- AKP has now other priorities.

Blackmailing Europe



Trade issues (2024)

- Record trade volume: €210,4 billion (highest ever);
- 5th partner: 4.2% of EU's total trade (EU Exports: €112 billion, EU Imports from Turkey: €98.4 billion) + 13,6 billions
- 41% of Turkey's exports go to the EU, 32% of Turkey's imports come from the EU.

A key point: Turkish and German relationship



Turkey asks for:

- Reactivate the Association Council within the framework of the Ankara Agreement (suspended by the EU);
- Initiate technical negotiations to modernize the Customs Union (EU and Turkey do not share the same priorities);
- Improve visa facilitation (Turkey wants no visa at all, EU is afraid of illegal immigration).

EU wants Turkey to:

- Implement the Customs Union to Cyprus (GoC de facto Recognition);
- Execute the ECHR judgments;
- Fulfil the remaining criteria for visa exemption;
- Resume Cyprus talks (under the UN auspices);
- Find a common ground with the EU on Community foreign policy (presently 5%).

Perspectives: cooperating out of the accession process ?

- In the EU, the opinion is against accession, even if Turkey complies with all requirements;
- Several governments want to kill the negotiations (subject to unanimity);
- Turkey is also tempted to withdraw;
- Nevertheless, on which topics might cooperation deliver?

