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TOPIC: Turkish policy towards the Middle East during the Davutoğlu period

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1. Introduction

This thesis aims at analyzing the political processes that took place in Turkey during the past decade, focusing on the period when other than scholarly work, Ahmet Davutoglu started his political career.

Many researchers agree that after coming to power through 2002 elections in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP) has significantly altered the political processes within the country as well as used historically unprecedented approach to the foreign policy. Ahmet Davutoglu started his political activities first as an adviser to the Prime Minister, later changing his role to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and finally, occupying the post of the Prime Minister of Turkey until his announcement on the 5th of May, 2016, that he would not be seeking reelection as the chairman of the AKP party thus stepping down from the post of Prime Minister as well.

It is hard to deny and many researchers indeed agree that the foreign policy of Turkey during the AKP administration was shaped based on Davutoğlu's views and by Davutoğlu himself. His approaches to foreign relations has often been characterized as liberal, which is understandable in the context of a scholar such as Davutoğlu assuming a powerful political position. His main goal throughout his political career has been to increase the significance of Turkey in the region and on the international political arena, through establishing good relations with the neighbors and other global actors.

Therefore, it is necessary to explore and analyze changes that the Turkish foreign policy experienced during the AKP administration and with the direct involvement of Davutoğlu.

1.1 Research Method

The present study is a research synthesis which uses empirical evidence reported in the existing studies on Turkish foreign policy and utilizes other relevant sources of information, such as books, scientific journal articles, news reports on recent developments in world politics and public speeches made by key political figures. The study is designed around the analysis of collected empirical data and provides multiple cases studies for the purpose of testing the research hypothesis formulated below.

In order to meet research objectives and answer the major research question, I will use main sources such as speeches, video recordings and scholarly work of Davutoğlu and secondary sources, such as books, journal articles and other electronic sources about the policies of Turkey in terms of foreign relations. In this thesis the existing studies on the foreign policy of Turkey will be analyzed in order to acquire insight on its current state. Overall, this study offers analysis of the current state of affairs in the area of foreign policy formation in Turkey during more than a decade of its recent history.

The research hypothesis to be tested herein, is the following:

Turkey's Middle East policy started to change radically following Davutoğlu's term in office.

The initial review of the existing literature indicates that since the early years of 2000s, when the AK Party came to power, the course of Turkish foreign policy took a radical turn towards becoming more proactive, especially in relation to the Middle Eastern countries. Given the fact that Ahmet Davutoğlu has served as a political advisor to the Prime Minister from the early years of AKP governance and has later

on held higher offices of a Foreign Minister and subsequently a Prime Minister, and his extensive background as a renowned scholar in the field of international relations, it can be hypothesized that his views on foreign policy discourse have had a significant influence on the formation of Turkish foreign policy over the past several years.

In order to test the hypothesis provided above, I will analyze and hereby present the existing studies, among them the scholarly work of Ahmet Davutoğlu himself. The historical tradition of foreign policy formation in Turkey will be described early in the study, in order to provide a historical background against which the hypothesis can be tested.

For this thesis, I have developed a research question which I will try to answer in the following sections. The major research question to be answered within this study is as follows:

How did Turkey's Middle East policy change by the influence of A. Davutoğlu's political thoughts?

In order to find a definitive answer of the main research question, I have developed and will use the following research objectives aimed at gaining deeper insight in the political processes that unfolded during the AKP administration:

- 1. What is the importance of the Middle East for Turkey?*
- 2. What are the roles of Davutoğlu in the Middle East policy?*
- 3. How was "strategic depth" doctrine adapted to the Middle East?*
- 4. How did "zero problems with neighbors" policy shape the relations of Turkey with Syria, Iran and Iraq?*
- 5. Does "zero problems with neighbors" policy continue or has it failed?*

By the end of this thesis, several case studies will be presented in order to illustrate the real-world application of policies formulated in the later years of Turkish political life and to demonstrate how the shifts in foreign policy have affected the actual relations of Turkey with the Middle Eastern countries.

1.2 Scope and Limitations of the thesis

The thesis provides historical background of the practices of foreign policy formation in Turkey. The main focus is attached to the foreign policy of Turkey during the prime minister – Ahmet Davutoğlu. In this thesis, I have aimed at offering a historical context to better understand the current changes that the policy has experienced. But in general, the scope of the research is focused on the later period, more specifically from AKP's accession to power in 2002, to the day of writing this thesis in 2016. The literature used for conducting this study includes books, journal articles and news articles on the subject and a synthesis of other scholars' opinions is also provided for the readers' reference.

The thesis bears certain limitations which I present in this section. This study is limited in that it has to heavily rely on the secondary data formulated and discussed by other researchers in the field and so the data used here is in itself based on the opinions of others. However, when the research concerns the policies formulated by one man, in this case Davutoğlu, the best source of information can in fact be the scholarly work produced by this person himself, which is quite abundant and which has been widely used throughout this research.

1.3 Literature review

Among the countries in the neighborhood of Turkey, Middle East has always been the most turbulent and politically unstable, and the foreign policy Turkey chooses towards this region requires extra care and precision. A number of scholars researching the characteristics of Turkish foreign policy agree that even though the Middle East presents a diverse array of challenges, it also affords quite a lot of opportunities in terms of increased cooperation and economic interests (Kirişci 2009, Oran 2011, Yilmaz 2001, Kardas 2012, Larrabee and Nader 2013, Ahmadian 2016, Müftüler-Baç 2014, Hale 2013, Murinson 2012).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of an era of two major powers governing the world politics faced many countries across the globe, and among them Turkey, with a challenge to find a relevant place in the newly forming world order. This challenge was ever so accentuated in the case of Turkey, since the country is located in geographical area in close connection to many diverse cultures and nations. As a result of these changing political realities, the foreign policy of Turkey radically changed since 1999, which can to some extent be related to the minimization of security threats and Turkey's candidature to be integrated in the EU. Being a candidate of EU accession also served as a basis for rapprochement with the Middle East, namely in terms of harmonizing Turkish and EU policies towards the region (Özcan 2008).

Turkish foreign policy has been largely indifferent towards the neighboring countries for a better part of the 20th century and making it more proactive is often ascribed to the different views of the AKP government from the early years of the 21st century (Linden, et al. 2011, Canan-Sokullu 2012, Keyman and Gumuscu 2014, Davutoğlu 2009, Davutoğlu 2013). The person responsible for this sort of departure from conventional

foreign policy-making of Turkey is considered to be Ahmet Davutoğlu, a scholar and a theoretician of international relations who started his political career serving first as the adviser to the Prime Minister, then as a Foreign Minister and in the later years, as a Prime Minister himself. He is often considered by many researchers as an architect of Turkish foreign policy (Grigoriadis 2010, Walker 2007, Aras 2009, Kardas 2012). Ahmet Davutoğlu's being the major driving force of formation and execution of Turkish foreign policy and at the same time his being an academic, has created a rare opportunity for researchers, considering the fact that during his service, he has published a number of works documenting his theories and general philosophy behind the Turkish foreign policy chosen to be utilized in the period of his service (Davutoğlu 2013, 2014, 2010, 2008).

The goal of adopting a more proactive foreign policy, instead of the pre-existing "wait-and-see" approach (Davutoğlu 2009), has been to transform Turkey into a more powerful regional and global actor including political, economic and discursive levels (Dinc and Yetim 2011). This role has largely been attained throughout a little over a decade of AKP administration and was based on quite simple philosophies of forming relations with the neighboring countries and especially the Middle East, as formulated by Davutoğlu. It is noticeable across the existing literature, that the most important of these approaches was the "zero problems with neighbors" policy also adopted and strictly followed within the period of AK Party's government (Davutoğlu 2010, Baudner 2014, Fuller 2008, Keyman and Gumuscu 2014, Almuedo 2011, Kibaroglu and Kibaroglu 2009). This approach implied elevating Turkey to a role of leading power in the region and important global actor through peaceful means of increased economic cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries and the resolution of all emerging issues through diplomacy rather than military force.

Having its foreign policy based on the ideals of achieving the state of “zero problems with neighbors” served as the grounds for the ruling AKP party to strive towards unlimited cooperation with neighbors. Assuming a role of a more assertive actor in the region helped Turkey take a more self-confident and autonomous position which was more effectively achieved as a result of Ahmet Davutoğlu’s appointment as Foreign Minister in 2009. The newly achieved position even allowed Turkey to sometimes deviate from the political agenda of the Western countries (Kardas 2012).

Another concept also formulated by Davutoğlu on which the Turkish foreign policy has been based during the past decade is the “strategic depth” doctrine (Davutoğlu 2001). This concept envisages drafting the foreign policy of Turkey based on the country’s inclusion in multiple geographical areas, as well as utilizing the historical depth of Turkey, its huge heritage and current identity. Joshua W. Walker (2007) considers “strategic depth” policy to be theoretically relevant, but adds that it fails in terms of application towards the real world events, since it is largely based on the assumption that the same good will can be expected from Syria and Iran.

Henri J. Barkey (2012) supports the claim that Turkey has made considerable advancement in terms of foreign policy under the AKP government. The most notable changes include the increase in assertiveness in international politics, its change in approach towards the Middle East and its direct engagement with the region, and economic expansion, with Turkish entrepreneurs gaining foothold in many areas of the neighboring countries as well as internationally. Based on the vision of having “zero problems with neighbors”, Turkey managed to initiate good relations with a number of countries, effectively promoting tourism and trade. In the period of AKP government, Turkey clearly demonstrated that it was in the country’s capacity to act and develop relations with both Eastern and Western countries without having to sacrifice its national integrity, historical heritage or ambitions.

The new foreign policies of Turkey especially towards the Middle East is also supported by other scholars. For example, William Hale (2013) considers that the attempts of Ankara to achieve a state of “zero problems” in terms of relations with neighboring countries is certainly a wise and approved choice as opposed to the previously existing assumption that Turkey was surrounded by enemies, which resulted in the country constantly looking out for threats to its security. This kind of defensive stance, left really limited options for advancing any kind of cooperation with the Middle East, be it economic or political.

Alexander Murinson (2012) ascribes the increased interest of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle Eastern countries to the newly emerged business interests. He considers that it was exactly these expanding economic interests of particular groups of entrepreneurs that urged the government of Turkey to promote trade and increase economic cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries.

The application of soft power in terms of foreign policy in the framework of above-mentioned general philosophical approaches has led Turkey to become a strong power in the region and in many cases a mediator in problematic issues throughout the Middle East (Yilmaz 2001, Keyman and Gumuscu 2014, Fuller 2008, Müftüler-Baç 2014, Almuedo 2011, Barkey 2015).

Democratization and economic growth were definitely the two most important internal processes that elevated Turkey to a position of a strong regional and global actor (Dinc and Yetim 2011). The foreign policy of Turkey in the later years has been more complex and goal-oriented. The most notable example of this can be the often openly expressed criticism of the Syrian regime on behalf of Turkey, while in relations with Iran, the government remains more pragmatic, emphasizing the significance of mutual non-interference. Turkey has also managed in the recent years to normalize relations with Iraq as well as establish and maintain mutually beneficial relations with the government

of Northern Iraq (Dinc and Yetim 2011). The reasons behind Turkey's attempts to have good relations and in some context strong hold on the government of Northern Iraq are twofold, and include the security issue in terms of controlling the Kurdish terrorist activities, with another aspect being economical, considering the rich oil resources located in the northern part of Iraq.

Throughout the AKP government era and currently, Turkey is actively trying to utilize its geographic and historical experiences. In these attempts, Ankara definitely seems successful, considering that the country has always been labeled as either a bridge or a barrier in relation to Middle East, however, it is now considered to be playing a role of a catalyst in the region. Turkey is now trying to serve as the mediator in bringing all the major actors in the region together to transform the Middle East into a more peaceful region, just as the involvement of US transformed Europe from a war-torn continent into a peaceful and cooperative region (Walker 2007).

In general, researches seem to unanimously agree that Turkish foreign policy experienced a radical change with the AK Party's coming to power and many among them identify Davutoğlu's influence on said changes. As the literature review provided above has indicated, the foreign policy of Turkey formulated and applied in the period of Davutoğlu's term in office has deserved criticism based on the viewpoint that while "zero problems with neighbors" policy is ideal in theory, the experience has shown that it fails when applied to the real-world politics. However, some researchers also claim that this approach has been quite successful when it mainly incorporated economic aspects but could not be extended on political relations with neighboring states with as much success.

The existing literature does not provide a thorough and synthesized analysis of the influence Ahmet Davutoğlu's political thought has had on Turkish policy towards Middle East. The present study aims at filling this gap in knowledge by providing an

extensive analysis of Davutoğlu's scholarly work and other studies conducted in the field of international relations, which deal with the issues related to Turkish foreign policy in the decades following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

This thesis also aims at further exploring the characteristics of Turkish foreign policy towards Middle East in the period of Davutoğlu's political career. In the subsequent parts and sections, I introduce the changes the foreign policy of Turkey has experienced over the past decade and offer analysis of how these changes have reflected on particular instances of Turkish relations with the Middle Eastern countries and towards other global actors as well.

1.4 Disposition and organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized in three major parts with the first part dealing with the provision of historical background for the purposes of setting the context for the further discussion that follows. The first part includes the discussion of foreign policies of Turkey since it became a republic under Atatürk's attempts. This period covers almost the entire 20th century and is divided in three topical sections: the first one dealing with the foreign policy of Turkey towards the Middle East from the formation of the Republic to the Cold War era. The second part is dedicated to the analysis of the same subject matter, but during the Cold War period itself. And the third sub-section covers the post-Cold War era up until AKP came to power.

The second part of the thesis starts of by describing the context and the political realities in which AKP ascended to power and then proceeds with the description of the foreign policies formulated by the AKP administration, which were most probably strongly influenced by Davutoğlu, considering his position in the

government. The following section in the second part of the thesis views Davutoğlu as an architect of Turkish foreign policy, however, this is not a discovery of this study. Due to the huge influence he has had on this aspect of Turkish political life, he is often referred to as an architect of the foreign policy. This section includes the discussions on the “strategic depth” doctrine formulated by Davutoğlu in his scholarly work and the utilization of the concept in relation to the Middle East.

