

Turkey's Recent National Role Conceptions and Shifts in its Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This thesis examines the shifts in Turkish foreign policy of the last decade and the accompanying changes in national role conceptions as defined by K. J. Holsti. Using primary resources it attempts to identify national role conceptions articulated by Turkish policymakers, which demonstrate the increased scope and activity of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule. The changes in Turkish national role conceptions are reflected discursively in the foreign policy debate, particularly in the frequent usage of the term "Neo-Ottomanism", which is supposed to denote current Turkish foreign policy, despite policymakers objections to use it. I inquire on origins of this term and its accompanying Neo-Ottomanist debate to see how the shifts in Turkish foreign policy and its role conceptions are translated discursively. In doing so, I rely on both secondary as well as primary sources, the latter including interviews, which I conducted in Turkey with Turkish scholars and analysts. I demonstrate that there exists a discrepancy between the officially articulated visions of national role conceptions of Turkish policymakers and the perceptions of various scholars, analysts and journalists. Moreover, I illustrate what specifically these perceptions imply and what visions of Turkey in the region and in the world they project and advocate.

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1. Introduction

Since the takeover of power by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) in 2002, Turkey has embarked not only on path of a very successful economic development but has also become an increasingly important political player on the international arena. Its importance has been demonstrated by the multitude of diplomatic actions, the expansion of Turkish soft power and economic ties, in particular in reference to countries located in the Turkish neighborhood, which comprises the Balkans, the Middle East and the South Caucasus. One of the reasons for the development of a highly assertive and self-confident foreign policy of consecutive AKP governments, all of them headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been the impressive performance of the Turkish economy, which grew significantly over the past decade and is now the 17th largest economy in the world. However, the changes in Turkish foreign policy originate primarily from the new paradigm, which was brought to the discourse by the AKP government and which resulted in a gradual departure from the Kemalist foreign policy¹.

The theoretical framework for this new foreign policy paradigm was laid out by foreign policy advisor to the Turkish prime minister professor Ahmet Davutoğlu, who became Turkey's minister of foreign affairs in 2009. In his book "Strategic depth" he argued that Turkish foreign policy was for many decades unnaturally unbalanced towards the West, it was reactive instead of being proactive, crisis-oriented, lacking a strategic vision, and it completely neglected Turkey's neighbors. Davutoğlu also suggested that the Cold War by and large conditioned such a foreign policy but after the collapse of the bipolar world, Turkey

¹ Kemalism as a foreign policy vision that favors cautiousness, limited cooperation with the neighbors and international organizations. It frowns upon Islamic influence in politics and Ottoman past and stresses the importance of the army as the guardian of the secular order established by the founder of modern Turkey; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

needs to reposition itself on the "great chessboard" and rediscover its imperial past, which has been neglected for many decades².

Davutoğlu's foreign policy vision for Turkey has been labeled by many analysts and scholars, both Turkish and international such as Ömer Taşpınar or Ariel Cohen as Neo-Ottomanist, because of its reach towards countries which once were part of the Ottoman Empire, solidarity with Muslim countries on a number of issues and the behavior and ambitions of a regional hegemon. This term, however, is refuted by Turkish officials because of its implications of having imperial notions and not reflecting the "reality". The Turkish policymakers argue instead that their "new vision" which is not to dominate but to develop "zero problems with neighbors"³. These developments were accompanied by the cooling down of relations with the United States, a slowed down process of European integration and deteriorating relations with Israel. On the other hand, Turkey's relations with Russia have been developing rapidly, ties with Iran have been strengthened, cooperation with Africa has reached new levels, and Turkey has become one of the key advocates of the Palestinian cause on the international arena.

In my thesis I am going to explore the emergence of this new Turkish foreign policy vision which is frequently labeled as Neo-Ottomanist by scholars and analyst. I will argue that since Neo-Ottomanism is not endorsed as an official policy by the Turkish government, one cannot speak of it as a foreign policy conceptualization but rather as a foreign policy discourse articulated by certain scholars, analysts and politicians, both Turkish and foreign, for reasons which I will outline in the main body of my thesis. However, prior to that I am going to analyze what kinds of national role conceptions are implied (explicitly and implicitly) by this policy, which is commonly referred to as Neo-Ottomanist. I believe that the

² Ömer Taşpınar, *Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist foreign policy*, [in] *Today's Zaman*, 22 September 2008 <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnists-153882-neo-ottomanism-and-kemalist-foreign-policy.html>.

³ *Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbors*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?45b45ccf-8814-4029-9224-5685e8ca3542>, last accessed at 14:49, on the 18th of May 2012.

national role conceptions theory developed by Kalevi Jaakko Holsti possesses the necessary explanatory power to throw light upon how this new foreign policy has emerged within the Turkish foreign policy-making arena and to illustrate how it reflects changing perceptions of Turkey's roles which are projected by its ruling elites, particularly by foreign minister Davutoğlu and prime minister Erdoğan since this theory can account for cognitive maps developed by policymakers. I will argue that this new policy is an attempt at redefining national role conceptions and foreign policy orientations of Turkey and it projects new roles due to the fact that the old roles are mostly incompatible with contemporary order, which is neither bipolar nor caught in the dynamics of the Cold War, hence new roles need to be assigned for a state to pursue its interests on the international arena. I will then display the ways in which this new policy as cognitively imagined by Turkish policy-makers has started to be articulated Neo-Ottomanism by scholars and analysts. In doing so, I hope to bring a theoretical contribution to foreign policy conceptualizations and shifts as defined by Holsti, since my empirical study suggests that Holsti's theory falls short of explaining the different discursive forms that foreign policy conceptualizations may take at the end.

2. Literature review

I believe that by using national role conceptions one can explain better the shifts in Turkish foreign policy in the past decade, then by using other approaches, which are common in the literature, such as the identity-based approach. I am going to explain below why I find national role conceptions theory to be the most suitable one for my research. However, I am going to introduce first the theory of national role conceptions of Holsti, which forms the theoretical framework for my analysis of shifts in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government.

The theory of national role conceptions was developed by K. J. Holsti, who explains it in depth in his study "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" which was published in 1970. What prompted Holsti to formulate the theory, was the omnipresence in academic literature of a limited number of state role conceptions performed by states in the bipolar world system during the Cold War period. Holsti found that the terms *bloc leader*, *satellite*, *ally*, and *non-aligned* did not exhaust the number of roles states play and those roles did not "reveal all the behavioral variations observable in the different sets of relationships states enter"⁴. Moreover, Holsti discovered that states usually do not project and play a single role but rather a number of various roles, depending on their interests and foreign policy outlook.

National role conceptions have been analyzed by also by other authors, according to Naomi Bailin Wish role conceptions act as "foreign policy makers' perceptions of their nations' positions in the international system"⁵. The beliefs and perceptions, policymakers hold of their nations are significant explanans of shifts in foreign policy, which is a view supported by Holsti in his other work, where he demonstrates that among various causes of

⁴ K. J. Holsti, *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, [in] *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3, September 1970, p. 235.

⁵ Naomi Bailin Wish, *Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions*, [in] *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No 4, December 1980, p. 532.

realignments in foreign policy, shifts in perceptions and leadership qualities were the most significant elements⁶. Charles Kupchan contributes to Holsti's claim by stating that elites' belief system is the predominant factor shaping realignments of foreign policy in a new international context, Kupchan adds that his study "demonstrates the critical importance of taking beliefs seriously, of treating beliefs as variables that shape how elites interpret events and formulate policy"⁷.

A more in-depth explanation of roles is given by Holsti in his study of national role conceptions, where he compares various authors' understandings of roles and concludes that roles refer to behaviors (decisions and actions) and "can be kept analytically distinct from *role prescriptions*, which are the norms and expectations cultures, societies, institutions, or groups attach to particular *positions*"⁸. He continues by saying that "role theory emphasizes the interaction between the *role* prescription of the alter and the *role* performance of the occupant of a position (ego)"⁹. This interplay is demonstrated by the graph Figure 1. Finally Holsti concludes that there are arguments for believing that "the role performances (decision and action) of governments may be explained primarily by reference to the policy-makers' *own* conceptions of their nation's role in a region or in the international system as a whole"¹⁰. He agrees with S.G. Walker that national role conceptions are significantly correlated with states' general foreign policy behavior, which is conceived of as a role performance¹¹.

⁶ K. J. Holsti, *Why Nations Realign*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1982.

⁷ Charles Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1994, p. 490.

⁸ K. J. Holsti, 1970, op. cit., p. 239.

⁹ K. J. Holsti, *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁰ K. J. Holsti, *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹¹ S. G. Walker, (1978) "National role conceptions and systematic outcomes." Prepared for the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Washington, D. C. February 22-25.

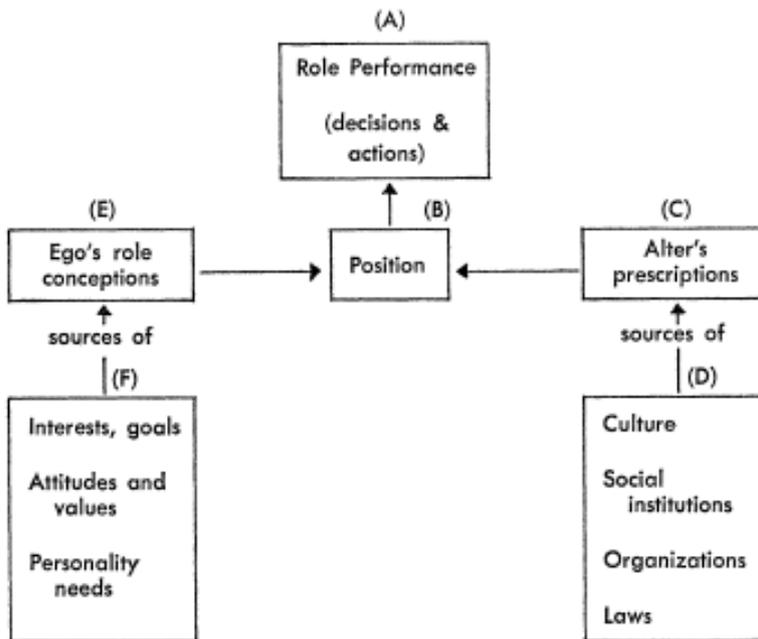


FIGURE 1. Role Theory and the Sources of Human Behavior

Source: K. J. Holsti, *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, [in] *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3, September 1970, p. 240.

