UNDERSTANDING THE NEW ACTIVISM OF TURKEY
IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
TURKEY AS AN EMERGING SOFT POWER

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis will examine the transformation in the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and evaluate the relevance of "soft power" term for describing Turkey's new activism in the region. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Turkey has aligned itself with the Western world so that this alignment has been the main determinant of its relations with the non-Western world. The Middle East was not an exception in this process. After decades of remaining aloof from the Middle Eastern affairs, Turkey has followed a new foreign policy towards the region, as part of its new foreign policy vision, since the AK Party coming to power in 2002 and has shown a growing willingness to participate in Middle Eastern affairs. Various arguments are developed by different actors, including the one elaborated in this thesis, to explain the new activism of Turkey in the region.

Keywords: Turkey-Middle East relations, AK Party, Strategic Dept, soft power.

ÖZ

TÜRKİYE'NİN ORTADOĞU'DAKİ YENİ AKTİVİZMİNİ ANLAMAK: YÜKSELEN YUMUŞAK GÜÇ OLARAK TÜRKİYE

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Bu tez, Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu politikasındaki dönüşümü anlamaya ve "yumuşak güç" kavramının, Türkiye'nin bölgedeki yeni aktivizmini açıklamada uygunluğunu saptamaya çalışacaktır. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti kuruluşundan beri Batı dünyasına yönelmiş; bu yönelim Türkiye'nin Batı-dışı dünya ile ilişkilerinde de ana belirleyici unsur olmuştur. Ortadoğu da bu süreçte istisna oluşturmamaktadır. Onlarca yıl Ortadoğu meselelerinden uzak kalmanın ardından, AK Partinin 2002 yılında iktidara gelmesinden bu yana, Türkiye, yeni dış politika vizyonunun bir parçası olarak, bölgede yeni bir dış politika izlemeye başlamış ve Ortadoğu meselelerinde yerini almak için artan bir isteklilik göstermiştir. Bu kapsamda, farklı aktörler tarafından Türkiye'nin bölgedeki yeni aktivizmini açıklamaya yönelik çeşitli fikirler geliştirilmiştir. Bu tezde de sözkonusu fikirlerden biri ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye-Ortadoğu İlişkileri, Ak Parti, Stratejik Derinlik, Yumuşak güç

To My Family

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a remarkable departure has been observed in the Turkish foreign policy especially towards the Middle East. In traditional Turkish foreign policy thinking, Turkey geographically and strategically was aligned within the Western world and the relations with the non-Western world were seen as extensions of Turkey's Western alignment. For most of the Republican period, Turkey remained aloof from the Middle Eastern politics and even when engaged, it was perceived as the advocate of Western interest in the region. On the other hand, Turkey's alignment with the West does not mean that its relations with the West were free of problems. There is a discrepancy in the sense that on one hand, the necessity to heighten the standards of Turkey to the level of civilized world of the West was emphasized, on the other hand, the West continued to be perceived as a threat for the continuity of the nation-state. The discourse on "country is surrounded by enemies" and "constantly faces the danger of partition" has result in defensive, inward looking and security-dominated foreign policy. This line of thinking also legitimized the dominance of military not only in foreign policy making but also in domestic politics.

The developments after the Cold War have challenged the traditional foreign policy thinking and alternative approaches have been developed by different actors. In 1999, the Helsinki Summit, which gave candidate status to Turkey for full EU membership, opened a new chapter in Turkey both in domestic and foreign politics. In 2002, with the coming of AK Party to power, the EU membership process was given priority and official negotiations with the EU started in 2005. With the help of EU anchor, Turkey has experienced a transformation in its domestic politics. Turkey has become more democratized, more sensitive on human rights and the rule of law. There is no doubt that this

transformation in domestic sphere has some reflections on its foreign policy. In contrast to the traditional bureaucratic-authoritarian, reactive foreign policies of the past, the AK Party decision makers have developed a new pro-active and visionary foreign policy for Turkey. This new vision emphasizes the multiple identities of the Turkey; calls for pro-activism and multi-dimensionality; and stresses dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation.

In this new era, by putting aside its policy of non-involvement, Turkey has shown a growing willingness to participate in the Middle Eastern issues. This active involvement in the region is not just peculiar to the political sphere. It ranges from politics to economy, history to TV series. This study aims to trace the transformation in the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and evaluate the relevance of soft power term for describing Turkey's new stance in the region.

The study will consist of six chapters and the following issues will be examined in each chapter:

The first chapter will try to examine the relations between Turkey and the Middle East since the establishment of the Turkish Republic until the AK party coming to power in 2002. After evaluating the general characteristics of traditional Turkish foreign policy, its Middle Eastern policy will be elaborated.

The second chapter will examine the AK Party governments' foreign policy vision in light of Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" doctrine. It will start with general characteristics of Turkish foreign policy in the AK Party era and then continue with the AK Party's Middle East policy.

The third chapter aims to understand the relevance of soft power term for Turkey in the Middle Eastern context. Firstly, soft power term will be explained. Following this explanation, it will try to determine the Turkey's potential as a soft power in the Middle East through using the three requirements for soft

power as guiding principles, namely, having soft power resources/assets, having the will to capitalize on them and existence of willing receivers/interpreters.

In the fourth chapter, with a view to demonstrating soft power in use, some examples will be covered such as relations with Syria, nuclear diplomacy with Iran, relations with Iraq, economic relations, relations with the Middle Eastern societies.

Being aware of the difficulty in predicting to what extent Turkish soft power identity will last, the fifth chapter will try to evaluate the possible challenges to Turkish activism in the region as a soft power under the sub-titles of internal challenges, regional challenges and international challenges.

This study will conclude by pointing out that, Turkey seems to largely meet the three requirements of soft power in the Middle East. In this sense, it is argued that Turkey is an emerging soft power in the region. To put it differently, Turkey has been in a transition from being solely a hard power to a rising regional soft power. Turkey is engaging with the Middle East in all areas at all levels, from its economy to its soap operas; from state-to-state cooperation to people-to-people interaction. Due to this multifaceted engagement, soft power identity of Turkey will probably be successful and enduring despite of the existence of challenges.

CHAPTER TWO

2. TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE PRE-AK PARTY PERIOD

Understanding the recent activism of Turkey in the Middle East requires the elaboration of the foreign policy practices of the past. This chapter aims to shed light on the relations between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries since the establishment of the Turkish Republic until the AK Party coming to power in 2002. Firstly, general characteristics of traditional Turkish foreign policy will be evaluated. Secondly, it will focus on the Middle Eastern policy of Turkey. It argues that given the time period, most of the time, Turkey saw its relations with the Middle East as extension of its relations with the Western world. Without developing an autonomous foreign policy for the Middle East, Turkey generally pursued a bureaucratic-authoritarian foreign policy that preferred status quo to activism.

2.1. General Characteristics of Traditional Turkish Foreign Policy

With the collapse of Ottoman Empire, a new nation-state, Turkish Republic, emerged in the Anatolian heartland. Preferring the Western path for the future of the new nation state, new political elites tried to re-engineer the state as well as the society through socio-political and structural reforms. However, replacing a multi-national, multi-ethnic empire with a territorial nation-state was not an easy task, and according to Lundgren, this endeavor is still an "on-going and open-ended project."[1]

Construction of a nation state required the creation of a nation. It was necessary to find a unifying principle which could embrace all people in Anatolia with different ethnic backgrounds. Increasing their attempts in social engineering for the creation of "a homogenous mass", new political elite invented "Turkishness"

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[1] Asa Lundgren, *The Unwelcome Neighbor-Turkey's Kurdish Policy*, I.B.Tauris: London and New York, 2007, p.2.

that was based on territorial principle rather than ethnicity.[2] In other words, everyone living within the borders of the Turkish Republic was a Turk. Hence, borders became crucial not only for "delimiting the territory" but also for "defining the nation."[3]

Secularism was another priority for the new political elite. By pursuing a French version of secularism, especially the French anticlerical tradition of *laicite,* they treated Islam as backwardness and saw the power of Islam as a major cause of social, cultural, political, and economic decline. To avoid such decay, they believed, religion had to be controlled by the secular state.[4] Fuller argues that Turkey's secularism was never "genuine" secularism in the sense that it has promoted absolute domination and control of religion by the state at all levels, rather than rigidly putting the state out of religious affairs entirely, as in the case of the US model.[5]

With a view to achieving the ideal of "a secular western nation state" many reforms were undertaken erasing the religion from the public sphere such as: Ottoman sultanate was abolished; caliphate, Arabic letters, Islamic education and Sufi brotherhoods were disposed.[6]

On the other hand, despite of characterizing the new state as an anti-thesis to Ottoman Empire, the new political elite followed the Ottoman bureaucratic

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[2] Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism", *Carnegie Papers*, No.10, September 2008, p.5; Lundgren, op. cit, p.2.

[3] Lundgren, op. cit., p.2.

[4] Taşpınar, op. cit., p.5.

[5] Graham, E. Fuller, "Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.3, 2004, p.52.

[6] Taşpınar, op. cit, p.4

tradition, particularly in the foreign policy making. Like their Ottoman predecessors, they perceived the foreign policy as an "elite business" that was based on "bureaucratic-authoritarian tendencies."[7] Hence, as Aras puts it, "Turkish foreign policy establishment was run by security elites who reserved foreign policy-making for experts, and sometimes totally isolated it as a national security issue."[8]

The new political-security elite had a responsive and defensive mindset in the sense that they had serious concerns for the survival of the nation state.[9] Though foreign policy choices were taken in line with the West, the threat perception from the West, which is called Sevres Syndrome[10], was dominant in the minds of the Turkish elite. Aras explains this situation as the following:

> Turkey's inclination toward the West in foreign policy matters was reflected in domestic politics through a kind of filtering mechanism. While clamoring for increased modernization and Westernization so as to elevate Turkey to the economic level of the civilized world, at the same time, the official identity at home had been one of distrust and latent enmity towards the West inherited from the Ottoman administrative elite.[11]

Reflecting the Turkish view of the world in that time, and to some extent still does, Sevres Syndrome in collaboration with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's famous dictum "Peace at Home, Peace in the World" have resulted in and legitimized

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[7] Bülent Aras, "Turkey's rise in the Greater Middle East: peace-building in the periphery", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 11, No.1, p.31.

[8] ibid.

[9] ibid, p.30.

[10] Sevres syndrome refers to Treaty of Sevres and implies that the country is surrounded by enemies and constantly faces the danger of break-up or partition. It still plays a vital role in shaping the minds of particularly nationalist policy makers.

[11] Aras, op. cit., p.31.

inward looking and defensive foreign policy.[12] In addition, official nationalist discourse that depicted Turkey as "a nation surrounded by enemies" was prevalent and also conveyed through the national curriculum. "Turks have no friends but other Turks" was repeatedly found place in the textbooks since 1930s and gave the students the message that "they have reason to feel insecure, that they live in a world that is hostile to them, and that they have to be aware of multifold threats, internal as well as external."[13] Such a perception helped the policy makers to create "a strong sense of defending the homeland, mobilize support at home and preserve their hold on power."[14] In other words, understanding and conducting foreign policy through mere security lens paved the way for the growing role of military, using Fuller term "as the zealous and jealous guardian of Kemalist ideology"[15], in the foreign policy making process. Finally, "ideological narrowing in domestic politics caused foreign policies to be harsher, less sensitive to change and less flexible in regional policies."[16]

2.2. Turkey's Traditional Middle Eastern Foreign Policy

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the relations between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries were rather cool and unstable. Turkey's policy towards the region was described by Taşpinar, for its founding decades, as "benign neglect"[17]; by Bozdağlıoğlu as "staying aloof from Middle Eastern

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[12] ibid, p, 32; Can Erimtan, "A Pseudo-Ottoman Policy: Turkey's New Station in the World", *Todays Zaman*, November 4, 2010.

[13] Lundgren, op. cit., p.37.

[14] Aras, op. cit., p.32.

[15] Fuller, op. cit., p.52.

[16] Aras, op. cit., p.32.

[17] Taşpınar, op. cit., p.6

affairs[18]; and by Fuller as for more than half a century, behaving "almost literally as if the Middle East did not exist."[19]

After nearly four hundred years living together under the Ottoman rule, one would assume that Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries had established close relations due to their cultural and historical ties and the geographical affinity. Contrary to this assumption, rather than unify, religion and history distanced Turkey from the region[20]; the geographical affinity, rather than neighboring the two, led to the image of "Intimate Stranger." To put it differently, the Middle East represented the "unhappy association with Turkey's past"[21] in which mutual hostility and suspicion dominated the way they perceived each other. Arabs accused Turkey both for the extended "Turkish hegemony" over the Arab world during the Ottoman era and its pro-Western policies. Hence, besides the historical experience in the Ottoman era, Atatürk reforms created a difference between two Islamic peoples, and the general secularization of Turkey in the name of modernization created profound resentment and mistrust among Arabs.[22]

On the other hand, "Arab betrayal" to the Ottoman Empire, during the World War I, dominated the Turkish mind-set. In addition to this, during most of the Republican period, Islam/Islamists and Kurds constitute the primary "Others" of

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[18] Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity-A Constructivist Approach*, Routledge: New York and London, 2003, p.111.

[19] Fuller, op. cit., p.59.

[20] Bozdağlıoğlu, op.cit., p. 111-112.

[21] Fuller, op. cit., p.59.

[22] Mustafa Aydın, "Turkish Foreign Policy Framework and Analysis", *Center for Strategic Research (SAM)*, SAM Papers No.1, 2004, p. 58.

the political elites of Turkey who had spent several years to deal with them in domestic as well as international politics. Having a considerable amount of Kurdish population and having various groups of Islamists ranging from radicals to moderates, the Middle East symbolized the things that the Republican elite wanted to get rid of. However, the matters are so intertwined that the developments in the region have had some repercussions for Turkey and it could not be possible to escape from getting involved in it.

Until the World War II, Turkey followed a policy of non-interference and remained distant from the region. Except for a brief period, when Turkey had problems with Iraq over the issue of Mosul (1925-1926) and with Syria over the Alexandretta (Hatay) question (1939) and in 1937 Turkey-initiated-Sadabat Pact, Turkey mostly did not get involved in Middle Eastern affairs.[23] However, after the WWII, several developments in international context, such as the beginning of the Cold War and Turkey's alignment with the West, as well as domestic context such as transition to the multi-party politics, changed the foreign policy attitude of Turkey towards the region.

After the declaration of Truman Doctrine in 1947, which symbolized the beginning of Cold War, Turkey closely aligned itself with the West and devised its foreign policy accordingly. In addition, Turkey's membership to NATO in 1952 transformed it from being a "sympathizer" to an "actual ally of the West."[24]

During the 1950s, Turkey's attitude towards the Middle East was dominated by the communist threat. Turkey wanted to play leadership role for the Middle Eastern countries as the representative of the western world and got involved in the region with the aim of incorporating the regional countries into Western

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[23] Bozdağlıoğlu, op.cit., p.115.

[24] ibid.

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defense system against the Soviet Union.[25] In 1955, the creation of the Bagdad Pact among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and United Kingdom exemplifies Turkish initiatives towards the region in this period. However, rather than eliminating the Soviet threat, by deepening the existing suspicions of the Middle East towards Turkey, the pact deteriorated the already cool relations between Turkey and the Middle East.[26]

Turkey looks at the pact and its other ties with the West as necessary for its security, economic development and a boost to its Westernization efforts.[27] However, it did not consider how this situation would be perceived by the Arab Middle East. Similarly, different threat perceptions were not taken into account by Turkey. For the Arab countries, Israel, not the Soviet Union, constitute the biggest threat. Moreover, for the Arabs, Britain and France were colonial powers, from which other Arab territories still were attempting to gain their independence. Contrary to Turkish expectations, most of the time, Middle Eastern countries inclined to establish close relations with the Soviet Union with the aim of balancing American influence and getting support against the Israel.[28] In this sense, the Pact strengthened the image of Turkey in the eyes of the Middle Eastern states as "the spokesmen of the imperialism"[29]; as "an agent of American policy"[30]; as "a pawn of the West."[31] The Arab attitude towards

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[25] Mesut Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, Ashgate: Hampshire and Burlington, 2008, p.108; Bozdağlıoğlu, op.cit, p.117.

[26] Taşpınar, op. cit., p.8; Bozdağlıoğlu, op.cit, p.119.

[27] Bozdağlıoğlu, op.cit., p.119.

[28] ibid, p.117; Özcan, op.cit., p.110.

[29] Özcan, op.cit., p. 108.

[30] "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints", *International Crisis Group*, Europe Report No.203, April 2010, p.2.

