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Turkey's Foreign Policy and the Middle East under AKP Rule (2002-2012)

Summary

After the Justice and Development Party came to the power in 2002, Turkey increasingly became a committed actor in the Middle East. Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries define the future of the region and are the relevance of this study. The object of the study is Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries, and the subject is the role of the Justice and Development Party Government. Geographical boundaries of the thesis include Middle East region. The chronological framework of the study is the first decade of the rule of the Justice and Development Party Governments (2002-2012).

Key words: Turkey, Syria, Middle East, conflict, Turkish foreign policy.

JEL codes: F50

Introduction

*“Turkey is the only European country in the Middle East [and] the only Middle Eastern country in Europe”
(Taşhan 2009, p. 186).*

Turkey on the Asia Minor peninsula occupies a unique geographical and geopolitical position. It is washed by the Black, Marmara and the Mediterranean Sea; controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles; and controls the southern access to the Caucasian passage. Turkey thanks to its geographical location had been in a leading position for the long period of time - it could decide the passage of the ships depending on peace treaties. Situated on two continents, it can also affect the Mediterranean, the Caucasus region and, obviously, the entire Middle East region.

After establishing Republic of Turkey in 1923, Turkish foreign policy was anchored in the West, mainly as a consequence of its historical Western orientation to reaffirm its status as a European country. The Middle East was only considered in the framework of its relations with the West (Altunışık 2010). With the end of the Cold War the paradigm for Turkey changed radically. With the arrival of the Prime Minister Turgut Özal in 1983, the political

and economic transformation of Turkey began. He opened the Turkish economy to new markets, including the Middle East. (Almuedo 2014)

The post-Cold War paradigm also opened Turkey to new regions previously left aside, not only the Middle East, but also the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. As the EU started to absorb the Balkan countries and Russia regained its influence in Central Asia, the Middle East was the only region where Ankara could still exert its influence (Kardaş 2010, pp. 115-136).

After Justice and Development Party came to the power in 2002, Turkey increasingly became a committed actor in the Middle East. Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries define the future of the region and are the relevance of this study.

The aim of the paper is to analyze Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries during by Justice and Development Party Governments (2002-2011). The object of the study is Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries, and the subject is the role of Justice and Development Party Government. Geographical boundaries of the thesis includes Middle East region. The chronological framework of the study is the first decade of the rule of Justice and Development Party Governments (2002-2012).

Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and New Approaches in Foreign Policy

Justice and Development Party (JDP)

Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP or AK Party) was founded on August 14, 2001 by the incumbent Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Founding members n.d.). Since then the Party three times won the elections each time with an increasing vote percentage: in 2002 (34.29%) (Elections n.d.), in 2007 (46.28%) (Ibid.) and in 2011 won with 49.95% votes (Fabbe 2011). The origins of the Party can be seen in political Islamic tradition of Turkey the parties of which was stopped their political existence by Kemalist military or political elites.

JDP's Foreign Policy: The concept of "Strategic Depth"

The founder of the JDP's foreign policy concept is Ahmet Davutoğlu who is a professor of international relations, and at the same time the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey since 2009. Davutoglu's official bibliography includes a number of papers on a wide range of international political issues, Islamic civilization and its perspective. However, in the center of his publications stays his conceptual work "Strategic Depth" (published in 2001), in which the new strategy of Turkey's foreign policy is explained.

In practical terms, the “Strategic depth” concept has been used on its own in order to examine the transformation Turkish foreign policy underwent in the early 2000s and to illustrate the theoretical aspect of this new foreign policy concept. Based on Turkey’s historical and geographical depth, the strategic depth concept assumes that Turkey’s geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic place in the world has significance in terms of the transformation of world politics and international system. Departing from previous foreign policy discourses, which could not make use of the advantages offered by Turkey’s rich historical and geographical roots, the strategic depth concept is a theoretical framework that mainly examines the cultural (civilizational), geographical and spatial aspects of Turkish foreign policy (Davutoğlu 2011, p. 178). In practical foreign policy making, however, the concept of strategic depth refers to the cultural, historical and geographical “centrality” of Turkey in the regional and international system (Ibid.).

In Davutoğlu’s own words, “the close land, sea and continental basins surrounding Turkey constitutes the geographical center of the world, and historically covers the areas where the main artery of the history of humankind was formed” (Ibid.).

Zero Problems with Neighboring Countries

The approach of minimizing existing problems with neighbors has become the most contentious foreign policy principle in the JDP era. Put in more technical terms, the zero-problems policy is an approach built on the notion that “Turkey needs to improve its relations with all its neighbors by rescuing itself from the belief that it is constantly surrounded by enemies and the defensive reflex developing thereof” (Davutoğlu 2004). In this respect, existing problems are acknowledged and attempts are made to resolve them. Naturally, the concept implies the transformation of something negative into positive. The main purpose of this foreign policy principle is to form a line of stability around Turkey.