Another view is represented by Jacques E. C. Hymans, who states that national role conceptions are cognitive constructions of decision-makers of "what the nation naturally stands for and how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena"¹². Richard Adigbuo adds to this definition that role conceptions and identities are social phenomena, which can be shared even across majority of individuals in a particular state, but even when those role conceptions are not shared, policy-makers' actions are based on their ideas about their states' roles in the world and on which roles would be acceptable to their constituencies¹³. Those role conceptions help politicians and policy-makers to orientate their actions and are a "core of a grand causal map through which statesman make sense of the world and their personal existence therein"¹⁴. Moreover, "roles provide individuals with a

¹² Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 18.

¹³ Richard Adigbuo, *Beyond IR Theories: The case for National Role Conceptions*, [in] *Politikon*, (April 2007), 34 (1), p. 89.

¹⁴ Chih-yu Shih, *National Role Conception as Foreign Policy Motivation: The Psychocultural Bases of Chinese Diplomacy*, [in] *Political Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), p. 599.

stable sense of identity"¹⁵. However, roles, be they performed by individuals or by states, are neither deterministic nor indefinitely elastic, they are behavioral categories, states and individuals rely on to simplify and to guide them through a highly complex world¹⁶. They also rely on a set of norms associated with interstate relations, and according to Chih-yu Shih "diplomacy can be interpreted as a drama that embodies those norms, moreover playing that drama gives statesmen a sense of self-worth"¹⁷. Those norms and role concepts can both serve to help understand some of nations' puzzling foreign policy decisions or anomalies in the conduct of it and also offer an explanation of continuities in foreign policy execution, thus they confirm that "a state's foreign policy conforms to the policy-makers' national role conceptions"¹⁸. In the case of Turkey they can help an analyst to find the underlying reasons for changes in Turkish foreign policy of the past decade.

There are various national role conceptions, some of the most conventional of which are *superpower*, *middle power*, *regional power*, etc.. However, those terms fail to identify how much diplomatic influence state exercise in various sets of relationships, they merely suggest distinctions in terms of status on the international arena. Status is defined by Sarbin and Allen as "a location in a the social structure defined by expectations for performance by an incumbent.... The status dimension is correlated with legitimate power and social esteem"¹⁹. Status perception in international relations, although more vague than in a social context, is according to Wish, an important aspect of a national role conception, yet Holsti points out that "status is not necessarily linked to functions and its consequences on foreign policy behavior are largely unknown and unexplored"²⁰. It is for this reason that I will not

¹⁵ Richard Adigbuo, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁶ Richard Adigbuo, Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁷ Chih-yu Shih, op. cit., p. 599.

¹⁸ Richard Adigbuo, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁹ T. R. Sarbin and V. L. Allen (1968) "Role theory" in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds.) The Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. 1. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, p. 551-552.

²⁰ K. J. Holsti, op. cit., p. 242.

focus on status in my analysis but rather on national role performance, self-image and role prescriptions.

According to Holsti, national role performance is "the general foreign policy behavior of governments. It includes patterns of attitudes, decisions, responses, functions and commitments toward other states, he calls these patterns national roles."²¹ A national role conception is the image of state projected by its elites, an image of how the state should act on the international arena, what functions it should perform on a continuing basis. As Chih-yu Shih notes, "an essential part of our knowledge of the world is the role we believe we are playing in that world. Our behavior confirms that our roles can be enacted. Behavior dramatizes the world view by assuming that it is correct and it is shared by other people."²² This image is produced both for domestic as well as for an international audience, though for different purposes; domestically it may serve as a legitimizing tool, whereas in the international environment it may aim to demonstrate an attempt to either assume or reinforce states' claim to position their views as desirable. Alexander and Willey go as far as saying that self-image is the ultimate source of motivation"²³, meaning it is the main driving force behind foreign policy making. The projection of various images is clearly visible in Turkey, especially in the domain of its foreign affairs, where Turkey is playing multiple roles according to multiple visions of itself.

There is a large variety of reasons states assume certain national role conceptions, which may include: their location, their geography, abundance or not of natural, economic, technical and cultural resources, traditions, history, religion, ideology and even personality of their rulers. Most of those causes are internal, however, external factors can also play a role in the formation of national role conceptions, but there is no deterministic guarantee that a

²¹ K. J. Holsti, *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²² Chih-yu Shih, *op. cit.*, p. 601.

²³ N. C. Alexander, and M. G. Willey, *Situated activity and identity formation*, [in] Rosenberg, M., and Turner, R. (eds.), *Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives*, Basic Books, New York, 1981., p. 274.

certain neighborhood a state is located in will produce a particular role conception of that state. Moreover, when it comes to domestic factors, "there is no logical or empirical reason to believe that any particular type of state, must, or probably would, undertake specific policies or orient itself to the system in a particular way because it is either strong or weak or satisfied or dissatisfied."²⁴

National role conceptions can be categorized based on various criteria and according to Wish they can have one of the following four motivational orientations: individualistic, cooperative, competitive or mixed²⁵. Morgenthau approaches national role conceptions from a different angle, stating that states' policies seek "either to keep power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power"²⁶. From such assumption Morgenthau derives three kinds of policies on the international arena: policy of status quo, of imperialism and of prestige, and he suggests that these policies can envisage national roles²⁷. Other possible categorization of national roles is the one, which suggests their distribution along the active-passive axis, rather than on power differentials and this categorization is predominant in traditional literature. Holsti identifies nine national roles types according to this stratification, and which are presented in Table 1 starting from the top, they imply the highest degree of international activity, whereas the ones on the bottom indicate passivity in foreign policy behavior²⁸.

In Holsti's view, such typology is not exhaustive and neglects to address various aspects of state roles, for example, it does not differentiate between states' power capabilities, ideological outlooks or international status. That is why he undertook an extensive study of state roles by analyzing material from seventy one different countries and created a typology of 17 national role conceptions, which he explains in detail using specific examples. Similarly to the previous typology present in traditional literature, he arranged his list according to the

²⁴ K. J. Holsti, op. cit., p. 250.

²⁵ Naomi Bailin Wish, op. cit., p. 538.

²⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, (4th edition), Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1967, p. 36.

²⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁸ K. J. Holsti, op. cit., p. 255.

degree of activity or passivity implied by the role conception. The 17 roles conceptualized by Holsti are the following: bastion of revolution-liberator, regional leader, regional protector, active independent, liberation supporter, anti-imperialist agent, defender of faith, mediator-negotiator, regional-subsystem collaborator, developer, bridge, faithful ally, independent, example, internal development, isolate and protectee²⁹.

TABLE 1
NATIONAL ROLES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS LITERATURE

Role Type	Major Functions	Primary Role Sources
1. Revolutionary leader-imperialist	system transformation; change of power distribution	ideologies; rising capabilities
2. Bloc leader	bloc cohesion; protection of bloc members; opposition to other bloc(s)	external threats; ideology; structure of system
3. Balancer	balance unequal blocs; international integration	power distribution in system; location
4. Bloc member; ally	increase capabilities of bloc; support bloc leader	threat perception; location; ideological affinity; structure of system; insufficient capabilities
5. Mediator	interposition into bloc conflicts; integration	location; traditional policies
6. Non-aligned	possible mediation of bloc conflicts	location; threat perception; socio-economic needs; nationalism; insufficient capabilities
7. Buffer	separate bloc leaders or major powers	location; insufficient capabilities
8. Isolate	latent function of neutralizing potential conflict areas	location; threat perception; insufficient capabilities
9. Protectee	serve economic and/or security interests of major power	insufficient capabilities

Source: K. J. Holsti, op. cit., p. 255.

²⁹ K. J. Holsti, Ibid., p. 260-271.

Because of or despite the 17 various roles identified by Holsti, "policymakers of most states conceive of their state in terms of multiple sets of relationships and multiple roles and/or functions."³⁰ Holsti addresses the perception that the more national roles a state may possess, the more active it will be on the international arena. He finds that, although there may not necessarily exist a direct causal relationship between state's involvement on the international arena and number of national roles, it is indeed usually the case among the states he researched³¹. Wish complements his argument by stating that states "whose leaders perceived dominant roles and/or role affecting large domains were more likely to participate in the international arena."³² Holsti concludes with the remark that "governments which perceive many and active role types will tend to be much more highly involved in the affairs of the system or in subordinate systems than those states which have few and passive type role conceptions."³³ He also adds that most governments project a number of national roles their states should play simultaneously, and he also states that governments may pursue various policies on various levels, such as being expansionist economically but rather reserved politically. Finally, he acknowledges that role conceptions are not the ultimate perfect tool for analyzing foreign policy, yet they are a useful tool and can be regarded as an independent variable in the research of foreign policy³⁴.

Although Holsti's theory was developed during the Cold War and applied in the international affairs of that time, it still has a significant explanatory power and can serve as a useful tool for analyzing variations in foreign policy behavior. In my research I am going to apply Holsti's role conceptions, since they seem more applicable to my study than the more recent study on role conceptions by Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson and Suzette Grillot, which view them through the prism of their effect on compliance or non-compliance with

³⁰ K. J. Holsti, *Ibid.*, p. 277.

³¹ K. J. Holsti, *Ibid.*, p. 283.

³² Naomi Bailin Wish, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

³³ K. J. Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

³⁴ K. J. Holsti, *Ibid.*, p. 298.

nuclear weapons non-proliferation regime. Moreover, their typology of role conceptions includes fewer role conceptions than Holsti's typology which is still not exhaustive enough to describe the variety of role conceptions. However, the three authors make an important addition to Holsti's work by highlighting the significance of social, nonsocial and contextual elements in the formation of national role conceptions³⁵. These three elements are important for the analysis of Turkish foreign policy since the national role conceptions, responsible by and large for its shifts, have been formed by social, nonsocial and contextual elements.

There are scholars who hold views that the conceptions in Turkish foreign policy are by and large a product of shifts in Turkish identity, however, ideational factors fall short of explaining all intricacies of Turkish foreign policy during the AKP government. Ariel Cohen views the shift of axis in Turkey as a result of the AKP elite's attempts to dismantle the Kemalist state order and build on its ruins a new one, more Islamic, populist and authoritarian regime reflecting the political prominence of the new religiously observant political, economic and social elite of Anatolia and Black Sea region, which distances itself from Ankara-based Kemalists³⁶. However, the alleged hidden Islamist agenda of the current government, which is steering the country closer to the Middle East, does not explain why an openly Islamic government of Necmettin Erbakan in the middle of the 1990's did not embark on a serious revision of Turkish foreign policy.

According to Oğuzlu, the rise of Islam in Turkey can be seen through a closer engagement with Hamas, a political party considered as a terrorist organization by Israel³⁷; however, this explanation is a convenient simplification used to undermine Turkey's emerging regional role, part of which is composed of Turkey's involvement in the solution of the

³⁵ Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson and Suzette Grillo, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime*, [in] *Political Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Dec., 1996), p.735.