Turkey can be best summarized by Egypt's President Nasser, when he publicly declared Turkey "*persona non grata*" in the Arab world.[32]

In addition to the Bagdad Pact, there are several foreign policy decisions proving that Turkey pursued a policy defending the Western interest without being sensitive to concerns and aspiration of its Middle Eastern neighbors. Turkey voted against the independence of Algeria in the United Nations General Assembly in 1955. Turkey also remained neutral during the discussion of a proposal made by the African and Asian States for the self-determination of Algeria in 1957.[33] Moreover, Turkey sided with the West during the 1956 Lebanese crisis and pushed for Western intervention in Syria in 1957 and later in Iraq in 1958 following the military coup that overthrew King Faisal in that country.[34]

These foreign policy decisions have shown that, in the early decades of Cold War, Turkey followed a one-dimensional foreign policy in the sense that Turkey's relations with the Middle East were extensions of its relations with the West. However, in the second half of the 1960s, this one-dimensional foreign policy began to change due to several reasons, such as the participatory nature of the new constitution, the increasing effect of the public opinion on foreign policy formation, growing saliency of Islamic and leftist movements in national politics, rising Third-Worldism, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the Johnson Letter of 1964, having problems in getting support for the Cyprus issue and

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[31] Aydın, op. cit., p.58-59.

[32] International Crisis Group Report, op.cit., p.2.

[33] Özcan, op. cit., p.110.

[34] Bozdağlıoğlu, op. cit, p.119.

increasing economic problems.[35] The most important factor behind Turkey's rapprochement to the Middle East was its desire to get the Arab support in the UN for the Cyprus issue.[36] As Turkey felt increasingly excluded from the West in the Cyprus issue, it made efforts to gain the hearts of the Muslim states.

The diplomatic position taken by Turkey in the Arab-Israeli conflict illustrated the new rapprochement of Turkey to the region. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Turkey did not allow the US to use Turkish military facilities to aid Israel, but did allow the Soviet Union to resupply aircraft heading for Egypt and Syria to use its airspace.[37] On the other hand, at the same time, in an attempt to balance its interest with the West, Turkey abstained on the Soviet resolution that labeled Israel an "aggressor."[38] Thus, it is possible to call Turkish foreign policy in this period as "balanced" policy in the sense that while establishing relations with the Arab states and supporting the Palestinians, relations with Israel were continued despite the pressure from the Arab states.[39]

In 1969, Turkey participated to the proceedings of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Rabat and became full member of the organization in 1976. According to Taşpinar, such decision symbolizes the first major break with the secular principles in international relations.[40] In addition to OIC membership, Istanbul and Ankara became home for OIC's two permanent institutions, namely

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[35] Özcan, op.cit., p.111; Taşpınar, op. cit, p.8; Sedat Laçiner, "Turkish Foreign Policy (1971-1980): Ideologies vs. Realities", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Vol. 6, No. 21, 2010, p. 96-97.

[36] Aydın, op.cit., p.74-75.

[37] Özcan, op.cit., p.111.

[38] Aydın, op. cit., p.75.

[39] Özcan, op. cit., p.112.

[40] Taşpınar, op. cit., p.8.

IRCICA (Islamic History, Art and Cultural Research Centre) and SESRTCIC (Islamic Countries Statistics, Economical and Social Researches and Education Centre).[41]

The principles that guided Turkey's Middle Eastern foreign policy from the mid-1960s onwards can be enumerated as the following: being in favor of the status quo in the sense that maintaining the borders in the region; respect for territorial integrity, and being in favor of regional balance of power based on multi-polarity, meaning opposing the domination of a single country in the region. [42]

The second half of 1960s onwards, Turkey tried to change its one-dimensional foreign policy, based on West, through developing its relations with other actors in the Middle East. However, the Middle East was still considered as an extension of its relations with the West. As Altunışık rightly states "(E)ven when it was involved (in the region), Turkey did not consider itself as part of the Middle East regional system. This perception was due to the Turkey's Western historical orientation and the definition of its identity."[43]

In 1980s, Özal inherited a country highly dependent on Western alliances while having poor relations with its neighborhood.[44] Özal, as a Prime Minister from 1983, and as a President from 1989 until his death in 1993, emphasized the necessity of opening up Turkish foreign policy to new centers. By breaking

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[41] Laçiner, op.cit., p.97-98.

[42] Meliha B. Altunışık, "Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East" in *New Perspectives on Turkey, Special Issue on Turkish Foreign Policy,* No.40, (Homer Academic Publishing House: Istanbul, Spring 2009), p.175.

[43] Meliha B.Altunışık, "Turkey's Changing Middle East Policy", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No.23, May 2010, p.150.

[44] International Crisis Group Report, op.cit., p.1.

many taboos, he added new components to it such as the Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans while trying to keep Turkey's western pillar untouched.[45]

Turkey's relations with the Middle East gradually developed during the Ozal era. In the early years of 1980s, the European criticisms regarding the military interventions to politics and the quality of democracy in Turkey were instrumental in Kenan Evren's decision to attend a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 1984 as the first Turkish President.[46] In the same year, Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC (COMCEC, in Turkish İSEDAK) was formed under the permanent chairmanship of the President of the Republic of Turkey.[47]

In the 1980s, Iran-Iraqi War (1980-1988) was an important development in the region. During this war, Turkey took a neutral stand which contributed the Turkish economy positively in the sense that both countries were forced by the war to rely increasingly on Turkey for their supplies and connections with the West.[48]

The end of Cold War was regarded as a turning point not only for Turkey's self-image but also its regional role.[49] With the end of Cold War, Turkey began to concern about possibility of decreasing its strategic importance to the West. At that point, the Gulf Crisis (1990-1991) gave the opportunity to Turkey to show its continuing importance to the West by supporting the US's Iraq policy. Turkey's policy in the Gulf Crisis was characterized by active involvement, in

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[45] Aydın, op. cit., p.109.

[46] ibid, p. 90-91.

[47] Further information available at COMCEC website, www.comcec.org

[48] Aydın, op. cit, p.106.

[49] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit, p.1.

contrast to earlier Turkish stand of not getting drawn into Middle Eastern affairs and the main architect behind this activism was Özal.[50]

However, the consequences of Gulf War have brought further new challenges for Turkey. Firstly, the northern Iraq emerged as an area out of control of central government. From Turkish view, the consolidation of Kurdish rule in northern Iraq was a threat to Turkish security not only for the possible spillover effects of these developments for Turkey but also for the presence of the militant Kurdish institution, PKK, which started its attacks to Turkey from the northern Iraq.[51] Secondly, as a result of embargo against Iraq, Turkish economy damages badly and the foreign aids to Turkey could not be enough in compensating the loss.[52] Thirdly, in contrast to the expectations, the Gulf War could not ameliorate Turkey's image and prestige in the eyes of Western world. On the contrary, the Western criticisms on human rights abuses, democratization deficits have intensified. Unfortunately, these criticisms were closely related to the increasing PKK activism after the Gulf War.[53]

During the 1990s, Turkey was actively involved in the region, particularly northern Iraq by using hard power means such as military operations to end the attacks of the PKK. Turkey's relations with its neighbors, namely Syria, Iran and Iraq were deteriorated in the same period due their support for the PKK and

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[50] Aydın, op. cit., p.108.

[51] Altunışık, "Changing", p.150.

[52] Ramazan Gözen, *Amerikan Kıskacında Dış Politika: Körfez Savaşı, Turgut Özal ve Sonrası*, Liberte Yayınları: Ankara, 2000, p.383.

[53] ibid, p.384.

Iran's attempts to export its theocratic regime.[54] In this sense, in time, Northern Iraq issue has captured Turkey's Iraq policy and even more its whole Middle East policy.[55] In the mid-1990s, Turkey identified the Middle East as its main source of threats and to balance this threat perception, Turkey became closer to Israel and signed agreements with Israel for military cooperation.[56]

It is widely accepted that throughout the Cold War years and also in the 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy agenda and strategic orientation as "a loyal NATO member, a military power, and a Western frontline state in a volatile but strategically important part of the world" was framed by the powerful military and the Kemalist establishment.[57] In the formation of Turkish foreign policy, the security approach has been predominant against the more liberal approaches.

In the post-Cold War period, the efforts of the advocates of change or reform in the foreign policy were undermined by the military and hardliners within the state establishment."[58] For example, an overtly Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan who advocated a break with the West in favor of a stronger links with the Muslim world, faced the military pressure when he attempted to shape foreign policy according his vision in 1996-1997. He was, first, forced by the by the military into signing an agreement with Israel and then in February 28,

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[54] Asiye Öztürk, "The Domestic Context of Turkey's Changing Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East and the Caspian Region", *DIE (Deutsches Institut für Enticklungspolitik),* Discussion Paper, 2009, p. 6.

[55] Gürkan Zengin, *Hoca: Türk Dış Politikası'nda 'Davutoğlu Etkisi',* İnkılâp Kitabevi: İstanbul, 2010, p.153.

[56] Altunışık, "Changing," p.150.

[57] Piotr Zalewski, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Telling Style from Substance", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.7, No.4, Winter 2008, p.55-56.

[58] Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times*, Institute for Security Studies European Union: Paris, 2006, p.17.

1997, the military overthrew the coalition government led by Erbakan.[59] This event is commonly known as the "post-modern coup." Hence, as Onar argues during the 1990s, it is possible to see a more assertive Turkey in the Middle East with different actors having different motives. On the one hand, there was overtly Islamist Erbakan government, which sought to torn the country from the West, saw Turkey as a "big brother" to the Arab world. On the other hand, pro-Kemalist governments in cooperation with the military tried to bolster Turkey's Western credentials by cooperating with the US and Israel in the Middle East.[60]

The emergence of alternative ideas against security approach has been an important development in the sense that these ideas have made the Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East highly contested. In other words, since the since the late 1980s, there has been a transformation in Turkey's Middle East policy from being "a relatively stable policy dominated by fairly established norms and principles into a more contentious and pluralistic one."[61]

It is generally argued that Turkish activism in the Middle East started with Özal. He was critical of traditional Turkish foreign policy in the sense that it had been largely reactive and cautious and followed a policy of "liberal functionalism."[62] He saw more opportunities than threats in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. According to him, "panacea" for resolving political problems and

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[59] Zalewski, op.cit., p.55-56.

[60] Nora Fisher Onar, "Neo-Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy", *EDAM Discussion Paper Series*, No.3, October 2009, p.11.

[61] Altunışık, "Worldviews", p.171-172.

[62] ibid, p.181.

achieving peace was the advancement of economic relations.[63] However, after his death, his vision and policies could not be followed systematically.

Similar to Özal, İsmail Cem, Minister of Foreign Affairs during the 1997-2002 period, was also critical of traditional Turkish foreign policy for ignoring Turkey's history.[64] However, he could not manage to implement a new vision due to coalitional and bureaucratic politics.[65]

In the period of October 1991-November 2002, in 11-year-time, eight governments took office. Political and economic instability, corruption and increasing PKK activities in the Southeastern Anatolia were the factors that took Turkey's energy in international competitiveness.[66] Davutoğlu makes the following analogy to describe the situation of Turkey after the ten years from the end of Cold War: A mid-witted man, who has strong muscles, empty stomach and his heart stuttered. According Zengin, strong muscles imply the strong army; empty stomach implies fragile economy; stuttering heart implies the concerns due to the Kurdish issue; mid-wittedness implies the lack of strategic thinking ability.[67]

The year 1999 can be regarded as the turning point in Turkey's relations with the outside world, particularly with the Middle East. Giving the candidate state status to Turkey in 1999 Helsinki Summit, EU anchor has paved the way for Turkey evolving in the direction of a more democratic, less hard security-

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[63] ibid.

[64] Danforth, op. cit., p.93.

[65] Altunışık, "Worldviews", p. 192.

[66] Zengin, op. cit., p.75.

[67] ibid, p.78.

oriented foreign policy.[68] In addition to that, the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in the same year have facilitate abandoning security lenses and establishing closer ties in different fields such as economy, culture, etc.

All these developments have facilitated the implementation of alternative perspective, embodied by the Strategic depth doctrine in the AK party government era, in Turkey's foreign policy in general and the Middle East in particular.

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[68] Zalewski, op. cit., p.55-56.

CHAPTER THREE

3. TRANSFORMATION OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE AK PARTY ERA

Analyzing the foreign policy of the AK Party governments in this chapter, will give the answer to the question of "What is the new in the recent foreign policy behavior?" It is argued that since the AK Party came to power in 2002, Turkish foreign policy has transformed from being largely passive, defensive, securitized, and one-dimensional foreign policy to a dynamic, pro-active and multi-dimensional one.

3.1. General Characteristics of Turkish Foreign Policy in the AK Party Era: "Strategic Depth"

Turkish foreign policy in the AK Party era has been associated with the name of Ahmet Davutoğlu. He was the chief foreign policy advisor of the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before he was appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2009. As an academic, though outlining his foreign policy vision in several writings, Davutoğlu's book called "Strategic Depth" has gained much popularity. Davutoğlu was given the opportunity to put his theory into practice so that Strategic Depth has been used as a synonym to AK Party's foreign policy. Also, throughout this thesis, they will be used interchangeably.

The most salient feature of the strategic depth doctrine was the introduction of a **new geographical imagination** through which Davutoğlu re-defines Turkey's role in neighboring region as well as in international politics. He notes that:

> In terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast landmass, it may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character. Like Russia, Germany, Iran, and Egypt, Turkey cannot be explained geographically or culturally by associating it with one single region. Turkey's diverse regional composition lends it the capability of maneuvering in several

regions simultaneously; in this sense, it controls an area of influence in its immediate environs.[69]

Such a kind of geographical imagination provided Turkey with multiple regional identities: Turkey is, all at once, a European, Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country.[70] According to Davutoğlu, with these multiple regional identities, Turkey should leave aside its traditional role of a "peripheral country" or "bridge country", and adopt a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security not only for itself but also for its neighboring regions.[71] He thinks that the adoption of the bridge metaphor has resulted in the negative perception of Turkey both in the West and the East: in its relations with the East, Turkey was perceived as a Western country trying to impose Western values while in its relations with the West, it was perceived as an Eastern country. However, Turkey should be a country which tries to find solutions to the regional problems with its Eastern identity, without being ashamed of it, whereas in the Western platforms it should act as a Western country discussing the problems of the Western world through its Western identity.[72] Thus, in contrast to the promotion of Turkey as a "bridge" between East and West, Davutoğlu defines a more central and active role for Turkey, since bridge metaphor entails passivity.

Undeniably, geo-politics has played an important role in Turkish foreign policy making process for many decades. Yet, for a long time, as Bilgin claims, it was perceived as a scientific perspective on statecraft which could be only performed by military actors. She argues that through the production and dissemination of

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[69] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No.1, 2008, p.78.

[70] Zalewski, op. cit., p.56-57.

[71] Davutoğlu, op. cit., p.78-79.

[72] Zengin, op. cit., p.92.

particular understanding of geopolitics as a "scientific" perspective on statecraft, and the military as an actor licensed to craft state policies by virtue of its mastery over geopolitical knowledge, the Turkish military has played a central role in shaping domestic political processes and rendered its interventions inevitable.[73] According to this line of thinking, geo-politics was put to work in shaping not only foreign policy but also domestic political processes.[74] For example, recently, the geographical arguments, such as "Turkey's geography does not allow for more democracy," have been used by the civilian and military actors to argue against making the reforms required by EU conditionality. [75] However, Davutoğlu, with his alternative definition of Turkish geography, calls for activism rather than caution and status quo.[76]

Another factor that differentiates the AKP's foreign policy from the previous practices is the adoption of different security approach, in order words, **re-definition of security**.

For most of the Republican history, security was perceived as an internal problem and in this respect foreign policies were seen as extensions of the considerations in the domestic sphere. In other words, Turkish foreign policy has been shaped under the constraints of domestic politics. This line of thinking usually had a tendency to externalize domestic problems and to search for foreign enemies as the root causes of security problems. Though in some cases there may be external causes of the problems, but as Aras notes "political elites tended to exaggerate and manipulate perceived external threats to preserve their

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[73] Pınar Bilgin, "'Only Strong States Can Survive in Turkey's geography': the uses of 'geopolitical truths' in Turkey", *Political Geography*, No.26, 2007, pp.740,746.

[74] ibid, p. 741.

[75] ibid, p.749-750.

[76] ibid.

hold on power" [77] and "project their domestic concerns onto foreign policy making process."[78] Similarly, especially after the second half of 1990s, emergence of a national security discourse (national security syndrome)[79], which sanctifies security over democratic and developmental objectives, is important in demonstrating the increased security concerns of the military against the democratic priorities of the EU.[80]

However, in the new definition of security, it is a more enlarged concept including economic, political and social dimensions.[81] In the new definition, there is a balance between security and democracy. In a country security should not be at the expense of freedoms and human rights, according to Davutoğlu.[82] He argues that balancing security and democracy has been an "ambitious yet worth aim" particularly in the post-September 11 environment, in which "the general tendency has been to restrict liberties for the sake of security."[83]

The old geographic imagination, which regarded Turkey's neighborhood as "a geography of chaos and a source of instability" resulted in Turkey's "conscious

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[77] Bülent Aras, "The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No.3, 2009, p.128.