The third part of this research starts out by introducing the at times widely accepted and at times widely criticized concept of the “zero problems with neighbors” policy and its effects on Turkish foreign relations both with the neighboring countries and with other political actors on the international arena. The concept of this policy relies on using diplomacy instead of force and the possibility of elevating Turkey to the level of regional power through establishment of good neighborly relations with the regional actors and also through playing a chief facilitator’s role in case of disturbances within the region. While the concept itself is noble and attractive, it is interesting to see how it works in practice, so in order to achieve this goal, I have used three case studies where this policy has been utilized and it relates to the relations of Turkey with three other regional actors: Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The final section in the third part discusses the changes in the political life of Turkey that came to be known when writing this thesis and concerns the stepping down of Davutoğlu from the post of AKP party’s chairman, implying that he will be giving up the mandate of the Prime Minister as well. The final section therefore discusses the widely spread criticism of the “zero problems with neighbors” policy in the later years and the end of the policy with the resignation of Davutoğlu.

The final chapter offers the answers to all the research questions and as well as general concluding remarks

2 Historical Background

The following sections in this chapter offer the historical background that is necessary for understanding the context of the research problem and cover the period since the Ottoman Empire to the AK Party's accession to power through the 2002 elections.

2.1 Policy Vision of Ataturk's Era

World War I changed the political map of the world in a significant way. The previously existing empires collapsed and in their places arose a number of states which were comparatively unstable. Ottoman Empire was among the ones defeated in the war and the Turkish Liberation War that followed soon after, turned out to be a decisive blow to the existence of Ottoman Empire (Stone 2001). On the 20th of October 1923, after the successful military campaign, Republic was formally declared with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a national leader and its president and Ismet Inonu as Prime Minister (Hale 2013).

According to Ataturk's principles, the foreign policy Turkey chose was one seeking recognition as a sovereign nation for the purpose of enjoying the benefits of the newly acquired peaceful times (Göl 1993). To accomplish this objective, Turkey decided to adopt the non-alignment and non-interference policy. Like on many other countries, World War I left a significant negative mark on the country and the immediate goal it sought to accomplish was to dedicate all resources to internal reconstruction, which

was necessary to warrant the future peaceful environment. In light of these needs, there were two major foreign policy directions: Firstly, a modern, self-sustaining state was to be built with the capability of protecting its territories and independence from any aggression, without relying on the support of its allies. Second, Turkey was aiming at becoming a full member of the community of nations of Western Europe (Criss 1997).

Ataturk claimed that being predominantly Islamic and at the same time multinational, had hindered the scientific progress and had created a largely centralized bureaucratic governance system during the Ottoman rule. His idea of transforming Turkey into a more modern state lay in forgetting the Ottoman past and building a new powerful nation from the scratch, while also maintaining tight control of its existing territories and a homogenous population (Abramowitz and Edelman 2013). After the Turkish Liberation War, it was equally necessary to economically and socially rebuild the country that went through a war as well as modernize the new regime of the republic. Naturally, swiftly achieving such goals required the establishment of national peace and stability in the region and internationally. ‘Peace in the Country, Peace in the World’, a motto attributed to Ataturk is a clear reflection of what were the country’s and government’s priorities at the time (Türkmen 2010). This frequently repeated motto became face of the Turkish policy. Accordingly, guided by the secular-nationalist and modernist beliefs, in the 1920s, Ataturk together with his colleagues started the process of transformation and reorientation of the political institutions, as well as the culture and the society. Additionally, the Caliphate, which was separated from Sultanate since 1922, was thereby abolished in 1924. The constitution was enacted later that same year, which included these and many other changes, among them were the confirmation of Grand National Assembly as the “sole rightful representative of the nation” and choosing Ankara as the new capital of the country

(Hale 2013). As a whole, establishing Turkey as a republic was a significant step towards starting the process of nation-building, socio-economic change and cultural revolution.

The need to address the issues of internal political and social system were dominant in this period, because the years of domestic and international conflicts had weakened all aspects of life in the now newly formed state. The creation of new system was absolutely necessary in order to maintain order in the society and have the ability to enforce relevant laws. At the time, the government was based on the implementation of the single-party rule, which in the period of 1925-1945 was the Republican People's Party. Having the single-party government ruling the country helped ease the political leadership's efforts to start modernizing Turkey. One of the first attempts to do so, was to take Western European laws and regulations and to adapt and integrate it with the realities of the country. Accordingly, the newly created laws were mostly based on the legal systems of France, Switzerland, Italy and Sweden (Aslan and Selcuk 2014).

Oran (2011) distinguishes between two directions of politics of Turkey during Ataturk's era. 1923-1920 covers the first half and is called the liberation period, which was characterized with the attempts to establish a strong nation with equally strong statehood and political system. The second half of the Ataturk's era is called Statism and covers the period of nine years, from 1930 through 1939 and was characterized with Statism in economy and all-encompassing control over the country's political life.

Oran (2011) summarizes the major aspects of the period quite well:

- *Nationalism was confined within the country's frontiers;*

- *The regime employed nationalism not as a pretext for imperialistic actions but against imperialism;*
- *Although an authoritarian structure came into being, the ultimate goal was to be like the West. The Western model in Ataturk's mind was not the German but British version, so it was bound to lead to democracy;*
- *Party was under the state control;*
- *The nation-building method did not base itself on blood as in Germany but adopted a culture-based territorial model as in France (144-149).*

With Hitler's coming to power and subsequent aggression to Germany's neighboring countries, the government of Turkey recognized the increasing security concerns and signed a number of agreements and protocols with its neighbors. The agreements dealt with the issues concerning friendship, affirmation of good neighborly relations, security, neutrality, non-aggression pacts and cooperation in a diverse array of fields. The most notable among the signed agreements that also fit the interest and purpose of the present research were agreement signed with Iran in 1932, the 1934 Balkan Entente against Revisionist states, as well as the Sadabad pact signed with Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan in 1937. Based on the type of documents signed with the neighboring states, it can be asserted that all throughout the World War II, up until its end, Turkey chose the non-alignment policy, while still maintaining major focus on dealing with the internal problems, such as controlling the Kurdish question and in general, continuing to build a strong and modern state (Oran 2011).

Even today, the Turkish foreign policy is in great part based on the principles of Ataturk's legacy. "Peace at home and peace abroad" remains the cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy to this day. The basic ideology of Turkish foreign policy is well-reflected in the State of the Nation speech delivered by Ataturk on November 1, 1928:

"It is quite natural and therefore simple to explain the fact that a country which is in the midst of fundamental reforms and development should sincerely desire peace and tranquility both at home and in the world. [...] In the formulation of our foreign policy we pay particular attention to the safety and security of our country and to our capability to protect the rights of the citizenry against any aggression."

The underlying theme of Turkish foreign policy has always been the desire to maintain friendly relations with all international players, be it great or small powers, while staying prepared in the face of any potential aggression (Criss 1997).

2.1 Turkey`s Middle East Policy Since the Establishment of the Republic until Post-Cold War

The foreign policy of Turkey towards Middle East has undergone a number of radical changes over the past decades. While the earlier period was marked with almost complete neglect in terms of attention towards the foreign policy, a lot of things changed with the commencement of the Cold War. During this period, Turkey and its Middle Eastern neighbors found themselves on the opposite sides of the strategic divide, but in general, over the years, history, identity and security dimensions have played an immensely significant role in the context of Turkey`s relationship with the Middle East.

In order to provide thorough analysis of Turkey`s policy towards Middle East, we divide it in several periods based on some of the significant changes the policy experienced due to the new realities brought about by the changes in the world politics.

The first part covers the period from the establishment of the Republic up until the Cold War, which is the period from 1923 to 1945. The next period encompasses the years between 1945 and 1991. The post-Cold War period, from 1991 to 2002 is analyzed separately. And finally, the period during AKP government is discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

2.1.1 From the establishment to the Cold War

As a result of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a number of problems arose in the region in terms of relations among the newly-formed states. Turkey's relationship with the Middle Eastern states became quite complex and even today, the Muslims who once populated the same empire, are very distinguished from each other in terms of cultural, linguistic and territorial nationalism, as well as in economic functioning and rural-urban divide. The difference within each state also amounts to pro-Western and anti-Western political figures (Yilmaz 2001).

During and shortly after the First World War, Arabs had a number of attempts at establishing independent states, however, all they managed during the war was to separate from the Ottoman Empire and fell to the influence of the then great powers such as England and France. This sort of control of foreign states, naturally influenced Turkey's attitude towards these Arab countries, but it was not the only reason for complication.

Graham E. Fuller (2008) identifies several reasons as to why the Arab world did not fall into the interests of Turkish foreign policy after World War I, which in some way coincide with the reasons named by Oran (2011) that we have discussed above. The reasons identified by Fuller are as follows:

- *The Arab world had ceased to be part of the Turkish state;*
- *Neighboring Arab states were under European mandate control and could therefore play no real role on the international scene or pose any threat to Ankara;*
- *Turkey was internally absorbed with its new nation-state building tasks;*
- *Turkey`s priority was to build new ties with its erstwhile European enemies*
- *Turkey pronounce the denigration of Arab and Islamic culture dominated Ankara thinking (Fuller, The New Turkish Republic - Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World 2008).*

It is understandable that Turkey's policy towards Middle East in this period was somewhat indifferent, because even in the cases when Turkey needed to sign agreements with some of those countries, the government could not establish direct contact with the respective states. Instead, they had to negotiate with the outside powers controlling those states. For example, Turkey had to arrange all matters regarding Syria with France, and all Iraqi matters with England. Additionally, the Mosul and Hatay issues remained largely unresolved within the framework of the Lausanne Conference, even though these issues were to be negotiated with the outer powers. However, Turkey did manage to establish and maintain good relations with Iran and Afghanistan (Fuller, The New Turkish Republic - Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World 2008).

In this period, most of the foreign policy matters concerned the border disputes. After the Lausanne settlement in 1923 there were some issues concerning lands that Turkey could not agree with the neighboring countries. This was also the case in Iraqi-Turkish relations. The disputed territory was Mosul. Turkey was basing its

claim on the territory relying on the National Pact of Turkey signed in January of 1920, according to which all the former Ottoman territories inhabited by Ottoman Muslim majority was part of the inseparable Turkish homeland. Additionally, during the Lausanne conference, two parties had agreed that Mosul would be included in the Republic of Turkey, and in case of dispute, the matter was to be resolved by the League of Nations. However, Great Britain, which was then controlling Iraq, chose to break the agreement in 1924 with the desire to incorporate Mosul and Hakkari province in the territory of Iraq (Bilgin 2007). Both parties had their reasons to be so interested in this particular piece of territory. For Turkey, it represented a strategically important location and in addition to this security concern, the composition of its population and the rich oil reserves were the main reasons for laying claim on the region. The interests of Great Britain also included the rich oil reserves as well as its strategic location, namely the route to India went through this territory (Oran 2011).

Due to the inability of the parties to agree on mutually acceptable terms, the dispute was introduced to the League of Nations. As a response, in order to appraise the local conditions and the attitudes of the local population, the League of Nations established a committee that was charged with surveying the opinion of the population. Based on the results of the survey, the Committee recommended to incorporate Mosul into the territory of Iraq. The decision was then approved by the Council of the League of Nations (Türkmen 2010). Turkey was left with limited options in this case. Correspondingly, in 1926 Turkey agreed to comply with the decision on its terms, which the government offered to Great Britain in three major points: Firstly, Britain was supposed to sign a neutrality treaty with Turkey; Second, Mosul would be transferred to Iraq, with the condition that it would remain a fully self-governing state; And third, Turkey requested shares from the oil extracted from the territory of Mosul. Britain accepted these terms and the British-Turkish Treaty was signed on the

6th of June, 1926. The shares from oil that Turkey would receive was defined in one of the clauses that afforded Turkey a total of 10% of the royalties of the oil extracted from the Mosul oil fields during the following 25 years (Göl 1993).

At first glance it may appear that Turkey agreed to quite unfavorable conditions with regards the Mosul territory, however, there were a number of reasons behind this decision. Most importantly, the former Ottoman province of Mosul was in fact an oil-rich territory and it should have been in Turkey's interests to maintain control over the region, however, the majority of the population was Kurdish and the government of Turkey perceived the issue more as a territorial concern and not so much as an economic one. The way the government of Turkey saw this issue was that if it was incorporated within the Republic of Turkey, it would prove more problematic than beneficial (Göl 1993).

Another disputed territory where Turkey tried to establish authority and eventually succeeded was Sanjak (or Sancak), which was at the time included in the territory of Syria and supported by France. For a short period of time, Turkey and France were unable to reach an agreement in terms of authority over this region. But finally, in summer of 1938, Turkey and France formed a composite military force of 6,000 soldiers, which was then stationed in the region for the purpose of maintaining peace. In the same period, a Friendship Agreement was signed between Turkey and France, based on which Sanjak was recognized by both sides as a separate and independent entity (Yamaç 2015).

Following the Turkish-French agreement, in August of 1938 the parliamentary elections were held in which 22 seats out of a total of 40 was won by Turks, 9 seats were won by Alevis, while Armenians, Arabs and the Greek-Orthodox each won two seats. Consequently, during the first session of the parliament on the 12th of

September the same year, the name of the region was changed from Sanjak to Hatay (Türkmen 2010).

Eventually, the resolution of dispute and negotiations over the Hatay region was reached between Turkey and France in light of the war initiated by Germany on the mainland Europe. Due to this new reality, the more important goal for France was to deal with the newly arisen threat in the face of Germany and secure Turkey's support in fight against Germany. Therefore, on the 23rd of June 1939, Turkey and France signed a declaration "The Agreement concerning Exact Solution of Territorial Issues between Turkey and Syria" based on which Hatay was integrated into the territory of Turkey (Yamaç 2015).

