

## **CEEISA-ISA JOINT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2016**

### **Panel: Domestic Political Parties, Cultures and Attitudes: Cross-Border Issues**

#### **The Party-political Dimension to Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey**

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#### **Abstract**

The relationship between domestic politics and international relations is one of the most discussed issues of the discipline. While the foreign policy of a country is a continuous process and does not indicate radical shifts depending on the political parties, it is also noteworthy to stress that party politics, to some extent, plays a role on foreign policy; the ideological orientation of the government has impact on designing the foreign policy, thus on international politics. Turkey is a good example of this statement. Justice and Development Party's (JDP) coming into power for the first time in 2002, can be regarded as a turning point in Turkish Foreign Policy. Turkey started to implement a new style of diplomacy and seek for a more powerful, active role in world affairs, especially within the Middle East region. In parallel with the party's ideological stance, Turkey began to be more interested in the Middle East, as a result of not only the international political conjuncture, but also a foreign policy choice. This attention even led to 'Neo-Ottomanism' debates. This paper attempts to analyze how far JDP's ideology plays a role in Turkey's foreign policy choices and explore the party-political dimension in international politics.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Middle East, Turkey, Ideology, Political Parties

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## **Introduction**

It is well observed that there is a remarkable transformation in Turkish foreign policy in 2000s. In an environment of post-Cold War and post 9/11, where the international system radically changes, one can argue that the dynamics of the foreign policy shifts, so the transformation of Turkish foreign policy was expected. Yet, this transformation is highly due to the impact of domestic political developments of Turkey. In other words, the Justice and Development Party's<sup>1</sup> (JDP) winning the elections in 2002 for the first time and coming to office, represents a landmark for Turkish foreign policy. As a conservative party with Islamist roots, the party has been subject to attention and debates not only within the country, but globally.

While the ruling party of Turkey pursues a leader, global role in world politics, especially the radical shift in foreign policy can be followed by the Middle East policy. This paper argues that JDP's case indicates there is a party-political dimension to foreign policy and international relations. It is suggested that the ideological orientation of JDP plays- not the sole- but a significant role on determining the foreign policy preferences of Turkey.

## **Turkish Traditional Foreign Policy**

The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, after an Independence War which lasted during 1919-1922, following the Great War. As the Ottoman Empire collapsed in the end of the World War I and Istanbul was occupied by the Allied Powers, the national leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk launched the Independence War. The Independence War ended with Lausanne Peace Treaty, which was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1923. Although the Turkish Republic was founded by

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<sup>1</sup> JDP's Turkish abbreviation is AKP- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi. On the other hand, the party calls itself as AK Parti (Party), thus connoting itself with whiteness, pureness, honesty.

overcoming an independence war against the Western powers, Turkey chose to turn her face towards the West, where she has done starting the late Ottoman period, and tried to build good and peaceful relations with the Western countries.

It can be argued that there are two main pillars of Turkish foreign policy since the early years of the Republic: preserving the status quo and Western-orientation. In Turkey's practice of status quo, it refers to be pleased with her borders, not having the ambition of redrawing them, and not having the agenda of irredentism. Atatürk's quote 'Peace at home, peace in the world' is believed to be the doctrine of commitment to status quo, especially during the interwar period. The other main principle of Turkish foreign policy, Western-orientation refers Turkey's considering the Western civilization as a reference point in foreign policy in terms of ideology, culture, identity, democracy and human rights.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Turkey is much a Western country, rather than an Eastern country. As a country possessing the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, and geographically, Turkey belongs to the East and to the West, as well. Yet, Turkey has identified herself within the West, till JDP era. She is a unique secular country with the predominant Muslim population.

During the World War II, Turkey's two main goals had been not being occupied and not combating in war. She executed a balance-policy. Yet Turkey was not neutral in the war, she was non-belligerent. She was on the side of the Allies led by Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> In the end of war, she eventually declared war to Germany and Japan in order to attend the San Francisco Conference

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<sup>2</sup> Baskın Oran, TDP'nin Kuramsal Çerçevesi, Baskın Oran (Ed), Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt 1, 6. Baskı, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, p. 46-53.