³⁶ Ariel Cohen, *Washington concerned as Turkey leaving the West*, [in] *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Volume 9, Number 3, p. 26.

³⁷ Tarik Oğuzlu, *Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?*, [in] *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No.1, 3-20, March 2008, p. 14.

Palestinian conflict. This involvement cannot be attributed solely to religious motives of Sunni solidarity, which are also used by Oğuzlu to explain Turkey's attempts to forge closer ties with Sunni groups in Iraq. Turkey is simply trying to gain a foothold in the region by reaching out to the actors, which due to their similar religious backgrounds can be more receptive and willing to cooperate with Turkey. Actually, despite frequent portrayals in the media, the role of Islam as one of the main motivators of the recent changes in Turkish foreign policy, is exaggerated. Instead, it is much more likely to be used as a convenient cover, rather than a real moving force behind foreign policy choices³⁸. Especially in the security field Turkey's commitment to transatlantic ties is firm and not undermined by its "flirting" with Iran and other countries in the region perceived in the West as hostile or rogue. After all, at the end of the day Turkey decided to host NATO's early warning radar for the anti-missile shield, which clearly demonstrates that Islam and solidarity with Muslims are not the main driving forces of Turkish foreign policy, which is particularly in its security dimension deeply committed to transatlantic obligations³⁹.

Despite Turkish diplomatic and economic (over)activism in the region, Turkey remains still firmly committed to European integration, and membership in the European Union is the ultimate goal and the main axis along which Turkish policymakers orientate Turkish foreign policy⁴⁰. The emergence and influence of a Muslim identity is undeniable but it does not completely overshadow other identities, which also play a role in the formation of foreign policy, which is a matter of fact in the country as sizeable and as diverse as Turkey. Summing up; states in general have multiple identities which may or may not be compatible with each other to a certain degree, but what is more important is the fact that it is not them exercising the greatest influence on policy-makers, it is the national role conceptions, their

³⁸ Mustafa Aydın, *Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Threshold of the 21st Century*, [in] *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics*, ed. Tareq Ismael and Mustafa Aydın, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

³⁹ Barçın Yinanç, *Re-allying with old allies*, [in] *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 5th, 2012.

⁴⁰ Turkey committed to EU membership, says top negotiator, [in] *Hürriyet Daily News*, 8/8/2010.

perceptions and imagination, hence I dismiss the ideational and identity factors as insufficient explanans of the phenomenon of the emergence of new conceptions in Turkish foreign policy-making.

An alternative explanation of the transformation of Turkish foreign policy from, commonly labeled by Davutoğlu as passive and reactive Kemalism⁴¹ to expansionist and active foreign policy is offered by Kemal Kirişçi and his application of the concept of the *trading state*. According to him the shifts observed in Turkish foreign policy have their roots in the liberalization of the Turkish economy in the early 1990's, which resulted in the exponential growth of foreign trade and its crucial role in the national economy. He argues that a trading state is an arena where a wider range of actors participate in the foreign policy-making, and actors have interests which often differ from the ones pursued by the traditional actors, which are primarily concerned about security⁴². In contrast to them, the new actors are primarily concerned about access to the export market, international trade and foreign direct investments, they are advocates of a more open foreign policy, especially in Turkey's most immediate neighborhood, where an increased economic interdependence will be beneficial and strengthen the country both economically and politically. They advocate development of closer economic ties with other nations, assuming that the improved economic relations will be followed by stronger political cooperation, which would be a natural outgrowth of bilateral trade and investments. Those ideas resonate in statements made by minister Davutoğlu, yet although the recent shifts in Turkish foreign policy have a very firm economic background and a new Turkish foreign policy conceptualization would not emerge without Turkey emerging as a regional economic power, the idea of the trading state advocated by Kirişçi cannot explain certain foreign policy choices made by Turkey during the tenure of the AKP

⁴¹ Özden Zeynep Oktav (ed.), *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy*, Asghate, Surrey 2011, p. 21.

⁴² Kemal Kirişçi, *The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state*, [in] *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 40 (2009), p. 33.

governments. If Kirişci's argument were the most essential factor underpinning Turkish foreign policy, why would Turkey side with impoverished Palestinians, risking cooling down the relations with an important economic partner such as Israel? Why would Turkish Airlines, which are still 49,12% owned by the Turkish government⁴³, launch direct flights from Istanbul to war-torn Mogadishu, a route which is unlikely to become profitable? There is a need to find a theory which could find an answer to this puzzle and the most suitable one which I am going to apply is the theory of national role conceptions.

However, every theory has its limits and cannot explain all phenomena in depth and the theory national role conceptions is no exception of it, because on the one hand it accounts well for the shifts in foreign policy, yet on the other hand it cannot explain the discrepancy between what policymakers say and what they actually do and how all these processes are interpreted and articulated by others. In the case of Turkey policymakers there is a high likelihood that policymakers have in mind a slightly different vision than they articulate, because they may fear negative connotations, which could be evoked by a more direct expression of their desires. The reasons behind it lie in history and in the legacy of the Ottoman state, which may be perceived negatively by people in Turkey's neighborhood. But such indirect or implicit Neo-Ottomanism as it is commonly labeled, mostly by its critics is the result of a different discursive formulation of Turkey's increased engagement in the region, "zero problems with neighbors" policy and other actions. In the following sections, I am going to elaborate on this phenomena by displaying how these new conceptions have emerged using Holsti's theory, but by also demonstrating how it has been discursively formulated by others In so doing I hope to bring some theoretical contributions by filling a gap Holsti's theory on national role conceptions .

⁴³ <http://www.turkishairlines.com/en-int/corporate/investor-relation/organization>, last accessed at 15:44, on the 11th of May 2012.

2.1. Methodology

My research is based on a qualitative analysis of Turkish foreign policy, mostly by having critically reviewed secondary sources such as academic publications on Turkish foreign policy by both Turkish and foreign scholars. Moreover I have also analyzed statements and speeches made by Turkish policy-makers, mainly Turkish president, prime minister and foreign minister. Unfortunately, I had to rely on secondary sources when it came to the analysis of the book "Strategic Depth" by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, which as of now still has not been translated from Turkish into English. I was confined to a lesser degree to secondary sources, which translated speeches of Turkish parliamentarians and policymakers into English, because the website of Turkish Foreign Ministry contains a rich collection of speeches and articles of foreign minister Davutoğlu, which I reviewed in the search of national role conceptions articulated by him for Turkey.

Additionally, I have conducted interviews with four scholars and think tank analysts in Turkey where I was inquiring on the sources and origins of the recent foreign policy conceptualizations in Turkey. I have contacted various academic centers and think tanks in Turkey but due to a low number of replies to my interview requests, I was confined to interview a limited number of scholars and analysts who were willing to be interviewed. Two of them were working in the academia at universities in Istanbul and Ankara and two other were researchers working for Turkish think tanks, the first two are Ziya Öniş from Koç University in Istanbul and Ioannis Grigoriadis from Bilkent University in Ankara. The other two researchers are Erdem Kaya from the BILGESAM think tank in Istanbul and Yusuf Çınar from the Strategic Outlook think tank in Konya. Their views expressed during the interviews have helped me to identify the underpinnings of new foreign policy conceptualizations in Turkey and the ways in which it has been started to be articulated as Neo-Ottomanism by scholars and analysts and they supplement my qualitative research of secondary sources.

In order to analyze Turkish foreign policy, I have applied the national role conceptions theory of Holsti and I am using his 17 national role types for my analysis. In order to determine which national roles are advocated for Turkey by its politicians, I have analyzed statements by both Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, president Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. These statements can be considered to be part of the Neo-Ottomanist discourse, although this label is refuted by Turkish policymakers but is frequently used by analysts, hence it is an implicit and not explicit Neo-Ottomanist discourse on behalf of Turkish authorities. Though they rather make indirect references to the Ottoman Empire, still they indicate what national roles Turkish leaders project for their country on the international arena. However, these roles have not been formulate discursively by Turkish statesmen, who make references to the Ottoman Empire, hence many analysts and scholars have labeled such a formulation of national roles and of foreign policy in general as Neo-Ottomanist because of the intensiveness of references to the Ottoman past and legacy both on the discursive as well as on the practical level. Many of those roles are new and were brought by the Neo-Ottomanist discourse, which stands in a contrast to the Kemalist foreign policy articulations and practices which perceive a rather limited international role for Turkey than the one envisaged by Neo-Ottomanist.

First I analyze in the second chapter the national roles implied by the new foreign policy conceptualizations, commonly referred to as Neo-Ottomanist and then I am going to highlight in my third chapter what Neo-Ottomanism is and where it originates from. I will do so because despite frequent refutations of Turkish officials of the term "Neo-Ottomanist", it is this term that is commonly employed to both label and to describe Turkish foreign policy. Although the national roles implied by Turkish policymakers are not intended to have any Neo-Ottomanist notions, they are commonly interpreted as such by many scholars and analysts, that is why I find it necessary to highlight the development of the Neo-Ottomanist

discourse in Turkey, to understand better what it implies and what perceptions of Turkey it projects.

I first focus both on the academic literature of the subject, reviewing major perspectives on the new foreign policy conceptualizations in Turkey, as well as on the findings of the interviews I conducted in Turkey with scholars of Turkish foreign policy. Then in the second chapter I apply Holsti's theory of national role conceptions to Turkey, relying heavily on the work of Bülent Aras and Aylin Görener "National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation; the ideational bases of the Justice and Development Party's foreign policy activism in the Middle East". However, unlike Aras and Görener I am combining the national role conceptions typology developed by Holsti with the more recent study of Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson and Suzette Grillot, which defines a more limited number of roles. I find both models to be complementary and I believe that applying roles from both models will provide the researcher with a more accurate tool to portray national role conceptions envisaged by the Turkish foreign policy elites. Moreover, I do not confine my research of new foreign policy conceptualizations in Turkey in reference to the Middle East only, but expand it to other areas where Turkish foreign policy has been particularly active during the tenure of AKP governments. Using statements made by the Turkish leadership, I identify the national roles projected by them and describe them in reference to Turkey. Finally I conclude my thesis by reinforcing my claim to national role conceptions theory as a strong explanatory tool for studying Turkish foreign policy.

3. National role conceptions in Turkish foreign policy

States' foreign policy preferences usually differ from one another, which is something often taken for granted by journalists without employing a thorough thought-process to analyze how states acquire these various preferences. These preferences are the product of foreign policy elites of a given nation and they often have their origins in the nascent stage of state's history, when the state was either established or experienced fundamental changes both inside and outside of its frontiers. In the case of Turkey this period of history would clearly be the years following the demise of the Ottoman Empire, end of World War I and the victorious Turkish Independence War, which paved the way for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to establish the Turkish Republic in 1923 and implement his radical reforms, such as the abolition of the caliphate, universal suffrage for women, secular character of the state and the introduction of the Latin alphabet among many others. It was in that time when Turkish foreign policy role conceptions were formed and became the official guiding principles in country's interaction with other nations.