Oran (2011) assesses these two efforts of Turkey in the field of international politics in two different ways. He sees Turkey's attempts to institute control over Mosul as a failure, while the Turkey's dealing with the Hatay issues is seen as more of a success. It is understandable why losing control over Mosul can be considered a failure, since the region had rich oil resources and it should have been a higher priority for the government of Turkey to do more in this regard, while Hatay, being an important region in its own respect, had no such resources. On the other hand, as discussed above, Turkey was initially more concerned with the internal problems and could not concentrate on foreign policy issues, which could explain why its policy proved unsuccessful towards Mosul. In a way, Turkey got luckier with regards the Hatay issue, because in the 1930s the major political reforms had mostly been undertaken and the government had more possibilities to deal with this issue. Additionally, France was facing its own problems in this period and was largely uninterested to continue pursuing mandate system in the Middle East. Currently, the issue is resolved and Turkey exercises full control over the province, but Muhammad Muslih (*see*

Oran, 2011, p. 165) considers it a “sleeping question” and all things that sleep are bound to wake up at some point.

The Turkish-Iranian relations were plagued with a similar dispute over the border as well. These issues between the two countries remained largely unresolved until 1932. The border was demarcated between Turkey and Iran in 1913, however, the decisions were never ratified and during this period, minor disagreements would often arise. While Turkey was preoccupied with the issues regarding Mosul and the Eastern Anatolian rebellions that occurred in 1925, the instances of Iranian tribes violating the agreements over the borders were quite frequent. Even when the Mosul issue was finally resolved, such occurrences of violating rules did not cease on the part of Iran (Türkmen 2010). In 1926, the two countries signed a Security and Friendship agreement. The agreement was aimed at securing the good relations between the two countries and envisaged taking measures for preventing protests of the tribes near the border which was undermining the security of both countries. Additionally, the agreement provided that in case of military aggression against one of the countries, they would remain neutral and not attack each other. One aspect that positively influenced the relations between Turkey and Iran was the new leadership that came to power by overthrowing the Iranian Qajar dynasty. Colonel Reza Pehlevi was the new leader in Iran, who was himself an admirer of Atatürk and shared many views on governance, among which was the opinion that religion halts progress (Oran 2011).

Notwithstanding the good relations between the two countries, and the fact that their leaders saw eye-to-eye on many political and governance issues, the problems on the borders continued until 1937, with neither of the states being able to find tangible resolution to them. Eventually, a treaty was signed between the two countries on the 27th of May, 1937 which determined the current borders between them. According to

this agreement, Mount Agri remained on the side of Turkey, while Iran received agricultural land in the province of Van, in the region of Kotur (Oran 2011).

In attempts to warrant the security of the state, Turkey initiated a number of agreements with the neighboring countries. Among them was the 1937 pact signed by Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan known by the name of Sadabad Pact due to the place of its signing. Even though it was a pact, it did not envisage creation of military alliance and dealt mostly with the issues of non-aggression towards each other, territorial integrity and noninterference. In terms of Kurdish issue, the pact also envisaged that parties would limit the establishment and activities of armed groups within their respective territories. Soon after the pact was signed, the World War II broke out and in 1939, Britain offered Ankara to turn the agreement into a defensive alliance against the USSR, however, Turkey did not take the suggestion into consideration. With this, during the World War II, the pact was largely ignored and forgotten (Oran 2011).

With the passing of Ataturk on the 10th of November, 1938, a chapter in the history of Turkey was closed. Ataturk was a hugely influential political figure not only in the context of Turkey, but in terms of international politics as well. The successor of Ataturk, Mustafa İsmet İnönü's foreign policy can be analyzed in two main phases. The first phase is prior to the World War II, just after he took over as president and the second phase is during the Second World War, involvement in which he persistently tried to avoid (Kibaroglu and Kibaroglu 2009). The basic principles of Inonu's foreign policy were largely based on Ataturk's policy and the multiple agreements signed with the neighboring countries during Ataturk's leadership helped the government under Inonu's management to stay away from direct involvement in the war (Duran and Karaca 2011).

During the entire World War II, there were practically no war efforts carried out in Middle East that could directly affect Turkey, since Germany was unable to approach Turkish border from the Caucasus. The closest Turkey came to be involved in the war was the coup that occurred in Iraq in that period (Türkmen 2010). Even after Atatürk, the major principles of Turkish foreign policy remained largely similar and focused on maintaining territorial integrity, modernizing the country to fit those of Western standards, as well as non-involvement in the domestic affairs of neighboring countries that had a potential to endanger peace and stability of the country (Yılmaz 2001). Therefore, the relationship of Turkey with the Middle Eastern countries was not very active and remained limited for quite a long period of time. Turkey recognized the newly emerged countries in the region and its policy was mostly similar to that of Western countries (Dinc and Yetim 2011). One important aspect that should definitely be emphasized is the fact that during this turbulent period, Turkey managed to establish and maintain good neighborly and friendly relations, or in some cases simply neutral relations, with both sides participating in the global conflict. It can surely be considered an achievement and a success of decision-makers in the government, who against all odds, managed to implement a successful, versatile and well-managed foreign policy (Aslan and Selcuk 2014).

2.1.2 During the Cold War

When the World War II finished, Turkey was in some sense isolated, due its policy during the war throughout which it remained largely uninvolved in the conflict. Due to the perceived threat from the North, Turkey tried to establish close relations with its Arab neighbors, the goal of which was to enhance the security of the state and resolve the problems across its southern border.

Mesut Özcan (2008) divides the Turkish policy towards Middle East during the Cold War period in the following four phases:

- *Beginning of the Cold War and security based on foreign policy: 1945-1950s;*
- *The new shift on foreign policy: 1960s-1980s;*
- *Economic factors and the search for balanced policy: 1980s-1990;*
- *The end of the Cold war and active involvement in Turkey`s Middle East policy.*

The period after the Second World War was characterized with drastic changes in world politics which had significant influence on Turkish foreign policy as well. Among other nations, Turkey was one of the founding members of the United Nations in 1945 and the Council of Europe in 1949. At this point, Turkey had given up its neutral foreign policy and joined the alliance of Western nations. The shift in the foreign policy was caused by the security concerns, namely the perceived threat from Russia, which overall influenced Turkey`s attitude towards the Middle East as well. The goal of Turkey was to benefit from the new realities on the international political arena and attempted to play a role of a representative of Western nations in the Arab world and Middle East in general. However, the act of recognizing Israel`s statehood and its outright opposition of USSR`s Middle East policy somewhat complicated the relations with the Arab countries. In the eyes of its Western allies, Turkey managed to occupy a distinctive position by its firm decision to recognize Israel`s statehood and by maintaining diplomatic relations even though the tensions between Arab countries and Israel was high (Carley 1995).

In 1951, Great Britain and the United States of America introduced Middle Eastern Command Project, according to which the Middle Eastern Command would not be under direct control of NATO, but close links would still be maintained. The project

envisaged contributing to establishing close partnership and cooperation among the countries in the region. Considering the size and might of its army, Turkey was charged with the task of defending the Middle Eastern region. Being a predominantly Muslim country, Turkey's involvement was crucial in this project, in order to alleviate the impression that it was a purely Western project. Arab countries still rejected to join the project, but Turkey announced that the country would be joining it. In light of these realities, Britain and US altered the type of organization and instead of the Middle Eastern Command they established Middle Eastern Defense Organization, however, the organization was never made fully operational (Oran 2011).

In light of the Middle East command and Middle East Defense Organization projects' failure, Adnan Menderes, the then Prime Minister of Turkey, followed a more cautious policy towards Arab states. As a substitute to the establishment of the above-mentioned organization, and since it proved impossible to get the approval of Arab countries, it finally took a form of the Baghdad Pact (Robins, Turkey and the Middle East 1991). The Pact initiated by the United States was signed by Britain, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and monarchial Iraq. The major goal of the Pact was to diminish and battle against the establishment of Communist influence. Due to its nature, this Pact negatively influenced the Soviet-Turkish relations especially in this period (Robins, Turkey and the Middle East 1991).

Following the year 1956, Cold War affected the Middle East as well and a number of crises emerged in the region. Mostly due to Menderes's government, in this period Turkey was almost completely isolated from the political processes developing in the region and did not have a clearly defined policy towards Middle East. After the indecisive policy in the 1950s, Turkey adopted several principles to guide its policy towards Middle East:

- *Noninterference in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern countries. Turkey had neither self-confidence nor knowledge to use the personal and kinship dynamics which govern Arab politics for its own gain.*
- *Noninterference in disputes between states in the area. This applies in particular to intra-Arab relations.*
- *The development of bilateral relations with all states in the region. Here the emphasis is on bilateral as well.*
- *Continued fragmentation of the Arab state system.*
- *The maximization of trade and economic relations.*
- *The separation of the Middle East from Turkey's role within the Western alliance. In the 1950s Turkey regarded by the radical states of the Middle East as Nato` agent, one which saw the region through eyes.*
- *Scrupulous balance in its approach to the Israel-Palestine question (Robins 1991, 65).*

From the coup of 1960 to the coup of 1980, Turkey underwent the most unstable period in the history of the country. However, the coup on the 27th of May in 1960, marked a new beginning in the foreign policy-making of Turkey. After overthrowing the Menderes government and changing the 1923 constitution with a new constitution (of 1961) the Turkish foreign policy system and the government at large, saw the emergence of new political parties and political figures. Naturally, the changes that the domestic politics experienced, affected the foreign policy decisions as well. The new political realities created a need to revise the relationships of Turkey with its neighboring countries (Ismael and Aydn 2003). From the early 1960s, the one-dimensional, pro-Western orientation of Turkey was being largely criticized among the political elites. This criticism was mainly caused by the participatory nature of

the new constitution, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and the increasing influence of public opinion on the matters of foreign policy formation (Özcan 2008).

From the early 1970s, Turkey showed increased interest towards Middle East, which was caused more by a necessity than merely a good will. In the face of the oil crisis and the embargos from Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the US, the economic situation in Turkey worsened considerably and the oil prices tripled. In order to overcome this crisis, the coalition government headed by Bulent Ecevit and Suleyman Demirel concentrated their efforts in establishing closer ties with the Arab countries. This was the first instance when the economic aspect was not only added, but in fact determined the course of Turkish foreign policy. In 1973, Turkey and Iraq signed an agreement, which envisaged construction of a pipeline from Kirkuk oil field to a terminal to Turkey`s Mediterranean port of Yumurtalik. The pipeline started operating in 1977 and provided enough output to satisfy the two-thirds of Turkish oil needs (Oran 2011).

As can be expected, the Turkish policy towards Middle East was greatly influenced by the domestic and international changes in the region. In light of the 1970s oil crisis, both Western countries and the United States reassessed the importance of Middle East and the role of Turkey in the region. Additionally, there was an increased security threat to the Gulf States from USSR and the radical Islamist Iran and since US did not want to directly interfere in the conflict, they had to rely on Turkey to take action. With these new realities, the importance of Turkey in the eyes of the Western countries and mostly for the US increased and Turkey became a significant player in attempts to hinder any potential attempts of advancing to the Middle East on behalf of the Soviet Union (Hale 2013).

During the 1980s, Turkey was controlled by several different regimes. The three years of military dictatorship that was established following the 1980 coup d`etat,

was later succeeded by a multi-party parliament and the process of coming closer to a full democracy (Ismael and Aydn 2003).

The period of the government headed by Turgut Özal was characterized with uncertainty in terms of foreign policy. Özal was looking at the Western countries for economic cooperation, however, firmly believed from the very beginning that Turkey should have relied on the Ottoman heritage (Linden, et al. 2011). Özal saw Turkey as a 'Bridge Country', which implied that the country was supposed to take good practices from both East and West and become a facilitator of dialogue between the two diverse cultures and nations of Eastern and Western World. The goal of such policy and such philosophy was to increase the political prestige of Turkey in the eyes of other countries around the world (Dinc and Yetim 2011). In this period, the focus on the economy remained part of the foreign policy in addition to security issues. The economic policy was based on three major aspects, which were more foreign borrowing, more capital flow into the Turkish economy and more exports. Özal firmly believed that economic policies were the answer to the chronic problems in the overall foreign policy of Turkey (Linden, et al. 2011). Based on these views, the economic and political liberalization reforms undertaken by his government were quite drastic, which hindered the bureaucratic authoritarian control of the government and the country entered the post-Cold War era more prepared than it would have been otherwise (Kösebalaban 2011).

Establishing closer ties with the countries of Middle East continued in the 1980s as well. Among the most notable instances of close cooperation were the 1984 agreement signed with Saudi Arabia regarding the military Training and Education and Temporary Assignments, and later on, another agreement to establish Turkish-Saudi Joint Investment and Trading Company was signed. Following these agreements, and with the initiative of Saudi Arabia, Turkey also signed a similar

military agreement with Kuwait. Additionally, the government of Turkey was trying to maintain good relations with Organization of the Islamic Conference. Turkey was aiming at gaining support of the Arab states on the foreign policy matters, among which the most pressing was the Cyprus issue. Through all possible channels and on all ministerials, Turkey was appealing to the representatives of Middle Eastern countries to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Oran 2011).

In general, throughout the 1980s, Turkey followed an active foreign policy towards the Middle East, however, there were certain problems in this regard too. The Kurdish question remained problematic in relations with the neighboring countries Iran and Iraq. Another issue was the sharing of water from Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which became more debatable with the regional development project implemented by Turkey and known by the acronym GAP (Güneydoğu Anadolu projesi – Southeastern Anatolia Project) (Oran 2011). Syria too had claims on the water resources and opposed the GAP project based on the concerns that the Turkish irrigation plans would diminish the amount of water Syria could use from the river. The problem was resolved with signing of the security and economic cooperation protocols in 1987, which envisaged that Syria would receive more water (Kösebalaban 2011).

2.1.3 Post-Cold War Period

When the Cold War ended, Turkey's foreign policy also experienced certain changes and became more diversified both towards Middle East and on the international arena. The policies of Özal's government served as a basis for this sort of diversification. The quest for tying policies with the Ottoman past during Özal's period came to be known as "Ottomanism" or "neo-Ottomanism", which referred to the attempts of creating a more inclusive and multicultural state. The Ottoman period

was perceived as a good example of incorporating Kurdish and Islamic identity into a one political culture within the Republic of Turkey. Özal was comparing Ottoman Empire with the United States of America in a sense that they both had a capacity to accommodate diverse cultures, by allowing people of different origin to freely exercise religion, nationality and economic preference. Additionally, in this period, Turkey's Islamic identity was used as a tool for further deepening the economic and political ties with the Middle Eastern countries and the government firmly believed that success in developing relations with Middle East could serve as the basis for opening up the relations with US and EU (Danforth 2008).