<sup>3</sup> Baskın Oran, 1939-1945 Dönemin Bilançosu, Baskın Oran (Ed), Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt 1, 6. Baskı, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, p. 387-393.

where the United Nations was established. In the aftermath of the World War II, Turkey conducted a totally West-oriented foreign policy. She became a member of the Western Bloc in the Cold War climate and joined NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 1952. During the Cold War, some foreign policy choices of Turkey upset the Middle Eastern countries and caused the decline of Turkey's reputation amongst them. Turkey did not participate in the Asian Countries Congress in 1949, supported France in the Algeria issue, constituted Baghdad Pact which would get reaction from the Arab countries. In 1955 Turkey participated the Bandung Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, where she championed the United States, thus offended the undeveloped countries. She supported Britain and France in the Suez Crisis in 1956.<sup>4</sup>

While Turkey strongly anchored herself to the Western Bloc, the Middle Eastern countries did not officially become part of any bloc, although they individually developed some ties with one of the two superpowers. During this period, the rise of the Arab nationalist discourse framed Turkey as a stooge of the West and as 'other'. This discourse was contributed by the negative historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 created an additional division. On the other hand, Turkey also generally distanced herself from the region and identified herself instead as part of the West. So, she was perceived in a negative way by the regional countries and had very limited influence in the region during most of the Cold War. The region was defined by the Turkish foreign and security elites as unstable and conflict-ridden, 'a swamp that should not be got drawn'. Though some efforts were employed in

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<sup>4</sup> Baskın Oran, 1945-1960 Dönemin Bilançosu, Baskın Oran (Ed), Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt 1, 6. Baskı, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, p. 495-496.

establishing better economic relations in the 1970s, mainly due to the increasing oil prices, the political relations remained poor.<sup>5</sup>

In 1990s, with Turgut Özal<sup>6</sup>, some initiatives to improve the relations with the Middle East region and post-Soviet Turkic republics launched, though the main leap would come in 2000s.

### **Turkish Foreign Policy under JDP Rule**

JDP came to power for the first time in 2002, and has been governing the country since then. Its coming to office addresses the opening of a new era in Turkey's politics.

Actually, political Islam and Islamist parties have been part of the Turkish political system since 1970s. The mainstream Islamist movement "national view" (*milli görüş*) has been represented in the Turkish parliament and in the government under different parties. Yet, these parties were sometimes banned because of their anti-regime discourse and activities. A splinter group of reformers in the movement who had criticized its policies and inner party politics established JDP. The founders of the JDP argued that the new party was no longer Islamist but rather conservative democrat, in parallel with the Christian Democrat parties of Europe.<sup>7</sup>

JDP situates itself as a 'conservative democratic mass party', arguing that it is located at the center of the political spectrum. The conservative democrat political identity is highly stressed by

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<sup>5</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East', *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2008, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Turgut Özal was the 8th President of Turkey who was on duty from 1989 till his death in 1993. He before was the leader of the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi/ ANAP) and served as the Prime Minister during 1983-1989. He is also known as the architect of the economic neoliberalization of Turkey.

<sup>7</sup> Altunışık, *Ibid*, p. 44.

the politicians and it is underlined in the 2023 Political Vision, which refers to the goals list aimed to be achieved by 2023, the centennial of the foundation of the Turkish Republic:<sup>8</sup>

*“The ‘conservative democrat’ political identity that AK Party developed has now been fully established and become a political attraction. It is a source of inspiration for regional countries. The conservative-democrat political identity that AK Party has been trying to develop has overlapping characteristics with other practices of conservatism in the world. That said, this political identity has been shaped by Turkey’s socio-cultural characteristics and has a political style that has been shaped by Turkey’s local dynamics. In a predominantly Muslim country, this conservative-democrat understanding contributed significantly to the development of democratic experience and set a precedent in its region.”*

JDP presents itself not only as conservative, but also highly as ‘Muslim’. Muslim norms and values are very often used in the party programs and in the speeches of the politicians.

When one talks about JDP, he maybe should start with R. Tayyip Erdogan since he is the dominant actor of JDP policies. Erdogan served as the Prime Minister and now is the first publicly elected President of Turkey.