In terms of international affairs, Atatürk pursued a careful and restrained foreign policy, which allowed him an uninterrupted consolidation of his power at home and a very much needed stability for the formative period of the Republic, after a tumultuous decade prior to its establishment. The official motto of the Kemalist foreign policy was the famous quote of Atatürk "peace at home, peace in the world", which expressed his desire to prioritize peace and stability in Turkey and in its neighborhood, even when it came at the price of limited involvement in regional affairs. However, it would be an overstatement to describe Atatürk as an isolationist, he was risk-averse but willing to cooperate when the cooperation would not jeopardize the internal development of Turkey and its territorial integrity, what he and his people passionately fought and made great sacrifices for. He recognized the importance of international relations by saying:

“We cannot think of ourselves living alone by closed eyes. We cannot also live by taking our country in a circle and keeping away from the global relations ourselves. Any country or nation who gets, involved in such a manner will be condemned to be put under the dominance and yoke of other nations who are able to embrace the philosophy of life in a larger angle”⁴⁴

Drawing from the early history of republic foreign policy I am inclined to state that the most accurate national role conceptions of that period, from the ones suggested by Holsti, were the ones of an *internal developer* and *independent*. A state with such role conceptions usually focuses most of its efforts on domestic affairs, development of its economy and pursues a rather cautious foreign policy. The foundations for such a foreign policy were laid by Atatürk in order to strengthen Turkey domestically so that it could develop and catch up with the developed Western world. According to Atatürk, Turkey had suffered from the backwardness of the Ottomans, who prevented it from exploiting its true potential and only recently Turkey embarked on the path of an enlightened development, which eventually will make it a respectable country on the international arena. This desire motivated Atatürk to orientate his country towards the West and to limit or even sever ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors, commonly regarded as backward traitors, whom one cannot trust. That is why in the initial republican period of Turkish history the role conception of an *internal developer* was very quickly embraced, however, it was not the only one favored by Atatürk.

The role conception of an *independent* signaled after the foundation of Turkish Republic that Turkey was a sovereign country and its foreign policy was based on the will of the people and not the will of foreign powers and Turkey would enter only alliances which would not challenge its sovereignty. Such foreign policy was also partially the result of the trauma inflicted on the Turkish people by the Sèvres treaty, which envisaged the partition of the Ottoman Empire among the victorious World War I powers. The Sèvres Treaty was the foundation of the mistrust of Turkish elites towards foreign powers, which found an expression in the popular saying that "for a Turk no one can be a friend except another Turk".

⁴⁴ Atatürkcülük, III, Intellectual system of Atatürkism, Istanbul 1984, p. 123.

As a result of both the Sèvres Treaty and Atatürk's desire to shield the young republic from its hostile neighbors and other powers, Turkish foreign policy has been deeply entrenched in a cautious, risk-averse and inward-looking paradigm of international affairs. The elite responsible for the formulation and execution of foreign policy has been tasked with maintaining this orientation after the death of Atatürk in 1935 and adhering strictly to his principles.

The only significant external stimuli which managed to modify Turkish foreign policy during its republican period before the end of the Cold War was the end of World War II and Turkey's alignment with the pro-Western camp, firmly confirmed by its entry into NATO in 1952. I argue that by joining NATO, Turkey abandoned its role conception of an *independent*, because it chose one of the sides of the Cold War conflict and from that moment adhered to the role conception of an *internal developer* and a *faithful ally*. Turkey's decision to join NATO was primarily motivated by security and not ideological concerns, on the other hand, Turkey did not shun from its duties of an ally, it did for example send a sizeable number of troops to fight alongside other UN troops in the Korean War, and it did so barely a year after it joined NATO. However, the fulfillment of Turkish military commitments did not significantly alter other aspects of Turkish foreign policy such as its cautious character and high degree of securitization, lack of significant involvement in regional affairs, risk-aversion and the Sèvres syndrome.

Turkish foreign policy and its national role conceptions were not significantly challenged during the entire Cold War period, which can be by and large attributed to Turkish military's role as the guardian of Atatürk's legacy. Any attempt to revise Kemalist cornerstones met with the reaction of the military, which intervened in 1960, 1971 and 1980 by launching coup d'états and seizing power. It was only at the end of Cold War that Turkey's foreign policy paradigm was challenged by president Turgut Özal, who recognized new

opportunities for Turkey given by the demise of the Soviet Union and the Cold War order. Özal was first to recognize the constraints of the Kemalist role conceptions and attempted to carefully revise them, without upsetting the military establishment. He believed Turkey was an important regional power and needed to act as one.⁴⁵ However, for the military circles Turkey still faced a number of enemies abroad, who wanted to dismember its territory, just as they did with Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. Hence, Turkey had to be cautious, shun adventurist foreign policy and focus on defending itself from domestic as well as from foreign enemies⁴⁶. Özal found the military to be a prisoner of the redundant Kemalist mindset, lacking a strategic vision, a term now commonly used by foreign minister Davutoğlu. He had a new vision for his country, which recurs in his speeches:

"People are not the servants of the state, but the state must be servant of the people. The next century will be a Turkish century. Turkey cannot be prisoner of the Misak-i Milli (National Pact) borders."⁴⁷

It was Özal who challenged the old national role conception of an *internal developer* without undermining the *faithful ally* role conception. Actually, he managed to simultaneously reinforce the *faithful ally* role conception, by aligning Turkey with the United States during the Desert Storm operation, a decision which also indicated his desire for Turkey to become a *regional leader*. However, a more pronounced vision of Turkey as a *regional leader* could be found in Özal's statements about the Turkic world "from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall" and his efforts to strengthen Turkey's position in the region, for example by forming the Black Sea Economic Cooperation zone. Özal argued that:

"Many things have changed in Turkey . . . My conviction is that Turkey should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in active foreign policy. . . The reason I made this call is because we are a powerful country in the region."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Berdal Aral, *Dispensing with Tradition? Turkish Politics and International Society during the Özal Decade, 1983-93*, [in] *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), p. 79.

⁴⁶ Sedat Laçiner, *Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism*, [in] *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law*, Vol. 2, 2009, p. 175.

⁴⁷ Turgut Özal quoted [in] Sedat Laçiner, op.cit., p. 153.

⁴⁸ *Milliyet*, 3 March 1991.

Another role conception introduced to the Turkish foreign policy discourse by Özal, later to be known by many as Neo-Ottomanist, was the one of a *bridge*, which Turkey embodied by spanning two continents, two religions, multiple identities and ethnic groups. Lerna Yanık argues that due to the collapse of the Cold War order Turkey did not have to play the role of NATO's eastern flank anymore and needed to come up with a new role conception for itself to highlight "the country's continued important role"⁴⁹. This role conception had to correspond to the perception of Turkey Özal had in mind:

"We are an Islamic country. We have differences from the West... We are the bridge between the West and the East. We need to take the science, technology, thinking, understanding, and compromise of the West. But we have also our own values that the West do not have."⁵⁰

This statement demonstrated the willingness of Özal to combine elements of East and West in the construction of Turkish identity, which according to him, had to embrace all citizens, be more inclusive and should not shun its Ottoman heritage. Although visionary and challenging to the deeply entrenched Kemalist establishment, Özal has not managed to achieve a long-lasting reorientation of Turkish foreign policy. However, he has inspired many and his legacy has been eagerly embraced by AKP. Although the death of Özal his ideas were largely forgotten or at best neglected, he brought new language to the Turkish foreign policy discourse, one which was unimaginable in the times prior to his presidency but became common after his death, as evidenced by the speech of foreign minister Ismail Cem:

"It is worthwhile to note that there are twenty-six countries with which we shared for centuries a common history, a common state and a common fate. ...In this vast socio-political geography, Turkey, ...has optimal conditions to contribute to stability and to enjoy the opportunities presented by the new 'Eurasian Order'. By virtue of historical and cultural attributes and its privileged double-identity, European as well as Asia, Turkey is firmly positioned to become the strategic 'Center' of Eurasia"⁵¹

⁴⁹ Lerna K. Yanık, *Constructing Turkish "exceptionalism": Discourses of liminality and hybridity in the post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy*, [in] *Political Geography* 30 (2011), p. 536.

⁵⁰ Turgut Özal quoted [in] Muhittin Ataman, *Leadership Change: Özal leadership and restructuring in Turkish foreign policy*, [in] *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2002, p. 155.

⁵¹ Ismail Cem, Preface, [in] *Turkey & the World 2010-2020, Emergence of a Global Actor*, Istanbul, DIVAK, 1998.

It was only in 2002 when Özal's legacy reemerged with the takeover of power by the Justice and Development Party. Moreover, a new foreign policy discourse, commonly referred to as Neo-Ottomanist started to appear on the political arena in Turkey. One of the first steps AKP took to construct a new foreign policy was to discredit the Sèvres syndrome as a hindrance to the country's development and its quest to achieve a position of regional power, as evidence by the speeches of then foreign minister, now president Abdullah Gül and current foreign minister Davutoğlu:

*"Remembering the Sèvres and knowing what happened at the time is meaningful, if it enables us to assess with a common sense our weaknesses and mistakes throughout the course of events that culminated in the signature of the Treaty of Sèvres; otherwise, if it pacifies us and engenders a sense of mental submissiveness at the psychological level that causes a defensive attitude, it certainly hinders our power and paves the way for new Sèvres-like treaties."*⁵²

"Surely, we have to be poised to act against the secret schemes on the destiny of our country. I'm not implying that we should ignore such schemes; but I would like to underline that it is unfair for Turkey as a great country to be forced to live with a syndrome like that."⁵³

With the Sèvres syndrome disarmed, new Turkish foreign policy elites could embark on a path of constructing new national role conceptions for their nation. With the arrival of AKP on the political scene in Turkey, a new rhetoric has gradually been used discursively when referring to foreign policy. This form of discourse has been called "soft Neo-Ottomanism" by Ziya Öniş, who distinguishes it from "hard Neo-Ottomanism" by highlighting its cultural aspect, new, more inclusive identity and the idea of Turkey as an assertive central state⁵⁴. According to Turkish foreign policy elites their country cannot afford to be isolationist and defensive but it needs to embrace the Ottoman legacy and recognize its special role in the region. If it is not the case Turkey risks the following:

"The territories over which [Ottoman] sovereignty was forfeited were also abandoned immediately in a hurry to defend the rest within new borders. This [total withdrawal] hindered the development of auxiliary tactical formulas such as creating spheres of influence within the territories that were in-between absolute sovereignty and total withdrawal, defending the borders through trans-boundary

⁵² Ahmet Davutoğlu quoted [in] Kadri Kaan Renda, *Politicians as Story-Tellers: Narrative Reconstruction of Turkish Foreign Policy*, http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2012/809_431.pdf, last accessed at 15:07, on the 15th of May 2012, p. 4.