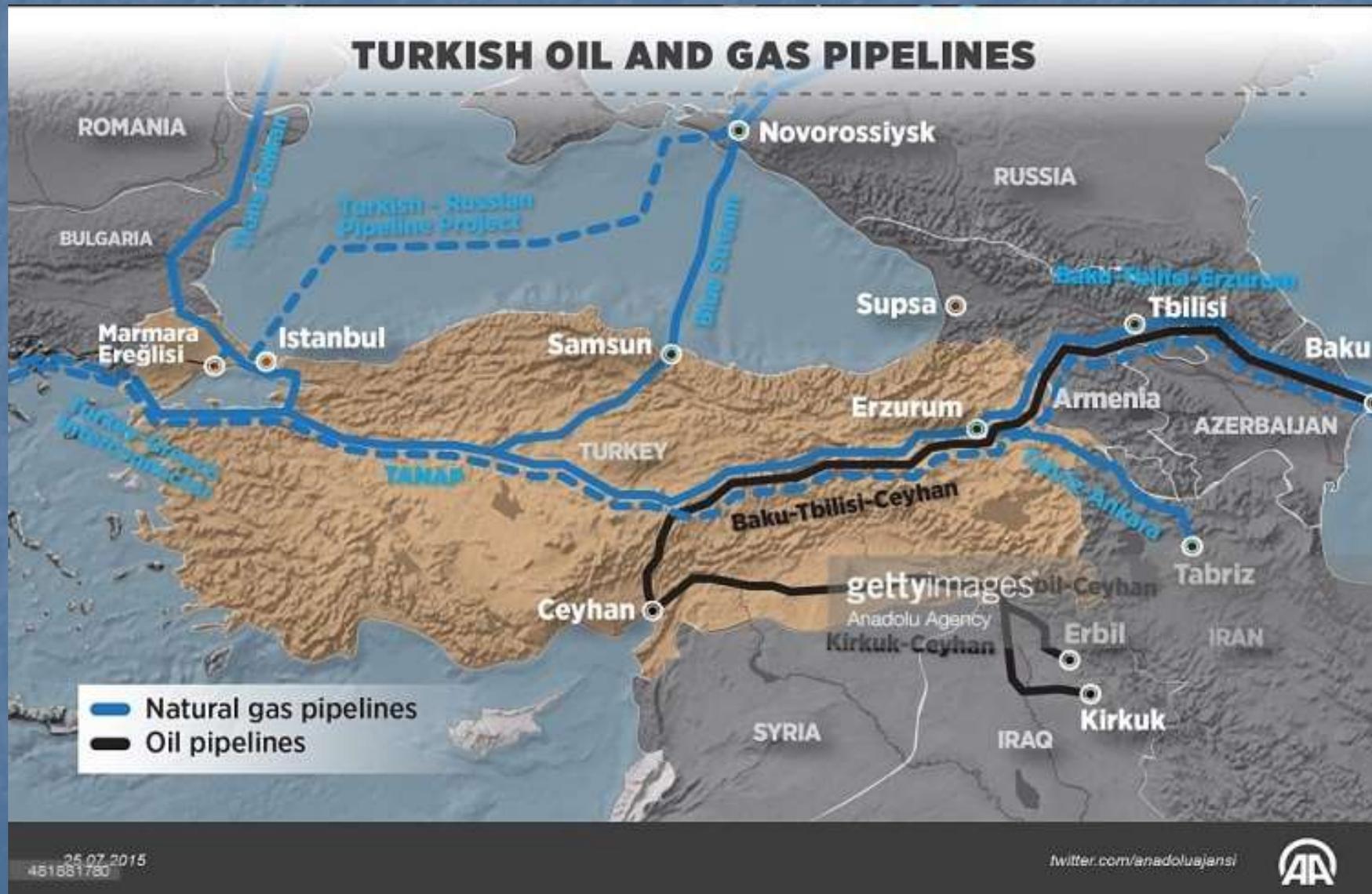
The energy issue

- Turkey has very limited energy resources but a significant geopolitical transit role, between Europe and major exporting countries ;
- As building pipelines is costly, it requires long term stability;
- Due to very poor neighbourhood relations, investors prefer to bypass Turkish territory.

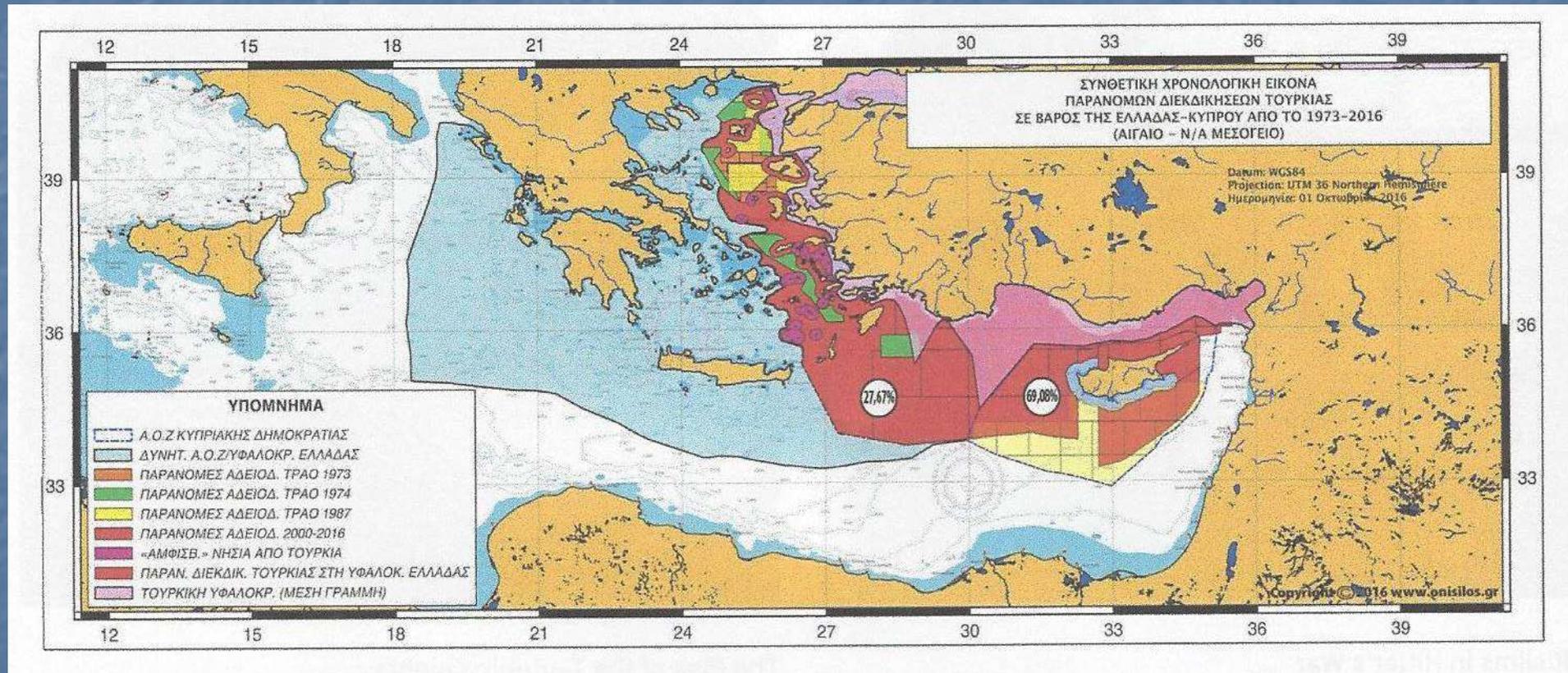
Turkish energy dependency: the gas challenge