[78] Aras, "Rise," p.30.

[79] See path-breaking speech of the former Deputy Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz on national security syndrome by which he urged the public and political fora to question the concept of national security.

[80] Ümit Cizre, "Demythologizing the National Security Concept: The Case of Turkey", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.57, No.2, Spring 2003, p.213.

[81] Öztürk, op. cit., p.29-30.

[82] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero Problems Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, May 20, 2010.

[83] ibid.

alienation" and "limited involvement" in the region.[84] In line with the new geographical imagination, AK Party government has followed the policy of **"zero -problems with neighbors"** with a view to putting an end to alienation of the Turkey's neighboring countries. The solution of all pending disputes is considered as "an indispensable factor for the rise of Turkey as a global actor."[85]

With zero-problem policy, as Aras notes, though the physical distance remain the same, a process of "discovering the 'closeness' of these geographies and their 'availability' for Turkey's involvement" has emerged.[86] To put it differently, instead of feeling sorry for itself over "its rough surrounding and lack of friends" and approaching the neighbors with well-established historical stereotypes, Turkey is now "cultivating new friendships in the region, offering trade, aid and visa-free travel."[87] In accordance with this policy, the government has launched regular high level meetings with the neighboring countries as well as encouraged the development of closer ties in all aspects including cultural, economic, social relations.[88] Kirişçi argues that in less than a decade, shifting from "bad neighborhood" to "zero-problem" zone is very telling about the transformation of Turkey's geographic imagination.[89]

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[84] Bülent Aras & Hakan Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a New Geographic Imagination", in *New Perspectives on Turkey, Special Issue on Turkish Foreign Policy,* No.40, (Homer Academic Publishing House: Istanbul, Spring 2009), p.197.

[85] Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy", *ELIAMEP*, Working Paper, No.8, 2010, p.5.

[86] Aras, "Davutoğlu Era", p.130.

[87] "The Davutoğlu Effect", *The Economist*, a Special Report on Turkey, October 21, 2010.

[88] Kirişçi, op.cit., p.50.

[89] Aras & Fidan, op. cit., p.198.

Besides repairing its own relationships, due to its multiple regional identities and its ability to speak to all parties, Turkey has launched a number of mediating efforts such as Israeli-Syrian talks, Bosnian-Serb talks, etc.

Redefinition of the role of Turkey in the neighboring region and international politics has required a **multi-dimensional foreign policy**. It is argued that with the emergence of multi-polar world order by the end of Cold War, hierarchy of priorities in the minds of foreign policy makers is no longer valid so that Turkey needs to abandon its foreign policy based on transatlantic parameters in favor of a multidimensional approach. In this context, anymore, Turkey has does not have the "luxury to turn its back on or avoid certain areas as it once did."[90]

Another salient feature of the AKP's foreign policy is its **willingness to be proactive and take risks**. Traditional Turkish foreign policy was always reactive in the sense that waiting till something happened and then simply defending its own position.[91] In this respect, it depicts a Turkey as a status quo power preferring "caution" to "daring" action while the AK party government seems to be much keener to daring in addressing foreign policy problems and attempting to resolve them at bilateral level as well as multilateral level.[92]

In the AK Party's foreign policy, there is a growing shift from seeing the world from the perspective of "win-lose" to **"win-win"** games.[93] In the traditional foreign policy thinking, realpolitik and power struggles constituted the dominant

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[90] Aras, "Davutoğlu era", p.8.

[91] Nimet Şeker, "A Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy Turkey's Strategic Depth", 2009, http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-1201/i.html (accessed on May 17, 2010)

[92] Malik Mufti, "Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Middle East Journal*, vol.52, no.1, Winter 1998, p.32-50.

[93] Kirişçi, op. cit, p.51.

perspective. Win-win thinking also existed but it was often limited to low politics issues such as illegal migration, trafficking in human beings. Though under Ozal's leadership, it acquired some prominence in the high politics, it had limited impact on overall foreign policy. However, in the AK party governments' era, win-win thinking seems to be part of "a common discourse" with regard to a wide range of issues in Turkish foreign policy agenda.[94]

Economic interdependence is another characteristic of new Turkish foreign policy. Due to their belief in peace promoting effects of economic interdependence, meaning that rising economic ties creating a disincentive to conflict, government has tried to boost trade relations besides increasing diplomatic ties.[95] Kirişçi explains the reason behind the current Turkish foreign policy with the rise of "trading state."[96] He argues that the emergence of trading state was a process which could be traced back in Özal era but this process was interrupted by prevailing military political and territorial system. With the AK Party government the trading state has made a "conspicuous comeback" but still is "far from being consolidated."[97]

Moreover, Davutoğlu has developed **a new conception of power**. He argues that "power parameters of countries should be seen not as single elements independent from each other but as dynamic elements that affect each other with new functions. And these dynamic elements should be taken into consideration

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[94] ibid, p.51-52.

[95] Öztürk, op. cit, p.15.

[96] Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State" in *New Perspectives on Turkey, Special Issue on Turkish Foreign Policy,* No.40, (Homer Academic Publishing House: Istanbul, Spring 2009), pp.29-57.

[97] ibid, p.53.

with coefficients involving the human element."[98] According to him, constant parameters of power are history, geography, population and culture while the potential parameters of power are economic capacity, technological capacity and military capacity. There are also coefficients such as strategic mentality, strategic planning and political will.[99] This new conception of power differs from the traditional conception of power in the sense that the new power equation includes also intangible parameters such as history and culture.

In addition to all these, there is **plurality in the foreign policy making**. In contrast to authoritarian tendencies of the past, in the new era, a growing number of new civil society actors have entered the political process, lending diversity to the ongoing debates in Turkey on foreign and security policy.[100] Davutoğlu claims that the success of Turkish foreign policy can not only be attributed to the success of state policies, but also the activities of civil society, business organizations, and numerous other organizations. For example, TUSKON (Confederation of Businessman and Industrialists of Turkey), organizes the Africa Summit in conformity with the Africa policy; while TUSIAD (The Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association) pursues lobby activities to facilitate Turkey's entry into the EU.[101]

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[98] Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik - Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Küre Yayınları: İstanbul, 48th Edition, 2010, p.17.

[99] ibid.

[100] Öztürk, op. cit, p.29.

[101] Davutoğlu, "Vision", p.84.

3.2. Turkey's Middle Eastern Policy during the AK Party Governments

It is widely accepted that since the foundation of the Republic, Turkey had failed to develop its own Middle Eastern policy. However, today, Turkey abandoned the crisis-oriented attitude in the foreign policy making and developed a vision for the region. Davutoğlu explains this vision as the following:

> Turkey has a vision of the Middle East. This vision encompasses the entire region: It cannot be reduced to the struggle against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), the radical Kurdish separatist group that for decades has waged a campaign of terror against Turkey, or efforts to counterbalance specific countries. Turkey can use its unique understanding of the Middle East, and its diplomatic assets, to operate effectively on the ground. [102]

In line with this vision, Turkey diversified it tools, strategies and cooperation areas in its relations with the Middle Eastern countries. Abandoning the traditional policy of non-intervention in regional conflicts, the AK Party government is willing to take third party roles in resolution of regional conflicts. For example Turkey attempted to mediate between Syria and Israel; facilitated the participation of Iraqi Sunni groups in the 2005 parliamentary elections; played a constructive role in the Iranian nuclear issue. In settling these regional conflicts, Turkey's guidelines are proactive approaches, engagement, and dialogue instead of isolation, confrontation, and containment.[103]

Since the end of Cold War several governments, such as Özal government, have attempted to play third party roles in the Middle East but they did not succeed. The factor behind the AK Party's success in such a role is its ability of having good relations with the parties to different conflicts, including Israel and even

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[102] Davutoğlu, "Zero Problems."

[103] Öztürk, op. cit., p.15.

Hamas. In contrast to the past's negative attitudes towards Turkey, today, even there are calls coming from Arab world for Turkey to play such a role.[104]

There are also political and economic necessities behind the new activism in the region. Strong Turkish economy requires the political stability. It is both "natural and rational" for Turkey to try to attract Gulf capital and other economic players from the region.[105] In addition to this, security concerns of Turkey require the active involvement in the region. Terrorism side of the Kurdish issue needs to be dealt in cooperation with other regional countries.[106]

Davutoğlu believes that in order to get rid of its image of Eastern in the West and its image of Western in the eyes of the East, it is a must for Turkey to reconcile with its own history and identity.[107] Through redefining Turkey and Turkish foreign policy, AK party has developed an alternative identity to the traditional identity of Turkey based on being a modern secular state committed to the West. According to Altunışık, through emphasizing its Muslim and democratic characteristics, the new identity places Turkey in Islamic civilization yet in harmony with Western civilizations.[108]

Moreover, in line with the "rhythmic diplomacy" principle, which requires the active participation in the international organizations, Turkey has become active

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[104] Kirişçi, "Turbulent", p. 62; Meliha B. Altunışık, "The Turkish Model and the Democratization in the Middle East", Arab Studies Quarterly, Vol. 27, No.s. 1 and 2 (Winter and Spring 2005), p. 50.

[105] İbrahim Kalın, "Style and Substance in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Yorum & Haber*, April 23, 2009, http://www.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=6166 (Accessed on May 21, 2010).

[106] ibid.

[107] Zengin, op. cit., p.97.

[108] Altunışık, "Worldviews", p.190.

in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and during the OIC Summit in June 2004, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, a Turkish academic, was elected as the Secretary General of the OIC. According to Kirişçi, Turkey was rewarded with this election "not just the fact that he was Turkish, but also that this was the first time the OIC was electing rather than appointing a Secretary General, carried significant additional symbolic value."[109] In 2008, Ihsanoğlu was re-elected as the Secretary General of the OIC.[110]

Believing in the importance of furthering Turkey's position in the Middle East, Davutoğlu counted four main principles for Turkey's Middle East policy: First, common security should be ensured for the entire region, not only for this group or that group. Second, priority must be given to dialogue as a means of solving crises. Third, economic interdependence must be ensured since order in the region can not be achieved in an atmosphere of isolated economies. Fourth, since none of the Middle Eastern cities have been composed of a homogenous ethnic and sectarian fabric, it is crucial to preserve the cultural coexistence and plurality.[111]

Such a kind of shift observed in Turkey's Middle Eastern policy seems to demonstrate that Turkey is becoming a regional power which intends to use bi- and multilateral delivery channels in politics, business, and culture to secure for itself a durably influential role in the region.[112] In contrasts to their earlier attitude towards Turkey, it seems that the Middle East is more willing to have closer relations with Turkey in all aspects of life including political, economic and cultural relations.

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[109] Kirişçi, *Turbulent*, p.90.

[110] "İhsanoğlu Bir Kez Daha İKÖ Genel Sekreteri", *NTV-MSNBC*, March 15, 2008.

[111] Davutoğlu, "Vision", p.85.

[112] Öztürk, op.cit.., p.22.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. TURKEY AS A SOFT POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Traditionally, Turkey has been viewed mostly as a hard power in the Middle East due to its military and geo-political capabilities. However, with the inclusion of soft power elements in the foreign policy during the AK Party government, Turkey has been in a transition from being solely a hard power towards an emerging soft power in the region. It is argued that it is the soft power elements, rather than hard power, that have created the recent interest in Turkey in the region as well as around the world.

This chapter aims to understand the relevance of soft power term for Turkey in the Middle Eastern context. In order to do that first of all, the soft power term will be explained. Following this explanation, three requirements of soft power will be used as guiding principles for further analysis. These requirements are: having soft power resources/assets; having the will to capitalize on them; existence of willing receivers/interpreters. It is argued that in line with these three requirements, Turkey has evolving towards being a soft power in the region.

4.1. What is soft power?

Soft power is a concept that was first used by Joseph S. Nye, a professor from Harvard University in his book called "Bound to Lead: Changing Nature of American Power"[113] that questions the conventional wisdom about American decline. After examining American economic and military power, Nye finds that besides its military and economic power, the US has some advantages arising

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[113] Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: Chancing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1990.

from its soft power. He further develops this concept in his next book called "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics"[114] published in 2004.

Since it was first introduced in 1990, the soft power term has achieving increasing popularity among both academics and policy makers. However, wide usage has sometimes meant misuse of the concept as a synonym for anything other than military force.[115] What is soft power then?

In the literature, it is a common practice to start with the definition of power before defining soft power. In the dictionary, power is defined as "ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something."[116] Nye defines power as "the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants." However, he adds that "…there are several ways to affect the behavior of others. You can coerce them with threats; you can induce them with payments; or you can attract and co-opt them to want what you want."[117] Making choice from these alternative ways depends on the point of view the one has. For instance, for a realist the best way to affect the behavior of others is acting as a hard power by forcing them to make a cost-benefit analysis through using economic and military power elements. On the other hand, for an advocate of soft power, it is better to attract and co-opt them to want what you want.

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[114] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, *Public Affairs*: United States, 2004.

[115] Joseph S. Nye, "Restoring America's Reputation in the World and Why It Matters", Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs U.S. House of Representatives, 2010 http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/Testimony-of-Joseph-S-Nye-mar-04-2010.pdf (Accessed on April 17, 2010), p.2.

[116] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/power

[117] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.1-2.

Soft power is "the ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuasion, positive attraction."[118] It is "getting others to want the outcomes that you want."[119] It rests on "the ability to shape the preferences of others."[120] It is the capacity to attract and inspire. Some have described it as "cultural power," "the power of example," or "the power of ideas and ideals."[121]

To engender cooperation, soft power uses "a different type of currency." The currency of soft power is not money or coercion but "attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values."[122]

With the communication revolution, which began after WWII and experienced massive advances towards the end of the twentieth century, information has become available to large publics. Thus, public opinion has turned into an increasingly important factor in international relations. To put it differently, "the democratization of access to information has turned citizens into independent observers as well as active participants in international politics."[123] In this context, following unilateralism, even for the most powerful countries, has become difficult and concerns of the other parties have been taken into account and people have tried to be persuaded. In other words, in a globalized world, it is necessary to win people's hearts and minds. In order to response the challenges

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[118] Nye, "Testimony", p.3.

[119] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.5

[120] ibid.

[121] Walter Russell Mead, "America's Sticky Power" *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2004, p. 50.

[122] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.7.

[123] Jan Melissen, "Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy", *Clingendael Diplomacy Papers*, No.2, 2005, p. 3-4.

in the new context, alternative ways of power configuration has become necessary and soft power is one of them with its key instrument as public diplomacy.

However, soft power is not just for countries. Since the information technology has made the communication with people around the world cheap and easy, using soft power has become feasible for all kinds of actors.[124]

Nye identifies three resources that a country's soft power rests on: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).[125] However, having these sources does not guarantee that one will always get the outcomes s/he wants. Effectiveness of the any power source depends on the context. Nye explains the importance of the context as the following: "Tanks are not great military power resource in swamps or jungles. Coal and steel are not major power resources if a country lacks an industrial base."[126]

As can be seen soft power is not a constant, it can varies by time and place.[127] Besides context, soft power also varies according to who the receivers of our message are. The same message can be "downloaded" and interpreted differently by different receivers in different settings.[128]

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[124] Janice Bially Mattern, "Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3, 2005, p.589.

[125] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.11.

[126] ibid, p.12.

[127] ibid, p.44.

[128] ibid.

In order to attract people and change their preferences along the lines of yours, you have to be perceived as legitimate and credible. For the construction of legitimacy, consistency is necessary in the sense that as long as there is a consistency between the power holder's stated values and actual actions, the actors appeal as well as legitimacy is enhanced.[129] Hence, Nye claims that "Politics has become a contest of competitive credibility."[130] It means that in the information age, politics is not about whose military or economy wins but about "whose story wins." Governments compete not only with each other but also with other organizations to enhance their own credibility while weakening that of their opponents.[131]

Soft power is a new configuration of power in a context where decades-long realist conception of power (hard power) prevails. As an alternative to hard power, soft power demonstrates that rather than thinking power through tangible and concrete elements, intangible assets such as culture, values, foreign policy style can be a source of power. Hard and soft power both aim to reach the desired outcomes but each of them through different ways. Hard power rests on inducements or threats, in other words 'carrots and sticks', in order to frighten, buy or coax the adverse party whereas soft power rests on co-optive means.

Another distinction between the two is that hard power is result-focused whereas soft power is more about relationships. It is more easy or quick with hard power to reach the desired outcome whereas soft power takes time, takes investment and requires patience in reaching the end result. In other words, with soft power, power is appeared as less concrete, less measurable and less predictable when we

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[129] ibid, p.4.

[130] ibid, p.106.