⁵³ Abdullah Gül, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Vol.105, Session 38, 2005, p.37.

⁵⁴ Ziya Öniş, interview in Istanbul, 2nd of May 2012.

diplomatic initiatives, forming coalitions around its own strategy, leaving behind collaborators in the lost territories, and exploiting the conflict of interests among great powers in order to gain more room for tactical maneuvers."⁵⁵

However, this does not imply any imperial or neo-colonialist notions, quite on the contrary, Turkey desires to become not only a "central state" but also a "wise country", a term coined by Ahmet Davutoğlu, which describes Turkey as a state whose voice will be listened to on the international arena, who will act wisely and proactively in order to find solutions to global problems⁵⁶. One of the ways of becoming a "wise country" is to develop Turkey's soft power, a fact recognized by Turkish foreign policy elites, who want to project a magnified vision of their country, both at home and abroad:

"Turkish foreign policy is rapidly developing its "soft power" based on persuasion, incentives, leadership and being an exemplar. As a matter of fact, our objective is to develop our soft power further. The ideal of a great country could only be fulfilled with such confidence."⁵⁷

As indicated by the above mentioned statements of Turkish policy makers, they are not only distancing themselves from the Kemalist vision of their state, they project quite a new set of roles for Turkey, because they profoundly believe that Turkey possesses the necessary potential to live up to the roles they articulate. The most vocal proponent and chief architect of Turkey's new role conceptions has been foreign minister Davutoğlu, who portrays Turkey as a country possessing a "strategic depth", which enables it to exert greater influence in its neighborhood, provided Turkey recognizes this potential and is willing to take advantage of it. He calls for the transformation of Turkey from a Cold War wing state to a "central state" and believes Turkey has the potential in a long term to become a global power⁵⁸. In order to become a "central state" Turkey needs to pursue a number of role conceptions envisaged by the AKP policymakers.

⁵⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001, quoted [in] Kadri Kaan Renda, op.cit., p. 11.

⁵⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, speech at the Annual Ambassadors' Conference of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011.

⁵⁷ Abdullah Gül, speech given in Bosphorus University in Istanbul 2004.

⁵⁸ Ahmet Sözen, *Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges*, [in] *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 103-123, March 2010, p. 110.

Below I highlight the national role conceptions which are prevalent in the AKP foreign policy discourse. I have arranged them according to the degree of activity on the international arena, which is used both by Holsti and Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot their studies on national role conceptions. My typology merges theirs in order to provide the reader with a more comprehensive list of national role conceptions, reflecting both the complexity and the multitude of roles envisaged by Turkish foreign policy elites. I have identified nine role conceptions of which are frequently articulated by Turkish foreign policy elites.

Regional leader

This role conception reflects both the special ambitions of a country in a given region, as well as its special obligations and responsibilities towards other states in the region. It is one of the more pronounced role conceptions articulated by Turkish policymakers, who are raising awareness of their country's former greatness in order to justify the means which they use to achieve greatness in contemporary times. This greatness is to be perceived as a natural outcome of both Turkey's history and its "strategic depth", as indicated in by foreign minister Davutoğlu:

"Countries like Turkey, China and Japan have deep historical roots in their regions. . . During the transit from the 19th to the 20th century; there were eight multinational empires across Eurasia: Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, China, Japan and Turkey. Now these countries are experiencing very similar problems with their prospective regions. As these countries possess historical depth they form spheres of influence; if they fail to do this they then experience various problems."⁵⁹

"Turkey is not just any old Mediterranean country. One important characteristic that distinguishes Turkey from say Romania and Greece is that Turkey is at the same time a Middle East and Caucasus country . . . Indeed, Turkey is as much a Black Sea country as it is a Mediterranean one. This geographical depth places Turkey right at the epicenter of many geopolitical areas of influence."⁶⁰

Regional protector

⁵⁹ *The strategic depth that Turkey needs, an interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu*, Turkish Daily News, 15 September 2001.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

This role conception highlights special leadership responsibilities of a particular state in the region. In the case of Turkey it is nowhere more pronounced than in the references to the Middle East, although Balkan and North African countries are also frequently portrayed as deserving special treatment by Turkey because of their Ottoman past. Turkish foreign policy elites regularly articulate Turkey's special responsibility towards the people in its region; be it Bosnian Muslims or Iraqi Sunnis. Turkey desires to become "an order instituting state" in the region and is "developing a strongly pronounced sense of responsibility to provide stability for the people and countries of the region with which it shares a common historical past"⁶¹, as evidenced by the following statements:

"Turkey should make its role of a peripheral country part of its past, and appropriate a new position: one of providing security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighboring regions."⁶²

"Turkey should guarantee its own security and stability by taking on a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs."⁶³

"Turkey now enjoys an image as a responsible state which provides order and security in the region."⁶⁴

"Beyond representing the 70 million people of Turkey, we have a historic debt to those lands where there are Turks or which was related to our land in the past. We have to repay this debt in the best way."⁶⁵

"All these lands, all these regions are our *tarihdaş*. As the state of Turkish republic we are obliged to protect the rights of our citizens, as a nation preserving the past ties with our *tarihdaş* is our historical mission. In this context, regardless of their ethnic and sectarian origins, we are determined to embrace all of our *tarihdaş* and eliminate all the existing barriers between us and our *tarihdaş*; this is why, we are pursuing region-wide policies; this is why, we are establishing trilateral and multilateral mechanisms; and this is why, we are in pursuit of new initiatives within our bilateral relations."⁶⁶

According to Kadri Kaan Renda, Davutoğlu coined the term *tarihdaş*⁶⁷ to imply a sense of common heritage, togetherness and belonging to the larger group of people, which

⁶¹ Bülent Aras and Aylin Görener, "National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation; the ideational bases of the Justice and Development Party's foreign policy activism in the Middle East" [in] *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Volume 12, Number 1, March 2010, p. 83.

⁶² Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Turkey Foreign Policy Vision: an Assessment of 2007*, [in] *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu quoted [in] Srdja Trifković, *Turkey as a regional power: Neo-Ottomanism in Action*, <http://www.balkanstudies.org/articles/neo-ottomanism-action-turkey-regional-power>.

⁶⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi* Vol.87, Session.37, 2011, p. 70.

⁶⁷ *Tarih* meaning history and *-daş* meaning togetherness.

share their past and, hence are more inclined to cooperate and accept the regional leadership of Turkey as the legitimate heir of the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁸

"I believe that Turkey has a lot to do in the Middle East. We are aware of this responsibility. We are here for this."⁶⁹

"We do not see the Syrian issue as an external affair. The Syrian question is our internal affair. Because we share with them a border of 850 kilometers. We have ties of kinship, history and culture. Therefore, we cannot passively watch what is happening. We need to do whatever is necessary."⁷⁰

"...we considered all people of the region as our eternal brothers irrespective of their background and saw it our duty to dampen sectarian tensions."⁷¹

However, as indicated above, the role conception of a *regional protector* could also imply the Turkish desire to interfere into domestic affairs of its neighboring countries, something those countries may not wish, still harboring negative memories of the Ottoman past. This role conception could also be potentially perceived as the lynchpin of a "hard" or "offensive" Neo-Ottomanism, a perception Turkey would like to avoid since it may threaten to undermine its efforts to build friendly relations in its neighborhood.

Mediator-integrator

The role conception of a *mediator-integrator* is projected by governments, which see themselves "as capable of, or responsible for, fulfilling or undertaking special tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states or groups of states"⁷². This role conception has not been as strongly pronounced by Turkish policymakers as the above mentioned ones, but it has been increasingly often articulated in the recent years, as exemplified below:

"Turkey's efforts are focused on bringing together the parties in order to solve or preempt conflicts..."⁷³

⁶⁸ Kadri Kaan Renda, op. cit., p. 11.

⁶⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Daily News, 2 May 2005.

⁷⁰ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/656181-erdogan-davutoglu-sama-gonderiyor>, last accessed at 16:18, 15th of May 2012.

⁷¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁷² K. J. Holsti, op. cit., p. 265.

⁷³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu published in AUC Cairo Review (Egypt) on 12 March 2012*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-_egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa, last accessed at 17:51, on the 20th of May 2012.

"Turkey's Lebanon policy, its attempts to mediate between Syria and Israel and achieve Palestinian reconciliation, its efforts to facilitate the participation of Iraqi Sunni groups in the 2005 parliamentary elections, and its constructive involvement in the Iranian nuclear issue are integral parts of Turkey's foreign-policy vision for the Middle East."⁷⁴

"Consider Turkey's mediation between Israel and Syria, a role that was not assigned to Turkey by any outside actor. Other examples of pre-emptive diplomacy include Turkey's efforts to achieve Sunni-Shiite reconciliation in Iraq, reconciliation efforts in Lebanon and Palestine, the Serbia-Bosnia reconciliation in the Balkans, dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the reconstruction of Darfur and Somalia."⁷⁵

Regional sub-system collaborator

This role conception envisages a long-term commitment to "...cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities"⁷⁶. In this way it differs from the *mediator-integrator* role conceptions, which implies an occasional intervention into conflict prevention rather than undertaking comprehensive measures to create sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Turkish foreign policy elites have at numerous occasions expressed their country's desire to become a major propeller of regional cooperation, as evidenced below:

"Before we came to power, we promised that we would develop relations with our neighbors and included this in our action plan. We did not make any discrimination among our neighbors. Regional peace will be set up this way."⁷⁷

"Today, it is important for Turkey to establish its position in the Middle East. This position must rest on four main principles. First of all, security for everyone, not only for this group or that group, this country or that country, but common security for the entire region."⁷⁸

"We are ready to do everything in our power to ensure peace and stability in the region."⁷⁹

"It has to take on the role of an order-instituting country in all these regions. ... Turkey is no longer a country which only reacts to crises, but notices the crises before their emergence and intervenes in the crises effectively, and gives shape to the order of its surrounding region."⁸⁰

"Why is it so important for Turkey, we are right at the center of all these earthquakes, in geo-political earthquakes from Balkans to Central Asia. Turkey is right at the center. And all of the crises were directly or indirectly, historically and culturally, were related to Turkey."⁸¹

⁷⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy?page=0,1&hidecomments=yes, last accessed at 00:40, on the 21st of May 2012.

⁷⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Ibid*.

