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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Definition of “Neo-ottomanism” :</td>
<td>9-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The Greek view</td>
<td>10-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The Turkish view</td>
<td>18-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The International view</td>
<td>23-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The modifications of Turkish Foreign Policy :</td>
<td>27-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-Balkans</td>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-Greece</td>
<td>40-46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-Middle East</td>
<td>46-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-Caucasus-Turkic Republics</td>
<td>54-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-Russia</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-US</td>
<td>63-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkey-EU</td>
<td>67-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The challenges for Turkish Foreign Policy</td>
<td>70-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conclusions</td>
<td>80-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bibliography</td>
<td>86-93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Turkey, during recent years, aims at re-conceptualizing its geostrategic and international position through the lenses of a new foreign policy. A pro-active and multi-dimensional role in regional and international affairs has been set on the international political framework. However, such a tendency was first met during Özal’s era. After Özal until early 2000’s the Turkish government focused more on domestic politics and national interests, rather than the international role of the country. Nevertheless, the emergence in power of an Islamic party, AKP, set a new axis of priorities concerning Turkish Foreign Policy, influenced by Ahmet Davutoğlu, firstly as advisor of Prime Minister in foreign affairs and then as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The press either refers to “Neo-ottomanism”, a “New Middle East policy” or “A New Era” in Turkish Foreign Policy. This dissertation aims to give a definition of the term “Neo-ottomanism” and its influence on Turkish Foreign policy.

The dissertation has five chapters. The First Chapter, is the introduction to the subject. The Second Chapter offers a definition of the term “Neo-ottomanism”. The Third Chapter outlines the main changes in Turkish Foreign policy toward its multiple regional interests (Balkans, Greece, Middle East, Central Asia, Caucasus, Russia, USA, EU). The Fourth Chapter examines the challenges of this policy regionally and internationally. The Concluding Chapter gives a summary of the aforementioned issues and proposes future tendencies for Turkish foreign policy. As far as research sources concerned, political analysis, speeches, journals, newspaper articles, studies and related books would be taken under consideration.
Introduction

This dissertation examines the emergence of “Neo-ottomanism” in Turkey’s politics and its influence in Turkish foreign policy practices. The time frame for the present dissertation is the time of formation of Neo-ottomanism, at around 1987 to the present.

Turkey has in recent decades acquired a growing importance in terms of international politics. This is more or less due to its geo-political and geo-strategic position, a land between Europe, Asia and Africa, including most troublesome regions. Moreover, Turkey’s proximity and contacts with major energy suppliers explain also its geo-strategic importance and the necessity to follow a clear strategic plan towards foreign policy.

The end of the Cold War was also the end of bipolar political structure and stability. The change of balance in their bilateral relations in the region as well as in its relations with Western or Western-oriented organizations has added greatly to a new foreign policy process. Turkey was struggling in order to find its position in the new emerging world. Turkey, having understood the validity of its geography, at the center of the destabilized region, between Balkans in the West and Caucasus and Middle East in the East and South, decided to take advantage of the international political environment and emerge as a major regional actor, owing to its long existence and history within the region.

It could be claimed that since the end of the Cold War or even since Önal, a re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy has emerged, informally called “Neo-ottomanism”. Turgut Önal proposed and even implemented to some extent a new
national role conception for Turkey. His vision was to provide his country as a regional leader and a bridge connecting East with the West. Özal even opened dialogue with countries or regions, which were so far out of the country’s interests. However, succeeding governments restored one dimension approach of Turkish foreign policy and intraregional relations weakened, while Erbakan’s policy emphasized only the Islamic identity of the Turks. So, his openness was towards Islamic-oriented countries and not a multi-dimensional one. AKP’s leadership and especially the ascendance of Ahmet Davutoğlu in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “revived” a pro-active and multi-dimensional policy approach.

The aim of the present dissertation is to define the term “Neo-ottomanism” in the Özalist and Davutoğlu’s framework, outline similarities and differences between them and analyze its impact on the Turkish, Greek and international press and analysts and on the character of Turkish foreign policy.

The dissertation is built upon two sources of data. The first is the review of published data in research literature related to the topic. The second is primary sources, consisted mainly by newspaper articles, interviews, political speeches, so that the pulse of time under consideration is given. A literature review was conducted first to search, analyze and build the theoretical framework of Neo-ottomanism. Firstly, most important references of the present dissertation are Turgut Özal’s Turkey in Europe, Europe in Turkey, which analyzes the whole political thought of this important politician and initiator of Neo-ottomanism and Ahmet Davutoğlu’s “Strategic Depth”, which is considered by the majority as the theoretical framework of today’s foreign policy. Secondly, a study with the title: “Turkish Foreign Policy:
New concepts and reflections”, which helped me, define my dissertation topic. Thirdly, Turkish press both pro-governmental and oppositional, American and Greek press, all presented clearly the interpretation the term had in different socio-political frameworks and also its impact on the public. In addition to that, the criticism, which was most of the times exaggerated, was evaluated as a part of Neo-ottomanisms’s discourse. Also, Alexander Murinson’s article in the Middle Eastern Studies Journal with the title “The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy” was a key reference for the present dissertation, as it analyzes in a dispassionate way, not following a certain think tank or political ideology, the origins of Neo-ottomanisms, the definition of Neo-ottomanisms, the extent at which Neo-ottomanisms is compatible with the “Strategic Depth” theory and policy today.