[131] ibid.

compare it with hard power.[132] Soft power resources work indirectly, take years to reach desired outcome. Soft power is more difficult to wield because many of the soft power resources are "outside the control of state" and their effects depend heavily on "acceptance by the receiving audience."[133] However, the effect of soft power is more enduring. As A. Selim Tuncer rightly states: "Hard power occupies while soft power conquests. Occupation is temporary, whereas conquest is permanent."[134]

So many times the distinction between hard and soft power is explained by the means each utilized. Oğuzlu rejects this distinction and claims that rather than the means used, it is the way these means used determined the type of power, whether it is soft or hard in nature.[135] Generally, military power and economic sanctions are associated with hard power, whereas culture, values and style of foreign policy are associated with soft power. However, it is possible to observe these means in different context with different effects and producing different types of power. For example, economy can be used as a hard power through applying a carrot-and-stick policy whereas a powerful economy can be a source of attraction and can be a source of soft power as well.[136] Similarly, though military is generally associated with hard power, sending troops for humanitarian aid or rebuilding mission can be described as a soft power since it brings prestige to a country because of its contribution to global peace.

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[132] ibid, p.99.

[133] ibid.

[134] A.Selim Tuncer, "Soft Power: Gücümüz İnceldiğimiz Yerdedir!", September 11, 2006, http://selimtuncer.blogspot.com/2006/09/soft-power-gcmz-inceldiimiz-yerdedir.html (Accessed on January 1, 2010).

[135] Tarık Oğuzlu, "Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* Vol.61, No.1, 2007, p.83.

[136] ibid.

Soft power has many advantages for its users, namely, its relative cheapness and its usability not just by the states, but by all actors including academics, private think thanks, NGOs, etc. Moreover, soft power may appeal the "ethically concerned people" in the sense that "unlike hard power which compels the submission of its victims through threats of unbearable harm, it rests on attraction that seems to promise an ethically superior method of political interaction."[137]

Nye claims that "Soft power does not depend on hard power."[138] However, in the information age, hard power depends on the soft power and the loss of soft power can be costly also for hard power.[139]

4.2. Requirements of Soft Power

Soft power is "attractive power." In order to create such an attraction, first of all, there must be resources. Soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction.[140] However, the existence of resources does not guarantee the existence of soft power. Secondly, for converting resources into realized power, there must be "well-designed strategies and skillful leadership."[141]Altunışık describes this second requirement as "the will to capitalize on the soft power assets."[142] Thirdly, Nye argues that all power depends on the context but, he claims that, soft power depends more than hard power upon "the existence of

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[137] Mattern, op. cit., p.589-590.

[138] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.9.

[139] Melissen, op cit, p.2.

[140] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.6.

[141] ibid, p.3.

[142] Altunışık, "Model", p.45.

willing interpreters and receivers."[143] Along these three requirements, soft power of Turkey in the Middle East will be evaluated.

4.2.1. Soft Power Assets of Turkey in the Middle East

Living together nearly four hundred years under Ottoman rule, Turkey and Middle Eastern countries have so many things in common. At the same time, due to their different development paths and different experiences in the more recent past, there are various points which differentiate the both. Thanks to both differences and similarities, the soft power assets of Turkey in the Middle East range from democracy to culture, foreign policy to economy, in a sense including all aspects of life.

4.2.1.1. Turkish Democracy

Democracy constitutes the most important soft power asset of Turkey in the region since most of its Middle Eastern counterparts still have authoritarian regimes.

Since the establishment of Turkish Republic, though Western path of development was chosen for the future of the nation state, the authoritarian tendencies and the interventions of the military into politics have prevented the consolidation of Turkish democracy. In other words, for several decades, due to self-perceptions of military and traditional state elite as being "guardians to protect democracy from its own population"[144] Turkish democracy could not be consolidated. As Fuller notes "After several decades of fits and starts, Turkey's democracy has now reached a relatively mature stage."[145] However it is widely

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[143] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.16.

[144] Öztürk, op. cit., p.30.

[145] Fuller, op. cit., p.54.

accepted that achieving this maturity has become possible mostly due to the European Union (EU) anchor.

With the official recognition of Turkey as a candidate country by the European Union at the Helsinki Summit in 1999, the relations between Turkey and the EU has reached to a new level. The emergence of concrete prospects of accession has brought a new dynamism to the reform efforts in the country by bringing together different elite groups. In this way, Turkey has undergone a process of serious reforms and political transformation.[146]

The coalition government of the time started the democratization program and adopted structural reforms despite of the difficulties in reaching consensus in the government. With the landslide victory in 2002 elections, AK Party got the majority of the seats and the reform process was accelerated especially in its first term. With the adoption of comprehensive constitutional amendments and reform packages to fulfill the EU Copenhagen criteria, the official launch of the EU accession process has become possible in 2005.[147]

Turkey's EU membership and democratization process have been closely observed by the Arab Middle East since Turkey is the first country with a Muslim population that has began to negotiate for EU membership. Numerous articles appeared in the Arab media which questioned the EU's ability to embrace a country with its Muslim population that had met the political criteria.[148] Though during most of the Republican period, the Arab media bitterly

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[146] Kirişçi, *Turbulent*, p.22; Öztürk, op. cit., p.12; Aras & Fidan, op. cit., p.198.

[147] Aras & Fidan, op. cit., p.198.

[148] For example, Gassan Serbel, "Sınavın Adı Türkiye", *Al Hayat* (London), 7 October 2004. [reproduced in Turkish in *Radikal*, October 15, 2004.]

criticized Turkey's Western vocation, now they have shown keen interest and presented Turkey's EU membership as a test case.[149]

Turkish democracy and EU membership process is an interesting case for the Middle Eastern states in the sense that it constitutes a test case in various aspects: First, it is a test case of whether EU would be able to incorporate a Muslim country. Exclusion of Turkey for religious and/or cultural reasons is simply intolerable for a Europe with multicultural pretensions and global ambitions.[150] Turkey's membership is particularly important in the post-9/11 context in which increasing negative images of the Muslims in the West have created "a profound sense of helplessness" in the region.[151] In this respect, second, it is a test case of whether "clash of civilizations"[152] theory suggested by Samuel Huntington would be averted.[153]

Moreover, Turkish experience is seen as "welcome evidence" against the ideas that the democracy cannot coexist with Islam.[154] Turkish experience proves that democracy, pluralism, the rule of law, and political modernity are not peculiar features of the West. They are also compatible with societies with a Muslim majority.[155] Thus, Turkish democracy presents "a stimulus to political reform" in

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[149] Kirişçi, *Turbulent,* p.90.

[150] Fuller,op. cit., p.57.

[151] Meliha B. Altunışık, "Turkey: Arab Perspectives", *TESEV Publications*, May 2010, p. 23-24.

[152] This theory claims that in the post-Cold War period, the main clash will be among the civilizations.

[153] Kirişçi, *Turbulent*, p.90.

[154] ibid, p.90-91.

[155] Öztürk, op. cit, p. 23.

the Arab world as well.[156] In this respect, Turkey's potential for constituting a 'model' for reform and transformation in the Middle East has been debated in the Arab media. For instance, Haşim Salih argues that it would possible to learn from the Turkish experience. Since the reforms would come via from within an Islamic country, it would be palatable than otherwise would to be the case.[157]

Turkey's image as a "model state" for promoting democratization in the Middle East has also been discussed by scholars, decision-makers from the Europe, the US, especially after the September 11 attacks. Actually, it is possible to trace the origins of these arguments in the 1990s. However, at that time, due to its ambivalent historical relationship with the Arab countries and insufficient democratic credentials, Turkey had little credibility which made it unacceptable as a role model or intermediary in the region.[158]

Beng argues that since the Middle East long to see "good governance and exemplary leadership," strong, ethical and sustainable home-grown reforms can be source of appeal and attraction.[159] In the Middle Eastern context, Turkish democracy has created such an appeal and attraction. It is clear that the more Turkey becomes democratized, the more attractive and influential it will become in its neighborhood.

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[156] Meliha B. Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey*, Vol.10, No.2, 2008, p.48.

[157] Haşim Salih, "Türkiye Başardı, Ya Biz", *Şark-ül Evsat*, 25 December 2004. [Reproduced in Turkish in *Radika*l 5 January 2005.]

[158] Öztürk, op. cit., p.23.

[159] Phar Kim Beng, "Turkey's potential as a soft power: a call for conceptual clarity", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.10, No.2, April- June 2008, p.21-40.

**4.2.1.2. Turkish Foreign Policy with its New Substance
and Style**

Nye argues that soft power also depends on the values a country expresses
through the substance and style of its foreign policy. He notes that:

> All countries pursue their national interest in foreign policy, but there are
> choices to be made about how broadly or narrowly we define our national
> interest, as well as the means by which we pursue it. After all, soft power is
> about mobilizing cooperation from others without threats or payments. Since it
> depends on the currency of attraction rather than force or payoffs, soft power
> depends in part on how we frame our own objectives. Policies based on broadly
> inclusive and far-sighted definitions of the national interest are easier to make
> attractive to others than policies that take a narrow and myopic perspective.[160]

It is possible to observe that Turkish foreign policy with its new substance and
style constitutes another source of Turkish soft power in the region. Multi-
dimensional, pro-active and self confident foreign policy of Turkey which pays
attention to international legitimacy and regional concerns and employs
diplomacy, even in the fiercest situations, has become a source of appeal and
increased Turkey's prestige in the Middle East.[161]

Kalın claims that attractiveness of the Turkish foreign policy for the region can
be better understood if a comparison is made between the foreign policy styles of
the countries of the region. He continues that Iranian style of foreign policy sees
confrontation as the most effective way to open up space for itself while the
Arab countries lack in creativity and subtleties. In this context, Turkish style of

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[160] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.60–61.

[161] Bülent Aras, "Turkey's Soft Power", Comment, April 13, 2009,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/13/turkey-middleeast (Accessed on
Januray 1, 2010) ; Kalın, op. cit.

making foreign policy with its stress on diplomacy and dialogue is closely watched by the countries of the region.[162]

Since foreign policies produce soft power when they promote broadly shared values, Turkish foreign policy creates an appeal in the Middle East with its stress on democracy and human rights. Moreover, as Nye argues it is easier to generate and wield soft power in multilateral context.[163] In harmony with the rhythmic diplomacy of the Strategic depth doctrine, Turkey has tried to be active in various international platforms and rather than unilateral assertion of its ideas and values, Turkey has advocated the involvement of all related actors in the solutions of problems and made multilateral consultations with the countries of the region. For instance, after the US invasion of Iraq, Turkey initiated the Iraq's Neighboring Countries Meeting with a view to find solutions to the regional problems by regional actors. This initiative also has important implications on how Turkey is perceived in the world as well as in the region.

The adoption of a new discourse and diplomatic style in foreign policy led to the spread of Turkey's soft power to the region. Davutoğlu explains this situation as the following:

> Although Turkey maintains a powerful military due to its insecure neighborhood, we do not make threats. Instead, Turkish diplomats and politicians have adopted a new language in regional and international politics that prioritizes Turkey's civil-economic power.[164]

The most important aspect of Turkish style of foreign policy is its ability to talk to everyone. This ability has facilitated the third-party/mediatory roles of Turkey in the region. Turkish attempts in solving regional disputes in Iraq, Lebanon,

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[162] Kalın, op. cit.

[163] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.63.

[164] Davutoğlu, "Zero- Problems."

Palestine and Syria, have changed the Arab perceptions about Turkey. Many Arabs began to see Turkey as "a constructive actor" and "a fair interlocutor."[165] According to Abbas Vali, "(Unlike Iran) Turkey has no linkages in the Arab World. It can be more of an honest broker. For Iran, its strength is its weakness. For Turkey, its weakness is its strength."[166]

There are also criticisms against the increasing willingness of Turkey to take the mediatory or facilitator role in the region. Sometimes, this willingness is regarded as "mediation obsession." However, through encouraging Turkey's neighbors to become responsible actors in the international scene, Davutoğlu seeks to canalize them into peace and cooperation and solve the regional problems by regional actors without the interference of non-regional powers.[167]

Graham Fuller defines Turkey as "a pivotal state" in the Muslim world. He argues that with its more independent, pro-active foreign policy which draws global attention and attraction Turkey, for the first time in its modern history, is becoming a major regional power in the post-September 11 world.[168]

4.2.1.3. AK Party

AK Party itself can be regarded as an important soft power asset of Turkey in the region. AK Party symbolizes not only the evolution of political Islam in Turkey but also the compatibility of Islamic values with democracy.

Since the 1970s, Islamic movements in the form of political parties have been part of the Turkish political system. The most important of these movements was

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[165] Altunışık, "Arab perspectives", p 19.

[166] ibid.

[167] Zengin, op. cit., p.20.

[168] G.E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, United State Institute of Peace Press: Washington, 2007, p.5.

the "National Outlook Movement" led by Necmettin Erbakan. This movement, since 1970, has been represented in the parliament under different party names because these parties were closed by the Constitutional Court due to their anti-regime rhetoric and activities. AK Party also was born from the "ashes of banned Virtue Party" coming from the tradition of National Outlook, whose leader, Necmettin Erbakan was imprisoned for "inciting hatred and enmity" and banned from running for 2002 elections.[169]

Known as the postmodern coup d'état of February 28, 1997, in which the military overthrew a coalition government led by Necmettin Erbakan, constitutes the turning point for the Islamists to rethink their future. After the ban of Erbakan's Virtue Party, the reformist fraction in the Virtue Party including Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç joined Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to found AK Party (Justice and Development Party) in August 2001. This newly founded AK Party won a landslide victory in 2002 elections by capturing 34 percent of votes and 363 seats in the parliament.

Strong anti-Westernism is the main characteristic of Islamism in Turkey, as well as in the Middle East. However, as a result of rethinking process, Islamist in Turkey have realized that they have been on the same side with the Westerners in demanding further democratization and guarantees of civil and political rights in Turkey.[170] To put it bluntly, as Dağı notes, they think that "the transformation of an authoritarian regime into a democratic one is in their interest, and they realize that the West, with its call for democracy, human rights and pluralism, could be possible partner in transforming the authoritarian tendencies in Turkey's state

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[169] İhsan D. Dağı, "The Justice and Development Party: Identity, Politics, and Human Rights Discourse in the Search for Security and Legitimacy", in *The Emergence of a New Turkey*, edited by H. Yavuz, (University of Utah Press, 2006), p.88-89.

[170] İhsan D. Dağı, "Rethinking Human Rights, Democracy, and the West: Post-Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey", *Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.13, No.2, Summer 2004, p.149-150.

apparatus."[171] Thus, AK party has become the staunch supporter of Turkey's EU membership by declaring the EU accession as the absolute priority of Turkish foreign policy.[172]

For the leaders of the AK Party integration to the West and maintaining an Islamic identity are no longer mutually exclusive. Dağı argues that through rethinking the Western question and criticizing the Islamist tradition, AK Party emerged as a "post-Islamist political movement."[173]

Though Erdoğan repeatedly stressed that the AK Party was no longer Islamist but rather "Conservative Democrat" along the lines of the Christian Democrat parties of Europe,[174] the critics accused him of harboring a "hidden agenda." However, as Dağı argues, EU membership process almost permanently eliminates the possibility of Islamic state in Turkey.[175] Thus, in Turkish politics, political forces have changed their positions towards opposite directions: while the Kemalists have abandoned the ideal of westernization, Islamists have become the advocators of further westernization which means deeper democracy, more human rights.[176]

As a soft power asset, different aspects of the AKP have been highlighted by the different domestic and foreign actors. Altunışık identifies two slightly divergent positions in this regard. According to the first view, evolution of Turkey's

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[171] ibid.

[172] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p. 44.

[173] İhsan D. Dağı, "Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization", *Turkish Studies*, Vol.6, No.1, March 2005, p.33-34.

[174] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p. 44.

[175] Dağı, "Discourse", p.92.

[176] Dağı, "Rethinking", p.34.

political Islam and the coming to power of the AKP exemplifies the compatibility of Islam with democracy. In other words, Turkish example demonstrates that moderation in political Islam is possible, as evidenced by the AKP's willing to operate under democratic norms.[177] On the other hand, for the second view, evolution of political Islam depends on Turkey's history of democratization and secularism. Accordingly, democratic, secular norms and institutional structure have a major role in the evolution of political Islam.[178]

Altunışık suggests that the Turkish experiences with the AK party are particularly relevant to two groups in the Middle East, namely: moderate Islamic groups and the collection of reformist, liberal and secular groups. Regarding the first group, since they have denounced the violence as a political method and wanted to participate in electoral politics, AKP experience exemplifies, for them, the possibility of engaging in legal politics without abandoning their conservative agendas.[179] Regarding the second group, AKP experience demonstrates that "through institutional limitations and democracy, Islamists parties can be managed and moderated."[180]

4.2.1.4. Turkish Economy

Nye claims that "A strong economy not only provides resources for sanctions and payments, but also can be a source of attractiveness."[181] Concerning the Turkish economy in the new era, the second option is more relevant. Turkey's economic transformation and economic performance have become important for

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[177] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p. 45.

[178] ibid.

[179] ibid, p. 48.

[180] ibid.

[181] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.7-8.

the countries of the region, especially which had serious socio-economic problems.