On the other hand, the end of Cold War brought about another host of problems. From the beginning of the 1990s, the new realities on the international arena, such as the Gulf War and the collapse of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in increasing the number of neighboring states around Turkey (Özcan 2008). As a result of these alterations to the political map of the world, Turkey assumed a new role of a prominent actor among the Middle Eastern countries. While during the Cold War the north was perceived as a threat to the national interests of Turkey, after 1974 the West was thought to be such a threat (Larrabee and Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East* 2013). However, with the end of Cold War, the perceived security threats increased. lists several internal and external security challenges that Turkey was facing immediately after the Cold War:

- *Rising Kurdish nationalism and separatism;*
- *Sectarian violence in Iraq, which could spill over and draw in outside powers;*
- *The possible dominated by groups with close ties to Iran and Syria* (Larrabee and Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East* 2013).

Yilmaz (2001) summarizes the major factors that influenced Turkey's policy towards Middle East:

- *The domestic Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê - PKK) problem and its connections to northern Iraq, Syria and Iran;*
- *Tehran's challenges to Turkey's secular regime;*
- *The increasing significance of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (the GAP) for Syria and Iraq and their access to fresh water;*
- *Turkey's need to bolster its economic position in order to obtain the membership of the European Union (the EU) and, to that end, the economic importance of the Middle East as an immediate area of opportunities for Turkey (Turkey is unique in the Middle East in terms of having inexpensive agricultural, food and water sources.);*
- *Challenges to the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC) regimes from Iran, Iraq, and the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the possibility of Ankara playing the role of an intermediary role. If the ensuring external and domestic security is the forefront issue for Turkey's Middle Eastern agenda, enhancing regional cooperation that would create interdependence is the second (Yilmaz 2001).*

3 AKP's Coming to Power

Throughout its history, Turkey has gone through two main phases of modernization. As discussed in the first part of this thesis, the first phase was the Kemalist reforms undertaken in the 1920-1930s. The second phase covers the period since 2000s and consists of Turkey's aspiration to join European Union (Oran 2011).

At the time of writing this thesis, Justice and Development Party (Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP) is the current government in Turkey. The AKP evolved gradually from the Islamist political movement in Turkey. Such ideas first started circulating in the political life of Turkey in the 1970s which was marked by the establishment of the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party) by Necmettin Erbakan. From the very beginning of the establishment of the party, its leaders have been indicating that Turkey should create closer ties with the Muslim-majority neighbors (Stein, I. Introduction: The Search for Strategic Depth – the AKP and the Middle East 2014).

AKP has governed Turkey for three terms prior to the final and current acquisition of power:

- 3 November 2002 – 22 July 2007;
- 22 July 2007 – 12 June 2011;
- 12 June 2011 – 1 November 2015;
- 1 November 2015 – present.

Due to the deteriorated economic situation in Turkey, and the financial crises of 2001 and 2002, the then governing coalition decided to hold elections ahead of schedule, which turned out to be a losing decision on their behalf and ultimately led to the AKP's victory in the elections (Kibaroglu and Kibaroglu 2009).

In 2002, when AKP came to power, Turkey was battling with an economic crisis and scandals related to corruption. Other than that, the party had to deal with many other internal issues. After winning the elections and all throughout its term, the party enjoyed popular support from the population. There were certain reasons behind its popularity among which the major one was the widely spread perception in the population that as opposed to politicians holding offices before them, the new government was not associated with the chronic corruption. In this period, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, together with the members of the party, started to use foreign policy as a means for placating domestic opposition as well as for expanding cooperation with the liberal elites of Turkey. Namely, during 2002-2005, AKP focused its attention on the process of accession to the European Union which was also aimed at gaining domestic support and weaken any support that the opponents enjoyed. It was also based on this strategy that Turkey started using its influence to effectively execute foreign policy in the Middle East, especially since 2004-2005, because the process of integrating into the European Union had already stalled due to internal politics of Turkey and Europe (Walker, Turkey's global strategy: introduction: the sources of Turkish grand strategy - 'strategic depth' and 'zero-problems' in context 2011).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan could not have participated in the elections without small amendment to the constitution. He was banned from political activity, due to the controversial speech he made in Siirt on the 6th of December, 1997. The support of the rising Anatolian bourgeoisie also played an important role in bringing AKP to power (Oran 2011).

AKP's leadership decided to distance the party from the heritage of National Outlook and instead chose to base the party economically liberal and socially conservative philosophy. As mentioned above, the party often demonstrated the desire to be a

member of the European Union, especially until the years 2005-2006, which was usually very welcomed in the political circles of the EU (Dinc and Yetim 2011).

At the time, AKP saw that in order to shape the country's future, they needed to consider their attitude with Islam and adhere to the Turkey's partly secular order. They saw the need to give up on the revolutionary aspects of Islamism and the idea of a just world order (Oktem 2011).

After winning the elections, in a press conference, Erdogan said that "religion centric but conservative and democrat". This statement and many other attempts show that AKP tried to distance itself from the Islam. In an attempt to detach itself from the Kemalist/secular political powers, AKP concentrated more on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Yavuz 2006). However, Graham Fuller (2008) considers that notwithstanding the party's claims and attempts not to be associated with religious ideology, the party can still be considered overtly religious. Hakan Yavuz (2006) compares AKP to a Christian democrat party, which upholds liberal democratic values but is at the same time largely influenced and informed by religious beliefs.

With AKP leading the political life of Turkey, the questions and the debate about Turkey's historical roots have emerged again, and the question of the country's legacy as a successor of Ottoman Empire has been renewed. Due to its Islamic roots, the focus of AKP has been the unification of the characteristics of the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim values that the state inherited (Linden, et al. 2011).

Notwithstanding the party's Islamist origins, Ahmet Davutoğlu was opposing the classic Islamist worldview that there should be a constant war between Muslims and infidels. He thought that Muslim world did not have enough resources to serve as an anti-system force by developing a global strategy. He also stressed the need for

civilized dialogue among cultures, since the history of different civilizations was not just wars and clashes. According to him, this kind of dialogue is the way towards a globally legitimate international order. The unexpected occurrence such as Arab Spring of 2011 which was an attempt towards political liberalization, has not been considered in Davutoğlu's grand vision (Hale 2013).

In terms of its strategic location, "turkey is a country with a close land basin, the epicenter to the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus, the center of Eurasia in general and is in the middle of Rimland belt culling across the Mediterranean to the Pacific". Such a geostrategic location and the political realities on the international arena, urge AKP to take a more proactive foreign policy, as well as find the ways to balance the relations and alliances for the purpose of leveraging on the global and regional stages (Linden, et al. 2011, Canan-Sokullu 2012).

The next elections held in 2007 in which AKP won 47 percent of votes was historic in a sense that since 1957 no other party had won such a large share of votes and since 1954, it was the first occasion when an incumbent party increased its share of votes in a subsequent election (Keyman and Gumuscu 2014).

Before AKP came to power, Turkey's foreign policy was largely based on concerns of security and skepticism in the region, but with the AKP in charge, the policy towards Middle East changed and took a more proactive form. The party believes that it is up to Turkey to play a decisive role in the region in terms of establishing prosperity, stability and interdependence. The way to achieve this goal is seen in increasing security for all countries in the Middle East and using dialogue instead of force as means of solving disputes and disagreements. They see the need to pursue economic interdependence, support plurality and strengthen the cultural coexistence (Keyman and Gumuscu 2014).

Economic factors also play a significant role in the formation of Turkey's foreign policy. Over the past decade, the country has become a strong player in the world economy. In 2008, Turkey passed the 1 trillion USD threshold. It has an open market and the total foreign trade had reached 334 billion USD in 2008. Having the open market makes the stability of Turkey an important aspect for the global economy (Altunısik and Martin 2011). With this economic factor, it becomes increasingly important for Turkey's allies and other international players that the country remains stable. It is a known fact that restructuring or transforming a country's economic system can also lead to changes in the foreign policy (Altunısik and Martin 2011).

During the period of AKP governance, Turkey has undergone a political transformation. The AKP government has restructured the judiciary and civil-military relations. Naturally, the internal changes have an influence on the formulation of the foreign policy. As a result of the changes, the influence of traditional bureaucracy and the military somewhat decreased in terms of foreign policy decisions. As a result of these alterations, the understanding of national security and potential threats, as well as the tools for foreign policy-making have also changed (Altunısik and Martin 2011, Karacasulu 2015).

Between 2009-2011, AKP won three elections. Eventually, in 2011, AKP managed to consolidate its electoral hegemony and political dominance by winning the elections with the 50 percent of votes (Keyman and Gumuscu 2014, Stein, I. Introduction: The Search for Strategic Depth – the AKP and the Middle East 2014).

3.1 Foreign Policy Orientation of the AKP Government

The review of historical background in the first part of this thesis has illustrated that the Turkish foreign policy has undergone quite big changes over the decades, but with the onset of the 2000s, the foreign policy had become more complex than ever. Ahmet Davutoğlu is an academic who at the time of writing this thesis occupies a post of Prime Minister in Turkey, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's presidency. He has also served as an advisor of the Prime Minister and a consultant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during previous AKP governments. Considering these positions that Davutoğlu has held over the years, it is understandable that a lot of scholars think he has greatly influenced the formation and basic philosophy of the Turkish foreign policy.

The major aspects of the Turkish foreign policy are formulated in the Strategic Depth doctrine (Turk: Stratejik Derinlik) by the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu. The doctrine emphasizes the need for Turkey's active engagement with the neighbors of the country in the Balkans, in the Middle East and in the Caucasus. Davutoğlu was persistent to deepen cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries, namely with Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf states (Murinson 2012).

Strategic Depth was the title of the book published by Ahmet Davutoğlu in 2001, however, the concept itself has since then widely been used to describe the theoretical aspects of the Turkish foreign policy in the early 2000s. The concept of strategic depth implies that the historical and geographical depth of Turkey, i.e. Turkey's geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic situation on the political map has a significant influence on the world politics as a whole (Yeşiltaş and Balcı 2013).

With the changing political realities in the region around Turkey and on the international arena, Turkish foreign policy has become more complex. Below we will describe some of the major concepts:

Center State is a term frequently used by Davutoğlu and describes the power of action Turkey has in terms of international politics. The concept itself consists of two elements: The first one of them disregards and criticizes the metaphor of “bridge” used before for comparing Turkey to a kind of connector between the Western and the Eastern worlds, be it in material or cultural context. On the other hand, it is in the power of Turkey to be a center state, however, there are three different factors influencing Turkey in such a case: terrorism and subsequent internal polarization, frequent economic crises and political instability (Davutoğlu 2004). As a general rule, center states are characterized with the following four features: 1) geographical depth, which makes it hard to ascribe a country to one geographical region; 2) historical continuity and depth; 3) cultural pass through and interaction; 4) relations with economic units (Davutoğlu 2013, 348).

Modern Turkey has undergone three stages of restoration: the Tanzimat, the Republic and the transition to democracy and a multi-party system. Each stage of restoration has been an effort on behalf of the country to adapt to the ever-changing global system.

Each of these transformations took tenuous battles and effort. Alongside the changing realities around the world, Turkish intellectuals have been trying to step up to the changes as much as was possible for the country. The Tanzimat made new terminology and concepts enter the Ottoman language through the French Revolution. The restoration of foreign policy was in itself intended to incorporate Turkey into the European system. And the formation of the Republic was in a way also an attempt of restoration, as a result of which not the institutions of the state were transformed, but the overall regime of the country as well. The Cold War brought with it yet another necessity for restoration. Nowadays, Turkey is following a path of political restoration while maintaining the main focus on the development

of freedom and democracy. Over the past decade and a half, Turkey has accomplished a restoration, the basis of which has become the returning of the self-confidence of the people residing in this country, by means of building a dignified future for them (Davutoğlu 2014).

You have existed throughout history, you will continue to exist. Your culture is not a secondary and passive culture; it is rather a nation which has shown its will to be an agent (Davutoğlu 2014).

The new dynamics that the Turkish foreign policy has acquired lately, ensures the active role of Turkey with the vision, confidence and determination that the particular historical moment requires. Turkey directly felt the results of the insecure atmosphere created by the Cold War and the resulting security issues all throughout its neighborhood. At the time, the most pressing issue for the Turkish diplomats was the harmonization of the influential power axes of Turkey with that of the new international environment. It should come as no surprise that the unique demographics of Turkey has a great influence on the foreign policy. Currently, there are five operational principles guiding the foreign policy-making of Turkey. The first principle is the “balance between security and democracy”. Any political regime needs to be able to provide both security and freedom to its citizens in order for it to be considered legitimate; increased security should not be achieved by sacrificing freedom and human rights. Since the year 2002, turkey has made a number of attempts to contribute to the increase of civil liberties without actually undermining security. In the case of any country, and Turkey is certainly no exception here, this is quite an ambitious move, considering the new realities of the post September 11 world. Influenced by the constant threat of terrorism, the response of many governments has indeed been the restriction of liberties in the name of increased security. Secondly, the “zero problems towards neighbors” has been another

principle that has been successfully implemented for almost the entire past decade (Davutoğlu 2010). The AKP government has paid particular attention to minimizing the problems with the neighboring countries. The idea behind this policy is that Turkey needs to stop viewing all neighbors as potential threat and get rid of the defensive reflex arising from this viewpoint. On the contrary, the aim of Turkey is to create a state of peace and stability in the region which will benefit all the countries to gain from it and improve their economic condition (MFA of Turkey 2014). Turkey managed to successfully implement this principle till the Arab Spring, but after this occurrence and with the commencement of the Syrian crisis, the policy came to its logical end.

“Proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy” is the third operative principle, which envisages implementing measures prior to the escalation of conflict or its reaching the critical levels. “Turkey’s regional policy is based on security for all, high-level political dialogue, economic integration and interdependence, and multicultural coexistence” (Davutoğlu 2010, 16). Proactive diplomacy embodies in itself the idea of Turkey taking charge of given problems with the neighboring countries in the region and playing a decisive role in them. Proactive diplomacy has been one of the major aspects of Turkey’s foreign policy during the AKP governments, and also has been accompanied by the pre-emptive diplomacy concept, which in turn implies taking measures aimed at limiting the emergence of conflicts in the region, or leading in the attempts of their resolution (Davutoğlu 2009).

The fourth principle is in itself an adherence to the chosen “multi-dimensional foreign policy”. Turkey aims to work with other global actors on the international arena, rather than compete with them for dominance (Davutoğlu 2009). This kind of multi-dimensional foreign policy is considered to be the end-result of the active role Turkey has played in the capacity of a “center state”. It also implies the establishment and

maintenance of harmonious relationship with different international political actors simultaneously, as well as taking a stance towards different issues based on such a multi-dimensional policy. Nowadays, fully realizing and taking advantage of the tools available to Turkey, the government maintains a multi-dimensional foreign policy with a greater focus on its being pre-emptive rather than reactive. As these terms imply, in terms of foreign policy, Turkey takes control of the emerging issues and does not wait for them to unfold, so that decisions can be made based on the developments (MFA of Turkey 2014).

The fifth principle would be a “rhythmic diplomacy”, which aims at giving Turkey a far more active role in the arena of international relations. The underlying idea in the concept is that Turkey should be involved in resolving all the issues of international importance through participation in international organizations (Davutoğlu 2009). In light of this, it is worth mentioning that Turkey is currently a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and is also a chair of three major commissions within the organization, on the issues of North Korea, Afghanistan and fight against terrorism (Davutoğlu 2010). In other words, rhythmic diplomacy entails usage of diplomacy among different fields both simultaneously and harmoniously. The concept views Turkey as an actor in terms of all arising global issues. Without this kind of active role in international institutions a country cannot be considered an influential actor. It is due to this necessity that Turkey tries to follow the rhythmic diplomacy (Davutoğlu 2013).

As mentioned above, the general principle, or an umbrella concept is the vision-oriented foreign policy that has been extensively used during the AKP government and implies a more proactive approach to foreign policy-making on behalf of the Turkish government (Davutoğlu 2009).

From the very beginning the foreign policy formulated by the AKP government strongly favored the idea of developing cooperation with neighbors which was demonstrated in the approach known as “zero problems with neighbors”. It has been also clear from the beginning that Turkey’s attempts to take on a more active role in the regional organizations was closely connected with the country’s attempts to get closer to EU. The AKP government did not base its decisions on the religious roots and instead stressed that they were not attempting to become a model for anybody (Baudner 2014). In the years 2002 to 2006, AKP government focused its efforts on acquiring membership in the EU, and even though foreign policy was a secondary issue up until then, in this period it became a crucial element of AKP’s social and political legitimacy (Tüysüzoglu 2014, Baudner 2014).

Beginning from 2006, Turkey changed its focus in terms of foreign policy, pausing the EU integration issue and instead focusing on utilizing the possibilities created by the power vacuum in the region. The region in this context implies the wider neighboring countries which Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time referred to as Afro-Eurasia. Davutoğlu’s stance to avoid siding with the neo-Ottomanist viewpoints can be considered a politically pragmatic step, considering that Ottomanist discourse implies a somewhat imperial view and has a potential to incur negative feelings in the majority of neighboring countries and internationally, as well as among the Turkish population (Tüysüzoglu 2014). However, utilizing the Ottoman legacy has its beneficial implications for Turkey. By relying on this view, the country has a better potential to establish cultural and historical connections with the Balkans, East Asia, Middle East and parts of Africa. In other words, it bears a potential to culturally and historically connect Turkey with these regions, the region in which Turkey itself is located (Yeşiltaş and Balcı 2013).

Davutoğlu did not agree with the prior decision-making of Turkey, because he thought it was based on a flawed interpretation of Turkey's geographical location and history. He considered that Islam should have been a source of communal strength and political legitimacy (Stein, I. Introduction: The Search for Strategic Depth – the AKP and the Middle East 2014).

From the very beginning, when AKP government came to power, they were trying to gain support of the West, which is why they chose to undertake sufficient reforms and attempt EU integration. Davutoğlu's policy vision was aimed at pursuing these goals. However, when the AKP government saw that Turkey became more powerful both within the region and internationally, the government felt more free to emphasize its Islamic roots and transform the country into a more religious one.

The year 2007 marked a point of transformation for Turkey in that the AKP, a party with Islamist roots, consolidated its power by winning the presidential elections and started to pursue neo-Ottoman policy more actively. Such a policy outright rejects the secular Kemalist legacy, as well as republican diplomacy (Stein, I. Introduction: The Search for Strategic Depth – the AKP and the Middle East 2014).

In general, Turkish foreign policy is based on a holistic understanding of history and the motivation to be actively involved in regional and international affairs, with a careful consideration of its own position and conditions. Turkish foreign policy takes into consideration its historical depth, geographical location and an enormous legacy in terms of international affairs. The role of historical legacy in formulating policies is paramount and should not be denied in case of any country, and accordingly, Turkey formulates its policies by paying careful attention to long-term historical trends and its position in the world history (Oktav 2016). Traditionally, Turkish foreign policy is shaped by the following five factors:

- *Historical experiences;*
- *Geopolitical and geostrategic location which provide a unique position for the country;*
- *A number of vulnerabilities;*
- *The political ideology of governing elite;*
- *The demands of systematic, regional and domestic changes on the country's external relations at any time (Oktem 2011).*

Davutoğlu places a huge significance on the economic integration of the region in terms of achieving peace and stability. Additionally, such an integration has a potential to improve relations Turkey has with the neighboring countries (Oktav 2016). With this vision, Turkey managed to increase its soft power because of the economic development within the country itself and the instances of pursuing active diplomacy. These attempts at conducting active diplomacy has not been limited to just the region and the neighboring countries, but has also involved countries from Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, with whom, Turkey had very little interaction before AKP government (Karacasulu 2015).

3.2 Ahmet Davutoğlu as an Architect of Turkish Foreign Policy

The Turkish foreign policy during the AKP government is strongly associated with Ahmet Davutoğlu and rightfully so, since he has greatly influenced the policy direction of Turkey in this period. Besides his direct influence on the foreign policy formation through a number of governmental positions he has held during the AKP government era, he is also an academic who has published a number of influential works on his visions regarding Turkish foreign policy, among which the most notable

is his book “Strategic Depth”. This deep involvement in the formation of policy has made it almost impossible to talk about Turkey’s foreign policy without referring to Ahmet Davutoğlu (Grigoriadis 2010).

Before AKP came to power, Davutoğlu’s works were mostly limited to academic circles without direct influence on the foreign policy formation of Turkey. However, after AKP, a party with explicitly Islamist roots, took charge of government, and considering Davutoğlu’s impressive academic record in the field, as well as his being a devout Muslim played an important role in his becoming chief foreign policy advisor to then party leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Later in his career, Davutoğlu became a Minister of Foreign Affairs, followed by his position as a Prime Minister since 2014 (Walker 2007). With this in mind, it becomes clear how and why Davutoğlu has had such a great influence on the formation and execution of Turkish foreign policy in the period of AKP administration.

Most scholars in the field of international politics agree that Davutoğlu managed to change the rhetoric and practice of Turkish foreign policy, by enriching it with a far more dynamic characteristics and a multi-dimensional orientation. He is credited for setting the vision and style of the foreign policy framework and the provision of means for pursuing it (Aras 2009).

According to Davutoğlu himself, Turkey’s new position in terms of foreign policy has concurrently ideational and geographic basis. Considering the unique position Turkey occupies in terms of geographical location and being a large country on the territory on the Afro-Eurasian landmass, it becomes hard to define Turkey in narrow and unified character, and instead it has a potential to be a central country within this region with multiple regional identities. Similar to other such countries, as are Germany, Iran, Russia and Egypt, it is hard to talk about Turkey in terms of single geographical and historical identity (Davutoğlu 2008). “In terms of its area of

influence, Turkey is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country” (Davutoğlu 2008, 79). Only such a geographical position is enough to serve as a basis for the importance of Turkey as a regional and international player. This vision has probably served as a major reason for turning Turkey’s foreign policy onto more proactive tracks during the AKP’s administration.

Davutoğlu has long been a proponent of a more proactive foreign policy, viewing it as an only logical path for Turkey, which is clearly illustrated in his academic work. He considers it impossible to turn a blind eye on the processes going on in the neighboring regions and internationally and advocates for Turkey’s increased involvement in all of those processes that directly concern the country’s interests (Davutoğlu 2013).

3.2.1 Strategic Depth Doctrine

Over the years of his political career, Davutoğlu has been shaping the Turkish foreign policy largely based on his “strategic depth” doctrine, which in itself takes into consideration the historical and cultural roots of Turkey in terms of its role in the international politics arena. Such an approach also emphasizes the Ottoman legacy and Islamic tradition of Turkey (Ulgen 2010).

Strategic Depth is a title of the book by Ahmet Davutoğlu, and the term later came to be used as a separate concept to analyze the transformation that the Turkish foreign policy experienced in the beginning of the 2000s, as well as to understand the theoretical aspect of the newly formulated foreign policy (Yeşiltaş and Balcı 2013). In other words, the book is a theoretical background for the newly adopted Turkish

foreign policy and serves the major purpose of suggesting as to how to transform Turkish foreign policy. The main underlying idea is that the concept of Strategic Depth should characterize the foreign policy (Bağcı and Açıkalin 2015).

Davutoğlu's concept of "strategic depth" includes four major denominators:

- ***Geographical depth*** – is derived from Turkey's geographical location with equal access to the Balkans, Middle East, Central Asia, and Russia.
- ***Historical depth*** – relates to the common Ottoman history of the region, which places Turkey, as the Ottoman successor state, in a unique position to exploit such a position as a means of diplomacy.
- ***Geo-cultural influence*** – relates to the present-day cultural commonalities with the post-Ottoman world that arises from this common heritage.
- ***Geo-economic importance*** – relates to Turkey's central position as a transit country for Europe's energy supplies. This geo-economic importance is complemented by the potential of the growing Turkish export market for not only Europe and the US, but for Russia as well (Murinson 2012, 6).

Such Strategic Depth affords Turkey quite unique opportunities in terms of global political economy, which as Davutoğlu claims can be attained by adopting a more proactive approach in the foreign policy of Turkey (Murinson 2012). Davutoğlu has also argued that the above mentioned Historical Depth in itself contributes to the enhancement of its Geographic Depth and Turkey needs to take advantage of the opportunities afforded to the country within this context (Danforth 2008).

The main thesis of Davutoğlu's book lies in perceiving the value of any given nation in the context of world politics, based on the geo-strategic location and historical

depth, and since in case of Turkey these two concepts are strongly emphasized, Davutoğlu thinks that they should form the basis of foreign policy (Walker 2007). As opposed to the Kemalist ideology, which Davutoğlu has criticized not based on the religious context, but more in pragmatic terms, he has been a more active advocate of focusing on the strategic importance of the Muslim world in Turkey's neighborhood and beyond, as well as the need Turkey was facing for re-engaging on this front (Danforth 2008). The geographical location of a country is certainly of significance, but alongside geography, historical and cultural roots play equal, if not greater role in the strategic depth doctrine. In this context, the Ottoman past of Turkey and the previously existing ties with the Balkans, the Middle East and central Asia take center stage in terms of Turkey's role in the region (Park 2012).

Davutoğlu's strategic depth doctrine bears similarities with neo-Ottomanist ideals which in itself is based on the solidarity among the Muslim nations. Davutoğlu sees no reason why Turkey should not re-emerge as a central and leading nation among the Muslim countries and bring positive changes by introducing the representative democracy, the Western standard of living and modernity (Murinson 2012). Neo-Ottomanism may have different interpretations, but the most common is the one referring to Turkey taking a more active role all throughout the former Ottoman space. This interpretation also corresponds to Ahmet Davutoğlu's emphasis on what role Turkey should play within the region and in relation to its neighbors (Hale 2013). Notwithstanding these similarities, Davutoğlu has never openly claimed to be a supporter of neo-Ottomanist vision, most probably because it has a potential to provoke negative political and social responses not only in the region and neighboring countries, but within Turkey as well (Tüysüzoglu 2014). The imperialist visions of a single country can have quite negative influence on Turkey's relations with its neighbors, so openly supporting the neo-Ottomanist vision is definitely out

of question, however, it is undeniable that the strategic depth doctrine has certain similarities with this vision.

The strategic depth doctrine has had a huge influence on the formation of Turkish foreign policy in the past years and Davutoğlu's influence on the process is not only apparent, but undeniable. In general, the new policy visions have completely reshaped Turkey's foreign policy approaches and has resulted in making Turkey a more active power both in relation to its neighbors, as well as internationally.

3.2.2 Strategic Depth Doctrine in Relation to the Middle East

It should come as no surprise that the most turbulent region in the neighborhood of Turkey is the Middle East, which provides both challenges and opportunities for Turkey. Since the 1990s Turkey's relations and attitude towards the Middle East has changed gradually and substantially, which can probably be ascribed to the AKP administration's profile and the characteristics of relations with the EU (Kirişçi 2009).

In March of 2003, USA took military action against Iraq to which Turkey's response was not immediate support to the US. The newly elected Turkish parliament did not vote for granting the Prime Minister permission to allow US invade northern part of Iraq. This issue certainly created tension between the two NATO countries, but simultaneously, increased the popularity of Turkey in the Middle East. The new realities in the region, gave Turkey an opportunity to become a major region among the neighboring countries, which contributed to improving, to a certain degree, Turkey's relations with Iran, Iraq and Syria. Since the AKP government came to power with the promise of representing the interests of the population beyond the

dominant political, economic and cultural elites, this discourse entailed that the party was obligated to bring change. This change was the most apparent in terms of its attitude towards the Middle East. Additionally, since the AKP government's history is clearly rooted in a political tradition that holds the Ottoman past in high regard, the cultural and historical ties with the Middle East became ever so significant (Altunışık and Martin 2011).