On the other hand, it should be stressed JDP’s foreign policy is mostly based on Ahmet Davutoglu’s ideas. Davutoglu served as an Adviser to the Prime Minister, then as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and recently as the Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> Though Davutoglu does not serve in the

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<sup>8</sup> Political Vision of Ak Parti (Justice and Development Party) 2023, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> It should be stressed that Davutoglu resigned after 20 months in Office. This resignation is widely interpreted as the consolidation of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s position as Turkey’s unrivalled political leader by the internal and international media. See for example: The Guardian, Turkish PM Davutoglu resigns as President

government any more, the main architect of JDP's foreign policy is Davutoglu, at least till now. His thick volume book, *Strategic Depth*, has been a road map for Turkish foreign policy during the 2000s. Davutoglu argues that in the post-Cold War era, Turkey's geostrategic role should be re-considered. Geopolitical location should no longer be regarded as an instrument of a status quo strategy which is motivated by defending the borders. Instead, it should be regarded as an instrument of opening to the world and transforming the regional activism to global activism. Thus, a dynamic foreign policy approach is required.<sup>10</sup> The shift in Turkish foreign policy is so observable that the term "the Davutoglu effect" has been coined. As the Economist notes, the man largely responsible for engineering this dramatic shift in foreign policy is Ahmet Davutoglu.<sup>11</sup> Davutoglu argues that Turkey has multiple regional identities which will offer an integrated foreign policy approach conducted in a large field.<sup>12</sup>

Believing that ideas are often significant determinants of government policy, Goldstein and Keohane argue that ideas affect foreign policy when the casual or principled beliefs they constitute provide road maps that advance actors' clarity about goals, when they become embedded in political institutions and when they influence outcomes of strategic situations in which there is no unique equilibrium.<sup>13</sup> In JDP's case, there is actually a road map that guides the foreign policy. This road map is Ahmet Davutoglu's book which was first published in 2001, the *Strategic Depth*.

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Erdogans tightens grip, 05.05.2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/05/ahmet-davutoglus-future-turkish-prime-minister-balance>, (16.06.2016).

<sup>10</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, **Stratejik Derinlik**, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2013, 88. Baskı, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> "The Davutoglu Effect: all Change for foreign policy", The Economist, 21.10.2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17276420>, (20.06.2016).

<sup>12</sup> Bülent Aras, Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy, SETA Policy Brief, May 2009, Brief No: 32, p. 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Goldstein, Robert O. Keohane, 'Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework', in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*, (Ed.) Judith Goldstein, Robert O. Keohane, New York, Cornell University Press, p. 3.

According to Davutoglu, Turkey's foreign policy today shaped by three methodological and five operational principles. The methodological principles are as follows:

1. embracing a "visionary approach" to the issues which means to abandon the "crisis oriented" attitude that was common during the Cold War era.
2. grounding Turkish foreign policy on a "consistent and systematic" framework around the world.
3. the adoption of a new discourse and diplomatic style which would extend Turkey's soft power within the region.

On the other hand, the operational principles designed by Davutoglu are:

1. establishing the balance between security and democracy
2. "zero problems towards neighbors"
3. proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy in order to get measures before crisis occur.
4. loyalty to a multi-dimensional foreign policy
5. rhythmic diplomacy, which means Turkey's assuming a more active role in international relations.<sup>14</sup>

Some scholars argue that the transformation of the foreign policy in JDP era should not be exaggerated, since the transformation did not start with JDP at all. For instance, Onis argues that there are elements of continuity and rupture in the style and behavior of Turkish foreign policy, rather than claiming that there is a totally new line of foreign policy Onis says the continuity is

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<sup>14</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy", Foreign Policy, 20 May 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys\\_zero\\_problems\\_foreign\\_policy?page=0,1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy?page=0,1), (17.10.2011).



evident given that the long-established state policies EU membership and commitment to the Western alliance endures. He notes it would be wrong to equate foreign policy activism exclusively with the JDP government since the elements of an active foreign policy view in Turkey could be dated back throughout the post-Cold War era starting with Turgut Özal's presidency in the early 1990s. (Turgut Özal's center-right wing party, the Motherland Party/ Anavatan Partisi- ANAP could be regarded as JDP's predecessor) Also Ismail Cem, the foreign minister of the coalition government between 1999 and 2002, advocated a multi-dimensional, pro-active foreign policy, while persisting a strict Western commitment. The early JDP years clearly indicated a continuation of the cycle established during the coalition government formed by the left-of-center Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*, the DSP), the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, the MHP), and the right-of-center Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, the ANAP). The relations with the Middle East actually began to develop from 1999 onwards and starting from 1990s, economic and diplomatic links with Russia and the post-Soviet republics have been improved.<sup>15</sup>

It is possible to read the new intentions in foreign policy as a continuation from 1990s, yet with JDP, Turkey began to play a more assertive role, sought to become a regional leader.