The study carried out by TESEV in seven Middle Eastern countries has shown that rather than the Palestinian issue, economic situation is the most important issue for the peoples in the region. Economic challenges such as chronically high unemployment rates and poverty dominate the Arab world today.[182]

Turkey has shown a remarkable economic performance in recent years and succeeded to become the 16th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest economy in Europe in 2009.[183] The performance of Turkish economy can also be seen from the foreign trade and tourism revenues: While exports reached 102 billion USD by the end of 2009, up from 36 billion USD in 2002. Similarly, tourism revenues, which were around 8.5 billion USD in 2002, exceeded 21 billion USD in 2009.[184]

AK Party's growing emphasis on economic interdependency has result in expansion of economic ties with its Middle Eastern counterparts. In the period of 2002-2009, a significant overall increase was witnessed in Turkish trade volume towards the region. Turkey's exports to the Middle East increased from 3 billion USD in 2002 to 17 billion in 2009 whereas its imports from the region, which were around 3 billion USD in 2002, exceeded 8.5 billion USD in 2009. [185]

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[182] Mensur Akgün, Gökçe Perçinoğlu, Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, "Ortadoğu'da Türkiye Algısı", *TESEV Dış Politika Analiz Serisi*, No.10, March 2010, p.9.

[183]"Economic Outlook", *Invest In Turkey*, http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/turkey/factsandfigures/Pages/Economy.aspx (Accessed on May 23, 2010.

[184] ibid.

[185] OECD Statistical Database, 2010.

Turkey is considered in the region both as a source of foreign direct investment and as an object of these investments. Regarding its first position, through making investments in the region in various areas such as construction, textile, and Turkish entrepreneurs contributed to the job creation. Regarding the second position, Turkey is seen by Arab entrepreneurs as a secure and suitable place for further investments.[186]

Since AKP regards regional trade as a "major synergy vehicle of continuous and sustainable economic development"[187], the number of Free Trade Agreements has increased in the same period, such as with Egypt, Syria, Jordan. The new trade destinations and relations have helped Turkey to alleviate the negative impacts of the global financial crisis of 2008. To put it bluntly, in the wake of world economic crisis, due to Turkey's diversification of export markets, particularly the Middle East market, the devastating effect of the crisis were not felt so much and Turkey has managed to recover more quickly than expected. As a result, international rating agencies have been upgrading Turkey's credit ratings day by day.

In such a context, it is not an exaggeration to claim that the vibrant Turkish economy has become a source of inspiration and a successful example to draw lessons, not only for the Middle East but also for the Western countries.

4.2.1.5. Historical and Cultural Ties

Culture and history are other assets producing soft power. Nye notes that "When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and

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[186] Altunışık, "Arab perspectives", p.24.

[187] AK Party's 2007 Party program, http://eng.akparti.org.tr/english/partyprogramme.html (Accessed on September 1, 2010).

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interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty it creates."[188]

Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries share strong historical and cultural ties which have been so many decades suppressed by nationalist historiographies. During most of the Republican period, due to the nationalist historiographies, historical and cultural ties have divided the two rather than unite. However, now, with the new foreign policy vision, these ties are re-interpreted and re-invented. As a result of this re-interpreting process, history and culture begin to be seen in positive terms and as Altunışık suggests, they make it easier for Turkey to be involved in the region as well as they actually "compel Turkey to be part of the Middle East."[189]

The change in the perception of history and culture has result in the change in the perceptions of both sides about each other. New foreign policy has also an effect on Turkish people's own self-perception. As Cüneyt Zapsu, a close advisor to Erdoğan, stated that "A new, positive role for Turkey in the world requires reconciliation with its own past, the overcoming of societal taboos and a positive new concept of Turkish identity. We are the Ottomans' successors and should not be ashamed of this."[190] In this regard, contrary to the earlier perception seeing the Middle East as backward in cultural terms, today having historical and cultural ties with the Middle East begin to be perceived as enrichment rather than something to be ashamed of.

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[188] Nye, *Soft power,* p. 11.

[189] Altunışık, "Worldviews", p.189.

[190] Şeker, op. cit.

4.2.2. Will to Capitalize On Soft Power Assets

The second requirement for the existence of soft power is the will to capitalize on soft power assets. Since having the soft power resources is not enough for depicting a country as a soft power, being aware of these resources, the country should have a concrete soft power strategy and strong leadership behind it in order to transform these resources into attraction and influence.

Nye emphasizes the importance of context for the existence of soft power. Domestic, regional and international context has provided a suitable ground for the new activism in the Middle East. Regarding the domestic context, the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the PKK, in 1999 relaxed the social context both for the domestic reforms and the normalization of relations with Syria and Iran.[191] Moreover, in the domestic sphere, the EU membership process has enabled the democratization reforms which have some reflections in the foreign policy sphere as well. In terms of the regional context, the start of Iraq war in 2003 forced the countries of the region to fall back on political balancing acts with the aim of safeguarding their interest. In this sense, how these countries positioned themselves politically have become increasingly important and according to Öztürk, "This led to a shift in the way Turkey was perceived by Syria and Iran, both of which, finding themselves under an uncomfortably close scrutiny from US Middle East policy, were forced to look for new partners."[192] In this sense, for the countries of the region, the Iraqi war made it imperative to cooperate with each other. Regarding the international context, it is possible to observe that due to the changing global power balance between the one superpower, namely the US, and other great powers such as China, Russia and the EU, new power vacuums and crisis situations emerged. In addition, "the

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[191] Öztürk, op. cit, p.22.

[192] ibid.

relative shrinking of Europe as a source of new ideas and bold policies"
contributes the emergence of new actors and players on the stage with new and
fresh ideas.[193]

One might claim that domestic developments, global dynamics and regional
developments are the basic determinants of the AK party's foreign policy in the
Middle East. It is true that all these factors might create a suitable environment
for an active foreign policy in the Middle East. However, the story seems to be
missing without the will of the AK Party leaders. It seems not fair to explain this
activism without the agency behind it: agency of the AK party policy makers.
Ersoy explains this agency with the ideational sources of the AK party, such as
the intellectual sources of its foreign policy and the foreign policy discourse the
AKP has adopted.[194] He asked the question of "whether Turkish foreign policy
would have been the same if the Republican People's Party (CHP) or the
Nationalist Action Party (MHP) had assumed the office and formed a single
party government" and added that "it seems extremely difficult to give an
affirmative answer to this question."[195] In this way, AK Party policy makers are,
using Ersoy's term, "actors, not reactors"[196] who are willing to be active in the
region through capitalizing on soft power assets.

The government feels confident because they are sure about the success of the
Turkish model which has the relevant assets. This feeling of confidence can be

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[193] Kalın, op. cit.

[194] Eyüp Ersoy, "Old Principles, New Practices: Explaining the AKP Foreign Policy", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.8, No.4, 2009, p. 126.

[195] ibid, p.116.

[196] ibid, p. 126.

easily observed from the statements of President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu. For example Gül stated that:

> Turkey is setting a very closely watched example among the Muslim world. Indirectly, we are educating our region through exemplary reform and development process. We have become a source of inspiration for intellectuals and politicians in our geography.[197]

In October 2003, while addressing the representatives of the OIC in Malaysia, Gül explained the mission of the AK party to accomplish as such: "We were to prove that a Muslim society is capable of changing and renovating itself, attaining contemporary standards, while preserving its values, traditions and identity."[198]

It is possible to observe the feeling of confidence from the speeches of the Prime Minister Erdoğan. He tries to give messages not only to the Islamic world but also to the Western world. His message to the Muslim world and the countries of the Middle East is to recognize that "Democracy is not particular to a specific group of societies. Democracy is universal and a modern day requirement." However, he warns that in democratization endeavors, there is not a "one-size-fits all" formula. Thus, Erdoğan continues, "Each country should lay out its democratization perspective that suits local conditions and in so doing benefit from the advice of third countries and international organizations. Instead of blaming the outside world for the difficulties, they should put their house in order."[199]

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[197] Abdullah Gül, *Yeni Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikasının Ufukları*, T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı: Ankara, 2007, p.224.

[198] ibid, p.539-540.

[199] Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech at Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government, January 30, 2003.

On the other hand, the message given to the Western world is that as exemplified by the Turkish case that Islam and democracy is compatible, so, they should get rid of their prejudices about the Islamic world.[200] The Alliance of Civilizations initiative of Turkey and Spain is an important development aiming at galvanizing an international effort to facilitate interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the process. In such a context, Erdoğan pleaded to the Western world to listen to the voice of Muslim world carefully with an open heart and to "establish a more just global order and seek harmony among civilizations."[201] He continued that "Change must be supported with soft power and by setting a good example…The greatest strength of those societies that represent modern values is the attraction they create."[202]

As can be seen, examining the speeches and acts of the leading figures of the AKP government seem to reveal that Turkey has the will to capitalize on its assets and turn them into influence and power.

4.2.3. Existence of Willing Receivers

The third requirement is related to how the message one sends perceived by the receivers. Construction of soft power requires willing receivers. The existence of willing receivers is related to how the actors and its actions perceived by the receivers. If the actor and its actions are perceived as credible and legitimate, it is more likely for this actor to wield its soft power.

Similarly, if Turkey wants to play the role of a soft power in the Middle East, the construction of credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of Middle Eastern receivers is a prerequisite for such a role.

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[200] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p. 46.

[201] Erdoğan, op. cit., January 30, 2003.

[202] ibid.

Fortunately, in recent years, the Arab views on Turkey seem to evolve in a more positive way. In order to understand the evolution in the Arab perceptions of Turkey, it would be better to look at how Turkey was perceived in the past. Being aware of the fact that Middle Eastern community or Arab view does not represent a homogenous, monolithic unit, some turning points which affected the perception of both sides about each other will be tried to analyze.

4.2.3.1. Traditional Perceptions: Durable Stereotypes

Arab world closely observed the Turkey's War of Independence. However, the real turning point came with the foundation of the Turkish Republic which based on Western modernism and secularism. The reform process initiated by the Turkish political elite to reshape the state as well as society had result in mixed responses from the Arab world. While majority of the Arab community were disappointed with the secular policies aiming to erase the religion from the public sphere, it is also possible to find admirers of Mustafa Kemal, especially among the emergent modern elites of the Arab countries.[203]

Throughout the history of the Turkish republic, due to the nationalist perspectives dominant in both Turkey and the Arab world, Turks and Arabs have perceived each other in negative terms, through the lens of stereotypes and prejudices.[204] On the Arab side, dominant feeling was the feeling of "suppression" in the sense that Arab nationalist discourse emphasized the notion of "terrible Turk" as the violent oppressor of Arab nationalism embodied by the Ottoman State.[205] It portrayed Ottoman Empire as colonizer that was responsible

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[203] Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and Modern Turkey: A Century of Changing Perceptions," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2009, p. 68.

[204] Dietrich Jung, "Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.10, No.1, 2005, p.5.

[205] ibid, p.4.

for the Arab backwardness.[206] On the other hand, in Turkey, Arab perception was associated with these words: betrayal, suspicion and conspiracy. Turkish nationalist discourse emphasized the end of centuries of common life with the Arab treachery. However, as Jung claims, it is possible to find a common denominator between both nationalist narratives that is their tendency to neglect the Ottoman period.[207]

Different threat perceptions affected Turkish-Middle East relations during the Cold War era. The Soviet Union was the main source of threat for Turkey whereas for major Arab regimes, in the early years of the Cold war, the Western bloc, particularly the US due to its support to Israel, constituted the main source of threat. Thus, Turkish involvement in the region during 1950s with the Bagdad Pact only served to reinforce the Turkey's image as "terrible Turk" and "a stooge of the US"[208]

Turkey's relations with Israel have always played an important role in how Turkey has been perceived in the region since the Arab world sees the Israel as the main threat for the Ummah. As being one of the first countries recognizing Israel in 1949, Turkey created additional rift to the already cool relations with the Middle East.

Throughout the history of the Republic, to establish strong relations with Israel and the Middle Eastern countries at the same time could not be possible. When Turkey's relations deteriorated with the Arab world, its ties with Israel were strengthening and vice versa. For example Turkey's rapprochement with the Arab and Islamic world in the second half of 1960s resulted in cooler relations

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[206] Altunışık,, "Arab perspectives", p.12.

[207] Jung, op. cit., p.4.

[208] ibid., p.9; Altunışık, "Arab perspectives", p. 12.

with Israel. Similarly, intensified cooperation with Israel in the second half of 1990s, created a "profound unease" among the Middle Eastern states.[209]Turkish-Israeli alignment was interpreted by the Arab media as the "continuation of historical politics of oppression" whereas the Kemalist elite in Turkey considered the alignment as a "pragmatic move."[210]

Özal era is also important for the betterment of perceptions between the two sides. It is possible to see the new interests to the region in the increasing number of Arab students studying in Turkey as well as booming tourism and trade between Turkey and the Arab world.[211] In addition to these, increasing number of meetings and publications in academic realm have led to a trend which emphasized the importance of revisiting common history and necessity of rethinking mutual stereotypes for the betterment of relations between Turkey and the Arab world.[212] However, the fragile relations were deteriorated, especially with Syria and Iraq, with the launch of GAP program (Southeastern Anatolian Project) which aimed to utilize the waters of Tigris and Euphrates to irrigate the vast part of land. Since Syria perceived the GAP as the "Turkish control of its waters" and brought the issue to the agenda of the Arab League Meetings in 1990s, GAP has turned to be "a pan-Arab issue."[213]

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[209] Jung, op. cit., p.10.

[210] ibid, p.11.

[211] Nafi, op. cit, p. 68.

[212] Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Arab Perceptions of Turkey and the Alignment with Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 2, 2001, p. 54.

[213] Altunışık, "Arab perspectives", p.13.

4.2.3.2. Changing perceptions: Willing Receivers

With the coming of AKP to power, the Arabs perceptions gradually began to change in a positive way. Several developments have contributed to this process.

To begin with, in March 2003, the vote of Turkish parliament refusing passage to the US troops on their way to invade Iraq, known as the 1 March Motion, was a welcomed development for the Arab world. Casting a dark shadow over the US-Turkey relations, this decision was perceived by the Arab world as a sign of democratic maturity in the sense that Turkish parliament could not turn a blind eye to the public opinion in Turkey.[214]

Secondly, from the Arab point of view, the cooling of relations between Turkey and Israel has been the most important development. Erdoğan's harsh criticisms of Israel, including describing some of its brutal actions as "state terrorism", have intensified after Israel's December 2008 attack on Gaza.[215] Erdoğan felt betrayal with the attack because Turkey has been following a shuttle diplomacy to open direct talks between Syria and Israel just when the attack on Gaza began. On January 2009, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Erdoğan strongly criticized President Shimon Peres on the matter and accused Israelis of "knowing well how to kill people" and walked off the stage during a panel discussion as a response to unfair treatment by the meeting moderator by vowing never to return to Davos.[216]

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[214] Ziya Öniş & Yılmaz Suhnaz, "Turkey-EU-Us Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.59, No.2, 2005.

[215] Patrick Seale, "The Rise and Rise of Turkey", *New York Times*, November 4, 2009.

[216] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit., p.23-24; Zalewski, op. cit., p.54.

Davos affair has made the Prime Minister Erdoğan a "champion" of the Arab masses, and made Turkey highly popular in the Arab world.[217] The Arab press was full of praise for Erdoğan who has began to be called as the "new Nasser" and "had done more for Gaza than all the Arab leaders combined."[218] Syrian leader Bashar Assad even acknowledged that Erdoğan was probably the most popular leader in Syria.[219] In addition to Arab masses, the overwhelming majority of Turks were proud of their Prime Minister who dared to speak truth to power[220] though some critics found this move contrary to diplomacy and concerned this would further damage strained ties with Israel.[221]

In the following months, the strained relations with Israel have further deteriorated with the new developments. Turkey cancelled the involvement of Israel to a multinational air force exercise. Later on, Turkish television soap operas depiction of Israeli soldiers killing of children in Gaza and the "low chair crisis" in which Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon invited the Turkish ambassador for a public dressing down have deteriorated the already cool relations. However, the tension between the two countries peaked when a Turkish-led civilian flotilla, named Mavi Marmara, was attacked by the Israeli army and resulted in the death of 9 Turkish citizens. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu demanded an UN-led inquiry, a formal Israeli apology and compensation. In September 2010, the UN Human-Rights Council criticized Israel, but the Israelis refused to apologize. It seems that unless there is formal apology and

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[217] Erimtan, op. cit.

[218] Zalewski, op. cit., p.55.

[219] ibid.

[220] ibid, p.54.