In order to analyze the modifications of Turkish foreign policy regarding its interaction with certain countries or regions: the Balkans, Greece, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia countries, Russia, US, EU, in a Neo-ottomanist framework, selected books like The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy edited by Lenore Martin and Dimitris Keridis, following the beginning of Turkey’s negotiations with the EU, the Turkish Foreign Policy in the post Cold War Era, following the 9/11 facts, edited by Idris Bal and Turkey's New World. Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy edited by Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayari, at the turn of the new millenium, should be referred.

There is a consensus that the man who ignores its past, cannot live his present and builds his future not in a proper way. Turkey for a long time misinterpreted its past. A change of dynamics and an identity crisis both of the society and the
democracy caused a re-conceptualization of the past. In this respect, Neo-ottomanism, emerges as a theory, which supports the reconciliation with the Ottoman past, the revival of its successful multiethnic co-existence, of administration effectiveness and cultural influence. This re-conceptualization of Turkish foreign policy, which dates back to Özal’s era, has given a sense of confidence and the theoretical background for initiating an assertive foreign policy, which provided many opportunities for the country to act as an important regional factor and evoked many challenges for the effectiveness of this vision and the stability of the region. However, politico-economic conditions of the country prevented the realization of such a vision. The emergence and prevalence of political Islam in Turkey’s political life during the last decade has, unlike inauspicious predictions, not led the country to radicalism. In fact, the constitutional and institutional reforms, which characterize the country’s political agenda, aim at creating an environment which accepts multi-ethnic and multi-cultural diversity. Bearing in mind that a state’s foreign policy is greatly influenced by a state’s collective historical memory, Davutoğlu embarks on a re-conceptualization of Ottoman past in terms of collective memory.

However, in the international environment, the term has been misinterpreted as irredentist and met harsh criticism. It was considered either as a differentiation of Turkey for Europe’s principles and interests and a turn to the Eastern world value system or as a reaction to the non-membership status of Turkey concerning the EU and a way to prove its power, its capabilities, its role as a strategic partner for the West. However, Neo-ottomanist policy is more than that.

This dissertation aimed at examining the “old-new” approach of Turkish
Foreign Policy, “Neo-ottomanism”, through the following questions:

- Which are the changes of regional and international system in the last two decades?
- How and in what extent have these changes transformed the foreign policy of Turkey into a new one?
- How can we define the term “Neo-ottomanism”?  
- How much did “Neo-ottomanism” affected Turkish foreign policy?
- How is the “Neo-ottomanist” policy being implemented in daily foreign policy issues?
- Which are the challenges for this new foreign policy approach?

The dissertation has five chapters. The First Chapter, is the introduction to the Subject, also a brief historical framework, the literature overview and methodology of the dissertation is given. The Second Chapter offers a definition of the term “Neo-Ottomanism”, how and when it emerged, its nature and its role in Turkish Foreign Policy. The Third Chapter outlines the main changes in Turkish Foreign policy during the last decades in regional and international politics. The Fourth Chapter examines the challenges of this policy regionally and internationally. The Concluding Chapter gives a summary of the aforementioned issues and proposes future tendencies for Turkish foreign policy.
Definition of “Neo-ottomanism”

“Neo-ottomanism” is a term, which emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century and has raised great criticism and discussion. Although there is no reference to the term at political level, its use by the press is abundant. According to Kemal Karpat (Karpat K., 2002, p. 524), Neo-ottomanism is a neoterism by the Greeks given to Turkey after the invasion in Cyprus in 1974. Therefore, the term has negative connotations. It was adopted by the international press during the Bosnian war in early 1990’s to characterize Turkey’s sympathy and support provision for all Muslim populations in the region, which was considered to be extravagant. Turgut Özal is considered by the majority of analysts and scholars as the initiator of Neo-ottomanism in Turkey, while Ahmet Davutoğlu, today’s Foreign Minister is considered to have led Neo-ottomanism to its maturity. The use of the term parallel to the policy gradually faded out in mid-1990’s, as Turkey entered an introversive phase in politics as a result of political and economic instability. Any reference of the term, mainly in 1998, when a rise of political Islam was observed, echoed Özal’s political framework. Neo-ottomanism recently has been used to a great extent and criticized both by the Turkish and the International press, characterizing Davutoğlu’s foreign policy as such. However, Davutoğlu himself denies that his policy is Neo-ottomanist (Çamlıbel C., 28.8.2011). While, it has caused serious concern to its neighboring countries. In that sense, it is essential that a definition of Neo-ottomanism is given through the Turkish,
the Greek and the International view.