⁷⁶ K. J. Holsti, 1970, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁷⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 29 July 2004.

⁷⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁷⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 4 January, 2009.

⁸⁰ Ahmet Davutoğlu quoted [in] New FM Davutoğlu to build order-instituting role for Turkey, http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=174284, last accessed at 1:10, on the 20th of May 2012.

"Turkey's growing influences in the region, the variety of means and capabilities available to us, as well as our unique geographic location have increased our soft power substantially. And we are ready to project that soft power to help bring security, stability and prosperity to a multitude of geographies."⁸²

"At the regional level, our vision is a regional order that is built on representative political systems reflecting the legitimate demands of the people where regional states are fully integrated to each other around the core values of democracy and true economic interdependence."⁸³

"One strength of our foreign policy, thus, is the ongoing process of reconnecting with the people in our region with whom we shared a common history and are poised to have a common destiny. This objective will continue to shape our foreign policy priorities, and we will not take steps that will alienate us from the hearts and minds of our region's people for short-term political calculations. This objective also means that we will seek to reconcile our differences with neighboring countries by engaging in a soul-searching effort and moving beyond the disputes that have divided us."⁸⁴

Global sub-system collaborator

This role conception implies states' desire to shape the global order by actively participating in various international forums and committing itself to undertake efforts aimed at establishing a stronger, more inclusive and fair international order. As it was mentioned before, Turkish foreign policy elites' desire is to make their country a global power in a long term perspective, they set an ambitious goal for Turkey to become the 10th largest economy on earth by 2023, the centennial anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The AKP leadership perceives that the growth of Turkish economy should be accompanied by Turkey's increased posture on the international arena and, this desire is demonstrated in the following statements of Erdoğan, Gül and Davutoğlu:

"From now on, neither the world can carry on without Turkey nor Turkey can carry on without the world. Our country is in the process of becoming a global player and this is an irreversible process."⁸⁵

"Turkey's aim is to intervene consistently in global issues using international platforms, which signifies a transformation for Turkey from a central country to a global power."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu quoted [in] Turkey Seeks to Be International Mediation Center, <http://www.turkishnews.com/en/content/2012/03/04/turkey-seeks-to-be-international-mediation-center>, last accessed at 1:00, on the 20th of May 2012.

⁸² Abdullah Gül, speech given at the German Marshall Fund, 2007.

⁸³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring*, [in] *Turkey Policy Brief Series*, 2012 Third Edition, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/bakanmakale_tepev.pdf, last accessed at 8:59, on the 20th of May 2012, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Daily News, 5 February 2005.

⁸⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Turkey Foreign Policy Vision: an Assessment of 2007*, op. cit., p. 87.

"The essential of our visionary policy is that global order must be inclusive, participatory, equalitarian and overarching. We are willing to be a spokesperson of such global order"⁸⁷

"Through increasing ties with neighbors, Turkey will be better positioned to play its role as a responsible country at the global level."⁸⁸

"We have already expressed our readiness to assume the responsibilities of a global actor, and set ourselves the objective to be reckoned as a wise country in the international community. [...] As a wise country, i.e. a responsible member of the international community, we aspire to enhance our capability to shape the course of developments around us and make a valuable contribution to the resolution of regional and international issues."⁸⁹

"Turkey now enjoys an image of an responsible state which provides order and security to the region, one that prioritizes democracy and liberties, while dealing competently with security problems at home. Turkey's aim is to intervene consistently in global issues using international platforms, which signifies a transformation for Turkey from a central country to a global power."⁹⁰

"In today's emerging world order Turkey is perceived as one of the actors that can shape the dynamics of the 21st century. This [perception] does not only rest on our strategic and geographic location, our greatness and our military forces. Apart from these, the importance attributed by others to Turkey has enhanced owing to our success to blend our traditional values with contemporary norms, our positive influence on spreading stability in our environment, in other words, our ability to utilize our soft power, our greatness. Up until now Turkey's image has been considered aggressive; now Turkey is a country whose power is well known, who has a great history, whose potential is high, and who aims to solve problems through communication and dialogue"⁹¹

"... Turkey feels itself well-poised to play an important role in addressing the challenges of the 21st century."⁹²

"At the global level, we will aspire to build in a participatory manner a new international order that is inclusive of the international community at large."⁹³

According to Davutoğlu Turkey is poised to take a role of one of the planners of the global order in the near future, because "people all around the world are expecting us to act like a wise country"⁹⁴. The statements above also indicate a sense of grandeur and self-confidence, features typical for aspiring powers.

Developer

⁸⁷ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁸⁹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Turkey Foreign Policy Vision: an Assessment of 2007*, op.cit., p. 83.

⁹¹ Abdullah Gül, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi Vol.70 Session 39, 2004.

⁹² Abdullah Gül, speech given at the American Turkish Council, 2004.

⁹³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁹⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, speech at the Annual Ambassadors' Conference of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010.

This role conception has only recently started to be articulated in the foreign policy discourse of AKP and , it envisages Turkey as a country with a special duty to assist less developed countries:

"...Turkey has become an emerging donor, conducting various development projects through its own agencies. Turkey is determined to help the least developed countries with a long-term commitment."⁹⁵

Example

The role conception of an *example* is positioned fairly low in Holsti's typology; however, in today's increasingly interdependent world this role conception can be regarded as more active than in Holsti's study. This role conception implies not only serving as a model for other countries to follow but also a desire to gain prestige on the international arena, as evidenced in the statements of Turkish policymakers:

"Turkey has achieved what people said could never be achieved—a balance between Islam, democracy, secularism and modernity. [Our government] demonstrates that a religious person can protect the idea of secularism. In the West, the AKP is always portrayed as being 'rooted in religion'. This is not true. The AKP is not a party just for religiously observant people—we are the party of the average Turk. We are absolutely against ethnic nationalism, regional nationalism and religious chauvinism. Turkey, with its democracy, is a source of inspiration to the rest of the Islamic world."⁹⁶

"With its stability, success in development, status within the West, rich historical heritage and identity, Turkey will be a symbol of harmony of civilizations for the 21st century."⁹⁷

"Turkey in its region and especially in the Middle East will be a guide in overcoming instability, a driving force for economic development, and a reliable partner in ensuring security."⁹⁸

"If our foreign policy were not so active people in the region would not see us as a model."⁹⁹

Bridge

⁹⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu published in AUC Cairo Review (Egypt) on 12 March 2012*, op. cit.

⁹⁶ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Newsweek*, 12 May 2008.

⁹⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 9 July 2005.

⁹⁸ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Conservative Democracy and the Globalization of Freedom*, speech at the American Enterprise Institute, 29 January 2004.

⁹⁹ Interview by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu published in *The Australian Newspaper (Australia)* on 21 January 2012, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-h_e_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-the-australian-newspaper-_australia_-on-21-january-2012.en.mfa, last accessed at 8:50, on the 20th of May 2012.

The role conception of a *bridge* implies acting as a "...translator or conveyor of messages and information between peoples of different cultures."¹⁰⁰ It used to be more pronounced in the early period of AKP rule, as evidenced by the following statements:

"At a time that people are talking of a clash of civilizations, Turkey is a natural bridge of civilizations. All we are trying to do is use our position to bring Islam and the West closer together."¹⁰¹

"The effects of having diverse Caucasian, Balkan, Middle Eastern, Iraqi Turcoman and Anatolian elements, even in small groups, are seen in everyday life in today's Turkey, where diverse cultural elements meet under the umbrella of the Turkish state."¹⁰²

" Turkey has a special role in strengthening dialogue between religions due to its location at the intersection of Asia and Europe."¹⁰³

"Turkey has a special role as a pivotal state between Europe and Asia."¹⁰⁴

However, currently Turkish policymakers are less keen on using this term and prefer to call Turkey a pivotal, or more recently, a central state. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey should become a "central state", with extensive links to its neighboring regions, a state with a capacity to institute a regional order and not just the outpost of the West in the East or of the East in the West. Hence he does not endorse the metaphor of Turkey as a bridge between continents and cultures. In an interview given in 2008, he stressed Turkey's uniqueness by saying it should not be seen "as a bridge country, which only connects two points, nor a frontier country, nor indeed as an ordinary country, that sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West, but rather as a central country"¹⁰⁵.

Faithfull ally

This role conception seems to be articulated by Turkish foreign policy elites mostly in response to claims that Turkey is leaving the West or switching alliances, hence Turkish

¹⁰⁰ K. J. Holsti, 1970, op. cit., p. 266,

¹⁰¹ Abdullah Gül quoted [in] Amir Taheri, "Turkey's Bid to Raise Its Islamic Profile and Court Europe May Backfire," Arab View, <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=7§ion=0&article=52442&d=6&m=10&y=2004>, last accessed at 15:32, on the 14th of May 2012.

¹⁰² Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Turkey Foreign Policy Vision: an Assessment of 2007*, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁰³ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Daily News, 17 May 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Nathan Gardels interview with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "A Union of Civilizations," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 24. Iss. 3, 2007, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Lerna K. Yanık, op.cit., p. 87.

policymakers feel the need to reaffirm their commitment to NATO, which is exemplified in the following statements:

"The European Union and NATO are the most important pillars of the policy of setting a balance between security and freedom."¹⁰⁶

"...NATO is still the cornerstone of our defense and security policy.[...] Turkey's membership of NATO is also an integral part of her global identity. Turkey proceeds to take part in missions and operations on collective defense and crisis management within NATO."¹⁰⁷

As evidenced above, Turkish policy makers in the past decade have been projecting a much greater number of national role conceptions for their state than ever before in the republican history of Turkey. New role conceptions gained a particular prominence such as *regional leader* and *regional protector*, whereas others such as *faithful ally* became more marginal. Holsti's theory of role conceptions is well-applicable to Turkish foreign policy as indicated above, yet it does not explain the emergence of different perceptions of role conceptions. It does not come as a surprise that a number of analysts and scholars interpret the shift in national role conceptions as a genuinely new foreign policy conceptualization, and they label it as "Neo-Ottomanist", a name which has imperial notions, referring to Turkish Ottoman history. Since the term "Neo-Ottomanism" does not resonate positively in most countries in Turkey's neighborhood, it is rejected by Turkish policymakers. Despite fairly clearly formulated national conceptions, they seem to be overshadowed in the foreign policy discourse by the term "Neo-Ottomanism", which is used to describe the entire foreign policy of the AKP elites. Nevertheless, I need to analyze the reasons for the emergence of the Neo-Ottomanist foreign policy discourse, which accompanies the emergence of new national role conceptions in Turkish foreign policy.

¹⁰⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu quoted [in] New FM Davutoğlu to build order-instituting role for Turkey, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu published in AUC Cairo Review (Egypt) on 12 March 2012*, op. cit.