Being directly related to other principles of foreign policy, the concept of zero problems with neighbors draws on six pillars:

- I. equal security for all,
- II. economic integration,
- III. the coexistence of different cultures in a respectful manner,
- IV. high-level political co-operation,
- V. high-level of regional consciousness, and
- VI. Understanding the relationship between security and stability and development (Ibid.).

This concept, however, has become one of the most contentious principles in Turkish foreign policy in the AK Party’s era. In principal, the concept of zero problem principle aims to resolve existing problems with Turkey’s neighbors and close countries; however, it has been criticized for its holistic approach. The critics believe that resolving problems with one coun-

try could lead to problems with another country, and therefore putting all countries under the same category is not a "realistic" policy (Tisdall 2010). The most frequently used examples of this criticism have been the deterioration of relations with Azerbaijan after Turkey started the normalization process with Armenia, the uneasy relationship with Israel and European countries after developing better contacts with Syria and Iran, and the severed relations with Syria after the civil uprisings in the Middle East (Yeşiltaş, Balcı 2013, p. 15).

Turkey's Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East During Justice and Development Party Government

The Middle East in Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkey's interest in close relations with the Middle Eastern countries has historical, geographical, cultural, economic, and religious reasons (Kürkçüoğlu 1972, pp. 2-6). The fact that the majority of people in the region are Muslims gave birth to close cultural partnership; and common religious beliefs, beyond official relations, have created a factor in bringing people always together (Davutoğlu 2001).

Despite the fact that Turkey turned its foreign policy direction to the West, it is geographically a part of the Middle East rather than Europe. Turkey being largely dependent on energy sources barely realized the significance of developing relationships with the Middle East following the oil crises in 1973. Besides, the importance of having good relations with the Middle Eastern countries for Turkey is high, in terms of solving its problems as Kurdish issue (Arı 2008, pp. 775-777).

Turkey and Iran

Turkish - Iranian relations after the Islamic revolution 1979 get highly strained due to suspicious stance of Kemalist elites who afraid Tehran's regime exportation. Furthermore, mutual rivalry in Central Asia and the Caucasus region for the spheres of influence after the collapse of the Soviet Union also did not add any positivity in this relationship. After Justice and Development Party came to the power in 2002 the relations between Turkey and Iran began to acquire a new content. On the one hand Turkish ruling Party imposes Iran, and on the other hand the emergence of new security threats and challenges also contributed to the improvement of relations.

In January 2003 in the midst of preparing Washington's military action against Baghdad Ankara stated that the need of against Saddam Hussein's regime should be based only on UN Security Council resolutions; and started an active shuttle diplomacy in the region which aimed at the settlement of the Iraqi problem politically. Turkish shuttle diplomacy included

Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. A series of meetings held at the level of Foreign Ministers, dedicated to the joint decision on Iraqi problem. Washington did not pay importance to relations of Iraq's neighbors in this format, and even to the formation of the Ankara - Tehran axis, which in the next two years grew into the "triangle": Ankara - Tehran - Damascus. During this period dramatically increased the number of Turkish-Iranian and Turkish - Syrian contacts at the level of heads of ministries and departments during which the Iraqi subject was discussed.

Turkey's cooperation with Iran intensified on security issues. During the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan to Tehran in July 2004, the two sides signed a cooperation agreement, which defined the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization; and since then both countries have started cooperation in border protection. In May 2006, the Secretary General of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran Larindzhani made a working visit to Turkey. He held meetings in Ankara with his Turkish counterpart, Secretary General of the National Security Council of Turkey I. Alpdogan, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan, during which the parties have agreed to boost cooperation to eliminate the PKK camps and bases (Larrabee, Nader 2013).

In April-May 2006, Tehran held a series of successful military operations against militants of the Iranian branch of the PKK (PJAK), their bases, including in northern Iraq, and extradited to Turkish side arrested several functionaries of the organization. Turkish - Iranian dialogue, despite the presence of some of the problems, is strengthened today and developing based on the trade and economic ties between the two countries as well as cooperation in the field of energy. The volume of trade between the two countries is ca 4.5 billion. In Iran there are over 40 Turkish companies and the attractiveness of the Iranian market for Turkish investors is growing. Iran is the second supplier of natural gas to Turkey after Russia.

An important step in bilateral relations was signing in July 2007, a Memorandum of Understanding concerning the transportation of Iranian and Turkmen gas to Europe via Iran and Turkey. The parties agreed to establish a Turkish - Iranian joint venture for transporting natural gas. According to the memorandum, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation has committed to participate in the expansion and modernization of a number of Iranian gas fields. At the same time it was pointed out the possibility of transportation of Turkmen gas too.

In November 2007, Turkey and Iran signed the Ankara Agreement on cooperation in the electricity sector. On the Turkish side, the agreement signed by the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Of Turkey Hilmi Güler, from Iranian side - Energy Minister of Iran Perviz Fettah. In addition, in this agreement, it is provided the joint construction and operation of three power plants in Iranian territory.