[221] For instance, see Murat Yetkin, "Öfkeyle Kalkan", *Radikal*, January 30, 2009.

compensation from Israel, Turkey does not intend to "normalize" its relations with Israel.[222]

The strong criticisms of Erdogan against Israel attract the Arab citizens who long for a "strong voice" that could express their anger to brutal acts of Israel.[223] In other words, Turkish actions against Israel are seen as "courageous stances in support of their causes."[224] Such a perception has made Turkey "a rising star in the minds and hearts of the peoples of Middle East." [225]

However, it should be emphasized that public opinion in the Arab world is not only shaped by the Turkish-Israeli relations. The survey done by TESEV has shown that there is a strong interest in Turkey as a democratic example. The question "Could Turkey be a model for the Arab world?" was answered affirmatively by 61 percent of respondents. 63 percent of participants believe Turkey is a successful combination of Islam and democracy. 64 percent of participants believed EU membership makes Turkey a more convincing partner for the Arab world.[226]

To look at the figures from the opposite side will show that there are also people in the Middle East who do not have positive perceptions of Turkey. The Middle East is not a monolithic unit. As Kalın states "Arabs still have mixed feelings about the Turks. Varying degrees of intensity, love, respect, admiration, suspicion, mistrust and even dislike are part of the Arab perception of Turks

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[222] Zengin, op. cit., p.247.

[223] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit, p.20.

[224] Aras, "Soft Power."

[225] ibid.

[226] Akgün, Perçinoğlu & Gündoğar, op. cit.

today"[227] However, the most important thing is that Turkey occupies an important place in Arab public debate. As Kalın argues:

> From the political elites and activists to civil servants and the media, Turkey is part of various analyses, comparisons and contrasts. Turkish foreign policy as well as soap operas, the history of Turks and Arabs as well as their future have become the fixed elements of daily conversation.[228]

One might claim that since most of the regional countries are ruled by authoritarian rulers, the public opinion in the Middle East does not so much matter. Kalın claims that such kind of claims is related to the inability in reading the societal dynamics. He argues that an emerging Arab public opinion is reshaping the political space in the Arab world and "Turkish debate" in the region should be understood along these lines. He states that:

> Turkey is back not as a matter of ethnicity or religion but as part of the new debate about geopolitics and world-system analyses. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and its leader receive attention because they are perceived as a new force and as a new dynamic in the emerging world system....What we are seeing is not simply emotions or historical nostalgia but a different way of looking at the world system. It is this aspect of the Arab public opinion that will reshape Arab politics in the years to come.[229]

As can be seen, due to various reasons, there is a growing interest in the Middle East towards Turkey. By largely getting rid of their stereotypes and prejudices towards Turkey, the people of the Middle East are more willing to perceive Turkey from a different perspective and more willing to receive the message of Turkey.

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[227] İbrahim Kalın, "Arab public opinion and the world system", *Todays Zaman*, January 21, 2010.

[228] ibid.

[229] ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SOFT POWER IN USE

Turkey with its functioning democracy, its strong market economy, its pro-active, multidimensional foreign policy, its "post-Islamist" AK Party, and its re-invented historical and cultural ties has created an attraction in the Middle East as a soft power. Soft power theory and three requirements of soft power were already evaluated for Turkey in the Middle Eastern context. This chapter will cover some examples in order to further understanding of Turkish soft power in use.

5.1. Relations with Syria

As Turkey gradually ceased to see its neighbors just from security perspective, its soft power identity has become more visible. Syrian-Turkish relations constitute a good indicator of the transformation in Turkey's identity towards a rising soft power in the region.

For so many decades, mutual suspicion and mistrust has reigned over the relations between Turkey and the Arab world, and the relations with Syria are not an exception from this process. Even daring to think the "normalization" of the relations between Turkey and Syria was nothing but a "dream" that happened to cross too many redlines in both sides, according to Hamidi.[230]

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the relations with Syria have been shaped by the issues of province of Hatay (Alexandretta), the waters of Tigris and Euphrates (or Southeastern Anatolian project, GAP) and Syrian support of Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK. Syria accused Turkey of depriving it of its rightful share of the Euphrates through constructing of dams on it to prevent the

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[230] İbrahim Hamidi, "Syria and Turkey: History in the Making", paper presented to the *The 'Aqqad House Media and Journalist Conference 2009 on Turkey and the Middle East*, November 10-11, 2009.

flow of water into Syria. On the other hand, Turkey accused Syria of supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey branded as a terrorist organization. Moreover, Turks were also angry with the Syrians for their efforts for spreading anti-Ottoman sentiments in the Arab world through Syrian television dramas.[231]

The worsened relations, in the 1990s, have brought the two to the brink of war in 1998, due to the Syrian support of the PKK. After signing the Adana Accords, Syria expelled PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and reduced its support to PKK.[232] With these developments, the normalization era began in Turkish-Syrian relations.

During the AK Party governments, Turkish-Syrian relations well go beyond normalization and have reached to an unprecedented level of cooperation, comprising of economic, political and cultural dimensions. In this era, Turkish-Syrian relations have experienced many "first times." For example, with his visit to Turkey in 2004, President Bashar al-Assad became the first Syrian president to visit Turkey since independence was achieved in 1946.[233] During this visit, he put his signature on documents which explicitly recognizing Turkey in its current borders. It means accepting province of Hatay (Alexandretta) as part of Turkey.[234] Another example is the convening of First Ministerial Meeting of the Turkey-Syria High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council in Aleppo, October

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[231] ibid.

[232] Nicholas Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.7, No.3, 2008, p.92.

[233] Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (November 2006), pp. 956.

[234] Özlem Tür, "Turkish-Syrian Relations- Where Are We Going?", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No.23, May,2010, p.168.

2009.[235] By bringing several ministers of the two countries together, this meeting worked on the possible cooperation areas. Moreover, in September 2009, the two countries decided to reciprocally lift the visa requirements;[236] in December 2009, 51 agreements, memorandum of understanding and work programs were signed on cooperation between the two countries in all areas.[237]

Undeniably, people living in the borders are the ones affected most from the relations between two countries, either these relations are intimate or tense. When the relations become tenser and even leading to war, as a precautionary measure, the borders are closed and activities are slowed down. However, when the relations have becoming intimate, the borders are open and interactions increase. It is also relevant for Turkish-Syrian relations. Warming relations between the two countries has resulted in the launch of Turkey-Syria Interregional Cooperation Program which includes Gaziantep, Kilis provinces from Turkish side; Aleppo province from Syrian side. Due to its success, the scope of the Program has been expanded with the inclusion of new provinces from the both sides. This program has been closely observed by the Arab world, and Islamic Development Bank promotes it in the whole region as a model of cooperation on bilateral basis.[238]

In a joint press conference with his Syrian Counterpart, Walid al-Moallem, Davutoğlu declared their common slogan as "a joint destiny, a joint history and a

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[235] "Turkey-Syria High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council Convenes", *Turkish Weekly*, October 13, 2009.

[236] "Turkey, Syria sign strategic deal, lift visa", *Todays Zaman*, September 17, 2009.

[237] "Turkey, Syria talk latest regional issues", *Haberturk,* October 11, 2010.

[238] Further information is available at Program Official Website, http://www.projekoordinasyon.org/tr/index.asp

joint future."[239]As Oğuzlu rightly notes that "The economic and cultural dimensions of Turkish-Syrian relations have eclipsed its political-military character."[240]

The strong relations established between Turkey and Syria has facilitated the third party role of Turkey in its regional policy. After the collapse of Syrian-Israeli talks in 2000 and the deterioration of US-Syrian relations, Turkey took an initiative to restart the negotiations between Israel and Syria. In May 2008, the indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel started in Istanbul. The aim was to pave the way for direct negotiations and, ultimately, a peace deal and the return of Syria's Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967.[241]Prime Minister Erdoğan has involved personally in this process and has conveyed the messages to both sides.[242] However, after five rounds of indirect talks, talks broke down in December 2008 when Israel's Operation Cast Lead started against Gaza. Erdoğan felt betrayed and he intensified the criticism against the Israeli actions.[243] Recently, there has been willingness on the Syrian side to resume the negotiations, with the help of Turkey's mediation role, despite Israelis reluctance. Perceiving Turkey as a reliable partner in the process is an important indicator of the level of the level of trust between Turkey and Syria.[244]

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[239] **"Davutoğlu: Common destiny, history and future is slogan of Turkey and Syria",** *Todays Zaman*, October 13, 2009.

[240] Oğuzlu, op. cit., p. 93.

[241] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit., p.14-15.

[242] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p.50.

[243] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit, p.14-15.

[244] Tür, op. cit., p.171.

5.2. Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran

Contrary to decades of negative perceptions that saw Iran as an important threat trying to export its regime to Turkey, in recent years, with the abandonment of security lenses, Turkish-Iranian relations have flourished in many aspects of life. Iran has become an important trade partner of Turkey. The trade volume between Turkey and Iran rise up from 1.2 billion US Dollars in 2002 to around 5.4 billion US Dollars in 2009.[245]

Since Iran is a big oil and gas producer neighbor, Turkey aspires to serve as an energy corridor to Western markets for Iranian gas and oil. Moreover, lifting visa requirements also contributed the increasing number of Iranian tourist visiting Turkey, as being the biggest number from the Middle East. According to International Crisis Group Report, since Iranian tourists are "exposed to a Muslim society at peace with the world, economically advanced and where Islamic traditions coexist with Western patterns of consumption, commerce and secular institutions, it is more likely that "Turkey is influencing Iran rather than vice versa."[246]

In addition to these, nuclear diplomacy with Iran with its delicate and complicated nature might constitute an example of Turkish soft power identity. Being unsuccessful in convincing the international community about the civilian intentions of its nuclear program, Iranian government has found Turkish government as a reliable partner, who empathizing Iranian sensitivities. According to Aybet, Turkey's independence from the West and Erdoğan's

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[245] Undersecretariat for Foreign Trade, 2009 Annual Foreign Trade Report and Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat).

[246] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit., p.16.

populist rhetoric against Israel can be regarded as the most valuable asset of Turkey in its engagement with Iran.[247]

Regarding the nuclear issue, the divergence between Turkey and Western world, especially the US, is about the means rather than the outcome. Neither side would like to see a nuclear-armed Iran. However, the means they prefer to reach this commonly preferred outcome differs. The US has advocated hard power means such as economic coercion and even military force whereas Turkey has preferred diplomacy first approach and tried to keep Iran engaged. In this way, Turkey objects any new sanctions regime and armed conflict in the region.

Turkey with Brazil attempted to mediate between Iran and the West. Through Turkish-Brazilian plan[248], Iran was persuaded for the uranium exchange, while the US did not find the deal sufficient for satisfying American concerns. Thus, Turkish-Brazil Plan could not prevent a new UN sanction on Iran. In June 2010, a resolution to tighten sanctions on Iran, in order to compel it to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, came before the UN Security Council. Turkey faces a "though choice" in the sense that by voting the new sanctions would risk the greatly improved relationship with Iran, on the other hand, no vote would risk the already strained relationship with the US.[249] However, saying yes to sanctions or abstaining from voting would endanger the reliability and

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[247] Gülnur Aybet, "Behind the rhetoric: Why Turkey wants to keep Iran engaged", *Todays Zaman*, October 29, 2009.

[248] This plan based on the exchange of 1200 kilograms of Iranian low grade uranium for 120 kilograms of enriched uranium that is to be used for medical purposes and that Turkey would serve as the depository of the fuel until the exchange is completed.

[249] Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey and the Nuclear Summit", *GMF Analysis on Turkey,* April 21, 2010, p.1.

credibility of Turkey as a facilitator or mediatory actor. Thus, Turkey decided to vote against it "to keep its dialogue with Iran going."[250]

Giving lessons from the oil embargo against Iraq in the Gulf War, Turkey realized that the burdens of an embargo are not shared equally. In other words, due to "a disproportionate burden" on Turkey without adequate compensation from the international community, Turkish economy suffered badly during 1990s.[251] Thus, even just for economic concerns, Turkey has sufficient reasons to oppose further economic sanctions on Iran.

However, it seems not fair to explain the Turkish stance on Iranian nuclear dispute just through economic concerns. Besides these concerns and even more than them, it is related to how Turkey perceives the world. It is about the broader vision Turkey has for the international order. As Turan rightly states "the desire for a new international order that is in greater harmony with the emerging distribution of global power also appears to constitute a more comprehensive framework that better explains Turkish foreign policy actions in general, not just with regard to Iran."[252]

For a nuclear-free Middle East, although some advised Turkey to use a carrot-and-stick approach in the sense that by using the economic ties between the two countries as a form of "negative reinforcement,"[253] Turkey chose diplomacy in line with its new foreign policy understanding that favors soft power to hard

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[250] "The Davutoğlu Effect", op. cit.

[251] İlter Turan, "Turkey's Iran Policy: Moving Away from Tradition?", *GMF Analysis on Turkey*, p.3.

[252] ibid.

[253] Cenk Sidar, "Convincing Iran: A Critical Test for Turkish Foreign Policy", *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 18, 2010.

power. Turkey preferred persuasive diplomacy to carrot-and-stick approach and tried to ensure the dialogue channels remained open.

Zweiri and Staffell argues that those who complaint that diplomacy would not work for the Iranian nuclear issue have missed an important point that is the "changing dynamics of the power in the region." There have been increasing examples of cooperation in the region, though in many cases in the early stages. However, compounding this misreading with "a resort to further hard power" would seem to make the situation, and the region, "more dangerous."[254]

In this context, it seems that there are important lessons to be drawn from Turkey's diplomacy-first approach not only for the regional countries but also for Western countries.

5.3. Relations with Iraq

The efforts of government to liberate Turkey's relations with neighbors from the highly securitized perspective have been also relevant in its Iraq policy.

Lundgren argues though the political context changed significantly with the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Turkish foreign policy remained basically unchanged after March 2003, with its main pillars as the unity and sovereignty of Iraq and the prevention of Kurdish independence.[255] Lundgren is right in the sense that these pillars are still the cornerstones of Turkey's Iraq policy. However, he fails to understand that the style of Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq has changed drastically rather than remaining the same.

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[254] Mahjoob Zweiri & Simon Staffell, "Talking With a Region: Lessons from Iran, Turkey and Pakistan", *Middle East Policy Council*, 2009, http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/talking-region-lessons-iran-turkey-and-pakistan (Accessed on February 2, 2010).

[255] Lundgren, op. cit., p.116.

In contrast to the earlier practices, the government, from the beginning, has advocated dialogue and cooperation with Iraq, and particularly with the Kurdistan Regional Government, despite of the existence of domestic opposition.[256] Besides being important trade partners with Iraq, Turkey was among the top ten foreign investors in Iraq.[257] Turkish construction companies heavily invested in northern Iraq through building roads, bridges and other infrastructure projects.[258] Moreover, in October 2009, during the visit of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Iraq 48 memorandum of understandings were signed, in the fields of fields of commerce, energy, water, security, environment, etc.[259]

As dialogue with Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government began, besides economic cooperation, the relations in political realm have gained momentum. Turkey opened a consulate office in Erbil, the de facto capital of the Kurdistan regional administration in northern Iraq.[260] The AK Party government fostered the relations with Sunni and Shiite groups and in this respect, it played an important role in convincing some of the Sunni groups to participate in parliamentary elections in 2005.[261]

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[256] Altunışık, "Worldviews", p.189.

[257] International Crisis Group Report, op. cit, p.10.

[258] ibid.

[259] "Irak'la Büyük Aşk", *Milliyet*, October 16, 2009.

[260] "Turkey names consul general to Arbil", *Todays Zaman*, March 6, 2010.

[261] Altunışık, "Worldviews", p.189.

1 March motion led to concerns about losing an opportunity to have a say over the future of Iraq.[262] However, during and after the invasion of Iraq, Turkey has pursued an active diplomacy in solving the question of Iraq's future. Turkish government initiated the Meetings of Extended Neighboring Countries in an attempt to find solution to the Iraqi problem by regional actors. According to Davutoğlu, this initiative has demonstrated that Iraq issue was not only an American issue but also an international issue. [263]

Turkey has tried to maintain a balance between security and human rights, freedom democracy. However, the rising PKK activism in 2007 has made it difficult for Turkey to maintain the delicate balance between the two. Despite of the domestic calls for applying sanctions against Northern Iraq through closing the Habur Gate or cutting the region's electricity, Turkey resisted the pressure and the diplomacy channel always remained open.[264] An important question that might come to mind is that as Turkey continued its military operations against PKK and entered several times to the Northern Iraq since 2007, how such hard power actions can be compatible with its soft power identity? It is true that AK Party government have also used hard power means to destroy the PKK militant camps in Iraq. But this time, first, Turkey legitimized its hard power through parliamentary resolutions. Second, Turkey engaged in intensive contact with almost all of the regional leaders, including Iraq, Iran and secured their supports before entering.[265] Davutoğlu believes in the importance of employing soft power and military power in coherence. "If these forms of power are not

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[262] Lundgren, op. cit, p.98.

[263] Davutoğlu, "Vision", p.84.

[264] Zengin, op. cit., p.303.

[265] Davutoğlu, "Vision", p.86-87.

managed together", he said, "even the most successful operation would bring about damaging results."[266]

5.4. Economic Relations

Economic diplomacy of the current government can be also seen as an example of Turkey's increasing soft power in practice.