As Uzgel points out, the 'identity' component has been more observable in Turkish foreign policy under JDP rule. It is the first time in Turkish political history that a party that identifies itself with an alternative identity which does not originate from the system comes to office and this situation has influence on foreign policy as well. In this new period, Turkey has started to

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<sup>15</sup> Ziya Öniş, Multiple Facets of the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2011, p. 48-50.

present this new identity to the international system as well as her geostrategic location. In a world where identity politics gain importance, it is remarkable that JDP uses the ‘identity’ notion in foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

Erhan addresses that the JDP leadership was persuaded by Davutoglu’s efforts that Turkey has the capability to become a global power, if it becomes a regional superpower first. Davutoglu argues that Turkey can become a global actor with the help of her soft power instruments in her foreign policy towards neighbouring regions, including the Middle East, if she uses them efficiently. Davutoglu believes Turkey can establish an “order” in its vicinity since she is the most important country in terms of economy, military power and culture in a large area extending from central Europe to China. In this context, the major region to increase Turkey’s activism would be the Middle East, with its geographic closeness as well as economic and cultural affiliation to Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East has been highly shaped by a number of domestic factors and been a very dynamic policy affected by the unstable security structure of the region. Historical imaginations, elite perceptions, worldviews, norms, values, principles and group identities are the fundamental factors of the societal construction of foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> As Aras notes, Turkish state identity in an international system and in the Middle East as a regional level is mostly the product of her own domestic reality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> İlhan Uzgöl, “Türkiye’de, Dış Politikası da Değişiyor”, **Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası**, Ed. Habibe Özdamar, Osman Bahadır Dinçer, Mehmet Yegin, Cilt 2, Ankara, USAK Yayınları, 2010, s. 293-294.

<sup>17</sup> Çağrı Erhan, Turkey’s New Activism in the Middle East, International Conference In cooperation with the German ‘Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik’, 29-30 June 2010, p. 2, [http://www.sogde.org/framescontent/projekte/2010/conference\\_berlin\\_turkey/erhan\\_beitrag.pdf](http://www.sogde.org/framescontent/projekte/2010/conference_berlin_turkey/erhan_beitrag.pdf), (15.08.2015).

<sup>18</sup> Bülent Aras, Turkey and the Greater Middle East, İstanbul, Tasam Publications, 2004, p. 156.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

Turkey's geopolitical significance has already been an important narrative in Turkish political culture, yet with JDP rule, Turkey suggests a new geopolitics. JDP offers a new conception of geography to foreign policy<sup>20</sup>:

*“Our strategic depth and pro-activism in foreign policy is not limited to the Middle East region. From the Balkans and Caucasus to Africa and Central Asia, we see all countries as potential partners with which we can build a better future. Those countries also have a strong desire and strategic outlook to have partnership with Turkey. The reason for this is our ability to make use of our historical heritage, translate it into the context of today's global politics and deepen mutual understanding and partnership through concrete projects. Likewise, we have deepened our political, economic and cultural relations with those countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia with which we have a special bond of religion, language and culture. To develop a future vision, we have established the Turkish Cooperation Council. We will continue to be an active player in these regions of the world with the same outlook and determination.”*

*“We believe that Turkey is destined to play a historic and critical role in its region and the world. We have based our foreign policy on two main principles. First of all, we have based our policies on an accurate assessment of regional and global developments, taken necessary steps in a timely manner, devised our policies with a longterm perspective, and acted with a sense of commitment to our values and principles. Secondly, we have followed a dynamic foreign policy and reinterpreted Turkey's history and geography from the vantage point of our strategic depth*

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<sup>20</sup> Political Vision of Ak Parti (Justice and Development Party) 2023, p. 61.