Tehran strengthening its position in relations with Turkey on the Kurdish issue expected the support of Ankara around acute situation on Iran's nuclear dossier. However, Ankara supported Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, while urging Tehran to be as transparent

as possible in its relations with the IAEA. In August 2008, Iranian President Ahmedinezhad arrived to Istanbul with an unofficial visit. Although Turkey and Iran failed to reach an agreement on the supply of natural gas, the Iranian leader hoped that it would be signed in the near future.

2009 was the beginning of an important period in terms of deepening relations Turkey - Iran. In January 2009, Erdogan said in Brussels that it is pointless to discuss on gas pipeline «Nabucco» if the project will not engage Iran (Turkey, Iran Sign 2009). For Turkey, whose purpose to become the largest energy transportation hub of the region, Iran has great significance. This state has huge reserves of hydrocarbons and in the future may become an important supplier of gas to the EU, besides the entrance to Central Asia through Iran safer than through Georgia. In turn, Turkey for Iran is also equally important as the main way of transfer for Iranian gas supplies to the EU market through its territory. Turkish and Iranian officials also discussed issues of further expansion of economic and trade relations. In 2009, meetings were held on nuclear issues, on economic cooperation at the highest level. In September 2009, Turkey's Foreign Minister Davutoglu made an official visit to Iran, who highlighted the partnership between Turkey and Iran carries great economic potential. Davutoglu also described the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Gulf region, Afghanistan and Iraq as a problem affecting both Turkey and Iran. At the end of October 2009 Prime Minister Erdogan, accompanied by a large group of ministers, MPs and businessmen, visited Iran. He met with the spiritual leader of the country Khamanei, President Ahmadinejad, Parliament Speaker Larindjhani, and participated in the Turkish - Iranian Business Forum (Larrabe and Nader 2013).

During the visit, the discussed questions were the normalization of Iranian - Pakistani relations, complicating relations with Pakistan, because of the terrorist attack October 18, 2009 in the Iranian province Beluzhistan; threat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the possible threat to Iran; problems in US - Iranian relations; the parties also discussed the increased tension in the Palestinian - Israeli relations; normalization of Turkish - Armenian relations. Finally, the entry of Iran into the World Trade Organization with the help of Turkey was also in the agenda.

Turkey and Iraq

Before the invasion of Iraq by the U.S., the future of the uncertainties of Iraq and in particular northern Iraq caused the main factor affecting the relationships between Turkey and Iraq. This process from Ankara side concerned to be brought a result of the emerged power gap in Iraq after 1991, to normalize the situation in Iraq by involving into the international system, and stabilize the country. To take a step back of Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party and Iraq's transition to democracy was the ideal solution for Turkey in that situation. It was very important not to be negatively affected of borders of Turkey from the military

intervention to Iraq. Turkey's attempts to Baghdad to find the solution on that case were unsuccessful (Çetinsaya 2008, pp. 923-930). In fact, during the period up to 2003, relations between the two countries had even a few, but positive results too. In 1999, under the UN's food program framework Turkey had started to strengthen the economic relations with Iraq. While the Turkish companies in Iraq were trying the opportunities to do business, the diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2000 had been increased to ambassadorial level (Tür 2005).

After the U.S. occupation, Turkey's policy on Iraq started being focused around following general approaches: Political stability, security and social welfare provision in Iraq; prevention of PKK terrorist activities directed from Iraq to Turkey; and development of good neighboring relationship with Iraq. This approach of the Turkish foreign policy in the embodiment of the Iraq was to defend territorial integrity of Iraq, the improvement of Turkmen's political and social situation, to ensure merit-based permanent stability in Kirkuk, to end the existence of PKK terrorist organization in Iraq, to deliver Iraq's energy resources to international markets, and to be involved in the oil operations (Erkmen 2009a, p. 18).

Since March 1 Resolution Turkey's Iraq policy has passed through various stages. At the beginning Turkey engaged in activities to prevent itself and other countries in the region from the impacts of the war in Iraq. In fact, Ankara, by playing a leading role in the Iraq's Neighboring Countries initiation process, could involve Iran, Syria and Kuwait in Iraq issue. Despite the differences in interests, in the meetings, where Saudi Arabia also participated, the territorial integrity supported by all of the countries; and the process was successfully carried out (Çetinsaya 2008, pp. 931-932).

Turkey, initially, after March 1 in a very clear manner, supported the structure of the central government in Iraq and did not set up the relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey refused also to send official invitation to Jalal Talabani, despite his Presidency in Iraq; the Chairman of Kurdish regional government Barzani's policy, starting with Kirkuk, was criticized in front of the press at the official level. Regarding oil resources different policies has been conducted. Turkey remained silent in the activities of Turkish companies in the Kurdish region, while defending oil resources and the revenues from them to be under the control of Central government.