As being the most travelled Turkish Prime Minister, during his visits, Erdoğan, usually has been accompanied by a group of businessmen with a view to facilitating the business transactions. The economic motive behind the visit to wealthy countries is to persuade them to invest in Turkey; whereas the visits to developing countries are for helping boost trade relations.[267]

The mediatory efforts of Turkey have also continued in economic realm. For example Turkey has been involved in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also with its private sector actors that attempts to increase resources for settlement and capacity building. Being aware of the potential contribution of private sector dialogue to the confidence building in the region, Turkish Chambers and Commodity Exchange (TOBB) has launched the "Industry for Peace Initiative (TOBB-BIS)", supported by Israeli, Palestinian, and Turkish governments, and aimed to spread the Turkish model of Organized Industrial Zones (OIZs).[268] The first step in transferring Turkish OIZ model to the Middle East has been the project to revitalize the Erez Industrial Estate (Palestinian

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[266] ibid.

[267] Oğuzlu, op.cit, p.94.

[268] Esen Çağlar & Neslihan Kaptanoğlu, "Industry for Peace Initiative-concept and Implementation",*TEPAV*, http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1265709030r8671.Industry_for_Peace_Initiative.pdf (Accessed on February 10, 2010), p.4

Industrial Free Zone)[269] TOBB-BIS also established a trilateral private sector dialogue mechanism through launching "Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation between Palestine, Turkey and Israel."[270]

In the past, most of the time, Turkey used governmental and semi-governmental channels in providing development aid and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The impact of this aid is hardly assessed in the sense that it does not clear whether or not the aid exacerbates the conflict or encourages conflict prevention and peace-building. However, development assistance provided by the TOBB Project also contributes to conflict resolution by forging good relations between Israeli and Palestinian businessmen.[271] This project is a win-win project for all those involved in the sense that it provide employment to hundreds of Palestinians; security to Israelis; and profit to the Turkish companies.[272] However, due to the worsening of the security situation in the area, implementation of the project has been slow and its location changed from Erez to Jenin.[273]

Moreover, due to its strong economy, Turkey has moved from "being a recipient of development aid to being a donor." Afghanistan is the primary example in this respect. Turkey's aid to this country focused on reconstruction of the country by building roads, hospitals and schools for girls.[274] The government has also begun

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[269] ibid, p.10.

[270] Çağlar & Kaptanoğlu, op. cit, p.6.

[271] Esra Çuhadar Gürkaynak, "Turkey as a Third Party in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Assessment and Reflections", *Perceptions*, Vol 12, No. 1, 2007, p. 105-106.

[272] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p.52.

[273] Çiğdem Toker, "Ve Filistin Türkiye'ye Toprak Verdi", *Akşam*, March 18,2010.

[274] International Crisis Group Report, op.cit, p.12.

to use International Development Agency (TIKA) to carry out demand-driven development projects in the Middle East. Any Middle Eastern countries that were in need of Turkish aid and assistance can apply to TIKA. In this way, a "code of conduct" was created instead of "wading openly into the region."[275]

In addition to all these, the number of Free Trade Agreements signed with the regional countries such as Syria, Egypt, Jordan, etc., has increased. Day by day, the number of countries which lift visa requirements reciprocally with Turkey has been increasing, for example with Syria, Iran, Lebanon, etc. and due to visa-free travel, the number of tourists visited Turkey has also on the rise.

All these efforts prove that there is a growing emphasis on economic components in foreign policy. As Öztürk argues "A growing tendency to 'economize' regional foreign policy has led to a more pragmatic, less ideologized regional foreign policy, making Turkey's engagement in the region more predictable."[276]

5.5. Relations with the Middle Eastern Societies

Turkey's transformation from hard power to soft power can also be observed at the policies on the societal level. The government has intensified its efforts that will help to sustain closer ties with the Middle Eastern society in the long term.[277] The first example in this regard is lifting visa requirements for several countries, such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordon, Iran, Libya, etc. One can claim that this policy can be regarded extensions of its economic policy. However, it is

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[275] Beng, op. cit.

[276] Öztürk, op.cit., p. 29-30.

[277] Altunışık, "Arab Perspectives", p.29.

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clear that besides its economic contributions, this policy would help foster understanding, dialogue and mutual influence among publics.

The establishment of the Yunus Emre Foundation in May 2009 can be regarded as another example of cultural initiative of AK party. The foundation is the equivalent of Germany's Goethe Institute, Spain's Cervantes Institute and the United Kingdom's British Council. Dedicated to promoting Turkey, its cultural heritage and language overseas, the foundation will open and coordinate Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers around the world. Besides meeting the demand for Turkish language courses in other countries, it also aims at contributing the establishment of academic departments specializing in Turkology and training new Turkologists.[278] In short, Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center, which is named after a 13th-century Turkish poet and Sufi mystic, works to promote Turkish language, culture, art and history in different parts of the world.[279] Up to know several centers have been opened in countries like Bosnia, Albania, Germany, Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Egypt, Israel, United Kingdom, before the end of 2010 also in Syria and Russia.[280]

Noting that the few nations in the history have directly interacted with such a large number of civilizations as Turkey has, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu stated: "Being a member of such a deep-rooted and big nation is a source of honor on its own. Today, we have to spread this culture to the world in parallel with an efficient foreign policy." From the statement of Davutoğlu, it is obvious that such public diplomacy efforts have been regarded

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[278] Fulya Özerkan, "Turkey goes global as cultural outreach follows foreign policy forays", *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 9, 2010.

[279] Musa İğrek, "Turkey Opening Its Culture to the World through Yunus Emre Centers," *Today's Zaman*, May 27, 2009.

[280] Özerkan, op.cit.

as complementary to active foreign policy by helping to demonstrate changing image of Turkey not only to the Middle East but also to the world as a whole.

Yunus Emre Foundation opened recently, and it is too early to assess its performance. However, there are also other means which are effective in dissemination Turkish culture to the Middle East: through television, especially Turkish soap operas.

The popular Turkish sitcoms and soap operas have gained considerable popularity in the region. One series, "Gümüş" have fascinated the Middle East so that a significant number of Arab tourists visit the Bosporus-side villa in which it was filmed.[281] In this sense rising interests towards Turkish capital, films, TV series, music and products have encouraged more visits to Turkey by the citizens of Middle Eastern countries.[282]

In addition to soap operas, the launching of both Kurdish (TRT Şeş) and Arabic (TRT Al-Turkiyya) broadcasts by the Turkish state owned TV station, TRT, are important developments in this regard. TRT ŞEŞ has begun to address the Kurdish population especially living in Iraq, Syria and Iran. Similarly, TRT Al-Turkiyya has targeted the Arab world and tried to replace the negative stereotypes about the Ottoman era with a new Turkish image.[283] Fortunately, there is reciprocity in the sense that also Al Jazeera is opening a Turkish news channel.[284]

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[281] International Crisis Group Report, op.cit, p.20.

[282] Aras, "Soft Power."

[283] Zengin, op. cit., p.459.

[284] International Crisis Group Report, op.cit., p.13.

As can be seen, change in Turkish foreign policy has enabled change in perceptions of both sides about each other. In this way, change at people-to-people level has become possible.

CHAPTER SIX

6. SUSTAINABILITY OF THIS ACTIVISM: CHALLENGES TO THE SOFT POWER OF TURKEY

Turkey's transition from being solely a hard power to an emerging soft power is a process far from being accomplished. The existence of various challenges makes it difficult to predict to what extent Turkish emerging soft power identity will last. This chapter will elaborate the challenges which try to curb the sustainability of Turkey's soft power under the sub-titles of internal challenges, regional challenges and international challenges.

6.1. Internal Challenges

The most important challenge for Turkey on its road to rise as a soft power in the region lies in the need to solve its own internal problems, namely Kurdish question and conflict between Islamists and secularists. Unless Turkey is able to find peaceful solutions for these problems, its emerging soft power identity could not be consolidated since these problems have undermined not only soft power capabilities of Turkey but also the legitimacy of Turkey and its policies in the world, particularly in the region.[285]

Regarding the Kurdish problem, in 2009, AK Party government had attempted to solve it through launching a new initiative called "Kurdish opening", later called as "Democratic opening." A set of measures was announced by the Prime Minister with a view to providing equal rights to Turkish citizens of Kurdish descent.[286] Grigoriadis regards the return of a group of 34 PKK militants from northern Iraq to Turkey in October 2009 as the "most spectacular moment" of the AKP's democratic opening in the sense that Turkey's Kurdish population

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[285] Oğuzlu, op. cit., p.95 ; Altunışık, "Possibilities", p. 49; Öztürk,op.cit., p. 30.

[286] Grigoriadis, op.cit., p.6.

welcomed them with jubilation whereas the nationalist backlash in Turkish public opinion has resulted in slowing down the democratic opening by the government.[287] Despite of the top position of the democratic opening in Turkish political agenda in 2009, the progress achieved since then has been limited. However, Oğuzlu warns that for Turkey to be able to continue to act as a soft power, politicization of possible security issues in the domestic sphere, in other words "de-securitization", will be able to deliver "lasting solutions" because politicization without concrete achievements might pave the way for further securitization. Thus, hard power politics might make a "conspicuous comeback" both in rhetoric and practice.[288]

Regarding the second problem related to the tension between the Islamist and secularist, unfortunately it is not possible to see any sign of hope. However, it should be bear in mind that polarization between the AK Party government and secularists would undermine the exemplary image of Turkey as representing political modernization and compatibility of Islam and democracy.[289]

In addition to these problems, stagnation in the EU membership process constitutes another challenge for Turkey's soft power identity. Since democratization constitute one of the most important soft power assets of Turkey in the region and achievement in democratization has become possible mostly due to the EU anchor, Turkey needs to revitalize its EU membership process. However, since the beginning of accession negotiations in 2005, the progress has

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[287] ibid.

[288] Oğuzlu, op. cit., p.95.

[289] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p.49.

been limited and mutual accusations both from Turkey and the EU have dominated the process.[290]

Continuation of the accession process with the EU in an "uninterrupted manner" contributes not only to the consolidation of democracy and solutions of the above-mentioned problems but also contributes avoiding the Euro-skeptic concerns in the sense that uncertainties and ambiguities on the road to the EU membership will increase the appeal of Euro-skeptics and dilute the credibility of the soft power idea among the political and military elites in Turkey.[291]

6.2. Regional Challenges

The most important regional challenges to Turkey's soft power potential would be Turkey's unsettled neighborhood, the complexity of the conflicts in the Middle East and involvement of huge number of actors and interest in the region.[292] Oğuzlu explains this situation by stating that "regional dynamics should allow Turkey the luxury of acting softly."[293] However, he was very pessimistic in the sense that with the remaining uncertainties in Iraq and continuing PKK terrorist attacks, Turkey will more likely to resort to hard power.[294]

Increasing polarization and radicalization in the Muslim world can also be considered as a challenge to Turkey's soft power through limiting the appeal of Turkey. Though with several initiatives like "Alliance of Civilization" Turkey

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[290] ibid, p.49-50.

[291] Oğuzlu, op.cit., p.95.

[292] Öztürk, op.cit., p.30.

[293] Oğuzlu, op. cit., p.95.

[294] ibid.

attempts to present cooperation and harmony rather than conflict between the East and the West, rising Islamophobia in the West strengthen the hands of radicals in the region in the sense that through spreading mutual prejudices and "us and them" mentality, they were able to find disciples.[295]

As already mentioned before, the Middle East is not a monolithic unit. There are also Turkey-skeptics who perceive the Turkish activism in the region negatively. These Turkey-skeptics also can be regarded as challengers to Turkish soft power. For some Arabs, the rise of non-Arab powers like Turkey and Iran reflects the "weakness of the Arab world" and thus creates resentment.[296] Some Turkey-skeptics also concern about the relationship between the AK Party and the Islamists in the region since for some regimes in the Arab world, the main challengers are the Islamist movements.[297] Similarly, some of them emphasized the outstanding issues between Turkey and the Arab world, such as the water issue, in order to demonstrate the limitations these problems pose for Turkey's activism in the region.[298]

This study accepts the history as one of soft power assets of Turkey in the region. However, history can be a challenge for soft power as well. Too much emphasis on historical ties might create negative perceptions and revitalize the existing stereotypes. In other words, it might result in depiction of Turkey's policy in the region as "Neo-Ottomanist."

Neo-Ottomanism was first articulated by a liberal, secularist journalist Cengiz Çandar to describe the new Central Asia and Caucasus policy of Turkey during

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[295] Altunışık, "Possibilities", p.50.

[296] Altunışık, "Arab perspectives", p.25.

[297] ibid.

[298] ibid, p.26.

the Özal era. It emphasized the linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with newly independent states in these regions. However, Özal's neo-Ottomanism was not able to find willing receivers.[299] Today, it is also used to describe Turkey's new approach to relations with its neighbors. However, without a precise definition of the term, for some people, neo-Ottomanism has some positive connotations, such as Ottoman tolerance to diversity, whereas for the majority it refers to imperial rule.[300]

Neo-Ottomanism is a challenge to Turkey's soft power identity in the sense that through invoking concerns about the domination and hegemony in the Arab world, it creates suspicions about the Turkish policies in the region.[301] It gives the impression that Turkey is "still harboring imperialist sentiments" so that it seek to "forcibly dominate its regional hinterland and strike an aggressive pose further afield."[302]

Some people claim that Turkish pro-activism in the region reflect a change of orientation in the Turkish foreign policy. Neo-Ottomanism is also used to label this "shift of axis."[303]

Though Davutoğlu rejects the accusations that he is a neo-Ottomanist, it seems that Neo-Ottomanism, as an ambiguous term, will continue to dominate the debates in Turkey, in the Middle East and in the Western world for a long time.

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[299] Onar, op.cit., p.10.

[300] Danforth, op.cit., p.90.

[301] Altunışık, "Arab perspectives", p. 26.

[302] Erimtan, op.cit.

[303] Cengiz Çandar, "Turkey's 'Soft Power' Strategy: A New Vision for a Multi-Polar World", *SETA Policy Brief*, No.38, December 2009, p.5.

6.3. International Challenges: Difficulties in Balancing All Relations

William Hale made an analogy and stated that Turkey is in a situation rather like a circus rider who is riding two horses, with one foot on one horse and one foot on the other horse. He continues that "If the horses are close and going in the same direction, he does fine. But if the two horses go off in different directions then the rider is in a difficult position and has difficulties standing in the middle."[304] As this analogy rightly expresses, Turkey has faced difficulties in balancing all relations.

Turkish-American relations

9/11 Terrorist attacks has been regarded as a "turning point" not only US-Middle East relations but also the relations between the West and the East or Christianity and Islam.[305] With the aim of countering global terrorism, the US invasion of Afghanistan began in 2001 and followed by the invasion of Iraq beginning in 2003.

Some argue that following these invasions, the moral authority of the US in the Middle East has severely damaged and it has lost its ability to play constructive role in the region.[306] Danfort claims that in a context where anti-American sentiments have risen all around the world, particularly in the Middle East, it is difficult for any Turkish government trying to manage its relations with the US

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[304] Ayşe Karabat "Zero-Problem Policy as challenging as riding two horses, says expert", *Todays Zaman,* November 12, 2009.

[305] Sinan Ülgen, "Turkey's Route to the EU may be via the Middle East", *Europe's World*, Vol. 11, Spring 2009, p.20.

[306] Danforth, op. cit., p.92; Ülgen, op. cit., p.20.

and the Middle East.[307] It was even more difficult for Turkey to balance its relation with Syria, Iran and the US during the Bush administration due to his "with us or against us" attitude.[308]

It is evident that the American policy in the Middle East needs renewal. With the charisma of Obama, the international appeal and his emphasis on engagement, the Obama presidency has brought with it hopes that the problems with the region would be better handled.[309] However, as Zweiri and Staffell argue, and the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced, Obama's strategy was based on "smart power"[310] emphasizing diplomacy but also including military and economic coercion.[311] As easily observed in the Iranian nuclear dispute, Turkey has faced difficulties in balancing its soft power policy with the smart power policy of the US.

It is generally accepted the destruction of Iraq by the US forces have overturned the balance of power in the Middle East by facilitating the emergence of Iran as a regional power, as a rival to both Israel and the US. In addition to this, as Seale argues America's failure both in Iraq and in taming the Israel's excesses has encouraged Turkey "to emerge from its pro-American straitjacket and assert

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[307] Danforth, op. cit., p.92.

[308] Ülgen, op.cit., p.21.

[309] Zweiri & Staffel, op.cit.

[310] This term is also used first by Joseph Nye and it refers to the combination of soft and hard power.