*in the world. We have executed our foreign policy by developing our own vision, strategy and ideas.*”<sup>21</sup>

JDP offers “global activism” in foreign policy. JDP argues that one of the primary goals of the government has been to develop Turkey’s standing in the international order and increase its prestige, visibility and activism.<sup>22</sup> The increasing number of Turkey’s diplomatic missions gives an idea of this new foreign policy. According to the February 2015 data, the total number of Turkey’s diplomatic missions around the world has reached up to 228, whereas the number was 163 in 2002. Especially the increase in the numbers of missions opened up in Africa is substantial.<sup>23</sup> In parallel with Davutoglu’s quote “*There is no diplomacy of a line, but there is the diplomacy of the surface. That surface is the entire globe.*”,<sup>24</sup> this development indicates the assertive, confident new foreign policy.

Turkey’s initiatives to become a game-maker and international actor in the Middle East and in the world have been interpreted as a policy of “Neo-Ottomanism”. Turkey’s active foreign policy moves have raised the comments of the endeavor of arousing the Ottoman Empire. Turkey’s activism has been dubbed as “the return of the Ottoman to the Middle East” (or to the Balkans, to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> T.C. Başbakanlık Kamu Diplomasisi Koordinatörlüğü, “13 yılda 65 yeni temsilcilik: Türkiye’nin yurtdışındaki temsilcilik sayısı 228’e çıktı”, <http://kdk.gov.tr/sayilarla/13-yilda-65-yeni-temsilcilik-turkiyenin-yurtdisindaki-temsilcilik-sayisi-228e-cikti/41>, (19.06.2016).

<sup>24</sup> Davutoglu is inspired by Turkey’s founding leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s quote ‘*There is no defence of a line, there is a defence of the surface. That surface is the entire homeland.*’, which he said during the Independence War and became a slogan of defending the homeland.

Africa) by some. This foreign policy vision is followed with some doubt and anxiety in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Western world.<sup>25</sup>

According to JDP, the relations with the Middle East is a process of normalization. *“Turkey is making peace with its own history and geography. As a result, our relations with the peoples and countries in the region are also becoming normal again.”*<sup>26</sup>

Turkey got popularity among the Middle East countries, especially during 2009-2010. The public opinion surveys conducted by TESEV, a significant Turkish think-tank in 2009-2010 showed that Turkey’s attractiveness was quite high in the Arab World. This attractiveness was due to the perception of Turkish foreign policy; the view of Turkey’s political and economic transformation as a success story; and Turkey’s cultural products and played important role on Turkey’s soft power within the region. Turkey’s decision not to support the US war effort in Iraq in 2003, criticisms of Israel after the Gaza War and the general turn of foreign policy in the region was highly appreciated.<sup>27</sup>

Yet it is argued that Turkey’s soft power has declined in the last years due to the foreign policy failures. In the recent years, JDP’s foreign policy in the Middle East and engaging in the conflicts, especially in the Syrian War has been highly criticized.

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<sup>25</sup> Bilal Sambur, “Türkiye’nin Dış Politikasında Yeni-Osmanlılık: Mit mi? Gerçek mi?”, Türkiye’nin Dış Politikası: Yeni Eğilimleri, Yeni Yönelimleri, Yeni Yaklaşımları, Bursa, Dora Yayınları, 2014, Ed.:İdris Demir, p. 77-78.

<sup>26</sup> Political Vision of Ak Parti (Justice and Development Party) 2023, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, ‘Challenges to Turkey’s Soft Power in the Middle East’, TESEV Foreign Policy Programme, Istanbul, Yelken Basım, June 2011, p. 1.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, it can be argued that the activism and assertation in Turkish foreign policy is highly due to JDP. Though there is continuity in Turkish foreign policy in terms of the commitment to the relations with the United States and European Union, and the start of the multi-dimensional foreign policy could be traced to 1990s; there is a considerable transformation in the formulation of the foreign policy. Turkey started to implement a new style of diplomacy and seek for a more powerful, active, assertive role in world affairs, especially within the Middle East region. In parallel with the party's ideological stance, Turkey began to be more interested in the Middle East, as a result of not only the international political conjuncture, but also a foreign policy choice. So, JDP's case is a good example that demonstrates the party-political dimension, even if it is limited, in international politics.