At the beginning Turkey fully focused on developments in Iraq's northern part and on Turkmen, but after 2004-2005, when a new governmental structure was built in Iraq, Turkey started to dialogue with all Iraqi groups. In this sense, in the fall of 2005 Turkey's efforts to support the Sunni Arabs in Iraq to integrate them to the political system were effective (Ibid.). Essentially, Turkey was the only country to have the capability to establish relations with all political groups in Iraq.

The acceleration of the relations of Turkey and Iraq became visible in the mid of 2007. The turning point in relations between Turkey and Iraq was in July of 2008, when High-

Level Strategic Cooperation Council was established. The first step in this way was done by the Prime Ministers by signing the memorandum of understanding in August 7, 2007. Although, the memorandum to fight against terrorism did not produce concrete steps, it helped to develop the base for further development of the relations. At the same time was signed a memorandum of cooperation in the energy field, the aim of which was to increase the electricity transmission capacity and to establish a thermal power plant in both countries; and to transfer Iraqi natural gas to Europe via Turkey. The main aim was to isolate and to put to the end the activities of PKK. In this context, the further cooperation between Ministers of Internal Affairs of both countries was announced. Finally, another important development in this period is the opening of Turkey's consulate in the Persian Gulf (Erkmen 2009a, p. 19).

In March 2008, the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council decided to be established; and the on 10th of August, 2008 the Prime Ministers of both countries signed the document. In this regard, the working mechanism has been developed as follows. While the council is led by the Prime Ministers of both countries, to set the agenda is carried out by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Ministers, who are responsible for trade, investment, security and water resources are also the members of the Council. It planned to meet at least once a year in Prime Ministers Level, and three times at the Ministerial level. The identified working areas of the Council are followings: Iraq's territorial integrity, the fight against terrorism, the establishment of exchange programs among students and public officials, development of tourism, signing the free trade Treaty, cooperation in water resources and in the field of agriculture, support the transfer of Iraqi gas to world markets, the completion of Military Treaty, the training of the Iraqi army and the fight against terrorism treaties to be signed between the two countries.

In 2009, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to this country was an important step in the direction of improvement of cooperation between the two countries. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's visit had 4 main points. The first of these points is to improve the operability mechanism of the Turkey-US-Iraq Tripartite in the fight against the Kurdistan Worker's Party terrorist organization to get tangible results. The second point, the strengthening of economic relations between Turkey and Iraq and in this context to develop the cooperation on energy sector. In 2009, the participation of Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the ceremony of Nabucco and telling that Iraq can provide 15 billion cubic meters of gas for Nabucco, was an important development. The third point was political developments in Iraq. The fourth point was to create a new relationship model in the Middle East. The aim of this model is to clear away all obstacles in the relationship between the two countries and establish a strategic relationship based on integration in various areas of cooperation (Ibid., pp. 19-20).

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Iraq, with the 9 ministers, on October 15, 2009, was Turkey's the most important step on its Middle East policy. The importance is not in signed 48 protocols or strengthening Turkey's presence in Iraq economically, but Turkey's

new strategic vision on Middle East policy. This visit had mainly two dimensions: firstly, to remove the problems between two countries and develop the mutual cooperation fields. Prime Minister Erdogan's statement "We are going to integrate with Iraq" was the point two countries wanted to reach. The second major dimension is strengthening Turkey's relationship with southern neighbors and raising it to strategic level (Erkmen 2009b, pp. 9-11).

Another dimension of the trip contained improvement of the cold relations between Turkey and the groups in Northern Iraq without damaging the relations with the central government. The relations with the Iraqi Kurds are based on three basic dimensions. The first dimension is the increase of cooperation opportunities in the fight against the PKK terrorist organization. The second dimension includes the initiative of establishing the Turkish Consulate in Arbil. This initiation was included in the Prime Minister Erdogan's agenda before going to Iraq and during his visit was once again discussed. The third dimension is having the same position of Turkey and Iraq on Kirkuk, regarding Kurds (Ibid., pp. 11-12).

Positive developments of Turkish foreign policy, concerning its relations with Iraq, shows that the new approaches as "zero problems with neighbors" policy, multi-dimensional policies, and creation of mutual economic dependence are very important indicators of understanding the mutual relations.

Turkey and Israel

Turkey is the first Muslim country that recognized Israel in 1949 (Yılmaz 2010). Yet, since the establishment of bilateral relations the general characteristic of mutual relations could be described as volatile. In 1991, Turkey simultaneously upgraded relations with both Israel and the Palestinian entity to the ambassadorial level (Relations between Turkey n.d.). In the mid-1990s Israel - Turkish relations began in the economic realm and developed further to a strategic partnership in terms of military and intelligence cooperation.

Due to the fact that Ankara faced serious security challenges from Syria, Iraq and Iran. Israel seemed the perfect ally: a pro-Western country, privileged ally of the United States, which could give some leverage in the relations between Ankara and Washington and even gain the support of the Jewish lobby in the US Congress in a crucial moment when Armenian and Greek lobbies were pressing for arms embargos on Turkey. This was another motivating factor for the Turkish-Israeli partnership: Ankara was facing some restriction of arms transfer and military technology from the US and Europe for human rights concerns over the Cyprus and Kurdish issue.