[311] Zweiri & Staffel, op.cit.

itself as a powerful independent actor at the heart of a vast region that extends from the Middle East to the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia."[312]

Regarding Turkish-American relations, the failure of the US in Iraq and in its relations with Israel can be considered both as an asset and a liability or challenge for Turkey's soft power identity. It is an asset in the sense that it led to the emergence of Turkey as an independent actor who able to wield on it soft power assets. Since the US approached the region with its hard power means, Turkey with its soft power identity, based on dialogue and constructive diplomacy, has offered a new thing and received a warm welcome from the region. On the other hand, it is a challenge in the sense that rising anti-American sentiments put Turkey in a difficult position in balancing its relations with the US as well as the Middle East.

Relations with Israel

Contrary to the atmosphere of Arab-Israeli rapprochement in the early 1990s, the relations between Israel and Arab world have deteriorated with the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, with Israeli-Lebanese war in 2006, and Israel attack on Gaza in 2008. In such a context, it became much more difficult for Turkey to balance its relations with Israel, America and the Arab world.[313]

Some accuse the AK Party of acting selectively in its foreign policy stances, due to its religious affiliations. However, Turkish-Israeli relations have been deteriorated since the 2008 and it is not possible to explain the deterioration in relations with the betterment of Turkey's relations with Iran, Syria or other Middle Eastern countries. In other words, Turkey's relations with the Israel were not "automatically" strained with the coming of AK party. On the contrary,

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[312] Seale, op.cit.

[313] Danforth, op.cit, p.92.

Turkish-Israeli relations were generally regarded as positive.[314] The facilitator role Turkey played in Syrian-Israeli indirect talks has proved this situation. However, the Israeli attack on Gaza on December 2008 constitutes a turning point for the deterioration in Turkey's relations with Israel.

Relations with Israel might be regarded both as an asset for Turkish soft power in the region but also, more importantly, as a challenge to Turkish soft power identity in the region as well as in the whole world. Turkish-Israeli relations might be an asset in the sense that Turkey's, especially Erdoğan's criticisms towards Israel did increase the Turkey's influence and attraction in the Arab states, especially at the society level. Erdoğan was seen as a leader able to address the widely-known facts, issues that many governments would not dare to. On the other hand, the strained relations and rising criticisms against Israel are not compatible with the "zero-problem policy" of the AK Party government. Though the most important asset of Turkey in the region is its ability to talk to all parties, it is argued that the critical stance of Turkey towards Israel damage the mediator role of Turkey by shadowing its impartiality.[315]

The existence of consistency is important for the creation as well as for the sustainability of soft power. Inconsistent actions, discourses have badly damage an actor's credibility. For example if an actor is an advocate of democracy, s/he will seek democracy for all, not for this or that. Sidar argues that though the criticisms of Turkish government against Israel were "legitimate", turning their backs to the problems in Sudan and Iran made Turkey seem "subjective."[316] A

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[314] Zengin, op. cit., p.225.

[315] Ulrike Dufner & Marc Berthold, "Foreign Policy of Turkey in the Middle East: Values, Interests, Goals", Report, February, 2010, http://www.setav.org/ups/dosya/28685.pdf. (Accessed on March 21, 2010).

[316] Sidar, op. cit.

similar argument is made by Zalewski. He notes that "while labeling Israeli operations in Gaza as 'crime against humanity', Erdoğan has shied away from using similar language for the extensive atrocities in Darfur."[317] Rather than producing soft power, these kinds of inconsistencies consume soft power of the country.

Relations with the EU: Shift of Axis

In terms of the EU-Middle East relations, it is not possible to find a unified EU policy towards the region. Most of the time, countries, individually, establish relations with the regional countries. Ülgen argues that EU's difficulty stems from "lack of unity and influence" in the region rather than "lack of legitimacy" as in the case of the US.[318]

Though EU membership negotiations with Turkey started in 2005, the process continued at a slow pace, combining with the statements of European leaders opposing Turkey's membership. Turkish activism in the Middle East is perceived by some commentators as a response to the frustration with the stalled process of EU membership.[319]

The number of articles, commentaries, on whether Turkey is undergoing an axis shift increased especially in the second half of 2009. Under different headings like "How the West Lost Turkey", "Turks' Eastern Turn", the West discusses whether Turkey is turning from its traditional allies in Europe and the US.[320] Though most of them criticize AK Party having a hidden agenda or pursuing an ideologically oriented foreign policy, these claims themselves are intentional and

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[317] Zalewski, op.cit, p.58-59.

[318] Ülgen, op.cit., p.21.

[319] Onar, op.cit., p.13.

[320] Çandar, op. cit., p.3.

ideologically driven. As Dedeoğlu points out that "though the Turkish President's visit to Serbia and the Prime Minister's visit to Iran happened on the same days, everyone preferred to talk about Iran."[321]

Gözen argues that it is not correct to evaluate the foreign policy in the framework of alternatives since countries do not substitute each other in the foreign policy.[322] However, he accepts the existence of a deviation in the sense that the idea of Westernization, today, is diffused from state level to the society level. In contrasts to the state imposed Westernization policies of the past, today there is a growing society demanding the EU membership, economic development, human rights. In other words, the agent behind the Westernization today is expanded more towards the society rather than state. Undeniably, this is an important development for Turkish foreign policy and domestic policy as well.[323]

Turkish foreign policy makers insist that Turkish Middle Eastern policy is a complementary to Turkish-Western relations and Turkey offer opportunities to the EU for the stabilization of the region. Davutoğlu states that:

> Ankara's potential for exerting a positive influence on the region is one of the main advantages to be gained by collaboration between the EU and Turkey on foreign policy. The EU is already a motor driving the process of change in Turkey and together the EU and Turkey could become a motor for transforming the entire region.[324]

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[321] Beril Dedeoğlu, "Turkey's Place: Contradictory Approaches", *Todays Zaman,* October 31, 2009.

[322] Ramazan Gözen, "Dış Politikayı Alternatifler Çerçevesinde Değerlendirmek Doğru Olmaz, Zira Dış Politikada Ülkeler Birbirini İkame Etmez", in *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası,* edited by Habibe Özdal, Osman Bahadır Dinçer and Mehmet Yegin (USAK Yayınları: Ankara, Cilt 1, 2009), p.273.

[323] ibid, p. 268.

[324] Şeker, op.cit.

From this statement, it can be inferred that Turkish activism in the Middle East is a complement and even dependent on Turkey's ties to the West. With this activism, AK Party government has tried on enhancing Turkey's credentials as a "security producing country."[325]

Similarly, he opposes the claims on "shift of axis" as the following:

> The European Union and NATO are the main fixtures and the main elements of continuity in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has achieved more within these alliances during the past seven years under the AK Party government than it did in the previous 40 years. Turkey's involvement in NATO has increased during this time; Turkey recently asked for, and achieved, a higher representation in the alliance. Turkey also has advanced considerably in the European integration process compared with the previous decade, when it was not even clear whether the EU was seriously considering Turkey's candidacy. EU progress reports state that Turkish foreign policy and EU objectives are in harmony, a clear indication that Turkey's foreign-policy orientation aligns well with transatlantic objectives.[326]

It seems that all such claims put the government in defensive position and they can be considered as a challenge curbing the government's energy for wielding more soft power in its neighborhood.

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[325] Tarık Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Disassociate from the West?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol.9, No.1, 2008, p.16.

[326] Davutoğlu, "Zero Problem."

CHAPTER SEVEN

6. CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, the transformation of Turkish foreign policy, in particular its Middle Eastern policy was elaborated within the conceptual framework of soft power. This part will be devoted to the findings of this analysis.

Turkey with its multi-dimensional identities, with its ability to achieve a better-functioning democracy in a predominantly Muslim setting, with its strong market economy, with its "post-Islamist" AK Party, with its historical and cultural identity reconciled with its past, with its pro-active diplomacy has been an emerging soft power in the Middle East.

In contrast to its highly defensive and securitized foreign policy in the past, Turkey, in the AK Party era, has managed to develop a new foreign policy vision, called Strategic Depth, based on soft power elements such as persuasive diplomacy, economic interdependency and dialogue. Strategic Depth is not just peculiar to Turkey's Middle Eastern policy. It is a broad vision determining the place of Turkey in the world and managing its relations in all regions such as Africa, Caucasus rather than just Middle East.

Since soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, Nye argues that it requires understanding "how they are hearing your message and fine-tuning it accordingly." In this respect, "understanding the target audience" is crucial for soft power.[327] Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, most of the time, Turkey's relations with the Middle East were seen as extensions of its relations with the Western world. Turkey could not develop its own Middle Eastern policy. However, today, Turkey has a vision for the Middle East. For the first time Turkey tries to understand the receivers in the Middle East. Turkey approaches to the Middle Eastern problems as an independent player, as an

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[327] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.111.

insider who empathizes the sensitivities of the countries and tries finding solutions to these problems. Today, Turkey feels itself as part of Middle East and sees this as enrichment rather than something to be ashamed of.

Regarding the three requirements of soft power, it is possible to say that Turkey has already largely met them in its Middle Eastern policy. Firstly, its democracy, economy, foreign policy, "post-Islamist" AK Party and its historical and cultural ties constitute the main resources/assets of Turkish soft power. Secondly, there is a government in office since 2002 which realized the importance of these assets and is determined to act on them. To put it differently, there is an agent behind these assets determined to turn them into influence and power. Thirdly, there is a transformation in the perceptions of the Arab society as well as the Turkish society. Because "wielding soft power is far less unilateral than employing hard power,"[328] to communicate more effectively, Turkey has began to listen to the Middle Eastern society and tried to understand their concerns. Since the actions of the agent, AK party government, seem credible and legitimate to the receptive society, there emerge an enabling environment to act on soft power assets. In other words, the existence of willing receivers in the region enables the agent to capitalize on the soft power assets.

For soft power to create the intended influence or outcome, the context also must be suitable. Soft power also depends on the context. In a place like Middle East where security approaches and hard power politics have dominated the scene for centuries, Turkey, with its new policy favoring pro-activism to passivity; multi-dimensionality to one-dimensionality; cooperation to confrontation; building trust to perpetuating existing stereotypes; in short, soft power to hard power, has offered a new thing to the region.

For the new identity of Turkey, this thesis used the term of "emerging soft power." Turkey is an emerging soft power in the sense that this is a process far

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[328] ibid, p.125.

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from being accomplished. Unlike hard power politics, soft power requires patience; it is a long term strategy of gaining influence over shared understanding and values. As some skeptics rightly complaints soft power does not always produce the outcomes one seek. As Nye stated "The soft power of attraction and persuasion can create enabling or disabling environments that affect the probabilities of obtaining favorable outcomes, but human power relations, unlike the laws of classical physics, are probabilistic rather than deterministic."[329] Though these deficits, soft power is worthy of working on it. It effects are more durable. It is about winning hearts and minds. To repeat the statement of Tuncer: "Hard power occupies while soft power conquests. Occupation is temporary, whereas conquest is permanent."[330]

On the other hand, "emerging soft power" identity of Turkey has also met with challenges which have tried to curb its sustainability. This thesis elaborates these challenges as internal, regional and international challenges. The most important internal challenge is the existence of Turkey's own domestic problems, such as Kurdish issue and the tension between Islamist and secularists. These problems damage the soft power capabilities of Turkey through decreasing its credibility, legitimacy and the exemplary image in the region as well as the world in general. Regarding the regional challenges, the most important one is the existence of complex conflicts involving huge number of actors and interests. Though Turkish attempts to play mediator or facilitator role in some these conflicts, their solution seems to be unpredictable in the future. Being aware of the difficulty of achieving solutions in these problems, rather than its ability to find concrete solutions to the problems, in fact, Turkish sincere efforts along this way has boosted its appeal. In short, rather than the outcome or success of these efforts, the substance and style of Turkish diplomacy creates appeal. However, these

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[329] Nye, "Testimony", p.7.

[330] Tuncer, op. cit.

regional conflicts might put Turkey in an in-between situation and force it to make difficult choices between the actors, interests. Similarly, the most important international challenge before Turkey is the difficulty in balancing its relations with Middle East and the West. In general, at least rhetorically, the West seems to be appreciative of Turkey's new active foreign policy. However, there are also situations as in the case of Iran, Iraq, Turkey's interest clashes with the US interests and it becomes difficult to sustain delicate balance.

It should be bear in mind that for soft power is to be effective and sustainable; there should be consistency between the idealist rhetoric and action. Turkey sometimes failed to match its idealistic rhetoric with its political realities. The AK Party government has put emphasis on its "zero-problem policy" or its ability to talk to all parties. However, Turkish-Israel relations constitute a challenge in this regard. Similarly, the government is advocate of human rights. Consistency requires to be the advocate of human rights in all context, for all people, whether Israel, Palestine or Sudan. One might claim that such harsh criticism against Israel boost Turkey and Prime Minister's appeal. In the short run, it may be true but in the long run it might damage the existing soft power capabilities. Since soft power is a long term strategy, short term might or short term gains are anti-thesis of soft power.

As Turkey tried to remain aloof from Middle Eastern affairs for so many decades, the recent activism in the region has created concerns not only in Turkey but also, even more, in Western world. It is possible to observe these concerns in the growing number of articles, commentaries, reports written on whether Turkey change its axis from Transatlantic alliance to the Islamic world. These questions on "where is Turkey headed?" do not reflect reality, they seem to be intentional. They come from the frame of mind that see being a Western and a Middle Eastern country at the same time impossible. They see East and West as mutually exclusive.

It is true that Turkey changes axis in the sense that Turkey diversifies and broadens its axis, transform from being one dimensional power to multi-dimensional one. Turkey is not only in Europe or in the US any more but also in Africa, in Caucasus and in the Middle East. Turkey was elected as non-permanent member of UN Security Council for 2008-2010; its involvement in NATO increased; the EU membership negotiations continue though at slow pace; it is also facilitating talks between Bosnia and Croatia; it is in Africa with the new embassies and Turkish entrepreneurs. It is possible to increase the number of these examples. In this regard, what the AK party government has made is "breaking with the old Kemalist notion of Turkey as a country located exclusively -in cultural and strategic terms -in the West."[331]

In contrast to the claims, engagement with Middle East does not mean disengagement from the West. This pro-activism and multi-dimensionality has enhanced the role of Turkey as strategic partner of the EU, the US in the region and the beyond. In other words, it can be claimed that emerging soft power identity of Turkey in the Middle East, in turn, works as a Turkish soft power asset in its relations with the Western world. It increases Turkey's attractiveness to the Western world. In this respect, relations with the Middle East are not alternative to the EU or US but rather complementary. Turkey's soft power identity provides lessons not only for the Middle Eastern countries but also Western world, including the US and the EU.

For the government there should not be an option to turn from the EU membership bid. It is fact that Turkey owes its attraction in the Middle East mostly to the EU membership process and the transformation it experienced along this line. Turkish EU membership cannot be considered as the membership of any country to a supra-national organization. Turkish membership is also

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[331] Zilowski, op.cit, p.59-60.

about the West and the East; Christianity and Islam. Turkey's EU membership process is an interesting case for the Middle Eastern countries and societies and in various aspects it is regarded as test case. Moreover, the EU anchor might help the government in overcoming the challenges against its soft power identity.

Beng criticizes soft power for being a "Weberian archetype" in the sense that its sources as culture, democratic political system or foreign policy are depicted as ideal types. By collapsing all the nuances, distinctions, and finer points, soft power depicts a country as "the positive sum of all the ideals - a reification."[332] It is not the intention of this thesis to give the impression that Turkey, as a soft power, represents the ideal. Turkish soft power derives from its democracy despite "its deficit in making itself consolidated and deepened"; from its vibrant market economy despite "its deficit in making itself an economy which is sustainable in terms of its success in human-development."[333] This thesis stresses that despite the existence of flaws, weaknesses, Turkey is an emerging soft power in the Middle East; and it is the soft power elements rather than hard power means that have created recent interest in Turkey in the region and the beyond.

Due to multiplicity actors, interest and factors in the Middle East, the sustainability of Turkish activism as a soft power in the region remains to be seen. However, it can be claimed that since Turkish engagement in the region is comprehensive including state-to state cooperation, people-to-people interaction in economy, culture, ect, despite of the existence of challenges, soft power identity of Turkey will be probably more enduring and successful.

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[332] Beng, op.cit.

[333] E. Fuat Keyman, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Era of Global Turmoil", *SETA Policy Brief*, No.39, December 2009, p.4.

One might ask the question that in the global information age, how Turkey will compete with the soft power of others. It is possible to answer this question with the advice given by Nye to the US.[334] Turkey will compete with them through investing more on its soft power assets and through learning to wield soft power more effectively.

This thesis aimed to trace the transformation in the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and elaborate the relevance of soft power term for describing Turkey's new stance in the region. It is not the claim of this study to explain all the developments in Turkish foreign policy towards the region during the AK Party government era, namely the period of 2002-2010. This study tries to elaborate some milestones and basic points of views guiding the foreign policy decisions within the given period of time. In this sense, it is a general evaluation of the evolution of Turkey's soft power identity in the region. Similar studies might be done with each country of the Middle East and a more detailed analysis might be possible in this way.

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[334] Nye, *Soft Power*, p.98.

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