With the AKP government's focus on a more proactive foreign policy, it becomes understandable that they need to increase their influence over the Middle East and in general, become a more central player in the region. According to Davutoğlu (2013), by becoming more influential in the Middle East, Turkey gains greater bargaining power in relation to other global powers and by becoming of central importance in the region, the country will be more persuasive in relation to others.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, AKP administration tried to establish good relations with the neighboring countries in the Middle East. The attempts themselves were based on the three principles formulated by Davutoğlu. First of all, the foreign policy was supposed to be "visionary", which means acting on the pre-determined vision basis, and not reacting and dealing with issues as they occur. Secondly, the goal was to establish a more "consistent and systematic" foreign policy not only towards the Middle Eastern countries, but to others in the region and beyond. The focus in this aspect is to maintain good relations with all international players and deal with them by paying equal importance to the relations. The third principle was a resolve to follow a new discourse and diplomatic style. This has led to spreading Turkish soft power in the Middle Eastern region and the neighboring countries in general. Even though Turkey still has quite a powerful military force due to the insecurities arising from the region in which it is located, it is still noticeable that the

AKP administration has adopted a new language which brings forth the civil-economic power of Turkey (Davutoğlu 2010).

For the purposes of utilizing these methodological principles in practice, the AKP administration embraced the Islamic heritage and identity of Turkey, as well as its central role in the Middle Eastern region in the historical context. Additionally, AKP administration distanced itself from the US policies towards Middle East, criticizing them and considering them to be flawed, all while adhering to the principle of “zero problems with neighbors” to normalize and improve relations not only with the neighbors but all other partners on the international level (Fuller 2015).

Overall, the Middle East and related issues took a central role in the foreign policy of Turkey, which was an end-result of particular processes within the political life of the country and in terms of external processes as well. As opposed to the previous governments, which followed more ideological discourses in formulating policies, the need of democratization and continuous economic growth made the AKP government to become more pragmatic in formulating the policies, which is especially true towards the neighboring countries in the Middle East. In general, the elites of the AK Party view the Muslim and Ottoman dimensions as useful tools for establishing closer links with the Middle Eastern countries (Dinc and Yetim 2011).

The AKP administration’s interest in terms of improving relations with the Middle Eastern countries had an underlying economic motivation as well. Since from the very beginning of coming to power, the Party has been trying to resolve the economic crisis within the country, and considering that Turkish businessmen tend to be religiously conservative, preferring to do business with the Middle Eastern countries, the choice was somewhat obvious. This kind of demand urged the government to improve relations and establish better ties with the neighboring Muslim countries. As a result, trade increased between Turkey and the neighboring

countries. Since 2005, the exports from Turkey reached \$20,975,147 million, which is double what it used to be before that (Altunisik and Martin 2011). Additionally, according to Davutoğlu, the economic interdependence principle has an influence on increasing security in the region as well, since it creates an environment, in which countries have more incentive to resolve arising problems through dialogue. This concept is considered to be fundamental to increasing peace and stability in the region (Altunisik and Martin 2011).

With the onset of Arab Spring the focus of Turkey in terms of foreign policy towards Middle East changed from that of partnership to more of a moderator state. In the cases, where political instability in the neighboring countries threatened the Turkish economic and trade relations, the government took a more cautious stance towards these issues and took on a mediatory role to support democratic reforms. For example, in Lybia and Syria, Turkey had substantial economic interests, so the government tried to contribute to stability and gradual reform, while in Tunisia and Egypt, where their economic interests were considerably lower, the government of Turkey supported the popular movements (Keyman and Gumuscu 2014).

“A new Middle East is about to be born. We will be the owner, pioneer and the servant of this new Middle East” (Davutoğlu 2012).

Having realized the critical role Turkey played in Syria gave the government the needed self-confidence, which was well illustrated in Ahmet Davutoğlu’s speech to the Turkish parliament in the capacity of a Foreign Minister, where he stated that Turkey would be the leading power to bring change in the Middle East (Barkey, The Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East 2012). After Arab Spring Davutoğlu stated that Turkey tried to force other countries to adopt the Turkish model of democracy. However, it was most probably the regional developments that overthrew long-lasting dictatorships in some of the countries in the region, but it is

also hard to deny that Turkish experience with democracy and the possibility of having secularism in a Muslim society, contributed to inspiring and motivating the emerging regimes. Turkish government even provided financial aid to Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, which served as a test to the adopted policy of “zero problems with neighbors”. Additionally, when the Syrian crisis began, Davutoğlu’s model of foreign policy was not realized. In this context, the relations with some Arab countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia improved, while there emerged some tensions in the relations with Iran, Iraq and Syria (Keyman and Gumuscu 2014).

4 Policy of “Zero Problems with Neighbors”

As it has been frequently outlined in the previous parts of this thesis, and to which I, as a researcher also agree, is the fact that the major force behind the ideology and in general the formation of Turkish foreign policy has been Ahmet Davutoğlu, who has held various high-level positions in the government during the past decade. Although Erdoğan has certainly been the leader of Turkey within a little over a decade already, it is almost indisputable that Davutoğlu has been the key figure in forming Turkish foreign policy, which was mainly the result of an enormous trust Erdoğan placed in him, as in a renowned scholar and a policy adviser. Almost all the actions taken by Turkey on the international political and economic arena has been based on the visions formulated by Davutoğlu both in his scholarly work as well as through the capacity of a Policy Adviser to the President, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister.

In the second part of this paper, I discussed the politics and the foreign policy in a wider context, while in this part, the discussion will concern the “zero problems with

neighbors” policy. We will start out by conceptualizing the theoretical aspect of this policy after which we will discuss some of the case studies concerning the relations of Turkey with Syria, Iran and Iraq, in order to bridge the theory with practice.

Before we move onto discussing the theoretical aspects of the policy and consequently the case studies listed above, I find it important to clarify at this stage as to why I have chosen these particular cases studies. Even though nowadays there is a crisis in Syria, it has not been the only determining factor of including this case study in the research. Syria has been an important player in the region before the crisis as well, which is especially true in case of Turkey. However, the newly emerged crisis plays its own role as well since I think that it was the moment when Syrian crisis erupted that the Turkish “zero problems with neighbors” policy came to its end. Additionally, all the chosen candidates for case studies are influential actors in the Middle East and possess sufficient capabilities to cause alterations in the Turkish foreign policy. The significance of this aspect grows even more if we consider that similar to Turkey, all these countries are aiming at becoming main regional actors. Other than that, all these countries are facing issues regarding the Kurdish minorities within their boundaries and they all want to solve these issues without compromising their territorial integrity. Last but not least, and to me the most important aspect is the economic interdependence. As Ahmet Davutoğlu has indicated, economic interdependence is a vital tool in terms of allowing Turkey to “gain depth” in the neighborhood, and correspondingly, the chief principle of “zero problems with neighbors” policy is strongly linked to promoting economic interdependence among the neighboring countries of Turkey (Almuedo 2011).

The “zero problems with neighbors” doctrine is a brainchild of Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu has been compared to some of the most successful figures in the history of diplomacy, among them to Henry Kissinger. The reason for holding him in such a high

regard is the effective approaches to a very complex politics of the Middle East (Kibaroglu and Kibaroglu 2009).

It is pretty clear what the “zero problems with neighbors” policy implies, since it is so clearly worded, but its interpretation may vary. It does not change the meaning of the approach itself, but can be understood as an attempt to have maximum cooperation with neighbors, or have zero problems with regimes. This strategy, formulated and supported by Davutoğlu, aimed at helping the AKP administration take Turkey on a path of good bilateral relations, which was quite the opposite during the 1980s (Robins, Turkey and the Middle East 1991).

If the country has a psychology that it is surrounded by enemies it will take a defensive stance. From this point, Turkey has tried to have zero problems with neighbors, even though there was war in its territory/region. Although at the beginning it was criticized and was accepted as a utopia, we still managed to develop relations that yielded economically and politically advantageous results for Turkey (Davutoğlu 2013, 113).

This concept was not developed to normalize relations just with the Middle Eastern countries. The approach was used to eliminate problems in relations with Armenia, with Greece over the issue of Cyprus, and for starting a political dialogue with Syria and for building stronger ties with the Kurdistan regional government in Northern Iraq. In other words, this concept practical in terms of resolving a number of complex challenges facing Turkey in terms of foreign relations (Kardas 2012).

The principle of “zero problems with neighbors” is strangely reminiscent of Ataturk’s words “Peace at home, peace in the world”. The concept itself is related to other aspects of foreign policy and draws on six major pillars:

- *equal security for all;*

- *economic integration;*
- *coexistence of different cultures in a respectful manner;*
- *a high-level political cooperation;*
- *a high-level of regional consciousness;*
- *understanding the relationship between security and stability and development (Špak 2014).*

According to Davutoğlu, Turkey should be aiming at providing security not only for itself but for the neighbors in the region as well (Špak 2014).

The approach has also had its share of criticism, focusing on the linearity of the concept. Those who oppose this undiversified approach to foreign policy formation, say that resolving certain problems with one neighboring country has a potential to cause a host of problems with another country and judging all of them in a single category is not a realistic policy.

“I gave them an example of a saying by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, “peace at home, and peace with our neighbors”. A very successful military commander. Throughout his life he fought in many wars. He knew it was impossible to have peace always, but he wanted to show a new target for a society which had thirty years of continuous war in the Ottoman territories, the Balkans to Yemen. He wanted to show that we need a new era of peace to recover. Similarly, now, we want to show that there will be a new era with our neighbors. We want to show our neighbors that we may disagree on many points but we have to reintegrate because our destiny is the same” (Davutoğlu 2009, 8).

4.1 Turkey and Iran: friendly competitors

The relations between Turkey and Iran can be considered as “friendly adversary”, since it has become a habit that they are always competing over some issue, but this competition never leads to ending their relations with each other. One of the major reasons for maintaining relations with each other is the existing economic interdependence, which is especially true for Turkey. It is not in Turkish interests to lose an energy partnership like it has with Iran and on the other hand, Iran is trying to maintain the good energy export and transit potential that Turkey offers. The fact that the borders between Turkey and Iran have not changed over the last 400 years indicates that the two countries have good economic and cultural relations.

The following section serves the purpose of explaining how Turkish-Iranian relations developed in the context of “zero problem” policy adopted by Turkey. In order to draw a full and comprehensive picture, the following four dimensions need to be taken into consideration:

- *Economic relations*
- *Kurdish issue*
- *Iran`s nuclear programme*
- *Conflict of interests (in politics)*

According to Davutoğlu, both Turkey and Iran have cultural and geopolitical links with the Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Caucasian countries. He has regarded Turkey and Iran as two sides of the regional triangle (with Egypt being the third) that envelop weaker and artificial Arab states in the region (Stein, I. Introduction: The Search for Strategic Depth – the AKP and the Middle East 2014). The second half of the 20th century was characterized with more indifference in Turkish-Iranian relations than

problems, *per se*. However, the developments in relation to Kurdish movements since the 1998 and the emergence of common interests regarding the Kurdish issues within the boundaries of each one of them, resulted in the two countries signing a number of agreements to resolve these problems, which inadvertently contributed to improving the relations between them (Stein and Bleek 2012). The relations between Turkey and Iran improved in many areas especially after the AKP government assumed power in Turkey in 2002. As mentioned above, these improvements were based on common problems and interests, rather than religious or ideological similarities (Larrabee and Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East* 2013). In general, Turkey was no exception to the AKP administration's "zero problem" approach with the neighbors. The attempts to improve relations with neighbors in this context, included efforts of fostering cooperation between states, creating free trade zones, lifting or moderately simplifying visa restrictions and strengthening infrastructure connecting these countries (Stein and Bleek 2012).

4.4.1 Economic Relations

Economy can be said to be the major aspect helping Turkey and Iran maintain good relations. The economic interdependence urges them to cooperate with each other notwithstanding the many disagreements they have had over the years.

Russia is supplying most of the natural gas to Turkey, but Iran comes second in this list (Larrabee 2010). Historically, Turkey has been highly depended on Iran for natural gas. Currently, Turkey accounts for the 90% of Iran's natural gas exports (Stein 2014). Additionally, by 2012, Turkey depended on Iranian products for 40% in order to satisfy their petroleum needs (Robins 2013). It is therefore understandable, that having to rely

on Iran for the energy needs and for increasing bilateral trade, has greatly influenced the AKP administration's approach towards the relations with Iran.

The tourism sector is yet another field in which the two countries have advanced relations, mainly due to the fact that being a Muslim nation makes Turkey a desirable destination for Iranian citizens. The agreement signed to liberalize visa processes has contributed to increasing the number of tourists from Iran to Turkey to more than a million visitors per year.