The military agreement signed in 1996 on training, intelligence, and defense-industrial cooperation was seen as a great chance to overcome those restrictions, especially at a time when the military role in Turkish foreign policy was increasing, legitimized by security perceptions (Özcan 2008, p. 124). Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip in winter 2008-

2009 triggered a crisis in Turkey - Israel relations. The incident came only four days after the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Ankara as part of Ankara's role as mediator between Syria and Israel (Turkey Sets 'Gaza Condition' 2009). What is more, PM Erdogan's walking out of the Davos Forum after the discussion with President Simon Peres over the offensive in Gaza was a turning point in Turkish - Israeli relations.

Yet, the Mavi Marmara affair occurred in this context of deteriorating relations in this period. On 31st May, Israeli forces intercepted the flotilla in international waters owned by a Turkish NGO. Eight Turks and one US - Turk were killed by the Israeli forces. The reaction in Turkey was furious. Demonstrations against Israel broke out in Turkish cities and Ankara recalled its ambassador to Israel and cancelled joint military exercises. Almost a year after the episode, relations between Israel and Turkey has not been restored. Turkey insists on conditioning the normalization of relations on the compensation of the victims by Israel.

Turkey and Palestine

Palestinian issue is not only a conflict between Arabs and Jews, but also a regional conflict, which means Turkey is also "under" the impact of it. From the first days of being in Government JDP declared its support to Palestine that can be seen in governmental program "the attempts, which may establish peace considering UN's resolutions and healing of Palestinians' pains will be supported" (Gül's Governmental Programme n.d.). On the other hand, JDP foreign policy decision makers didn't ignore the Israeli side in accordance with the 'balance policy' (Varol 2004) they needed.

Soon in 2004, when the peace negotiations continued, Israel killed Ahmet Yasin who was Hamas' head. This attack was condemned by most of the politicians in the world. Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan also condemned this action with these words:

When we have just taken steps in the Israel-Palestine conflict, Ahmet Yasin was killed. It was a fault to kill a person two third of whose body was apoplexy. Yasin was the religious leader of Hamas. Why did you release him, and why did you kill with rocket? You, as a government, decided a murder, an assassination. If a government hates someone, it is a terror. The road map for peace has been removed. The (process) has entered into a difficulty (Karakuş 2004).

In spite of Israel's negative approach to the peace process and Turkish government's reactions in 2004, JDP government visited Israel several times in order to contribute the peace process between Palestine and Israel. Hamas' entrance to the political sphere shows Turkey's importance on the Palestinian issue.

Following Hamas' coming to the rule, Prime Minister Erdoğan mentions that "the democratic will of the Palestinian people should be respected; it should be given time and chance

to Hamas. It is not a correct political stance to turn our back to the organization (Hamas); then it would serve neither to democracy nor to regional peace". Moreover, Erdoğan says that "although Hamas holds the right to establish the government alone, supports a coalition government with al-Fatah; so it shouldn't be marginalized" (Hamas must stop 2006). On the other hand, Hamas expressed its pleasure with the JDP government's diplomatic struggle for the solution of political crisis in Palestine. Khaled Mashaal, the main leader of Hamas, mentions "how he welcomes the political support of Turkey". According to him, the JDP politicians have done what they could for the solution". Then he uses a special (religious) language to mention the importance of the JDP politicians: "We trust on Turkey's noble history which has turned to *ummah* and the Palestinian people. Turkish people won't forget the responsibility for the lands of *Isra* (the miraculous Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him))" (Mashaal 2007).

In the meantime, Hamas actually gave signals to accept "a new political language" with the Mecca Agreement in 2007 with al-Fatah, since the agreement has shown a second intention to contribute the political process for the solution. However Israeli side "excluded Hamas from new negotiations and chose al-Fatah besides Gaza War in 2009. Hamas' resistance in Gaza war showed the world the impossibility of a solution without Hamas" (Yaşar et al. 2009, p. 109).

The serious reactions from the JDP government against Israeli side, besides Gaza War have shown Turkey's increasing weight in the Palestinian issue. In addition, for the JDP politicians, especially after 2007 general election in Turkey a more available domestic and foreign conjuncture has emerged especially in the Palestinian issue. Moreover, the JDP government ended the negotiation attempts between Syria and Israel because of the Gaza War. Prime Minister Erdoğan saw this operation as an "attack on the peace attempts" (Disrespect towards us 2008) that he pursued for a long time. After Israel made the peace negotiations inconclusive, Ahmet Davutoğlu similarly mentioned that "a peace attempt which we had hardly constituted has been destroyed with a single movement" (Gaza is the redline 2009).