- In 2014, 99% of Turkey's natural gas consumption is met by imports, more than half coming from Russia;
- Should the Russian gas stop coming, 20% of electricity generation will be cut off, the area most affected will be Istanbul and the Marmara region; Gas storage capacity is very limited;
- Turkey imports from other countries: Azerbaijan (TANAP pipeline, and Qatar LNG), but is facing political obstacles to buy gas from Israel (Tamar and Leviathan) or Cyprus (Aphrodite being not available in the short term anyway;

Turkey's transit opportunities



The EEZ dispute





Gunboat diplomacy



Pipe dreams ?



The migratory issue

- With Syria, Turkey has played a dubious role, supporting islamists rebels and welcoming refugees (around 2,5 millions);
- According to Frontex, a number of other factors (low air fares with Africa) has developed Turkey as a transit country for illegal migration to Europe;
- Turkey is explicitly using migrants' pressure to blackmail Europe.

Conclusion: Turkey's Foreign policy results:

- From zero to only problems with neighbours ;
- Contributing to the Mideast chaos;
- Remaining a NATO dubious ally;
- Forgetting its European dream.

« Splendid loneliness »?

- No improvement with Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, deterioration with Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia;
- Messy relations with Iran and Russia despite support for escaping sanctions, likely confrontation in Syria with Israel;
- Growing suspicion in Washington (NATO and Mideast issues) and Brussels (blocking NATO-EU cooperation).

Turkey's geopolitical value

- Questions about Turkey's strategic assets for Europe (indispensable Turkey?);
- Growing doubts about Turkey's loyalty to the West;
- What to do if Turkey is pursuing opposite goals, contradicting Western policies and blackmailing the EU on migration and terrorism issues ?

Does Europe need Turkey ?

- Europe needs an European Turkey, respecting EU's values and fully complying to customs union rules;
- AKP's inflated view that « *the EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the EU* » does not help;
- Lack of trust about Turkey's present management, in particular Erdoğan's.

Turkey regional power ?



TURQUIE, CE CLÉ DE L'OTAN...
 membre de l'OTAN (membre depuis 1952)
 Turquie à des opérations militaires (ONU, OTAN, UE)
 membre de l'Union européenne, candidate depuis 1987, progressivement éloignée

- 3 ... ÉTEND SON INFLUENCE EN MÉDITERRANÉE...**
- Gardienne des détroits depuis 1923
 - « Patrie bleue » : doctrine visant à protéger et à étendre les intérêts maritimes turcs
 - Frontières maritimes théoriques turques
 - Zone maritime de coopération négociée en 2019 entre Ankara et Tripoli, au détriment de la Grèce
 - République turque de Chypre du Nord (RTCN), occupée par les Turcs depuis 1974, non reconnue par l'ONU

Turkey, a new world power ?