The chart below shows the development of trade relations during the past years between Turkey and Iran:

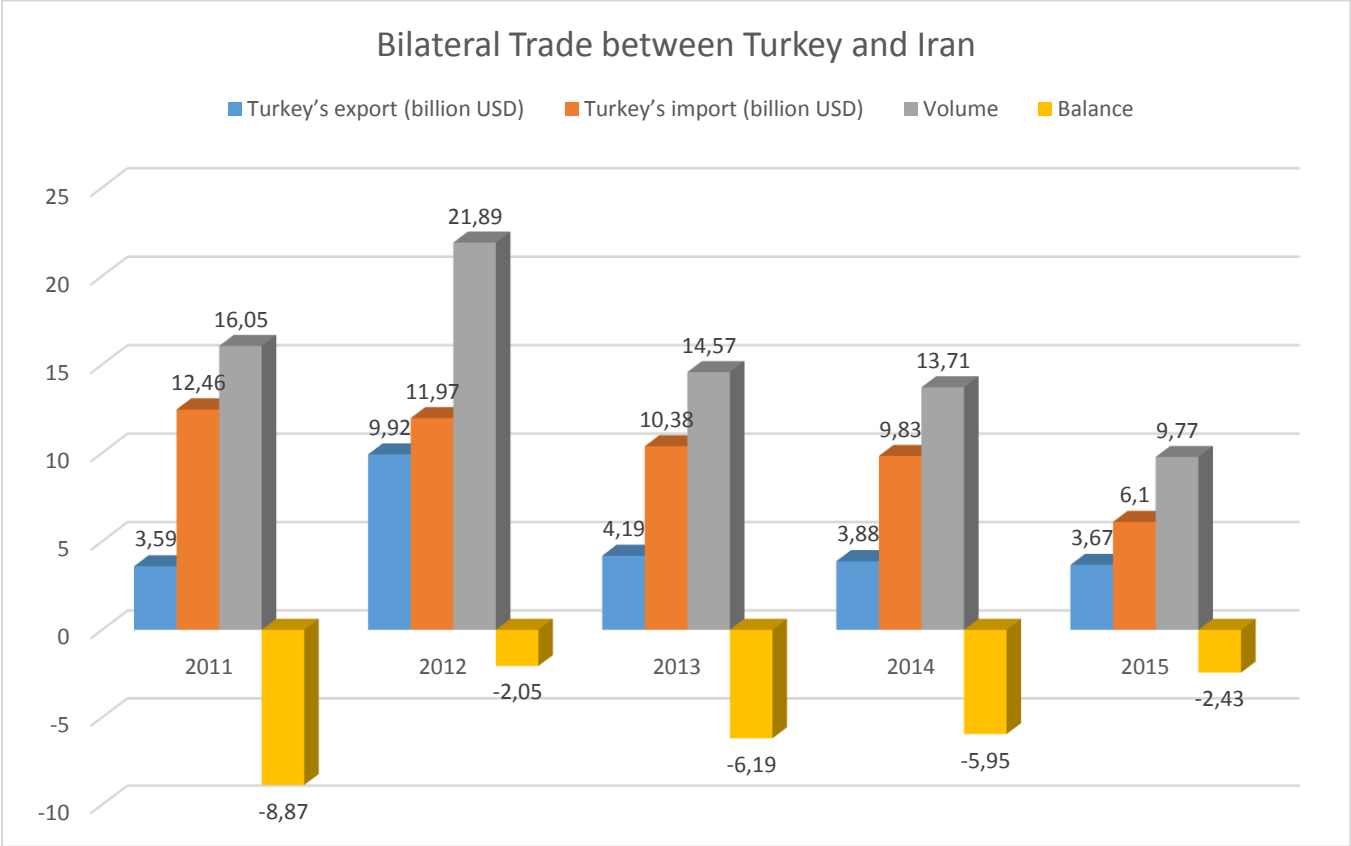


Figure 1 - Bilateral Trade between Turkey and Iran (Turkish Statistical Institute).

4.4.2 Kurdish Issue

Another issue that brings Turkey and Iran together is the common problem of Kurdish nationalist movements. In order to respond to the growing threat of an offshoot of Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), Iran actively started cooperating with Turkey to deliver joint response to the two parties located in the Northern part of Iraq (Barkey, *The Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East* 2012). The security cooperation between the two countries has also been confirmed by signing a relevant agreement during Erdogan's visit Tehran in 2004 (Larrabee 2010). The agreement did not just stay on the paper either. In 2007, Iran offered Turkey to cooperate against the PKK and carry out joint operations. Turkish commander of land forces, Ilker Basbug announced in 2008 that Turkey and Iran were carrying out coordinated efforts against PKK and PJAK in Northern Iraq. The 37 other such reports that emerged in 2011, serve as proof that the Kurdish issue still remains a major uniting aspect of relations between Turkey and Iran (Bengio 2011).

The two countries have been sharing intelligence regarding independent Kurdish state for years, however, since 2011, the growing problems in Syria caused this cooperation to seize, as Turkish officials saw links of Iran in the increased violence of PKK since the end of 2011 (Larrabee and Nader 2013).

After the Arab Spring and the disagreements on the course of action to be taken with regards Syria, Iran started using PKK as a tool of influence against Turkey. The Syrian crisis gave Iran a way of passing Kurdish groups from its territory. On the international arena, Iran takes a stance showing that it is fighting against Kurdish nationalists,

however, they also use this issue to influence Turkey. It is much easier for Iran to fight against PJAK, because they are freer in the sense that they are not limited by the rules and regulation of EU, and can use any means in their fight, while Turkey has to overcome much more complex challenges when dealing with the same issue. This is why the Kurdish issue is much more problematic for Turkey and why Turkey tries to resolve the problems through cooperation with Iran.

4.4.3 Iran`s Nuclear Programme

The nuclear programme of Iran is certainly one of the most sensitive issues in the relations of Turkey and Iran. If Iran possessed nuclear weapons, the military power balance would be altered in the Middle East putting Iran in a more leading position, which creates a threat for Turkey. However, when the secret nuclear works of Iran was uncovered in 2002, Turkey refrained from open and harsh condemnations, the kind that came from Western governments. Instead Turkey emphasized that Iran had every right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in the capacity of a member of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT). In a public announcement, Davutoğlu stated that Turkey opposed sanctions against Iran, since it would put constraints on the regional trade between the two nations and others as well (Pieper 2013). With these efforts, Turkey also encouraged Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and comply with United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions (Pieper 2013). Turkey supports Iran`s nuclear programme in this context, however, it is still a matter of concern for Ankara, since there is a threat of acquiring nuclear weapons. The threat of attack from Iran with nuclear weapon is not likely and it does not represent a concern for Turkey, but the problem they do perceive is that if Iran acquired nuclear

weapons, it could trigger an arms race in the region with Egypt and Saudi Arabia also trying to acquire such weaponry (Larrabee and Nader 2013).

“All nations have the right to obtain peaceful, nuclear technology, because technology doesn’t belong to one country, one group, it is the culmination of the knowledge of humanity, there cannot be a monopoly on technology, therefore Iran, Israel, including Turkey have the right to obtain peaceful nuclear technology (Davutoğlu 2009).”

Both Western countries and Turkey oppose the idea of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, but their approaches towards the issue differ considerably. Turkey tries to rely entirely on diplomatic negotiations to prevent Iran from getting their hands on nuclear weapons and opposes imposition of sanctions on Iran. Turkey is also strictly opposing any sort of military intervention in Iran, fearing the already tense Kurdish problem will erupt into a bigger conflict, while the war in Iran would be similar to what happened in Iraq (Stein and Bleek 2012).

We are against nuclear weapon. [...] There is no ethical justification for a nuclear weaponry system. No justification at all. Wherever, and whoever has it (Davutoğlu 2009).

As mentioned above, the support of Turkey over the nuclear issues was generated through the existing economic interdependence. The aspect of energy has played the most significant role in the approach adopted by turkey.

4.4.4 Conflict of Interests (in Politics)

Alongside the good neighborly relations and economic or security cooperation, Turkey and Iran are also competing for gaining influence in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The rivalry in terms of the Middle East is caused by the parties' desire to dominate the territory and become more powerful actors than the other. Turkey's rise as a regional power under the Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu has contributed to increasing the rivalry between the two countries (Larrabee and Nader 2013). The rivalry reached critical levels as a result of the crisis that emerged in Syria, mainly due to the differing positions the two governments had on the possibilities of resolving the conflict (Stein and Bleek 2012).

“The responsibility to protect the people of Syria is our fundamental duty. No political differences, no balance of power politics, no geopolitical considerations should prevail over our conscience and our concern for the destiny of the Syrian people” (Davutoğlu 2012).

Additionally, the Iraq issue has created an additional basis for competition between Turkey and Iran. The withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq, created a power vacuum in the country, which has a potential to shift the balance of power in the region. While Iran is trying to maintain the support of Iraq for its own policies, Turkey has at the same time established strong ties with the Kurdish Regional Government in the Northern Iraq (Larrabee and Nader 2013). Thus, Iran and Turkey have established their own spheres of influence at the opposite ends of Iraq (Barkey, *The Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East* 2012).

While it is a fact that Turkey and Iran disagree on some of the geopolitical issues, their economic cooperation does not tend to decline over these issues. Economic relations between the two countries have undergone serious challenges, but still managed to remain on good terms (Larrabee and Nader 2013). Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to Iran proved that the two countries are prepared to continue cooperation. During the meeting with the president of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, Davutoğlu said:

“We have already discussed upgrading the level of bilateral ties in order to boost cooperation in energy, banking, transport and tourism. By upgrading our ties, we can also sit for talks and resolve our political differences”.

The continued cooperation in the face of security and other kinds of challenges from the neighboring countries, serves as a proof that both of the countries have the ability to meet the rising challenges arising from Syria and the region in general (Ahmadian 2016).

4.2 Turkey and Iraq: Kurdistan regional government in Northern Iraq

Another country that is also important in the context of “zero problem” policy is Iraq, with whom Turkey has economic interdependence and common Kurdish problem, much like Iran. Turkey has always followed a policy supporting territorial integrity and stability of Iraq. The major considerations in this regard on behalf of Turkey are the security challenges that a failed Iraqi state represents near its borders (Müftüler-Baç 2014).

As was the case towards many other neighboring countries of Turkey, the AKP administration attempted to establish good relations with Iraq as well through the means of diplomacy and economic tools rather than military might. The instance of Turkey’s parliament rejecting the government’s proposal for allowing US to use its military basis for military campaign against Iraq has placed great tension in US-Turkish relations, however, it has also demonstrated the approach of Turkey towards its neighbors. In the years 2003-2005, Turkey allowed US to use its bases only for providing humanitarian

assistance and in another case, the use of Incirlik base for the rotation of soldiers (Müftüler-Baç 2014).

After overthrowing the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which was until then based in Syria, used this chance to return and establish itself again in the Northern Iraq. This represented a security challenge for Turkey in that the PKK party had a better chance to launch terror attacks on civilians (Hale 2013). Additionally, the possible emergence of a Kurdish nation, or the Kurdish Region of Iraq, was viewed as a threat to Turkey (Larrabee and Nader 2013).

Since the year 2008, Turkey intensified diplomatic efforts towards Iraq and all the parties involved in conflict (Larrabee 2010). Later on, Turkey recognized the Kurdish Regional government, which was a huge departure from conventional stances of Turkey. This was a result of Turkey's general policy vision and attempts of playing a powerful role of mediator in the region (Müftüler-Baç 2014, Almuedo 2011).

After electing Jalal Talabani as president in 2005 and Turkey's recognition of him as a legitimate ruler, Turkey has started establishing good relations with the emerging Iraqi government in Baghdad. As a result, both Sunni and Shiite Arab parties in Iraq were anxious to build good neighborly relations with Turkey (Hale 2013). Later on, Turkey played an important role in adopting a new constitution in Iraq, even though the draft of constitution was met with criticism, claiming that it would alienate Sunnis from the political scene. After the adoption of constitution, Turkey pursued a multi-level policy towards Iraq, aimed at increasing its hold and influence on the political scene of Iraq (Stein 2014). The meeting of Turkish and Iraqi presidents in 2008 marked a new beginning of active cooperation between the two countries, which was later confirmed with signing a number of agreements in diverse fields. The major achievement in this regard was the expressed readiness of Iraq to partner with Turkey in the fight against terrorist actions of Kurdish nationalists, which can be interpreted as a success for

Turkish foreign policy (Müftüler-Baç 2014). In the subsequent years, Turkey and Iraq have also managed to develop economic and political relations. A High-level Strategic Cooperation Council was established between Turkey and Iraq in 2009 which also included bilateral trade agreements (Almuedo 2011).

Turkish foreign policy towards Kurds experienced certain changes due to the desire to gain the support of Iraqis and Iraqi Kurds in the fight against PKK terrorism. In these efforts, Turkey relied on diplomatic means to secure the much needed support of Iraqis in this matter (Müftüler-Baç 2014). The first official visit from the government of Turkey to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq occurred in 2008, which was followed by then Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit the next year. This high-level visit marked an important point in developing Ankara-Erbil relations. This good attitude towards KRG was later finalized by the opening of the Consulate General of Turkey in Erbil in 2010 (Fidan 2016).

The attempts of Turkey to improve relations with KRG had economic grounds:

The matter of debate should not be as to how the government in the Northern Iraq is democratic or respectful to human rights. The way here to be adopted is by developing economic relations make close interdependence in the region and to make the borders less significant. Contrary to it, if we start to think about demarcation of borders, the problems sparked in the Northern Iraq will spillover to all regions. So our policy toward Northern Iraq is based on economic relations and human factors (Davutoğlu 2013, 307).

The economic relations with this region in particular is staggering. Approximately 80% of goods that are sold on KRG market are produced in Turkey and there are about 1,200 Turkish companies currently operating in Northern Iraq. KRG's economic future

depends heavily on Turkey, and although KRG is rich in oil, it needs a transport route to deliver the extracted oil to the Western markets. Currently, the oil pipelines are already operational that bring oil from northern Iraq to Turkey, and are at the same time the most cost-effective way to deliver Iraqi oil to European markets (Larrabee 2010). Turkey has had a cautious position towards KRG acquiring direct control over the oil resources, fearing that it would facilitate the process of creating an independent state in that region, however, contrary to this stance and despite the objections of central Iraqi government, Turkey still made a decision in 2012 to import crude oil from KRG. In 2013, KRG signed an agreement with Turkey without first getting permission from central Iraqi government to deliver natural gas and oil. The exact terms of the contract are not made public, but it is thought to be giving Turkey permission to explore new oil and gas fields in the region and giving Turkey preferential rates on exporting the energy from the region (Larrabee and Nader 2013).

As a result of these developments, the relations of Turkey with KRG are steadily developing while Ankara's relations with Baghdad are deteriorating with the same rate. As it seems from the current standpoint, the benefit Turkey is receiving from improving relations with KRG supersedes that of the potential benefits to be acquired through normalizing relations with the central government of Iraq.

4.3 Syria as a Challenge to the Implementation of the “Zero Problem” Policy

In terms of the “zero problems with neighbors” policy, the relationship of Turkey with Syria had been a high point in many regards. Erdogan and Assad managed to become good friends and left the Turkish-Syrian tense relations of the 1990s in the past (Barkey 2015). According to Davutoğlu, the relations between Turkey and Syria can be

characterized with the following motto: “common destiny, common history, common future” (Demirtaş 2013).

During the end of the 20th century there were mostly tense relations between Turkey and Syria, characterized by many disagreements on diverse array of issues (Stein 2014, Almuedo 2011). However, a number of positive changes in the Turkish-Syrian relations, crowned with the expulsion of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from Syria and the closing of the PKK training camps in the country marked a new era in the normalization of Turkish-Syrian relations (Larrabee 2010, Robins 2013, Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014). Other than this concrete reason for improving relations with the neighboring country, the additional reason can be considered to be the general policy of Turkey to improve relations with neighbors and the country’s aspirations to adhere to the European Standards.