In the aftermath of the Gaza War, the Global Economic Forum in Davos in 2009 were the signs of Turkey's rising involvement to the issue and the radical changes. In the Forum, "Erdoğan walked out of the debate..., after the moderator refused to allow him to rebut Peres' justification about the war... Before storming out, Erdogan told Shimon Peres, Israeli president: "You are killing people and you know killing people well" (Erdogan hailed after 2009). After the incident, Hamas praised Prime Minister Erdoğan's action, and mentioned that, "Hamas pays tribute to the courageous stand of Turkey's prime minister ... who in Davos directly defended the victims of the criminal war against our children and women in Gaza" (Turkish PM and Israel's 2009).

The peace seeking attempts of the JDP politicians remained after the Gaza invasion of Israel. But the Israeli side, with the attack on civil humanitarian aid flotilla in 2010, showed

its ignorance about the peace seeking attempts of Turkey between Palestine and Israel. Ahmet Davutoğlu, confirming this point, said that “in Washington we were expected to meet. Even the meeting became absolute. We took a confirmation from Syrian side. I was going to Washington, however on Monday the attack on those civil ships and I gave up from my decision. Thus they (Israeli side) destroyed a chance for negotiation” (Foreign Minister Davutoğlu 2009).

After Mavi Marmara raid by Israeli forces one of Turkish conditions that have been put forward in order to normalize the relations with Israel, was the removal of the blockade over Gazan people. In addition to that Turkey made an application to the UN for the raid to get an international support. However the Palmer Report was complying with the Israel's argument, as Finkelstein mentions in an interview “the report was written mostly by Israel” (Karagöz, Sancılı 2011). As a result of the report, Turkey unilaterally took several measures against Israel. Several military exercises were abandoned, more importantly the diplomatic relations level was reduced to the secondary secretary. Although Prime Minister Erdoğan recommended Hamas to stop rocket firing, he presented the disproportionate situation between the Israelis and Palestinians. For instance in a conference in South Africa in 2010, “Erdogan's remarks came in response to comments from an Israeli embassy diplomat in South Africa, who criticized Hamas, the Palestinian group which rules Gaza, for launching rocket attacks into Israeli territory: “I have asked many Israeli officials, how many Israelis have been killed by rockets launched from Gaza and Palestine. I could not get an answer; yet tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed from bombs that have rained down on them from Israel, and accused Israel of committing ‘state terrorism’” (Erdogan brands Israel 2011).

As a conclusion, one may come to conclusion that JDP governments have supported the the Palestinians' right of land which was mentioned in the UN's resolutions. The JDP politicians also have struggled to ensure the unity of Palestinian groups, and have supported Hamas' political activities as the legitimate political organization. Hamas' leader Khaled Meshaal in the last general congress of JDP in 2012, showed Palestinians approach to Turkey's support: “Turkey has shown the bright face of Islam”, and “Erdogan, you are not only a leader in Turkey now, and you are a leader in the Muslim world as well” (Turkey's PM says 2012).

Turkey and Syria

The evolution of Turkish-Syrian relations has passed through different volatile stages. To understand the significant progress made in Turkish - Syrian relations since AK Party Government came to the power.

Starting the renewal of the Turkish - Syrian dialogue was initiated between Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and the future Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, during

Turkish President's participation in the funeral of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. Despite being criticized by the US for visiting Syria (Aras and Köni 2002). The President Necdet Sezer gave a new impulse to bilateral relations. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad also supported this initiation and in 2000 several visits in ministerial level to Turkey were done: The Internal Minister of Syria Muhammad Harbai (September), Vice-President Abd al-Khalim Khaddam (November).

Both visits were organized at the highest level and showed serious intentions of the parties. In November of the same year held a brief meeting between the presidents of Syria and Turkey at the summit of the leaders of the Muslim states in Doha. From the perspective of the development of bilateral relations should also be mentioned the meeting of the officer corps of Syria Hasana Turkmani and his Turkish counterpart in Ankara Husseinoglu in 19 June 2002. During the meeting a number of issues discussed, including - the fight against terrorism, demining the entire border between the two countries, the possibility of holding joint military exercises.

As a new milestone can be characterized relations between the two countries after Justice and Development Party came to the power, whose foreign policy is aimed at establishing closer ties with the Middle Eastern countries. The evidence of pragmatism in Turkish foreign policy could be seen in shuttle diplomacy of the Turkish leadership, aimed at preventing the danger of a new war in the Persian Gulf in 2003. Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Gul in late 2002 - early 2003, visited many countries in the region - Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran. Ankara called for an unprecedented summit with the leaders of Iran and Arab states in the region, and in January 23, 2003 in Istanbul such meeting took place.

In 2004, for the first time in the history, The President of Syria made an official visit to Ankara. On the background of the cooling of relations between Israel and Turkey analysts have praised Assad's three-day visit as 'historical' in terms of final settlement of the main problems between Syria and Turkey. Assad told CNN Turk that 'building any Kurdish or other ethnic entity in Iraq would cross a "red line" for all Iraq's neighbours' (Syrian president makes 2004) and it made clear that on Kurdish issue both sides' position became very close. Turkish Prime Minister also replied in the same spirit. President Assad and Prime Minister Erdogan during the meetings signed an agreement on preventing double taxation and mutual investment was the impetus for the expansion of trade turnover between Syria and Turkey; and an agreement to open trade mission in Hatay became a de facto recognition of the existing borders by Syria.