4. Neo-Ottomanism: The discursive formulation of the recent Turkish foreign policy conceptualizations.

Before I attempt to define Neo-Ottomanism, it is necessary to first to refer to the original idea of Ottomanism (Osmanlıcılık) which inspired its modern form. Yılmaz Çolak defines Ottomanism as an ideology of modern political patriotism that emerged during the Tanzimat¹⁰⁸ period (1839) and became the official line of the Ottoman Empire in the remaining part of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ According to him Ottomanism was an attempt to modernize the outdated *millet*¹¹⁰ system of the Ottoman Empire by simultaneously retaining it and granting equal civil and political rights to all Ottoman subjects regardless of their religion which had been the dominant factor determining social status in the Empire. Proponents of Ottomanism advocated the idea of "a common homeland and common traits based on modern patriotic citizenship and universal law, which was developed to provide Ottoman unity in the context of each ethnic-religious group's efforts to develop its own nationalism"¹¹¹. The ultimate goal was the creation of a modern Ottoman nation whose unity was not to be threatened by sectarian divisions but it would be sustained by citizens sharing a collective Ottoman identity regardless of their ethnic or religious background. The Ottoman identity was supposed to become the primary one, whereas religious and ethnic identities were supposed to be of secondary importance and the state should disregard them in its treatment of citizens. In other words, Ottomanism foresaw an emergence of the Ottoman Empire as a melting pot of

¹⁰⁸ Tanzimat was the period of reforms, instituted in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876 with the aim of modernizing it in face of growing nationalist sentiment among its primarily European subjects and attempts of European powers to destabilize it and dismember its territory.

¹⁰⁹ Yılmaz Çolak, *Ottomanism vs. Kemalism: Collective Memory and Cultural Pluralism in 1990s Turkey*, [in] *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 587-602, July 2006, p. 589.

¹¹⁰ Millets were confessional communities in the Ottoman Empire, having a special legal status with own judicial system separate for Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities which were governing many of their matters independently.

¹¹¹ Yılmaz Çolak, *op.cit.*, p. 589.

various religions and ethnic groups coexisting peacefully and establishing a modern citizenship and abandoning theocracy.

Interestingly, Tanzimat is not only a period associated with the emergence of Ottomanism (Çolak), but according to Ahmet Sözen, it was also a period where the origins of Neo-Ottomanism can be traced back to. He characterizes it as a movement of liberal intellectuals who were discontent with the character of Tanzimat reforms, considering them imitative and superficial and advocating reforms through internal dynamics, calling for restrictions on the monarchy and establishment of a parliament, some of them such as the poet Namık Kemal attempting to synthesize Islam and democracy¹¹². Yet, according to Ebru Eren-Webb, the first appearance of Neo-Ottomanism as an idea can be associated with the Democrat Party in 1950s, which in comparison to previous governments assigned more space to the Ottoman past and religious issues, both in public life as well as in education¹¹³. One could even go as far as to argue that prime minister Adnan Menderes was the first Neo-Ottoman in power in the republican history of Turkey, as he was the first Turkish head of government who attempted to expand Turkish foreign policy to the East by signing the Baghdad Pact and strengthening Turkey's relations with Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. Finally, the origin of the term is attributed, according to Kemal Karpat, to the Greeks, who coined it after Turkey invaded Northern Cyprus in 1974¹¹⁴. However, they did not fill it with a specific meaning, merely having applied a convenient label evoking Ottoman Empire as an aggressor and occupier of Greek lands. Hence the term from its very inception has had a negative connection in Turkey's neighborhood. The term was also used by David Barchard when referring to Turkey's Middle East policies in the 1980's. Barchard claims that "consciousness of imperial Ottoman past is a much more politically potent force in Turkey than Islam and as

¹¹² Ahmet Sözen, op.cit., p. 106.

¹¹³ Ebru Eren-Webb, *To which Eurasia does Turkey belong? A comparative analysis of Turkish Eurasianist geopolitical discourses*, [in] *Boğaziçi Journal*, Vol. 25, no. 2 (2011), pp. 59-82, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society. Selected articles and essays*, Brill Academic Pub, Leiden, 2004, p. 641.

Turkey regains economic strength , it will be increasingly tempted to assert itself in the Middle East".¹¹⁵

The re-emergence of Neo-Ottomanism is in fact commonly attributed to Turkish prime minister (1983-1989) and later president (1989-1993) Turgut Özal, who laid the foundations for a foreign policy which departed from some of the cornerstones of Kemalism¹¹⁶ by pursuing a vision of a more pluralistic, multicultural and inclusive state coupled with an active foreign policy. According to Sedat Laçiner, Özal was the creator of the new Neo-Ottomanist foreign policy¹¹⁷, however, as argued by Nicholas Danforth, Neo-Ottomanism has not been closely associated with any clear and consistent definition, which may lead to confusion when used nowadays¹¹⁸. According to Danforth, Özal was looking at the Ottoman times for a model of mitigating ethnic and religious tensions and incorporating various cultures and identities, going as far as drawing parallels between the political structures of United States and the Ottoman Empire as the two entities which acted as melting pots for various peoples, religions and cultures. His admiration of America went as far as having a dream of turning Turkey into another America, that is, a country of secularism, yet with a religious zeal of its population, of democracy, capitalism and liberalism¹¹⁹. Özal attempted to reexamine and reevaluate Ottoman history so that it could become a source of national pride, rather than national shame, as it had been previously indirectly implied in the political discourse. This reexamination started, according to Graham Fuller in the early 1990's, when Turkey displayed a renewed interest in the territories and people of its former Empire, and he foresees an emergence of "certain

¹¹⁵ David Barchard, *Turkey and the West*, [in] *Chatham House Papers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Boston and Henley, 1985, p. 91.

¹¹⁶ Murinson Alexander, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy*, [in] *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6, November 2006.

¹¹⁷ Sedat Laçiner, op. cit., 156.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas Danforth, *Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP*, [in] *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Volume 7, Number 3, 2008, p. 90.

¹¹⁹ Sedat Laçiner, op.cit., p. 170.

organic geopolitical, cultural, and economic relations in the new 'normal' regional environment that had been absent during the 'abnormal' period of Cold War polarization"¹²⁰.

This "normality" shall be achieved by a process of reconciliation with its own forgotten and neglected history, as argued by Hadi Uluengin, who suggests that Neo-Ottomanism is an attempt at achieving this normality by bringing back and reviving the memories of the Ottoman past without glorifying it and without demonizing the republican period of Turkish history but giving both of them their just place in history and national narrative¹²¹. Uluengin rejects the chauvinist, imperialist and revisionist notions of Neo-Ottomanism, reassuring his readers that although history does not repeat itself, according to the Neo-Ottomanist vision it renews itself.¹²² Hence, instead of an inward-looking national psyche, Turks should re-discover their imperial past not to make revisionist claims but to do justice to the achievements of the Ottoman era such as the relative religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of various ethnic and religious groups. Zülfü Livaneli acknowledges the significance of the Ottoman past and Ottoman cultural legacy in the former domains of the empire but is reluctant to embrace Neo-Ottomanism as a political doctrine, instead preferring to opt for some form of cultural affinity and solidarity, one that could possibly resemble the one of Spain and Latin American countries¹²³.

Neo-Ottomanism has been viewed differently, however by Cengiz Çandar, regarded by many analysts and scholars as one of main (re)inventors of the term in modern times. Cengiz Çandar has been one of the staunchest supporters of Turgut Özal's new opening in foreign policy and used to refer to his political master as the "Neo-Ottoman of the 21st

¹²⁰ Fuller, Graham, *Turkey faces East: New orientations toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1992, p. 13.

¹²¹ Ali Fuat Borovali, *Post-modernity, Multiculturalism and ex-imperial hinterland: Habsburg and Ottoman legacies revisited*, [in] *Perceptions*, December 1997-February 1998 Volume II - Number 4, p. 4.

¹²² Ali Fuat Borovali, *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²³ Ali Fuat Borovali, *Ibid.*, p. 4.

century"¹²⁴, he has also been a prolific journalist and author advocating an imperial vision to give Turkey an impetus to move from a monocultural and closed nation-state to pluralist multicultural and multiethnic structure¹²⁵. However, Çandar's vision does not contradict the most famous principle of Turkish foreign policy, commonly attributed to Atatürk himself, "Peace at home, peace in the world", Çandar merely calls for an necessary reinterpretation and adjustment of this principle to contemporary conditions¹²⁶. Yet Çandar seeks inspiration for solving contemporary challenges in history by viewing Neo-Ottomanism as "an exercise of understanding how the Ottomans did it"¹²⁷, and he believes that one could employ some aspects of the Ottoman rule such as peaceful coexistence, pluralism and cosmopolitanism to elevate Turkey to the status of a great country, status currently unachievable due to Turkey's restrictive and inward-looking Kemalist policies. To sum up, the shift from Kemalism to Neo-Ottomanism, attributed by Çandar to Turgut Özal, meant the "funeral of Kemalism"¹²⁸.

However, the most important theoretical foundation for the revision of Turkish foreign policy has been given in the book "Strategic depth" authored by the current foreign minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu. Most scholars see the reasons for the departure from Kemalism in the collapse of the bipolar world, where Turkey was a staunchly pro-Western state, NATO member and an important regional ally of the United States. Most authors also agree that in order to take advantage of its unique geopolitical and cultural location, Turkey needed to reexamine its foreign policy and develop a new, ambitious foreign policy, one of a country desiring to become a regional and global player¹²⁹.

This reexamination, which has been taking place during the past decade, has been eagerly labeled as "Neo-Ottomanism" by various authors, and equally eagerly refuted by

¹²⁴ Ali Fuat Borovali, *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁵ Yılmaz Çolak, *op.cit.*, p. 593.

¹²⁶ Cengiz Çandar and Graham E. Fuller, *Grand Geopolitics for a New Turkey*, [in] *Mediterranean Quarterly*: Winter 2001, p. 23.

¹²⁷ Ahmet Sözen, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹²⁸ Sedat Laçiner, *op. cit.*, 156.

¹²⁹ Nora Fischer Onar, *Neo Ottomanism, historical legacies and Turkish foreign policy*, [in] *Discussion Paper Series*, 2009/03, October 2009, p. 1.

Turkish policymakers, who realize that the term may evoke certain imperialist notions, which they strongly deny. I have inquired on the developments of the Neo-Ottomanist debate in Turkey during my interviews, and according to Ziya Öniş, a scholar from Koç University, the term "Neo-Ottomanism" is too strong for the ones who think that Turkey is basically pursuing a pragmatic approach, driven by security and economic interests¹³⁰. On the other hand, the economic aspect of Turkish foreign policy has been frequently highlighted by all of my interviewees as a factor which enabled Turkey to pursue a more assertive, independent and ambitious foreign policy. In other words; Turkish foreign policy is catching up with the robust growth of Turkish economy, hence it is not surprising that Turkey desires to become one of the architects of the new global order, working closely with BRIC countries, Ioannis Grigoriadis actually calls Turkey "a minor BRIC state"¹³¹.