The case of Syria has proven to be quite challenging to Erdogan’s and Turkish government’s “zero problems with neighbors” policy. During AKP administration, Syria and Turkey established good relations from the very beginning and Ankara acted as a mediator between Damascus and Jerusalem supporting Assad’s position in Lebanon, while all the world powers such as US, France and the United Nations were urging Assad to withdraw its military from Lebanon. Turkey and Syria used to hold joint cabinet meetings as a symbol of good relations and cooperation, however, even though Turkey the practical results of these meetings were minimal, since Assad refused to implement even the minor reforms (Barkey 2016).

In addition to developing political ties, the two countries also significantly improved economic relations marked with a multiple agreements in the field of economic relations and protocols on trade throughout the first decade of AKP’s coming to power (Stein 2014, Almuedo 2011).

In light of these and many other instances that indicate at improved relations of Turkey and Syria notwithstanding the negative attitude towards each other in the years before AKP accession to power, illustrates the positive effects of the “zero problems” policy. According to Davutoğlu, the improved relations between Turkey and Syria was a perfect example of positive achievements of the “zero problems with neighbors” policy and could have been use as “a model of progress for the rest of the region”, in addition to being an indicator of the rising regional status of Turkey (Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014).

While it was truly a good example of the success of “zero problems” policy, it still ended unsuccessfully due to the changing realities in the region, the emergence of the Syrian crisis and Turkey’s support for Syrian opposition since 2011 (Bengio 2011). As a result, the options for Turkey were limited and the “zero problems with neighbors” policy had to be ended.

4.4 The End of Zero Problems with Neighbors Policy with the End of Davutoğlu Era

On the 22nd of May, 2016 Davutoğlu convened the AKP Executive Committee and announced that an extraordinary party congress would meet to elect a new chairman and that Davutoğlu would not be a candidate. Thus, the era of Davutoğlu in Turkish, international, Middle Eastern and Islamic world politics came to an abrupt end. After the committee meeting, Davutoğlu explained his decision with the journalists:

“I never regretted my actions. I did my best to carry out my duty. I have my own principles. I never asked for high position and authority. [...] A companion is more important than the road itself. I would like to be sure my companions will be with me till the end of the road.”

He reflected on his decision by stating that after certain changes in the AKP Executive committee, he was doubtful of the party unity and considered that the change of the party's chairman was better for the unity of the party. He claimed to get involved in politics through AKP when the party was facing problems and even now, the decision made was for the benefit of the party itself (kamu saati 2016).

The resignation of Davutoğlu was perceived differently inside and outside of Turkey. Within Turkey, the resignation has been perceived in two different ways. Some claim that Davutoğlu is to be blamed for the position Turkey has found itself today as well as for the failure of Turkey's Middle East policy. They consider Davutoğlu to be backed by US and to have come to politics with the support of US (Oda TV 2016, Ulusal Kanal 2016). However, others claim that Davutoğlu resigned as per the will of Erdogan. According to Rafet Balli, Erdogan did not tolerate Davutoğlu's accession to the position of highest importance in the context of relations with the USA and EU. After Davutoğlu expressed the desire to meet with the President of USA, Barak Obama, Erdogan felt threatened and did not allow this meeting to be arranged (Balli 2016).

The positions and opinions may vary, but what is undeniable is that the Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's resignation at the request of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leaves the latter in a position of consolidated power, even though he was already the most powerful politician in the country, since Turkey became a multiparty democracy in 1950 (Cagaptay 2016).

According to Cengiz Çandar (2016), what led to Davutoğlu's downfall was his uncontrollable ego and ambition that did not allow him to offer loyalty to a man with even a bigger ego, Erdogan himself, which as it turns out was very important for Erdogan. Erdogan suggested that Davutoğlu was left with two options: to remain as prime minister in disgrace or to leave office in perceived disgrace.

The same is true for the opinions circulating outside of Turkey, where it is perceived that Davutoğlu resigned due to the direct influence and request from Erdogan, because the President desires to be able to shape the policies of the country unchallenged. In this context, the article with the title “Turkey's Prime Minister: No room for moderate” in Economist gains even greater significance.

The man who pulled the carpet from under his feet was the same one who appointed him less than two years ago: Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Tensions between the increasingly authoritarian Mr. Erdogan and his prime minister have simmered for months. The two disagreed over the future of peace talks with Kurdish insurgents, and over Mr. Erdogan's plans to change the constitution to give the presidency executive powers, cementing his grip on government and his own Justice and Development (AK) party.[...] Mr. Erdogan has accused his prime minister of stealing the spotlight. "During my time as prime minister it was announced that Schengen travel would come into force in October 2016," he said recently, referring to the visa talks. "I cannot understand why bringing it forward by four months is presented as a triumph."

After reviewing the opinions and speculations expressed regarding Davutoğlu's resignation, I am left with an impression that all of the viewpoints are true to a certain degree. Firstly, it is in some ways true to say that Davutoğlu's policy vision more or less failed. Also, it is easy to believe that the force behind Davutoğlu's resignation was Erdogan himself, and the quiet resignation of the Prime Minister can be ascribed to the fact that Davutoğlu came to politics with the help of Erdogan in the first place. However, it is also true that supposedly, if Davutoğlu tried to fight the decision, he would not have been successful, considering his limited power and support both within and outside of Turkey. It is also entirely possible that as a scholar, he prefers to be remembered in

history as a decent servant of his country, rather than yet another politician involved in power struggle.

Davutoğlu's resignation had several causes both on the international and domestic arenas.

In terms of foreign affairs:

1. With the non-collapsing of Assad regime and the support of Iran and Russia to Assad, Syrian policy is deadlocked;
2. Davutoğlu managed to become chief negotiator in terms of relations with the EU;
3. Erdogan did not take well the process of signing the Schengen agreement, because he did not want it to be perceived as success achieved by Davutoğlu;
4. Erdogan considered that Davutoğlu did not manage to deal sufficiently well with the refugee crisis;
5. Erdogan considered that Davutoğlu's policy towards Iran was not successful;
6. While Erdogan and Turkish military forces are against US politics about Kurdish question YD's willing to build petroleum corridor Davutoğlu is more coherent.

In terms of internal affairs:

1. According to Erdogan, Davutoğlu did not struggle against Gulen movement;
2. In terms of Kurdish problem, while Erdogan wanted to fight with them by military means Davutoğlu insisted on holding negotiations again;
3. Erdogan does not want to share power with anybody in Turkish politics.

Hence, with the end of Davutoğlu's term in office, the discourses regarding the failure of his policies towards the Middle East increased. The critics have jointly blamed this failure on Davutoğlu, however, there are more aspects at play here than just the

decisions of one person and more are at fault than just Davutoğlu. His political career was characterized with tireless labor and attempts to implement his scholarly vision into practice, a chance that is not given to many academics. However, it is still true that theory does not always easily translate into practice and it raises questions as to how well-suited an academician was for such high-level political positions.

Davutoğlu's scholarly work certainly stands out especially due to this very aspect of him being so closely in touch with the actual implementation of Turkish foreign policies. Reading his works leaves an impression that he adopts liberalism as a theoretical approach for Turkey and wants the country to have good relations with the neighbors and become a regional power. However, his liberalism and the soft approach to very complex issues in the region is not necessarily full-proof. While the attitudes are to be respected in terms of their valuing diplomacy over brute force, it would be too hopeful to expect that building good relations with all the neighbors is possible, especially if we take into consideration some of them are adversaries of each other while some are direct competitors of Turkey for dominance in the region. Theoretically, his "zero problems with neighbors" policy was a decent one and it worked normally until the Arab Spring. The reason Davutoğlu named behind its initial success was that at that time the policy focused more on the economic aspects of cooperation and economic cooperation is something that countries in any given region need for their own good. In light of this approach, as I have illustrated in the third part of this thesis, the relations with the Middle Eastern countries, Syria, Iran and Iraq improved. However, with the onset of Arab Spring, Turkey started playing an active role of a moderator which entailed direct involvement in the internal affairs of the neighboring countries and this was certainly not perceived favorably by anybody. Turkey had its reasons for such direct involvement and it was merely an attempt to establish itself as the facilitating regional power in the Middle East. But with the emergence of Syrian crisis and Assad's

rejection of Erdogan's offers regarding political reforms, Turkey faced a huge challenge in terms of its Middle East policy. As a result of Arab Spring, the "zero problems with neighbors" policy failed. Consequently, when Turkey departed from its initial aim and started intervening in internal affairs of the neighboring states instead of staying focused on economic cooperation, and when politics came first instead of economy, the Middle East policy failed.

5 Conclusion

This thesis aimed at exploring the changes that the Turkish policy towards the Middle East experienced through the influence of A. Davutoğlu's work both scholarly and political.

In order to achieve the main aim of this thesis, five specific questions and one major question were asked and answered, which will be summarized below:

1. What is the importance of the Middle East for Turkey?

First and foremost, the Middle East is where part of Turkey is located, but its importance for Turkey derives from many other aspects as well. With the increased security threats from the Middle Eastern countries due to the political instabilities in some of them, Turkey has tried to follow a more proactive foreign policy and contain the problems before they reach the borders of Turkey. Aside from most of them being the neighboring countries, the security challenges have been the primary reason for Turkey to draw special attention to the Middle East. Additionally, Davutoğlu's policy vision of having "zero problems with neighbors" has shifted the focus of the government of Turkey towards normalizing the relations with the Middle Eastern countries. By attaining the role of a facilitator, Turkey has long been trying under the AKP administration to rise to the level of undisputed regional power based not on the arms but more on the diplomacy. This is an additional aspect that explains the increased interest of Turkey towards its Middle Eastern neighbors.

1. What are the roles of Davutoğlu in the Middle East policy?

The role that Davutoğlu has played in the formation of Middle Eastern policy is indisputably paramount and it would not be too far-fetched to state that he has been the chief political figure and major scholar in the entire process. This research has

demonstrated that Erdogan placed huge trust in him since the day of AKP's gaining political power and the successful years of peaceful and mutually beneficial policy towards the Middle Eastern countries are the deserved pay-out for Turkey.

2. *How was "strategic depth" doctrine adapted to the Middle East?*

This study has illustrated that the "strategic depth" doctrine, a concept formulated and constructed by Davutoğlu, which implies that the geographical and historical depths of Turkey place the country in an advantageous position in a number of regions and geographical areas, and that these geopolitical and historical aspects should be utilized in the relations towards other international actors. The research showed that in terms of the Middle East, this doctrine has been frequently used and the historical and geographical aspects of relations have been the basis of deepening cooperation with a number of Middle Eastern countries.

3. *How did "zero problems with neighbors" policy shape the relations of Turkey with Syria, Iran and Iraq?*

As the case studies discussed in the third part of this thesis have demonstrated, the approach of having "zero problems with neighbors" has played a significant role in developing both political as well as economic ties with the neighboring countries of Turkey in the Middle East. The achievements have been quite monumental in case of Syria, where over half a century of cold relations was replaced with friendly relations between the two heads of states and even joint cabinet meetings. Even though they did not yield any practical results, it can still be considered a success of the "zero problems" policy to have brought the two countries so close to each other, while the inability of Assad to carry out the necessary reforms simply does not fall in the capacity of "zero problems" policy and should be explored by other means. The same is true in case of Iran and Iraq, with whom the economic ties were

developed through this policy and maintained even though there were other politically charged issues emerging from time to time.

4. *Does “zero problems with neighbors” policy continue or has it failed?*

It is especially the development of economic relations with neighbors that is considered a success of the “zero problems” policy, while it is thought to have failed in relation to the Middle East when after the Arab Spring the concept had to incorporate political aspects and required Turkey to get involved in the internal affairs of other states. So in other words, the “zero problems” policy managed to perfectly normalize and develop economic relations of Turkey with Syria, Iran and Iraq, as well as many other countries in the region, but failed when it came to be applied to turbulent political realities of the Middle East. Therefore, with the inability to resolve the political needs of Turkey in relation to the Middle East, the policy has been largely disregarded by the Turkish government in the later years and Davutoğlu’s stepping down from the post of the chairman of the AK Party, has probably marked the official end of the “zero problems with neighbors” policy.

The above-listed five questions were the specific ones asked for the purpose of exploring more deeply the different aspects of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East. However, the major research question to be answered was the following:

How did Turkey’s Middle East policy change by the influence of A. Davutoğlu’s political thoughts?

As this study has illustrated, it is undoubtable that Turkey’s policy towards the Middle East experienced radical changes as opposed to the periods prior to AKP’s coming to power. It is also beyond doubt that the major force behind this change was the renowned scholar in the field of international affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who

started his political career as an advisor to the Prime Minister and within a decade, achieved a post of Prime Minister himself.

The political thought of Davutoğlu has been utilized in practice and has brought a considerable change in terms of approach and attitude towards Middle East. The main concepts used to alter the courses of action towards the Middle Eastern countries have been the “strategic depth” doctrine and “zero problems with neighbors” approach. The major difference in the foreign policy towards Middle East in the period of Davutoğlu and before him, has been the noticeable indifference towards the matters of neighboring countries in the period before AKP and the radical change of interest when AKP came to power. As a result of this increased interest, Turkish government has managed to exercise a more proactive policy towards Middle East, instead of adhering to the previously existing practice of waiting for occurrences to unfold and only then act upon them. The utilization of proactive policy towards Middle East also allowed Turkey to elevate to a position of regional power, and what is more important, it became possible through diplomacy and the attempts of establishing good neighborly relations instead of relying on military might.

It can be deduced that Davutoğlu as a person with huge scholarly background had immense influence on following the peaceful policies towards Middle East, which in fact proved successful in early years when the focus was mainly on deepening economic relations with the Middle Eastern countries, but when the policy was tested on the resolution of political issues, it proved unable to resolve the internal problems of other states. While many different aspects can be at play in this case, the policy is still widely criticized for its inability to adequately resolve the political challenges of Turkey in relation to the Middle East.

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