In December 2004, Turkish Prime Minister made an official return visit to Syria. During the visit the Turkish and Syrian presidents stated desire to develop cooperation in various fields. Both parties were in favor of preserving the territorial integrity of post-Saddam Iraq. During the talks stated that Turkey and Syria have more in common than differences, which is a solid foundation for the further development of good neighborly relations. These visits

gave positive results: The Free Trade Agreement was signed between the two countries, cooperation in the fields of agriculture and improvement of irrigation was decided. The water issue also started to be discussed and not de jure, but actually stopped to be a problem.

Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Syria in 2009 resulted two leaders signing a formal agreement in May 2008 resolving the issue of compensation for the agricultural land and business properties of nationals from Turkey and Syria in each other's countries that were confiscated during the 1950s and 1960s. Turkish property in Syria is estimated at approximately \$40 billion, while Syrian property in Turkey is about \$10 million (Bishku 2012). In October 2009 and again in December 2010, meetings of the Turkish-Syrian High Level Strategic Cooperation Council resulted in the signing of numerous bilateral agreements on environmental protection, social services and energy, among other things. In 2010, 750,000 Syrians visited Turkey, while 1.35 million Turks visited Syria. Trade volume between the two countries reached nearly \$2.5 billion, up from \$1.6 billion in 2009 (Bishku 2012; Turkish State Minister 2011).

In April 2009, Turkey and Syria engaged in a joint military exercise (Bishku 2012), which lasted three days. On the same day, the two countries signed a technical military cooperation agreement to deepen collaboration between their defense industries (Tür and Hinnebusch 2013 p. 166). During AKP Governments Turkish-Syrian relations in a short period of time reached the high-level strategic cooperation. However, Syrian crises in 2011 changed the situation. Turkey's foreign policy decision makers realized high level talks with Damascus to stop violence, but allowed Syrian opposition leaders held a meeting in Antalya aiming to Turkey's position toward the incidents, the result of which de facto finished of all positive relations built (Aslan 2012, p. 105). The next stage of improving Turkish-Syrian relations, perhaps, be only when Syria solves, firstly, its internal problems; and we hope that soon AKP's "Syria is Turkey's door to the Middle East, and Turkey is a gateway to Europe for Syria" (Gül: We will improve 2009) approach will give its fruits to both sides.

JDP and Arab Spring

It is an undeniable reality that after the AKP's landslide in Turkey, Turkish image has commenced to gradually change in a positive direction, when it is compared with Kemalist era and the Cold War era in the eyes of Arab nations (Nafi 2009, p. 64). JDP is considered to successful model by Arabs. The electoral success of the Justice and Development Party, the rejection of U.S. combat in Iraq, Ankara's mediator role between Syria and Israel and a Palestinian policy have created an atmosphere which is receptive to Turkey's increasing role in the Middle East (Ibid., pp. 72-76).

Although AKP does not have any open trace of Islamism in its party and government program and it is highly focused on EU membership, many Arabs consider it to be Islamist

party because of its origins. They point to, as proof of the Islamist identity of Justice and Development Party, the headscarf debates in Turkey and veiled wives of leaders in the party. (Shafiq 2009, pp. 33-34). In particular, Islamic movements in Arab countries are prone to promote AKP as a victory of political Islam (El-Labbad 2009, p. 55).

In research on the Egyptian people's perception of Turkey, six countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Tunisia, Malaysia, Morocco and Turkey) were offered as political and economic model to respondents from Egypt. They chose Turkey as model with 54 percent of the votes, followed by Saudi Arabia with 32 percent of the votes (Barkey 2012). According to Barkey, Turkey has been more popular than before because of marrying religion with politics as well as a result of its distance from Israel (Ibid.). Finally, Turkish economic prosperity has made it attractive in the eyes of many people.

According to a more general investigation in the Middle East and North Africa region, 78 percent of participants from Arab countries see Turkey as a mediator between Israel and Palestine. The integration of the EU and Turkey's position in G20 has also affected Arabs positively. Furthermore, 61 percent of participants see Turkey as a model. The question of "why do you see Turkey as a model" is answered by 32 percent of participants as because of its democratic regime. Respectively, the other reasons are the economy with 25 percent, Muslim identity with 23 percent, and secularism with 17 percent and finally strategic importance with 8 percent. Apparently, Turkey is a good composition of Islam and democracy according to most participants (Akgün and Gündoğar 2011, p. 23). Turkey is even more supported, at 78 percent, than Saudi Arabia. Also, 75 percent of surveyed people believe that Turkey should contribute to the peace process between Israel and Palestine. In fact, in terms of peace building, Arab people believe that Turkey is more effective than the U.S., the EU, the UN, China and Russia (Ibid.) These rates have not been fluctuated over the last few years, and they are becoming a structural characteristic.