During my interviews in Turkey I have identified various opinions on the sources of Neo-Ottomanist discourse. According to Ziya Öniş it must have originated outside of Turkey in order to demonstrate that Turkey is drifting away from Europe and is usually used by the critics of AKP's foreign policy¹³². A similar view is shared by Erdem Kaya, who believes that Neo-Ottomanism was initiated by some like-minded analysts who viewed Turkey turning to the south and east as an alternative to the West, but according to him in fact Turkey is trying to enrich its foreign relations, expand their scope but they are not an alternative to the West.¹³³ On the other hand both Ioannis Grigoriadis and Yusuf Çınar would look for the origins of the Neo-Ottomanist discourse in Turkey, particularly during the tenure of Turgut Özal, when Cengiz Çandar started to use it for the first time, often in reference to Bosnia, where according to him, Turkish culture was alive due to the Ottoman legacy.¹³⁴ Grigoriadis adds to this that the discourse itself is not new, because it also resonates among Kemalist and Ismail

¹³⁰ Ziya Öniş, interview in Istanbul, 2nd of May 2012.

¹³¹ Ioannis Grigoriadis, interview in Ankara, 3rd of May, 2012.

¹³² Ziya Öniş, interview in Istanbul, 2nd of May 2012.

¹³³ Erdem Kaya, interview in Istanbul, 2nd of May 2012.

¹³⁴ Yusuf Çınar, interview in Konya, 4th of May 2012.

Cem as a foreign minister in the 90's and Eurasian Kemalists have been calling for a policy similar to the one currently pursued by AKP; however, what has changed is that the Turkish economic success gave a new impetus for and could sustain an ambitious foreign policy.¹³⁵

This ambitious foreign policy manifests itself in the re-formulation of national role conceptions, but this re-formulation seems to be perceived in different ways by its proponents and its critics, and it is the critics, who tend to use the term Neo-Ottomanism¹³⁶. For example, Yunus Yılmaz argues that Turkey is nowadays pursuing a value-based policy, prioritizing values over interests¹³⁷, however those policies are viewed with skepticism by Ariel Cohen who states, that they jeopardize the relationship with the United States by unilaterally supporting Hamas and challenging Israel on the international arena¹³⁸. Another very vocal criticism of the Turkish foreign policy comes Srdja Trifković who claims that Turkey's strategy in the Balkans envisages creation of a "Green Corridor", which shall be "a contiguous chain of Muslim-dominated polities from Istanbul in the southeast to northwestern Bosnia, a mere 120 miles from Austria"¹³⁹.

The statement of Trifković illustrates to what extreme degree can the shifts in Turkish foreign policy be perceived abroad. However, current Turkish foreign policy, according to Grigoriadis tends to get blown out of proportions, because Turkey is not close to rebuilding the Ottoman Empire, Turkey is not successful because it's trying to rebuild the Ottoman Empire but because of its economy, it is a discursive battle in both Kemalist and conservative circles¹⁴⁰. A similar view is shared by Erdem Kaya, who believes that Neo-Ottomanism was initiated by some like-minded analysts, who viewed Turkey turning to the south and east as an alternative to the West, but Turkey is trying to enrich its foreign relations and to expand their

¹³⁵ Ioannis Grigoriadis, interview in Ankara, 3rd of May, 2012.

¹³⁶ Ziya Öniş, interview in Istanbul, 2nd of May 2012.

¹³⁷ Yunus Yılmaz, *Turkey's challenge to the realist world order*, [in] *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Volume 10, Number 2, p. 88.

¹³⁸ Ariel Cohen, op.cit., p. 30.

¹³⁹ Srdja Trifković, op.cit.

¹⁴⁰ Ioannis Grigoriadis, interview in Ankara, 3rd of May, 2012.

scope but these relations are not an alternative to its ties with the West¹⁴¹. Because of many questioning Turkey's commitment to West, Turkish government frequently reiterates its unequivocal support for European integration and its contribution to NATO's security. This commitment finds an expression in the *faithful ally* role conception, however, this role is not as prominent and frequently articulated in the foreign policy discourse of the AKP elites as the one of *regional ally* or *global sub-system collaborator*. Hence, some analysts tend to view the shifts in Turkish national role conceptions with a degree of suspicion and they resort to the Neo-Ottomanist label, as a convenient and easy to grasp way of describing Turkish foreign policy of the last decade.

4.1. From Davutoglu's Strategic Depth to Neo-Ottomanism

The shifts in Turkish foreign policy initiated in 2002 by the AKP have not only willingly produced a number of new national role conceptions, but also, contrary to the wishes of Turkish policymakers, a new foreign policy discourse - Neo-Ottomanism, which evokes some imperial notions, referring to Turkey's Ottoman grandeur. I have been trying to demonstrate how national role conceptions theory of Holsti accounts for the changes Turkish foreign policy underwent and I found it a useful tool to explain the motivations of policymakers, which are the drivers of those changes. These policymakers project images of their country, both for domestic as well as for international audience, they have clear role conceptions of their state in mind and those cognitive conceptions resonate with a desire to elevate Turkey's role in the region and in the world. However, they can be variously interpreted not only in different countries, but also in different societal and political circles in Turkey. By some the fact that Turkey desires to become a regional power is perceived as

¹⁴¹ Erdem Kaya, interview in Istanbul, 2nd of May 2012.

having an imperial ambition, whereas for others it is a merely an attempt to play a more constructive role in the region without dominating it.

Holsti's theory identifies the role conceptions associated with such a posture on the international arena, however, as I have found, it does not provide for an explanation of different perceptions and understandings of those role conceptions. In the Turkish case, there is a visible discrepancy between the officially articulated positions of Turkish policymakers and the perception of an "axis shift" in Turkish foreign policy, which is especially strong among its critics. My fieldwork confirmed that there are significant differences in perceptions of Turkish foreign policy and the role conceptions which it implies. Those differences also apply to term Neo-Ottomanism, which can be articulated in a way, which implies Turkey leaving the West, whereas although the Ottoman Empire was "the sick man of Europe, it nevertheless, was European, a fact which can create some paradoxes on the discursive level.

Other paradoxes could be associated with the large number of role conceptions projected by Turkish foreign policy. At first glance the role conceptions of a *bridge* and a *regional leader*, may not very likely seem incompatible, but nevertheless Turkish policymakers project a high number of role conceptions to demonstrate that their foreign policy has a broad spectrum and a multitude of fields where it desires to be engaged. Moreover, according to Holsti, policymakers project a number of roles and visions for their state¹⁴² and it is hardly surprising that an emerging regional power desires to assume more prominence by pursuing a more active, multi-faceted foreign policy. Still, this desire which is demonstrated in the high number of national role conceptions articulated by foreign policy elites, is confronted with a discourse, which does not depict the ideas of policymakers in the way they would do it.

¹⁴² K. J. Holsti, op.cit., p. 277.

5. Conclusion

The discursive formulation of Neo-Ottomanism has become very increasingly popular in the last few years to define the recent national role conceptions in Turkey and shifts in its foreign policy. Many writers and researches have thus developed an interest in it which resulted in a plethora of articles, books and other publications. However, when one scrutinizes a bit further this discourse, it becomes obvious that rather than being a national role conceptualization cognitively designed by the Turkish elites or policymakers, it is rather a perception. In this research, I thus attempted to scrutinize the gap between the officially articulated role conceptions and their perceptions, by first looking at what the Turkish policymakers try to achieve and design and then exploring how these new conceptualizations are interpreted and discursively formulated by scholars, analysts and journalist.

By applying Holsti's theory of national role conceptions I identified the role conceptions, which Turkish foreign policy elites have been articulating and projecting for their nation. Most of those role conceptions have marked their appearance in the discourse only in the past 10 years and as such they are a significant novelty in Turkish foreign policy. I looked and then I investigated how the national role conceptions and their evolution have been discursively turned into a rather dynamic Neo-Ottomanist debate, both domestically and abroad. My fieldwork has given me evidence as to how vibrant on the one hand, and how contested on the other hand the Neo-Ottomanist debate is and provided with an insight into its latest developments. Finally, in my both theoretical and empirical work, I have come up with the conclusions that, although unintended by the policymakers, there is a discrepancy between their articulation of national role conceptions and perception of analysts, scholars and a wider public.

Despite certain shortcomings of Holsti's theory, it is still a useful tool for analyzing foreign policy, however certain improvements may be necessary to make it more accurate at

identifying national role conceptions. Since Holsti's theory was developed, a number of events of great magnitude has changed the world and I believe his role conceptions need to be reexamined and adjusted to contemporary reality. Role conceptions such as *bastion of revolution-liberator* are mostly obsolete nowadays, yet states today due to a number of different circumstances may display features of role conceptions, which have not yet been identified or defined.

A secondary aspect of Holsti's theory, which needs to be further investigated is the wide variety of interpretations of national role conceptions. In the case of Turkey the difference between officially articulated role conceptions and their perceptions, especially among their critics, is stark and calls for a further study. The shifts in national role conceptions which I identified, have caused some to believe that Turkey is pursuing a neo-imperial policy despite frequent refutations of policymakers. The exact reasons of such perceptions need a further investigation, which should go beyond the simple Kemalist-Neo-Ottomanist dichotomy and include a more thorough study of both Turkish foreign policy and Turkey's post-Ottoman history.

Appendix

Interview questions

1. What is Neo-Ottomanism?

a) Is it a merely a label or a foreign policy discourse?

2) What elements of Neo-Ottomanism are emphasized by:

a) its critics

b) by its proponents

3. Who constructed Neo-Ottomanism and Neo-Ottomanist discourse and for whom?

4. Until when can one trace the origins of the Neo-Ottoman discourse?

5. How does Neo-Ottomanism in general contribute to the literature of foreign-policy discourses of geopolitical imaginations?

6. How is this discourse formed?

7. What are the differences in perceptions of Neo-Ottomanism among:

a) scholars -

b) politicians -

c) public -

8. Why was Neo-Ottomanism created?

9. What does Neo-Ottomanism resonate with?

10. Can Neo-Ottomanism be compared to Russian "Near Abroad", neo-colonialism or German Ostpolitik?

11. Isn't Neo-Ottomanism blown out of proportions by its proponents and demonized by its opponents?

12. Isn't Neo-Ottomanism and its goals over-ambitious?

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