Turkey's new regional initiatives especially towards the Middle East and North Africa have had strong economic motives. The transnationalisation of small- and medium-sized business in Turkey, the old Kemalist bourgeoisie and the business associations like TÜSİAD, MÜSİAD, TUSKON have emerged as central actors in Turkey's foreign policy initiatives.

In the "Arab spring" Turkey supported the opposition in Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, and so on. Turkey warned Hosni Mubarak leave the power, in order to prevent more deaths, extending thereby "helping hand" performances that began in Tahrir Square. Erdogan was the first public figure to visit Egypt after the parting of Hosni Mubarak from power. In one of his statements, Erdogan stressed that the new Egypt should focus on secularism and democracy. He added that secularism opens many "doors" for the state. But his words were not accepted by some political circles, such as the "Muslim Brotherhood".

Turkey most actively involved in the processes taking place in Libya. This was recognized by political analysts. The importance of inter-state relations stood in front of revolu-

tionary action in this country. According to some information sources, more than 20,000 Turkish citizens and builders have been in this country before the trial began. Not only the Prime Minister of Turkey, but also other Turkish statesmen, such as A. Davutoglu, was extremely active in negotiations with Muammar Gaddafi. However, negotiations and warnings made by the Turkish side were also unsuccessful. Turkey offered Gaddafi to conduct reforms. But, none of the advices of Turkish politicians were implemented and, finally, the Gaddafi regime collapsed, and he was killed.

Before the uprising in Syria, Turkey had a very strong economic and political relation with this country. As an example, the cancelation of visa regime between the two countries can be shown, and people on both sides could move freely from one country to another. But the result of the uprisings in Syria and the situation in the Syrian government circles regarding Turkey, led to the fact that political relations between Turkey and Syria have weakened, to the point that nullified. "Arab Spring" created a dialogue between Turkey and Arab world. New Turkish bureaucracy tries to keep pace with this new period, sometimes in a hurry and inexperienced ways, but surely acting towards adaptation situations in the Arab world. The "Arab Spring" helped popularization of Turkey in the region. There are also some states that aspire to become a leader in the region and, in general, the leader of the Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran and Turkey are the strongest in the Muslim world. But in this situation among these countries, Turkey is the strongest. Iran and Turkey are the leaders of the region. One of the authors of the "New York Times" writes that the "Arab Spring" widened the gap between Turkey and Iran, and Turkey is a real winner processes. Turkey's foreign policy in relation to the "Arab Spring" has strengthened the position of the State.

Conclusion

By studying Turkish-Middle Eastern relations under AKP rule in 2002-2011 following conclusions are made:

- Prior to Justice and Development Party Governments, the orientation of Turkish foreign policy was firmly Western: Turkey's general role in other regions was intimately connected with its role as a part of the West.
- Modern foreign policy of Turkey changed during Post-Cold War era. The roots of this change was made by Turgut Ozal. When JDP came to the power, in 2002, Turkey's leaders started to see the West as one among several vectors of its foreign policy.
- One of the main features of Turkish foreign policy during JDP Governments - the increased activity in the Middle East. This vector of Turkish foreign policy based on quiet diplomacy, consensus, and the search for negotiated solutions between the West and Iran, Syria and Israel, Israel and Palestine.

- Bilateral relations of Turkey and Middle Eastern countries have passed through different volatile stages:
 - with Iraq positive results were achieved, which can be seen not only in security issues, but also in trade and economic relations;
 - Turkish-Syrian relations have passed through 2 stages:
 - 1) improvement of the bilateral relations after changing the powers in both countries; and
 - 2) being nullified with the “Arab spring”.
- During AKP Government Turkish-Iranian relations has been normalized; due to official visits in high level several agreements were signed on security, transportation, energy and other areas.
- Turkish-Israeli relations worsen after Israel’s invasion to Gaza Strip and Mavi Marmara affair; and still in a complicated situation.
- Arab world sees Turkey as a mediator between the West and Middle East. So called Arab Spring helped Turkey to become more popular in Arab world.

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Polityka zagraniczna Turcji a Bliski Wschód pod rządami AKP (2002-2012)

Streszczenie

Po dojściu do władzy Partii Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju w 2002 roku, Turcja w coraz większym stopniu stawała się zaangażowanym graczem na Bliskim Wschodzie. Stosunki Turcji z krajami bliskowschodnimi określają przyszłość regionu i one stanowią istotę tego badania. Przedmiotem badania są stosunki Turcji z krajami bliskowschodnimi, natomiast podmiotem rola rządu Partii Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju. W sensie granic geograficznych teza ta obejmuje region Bliskiego Wschodu. Ramy chronologiczne badania stanowi pierwsze dziesięciolecie rządów Partii Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju (2002-2012).

Słowa kluczowe: Turcja, Syria, Bliski Wschód, konflikt, turecka polityka zagraniczna.

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