a) The Greek view

The term “Neo-ottomanism” and its implementation in Turkish foreign policy has caused great concern to the Greek side. The majority of political analysts outlines three basic characteristics of this theory: Ottoman heritage, Islamic rhetoric and a political conciliation between Kemalism and political Islam. The over-activity of Turkish foreign policy and its goal for political, cultural and economic expansion of their influence in multiple regions is obviously connected, mainly in conservative intellectual circles, with Turkish possible hegemonic or territorial aspirations, consisting thus an urgent threat for the Greek sovereignty. In this respect, Davutoğlu’s claims for a “restoration of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans”, edited in Wikileaks has raised caution of the Greek side (Ήφαιστος Π., Wikileaks vs Νταβούτογλου, 2010). What is most important is that scholars and analysts, not belonging to the conservative political space, also show their concerns over Turkey’s assertive foreign policy either they characterize it as “Neo-ottomanism” or not.

According to Lieutenant Kanavakis (Καναβάκης Ε.), Neo-ottomanism emerged in 1974 as a re-conceptualization of Kemalist foreign policy to a pro-active one, while he associates the Cyprus issue and the Aegean dispute with neo-ottomanist policy. He acknowledges Özal as the politician who initiated this policy, however, he believes that Neo-ottomanism turned to its more dynamic phase during Erdoğan’s governorship. Unlike others, he considers that the military factor is still one of major
importance for the development of Neo-ottomanist theory and practice.

On the other hand, scholar Grigoriadis\(^1\) (Grigoriadis I., 2010, p. 4) does not consider the term “Neo-ottomanism” as valid, as he holds that it was a term used by the Özalist regime, just to shape the extraordinary political initiatives taken by Turgut Özal. He points out that Turkish economic bloom has been interpreted as enhanced regional power and also that Turkey promotes its interests through this. He acknowledges a diminished political role for the military, while his skepticism over Turkey’s emergence as a regional or even global actor is obvious (Γρηγοριάδης Ι., 2011) . His view is that such an experiment is quite a risky case. According to the journalist Athanasopoulos in “Βήμα” newspaper (Αθανασόπουλος Α., 2011, Ο δάσκαλος του Ερντογάν στην εξωτερική πολιτική, 2008, O "τούρκος Κίσινγκερ" αναλαμβάνει θέση, 2009) . Neo-ottomanism is no virtual reality, it consists the contemporary Turkish foreign policy, which provides a pro-active role for Turkey and attempts to combine Middle East and European policy. What the Greek side should take into account according to him is the growing influence of Turkey in the Balkans and especially among Muslim minorities. Greece, having a Muslim minority, is, consequently, under threat of its territorial integrity. In addition to that, he sees an attempt to Greece’s diplomatic isolation through Turkey’s enhanced relations with traditional “friends” of the Greeks in the Balkans, like Serbia, and countries connected with Greece with frozen conflicts, like Albania.

1. Dr. Ioannis N. Grigoriadis is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Bilkent University and a Research Fellow at ELIAMEP
While for Ifestos (Ηφαιστος Π., Ένας άλλος κόσμος, ο ισλαμικός..., 2011), Davutoğlu’s doctrine is a matter of clash of civilizations, reminding us of Huntington’s theory\(^2\).

What is striking is that “Strategic Depth”, Davutoğlu’s book, which defines Turkish foreign policy today, edited in 2001, not translated even to a single language until late 2008, has been translated in the Greek language as soon as he was appointed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in less than two years has been criticized through the press, other books and lectures extensively. In that point, we should refer to three at least Greek books criticizing “Strategic Depth”, Davutoğlu’s and Turkish foreign policy in general.

The first one, “Neo-ottomanism and Greek identity” adopts a suspicious, more or less, attitude towards Turkey’s New Activism, summarizing the major concerns for the future of the Greek nation and the Balkans. Stefanos Konstantinides (Κωνσταντινίδης Σ., 2009, σσ. 25,28,32,39) maintains that neo-ottomanist discourse and Neo-ottomanism as a Turkish foreign policy gradually emerged after the adoption of multi-party political system and the emergence of political Islam. According to him Özal shaped Neo-ottomanist theory and supported conciliation between Kemalism and political Islam. While Erbakan paved the way for the emergence of AKP.

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2. According to S. Huntington “The intracivilizational clash of political ideas spawned by the West is being supplanted by an intercivilizational clash of culture and religion”, (Huntington S., 1997, p. 54)
In particular, he states that:

“Turkish foreign policy has shown recently remarkable mobility. This mobility is more obvious since the Islamic party of Justice and Development Party-AKP and Erdoğan’s rise on power in Ankara. It seems that the Islamists continue from the point that Turgut Özal stopped. The main characteristic of this policy is its Neo-ottomanist orientation, which aims at a more intense and autonomous peripheral existence, without shifting of Turkey from the West... The fact that the power in Ankara is implemented in a framework of historical compromise between Islamists and Kemalists, gives to the Turkish foreign policy an important flexibility...” (Κωνσταντινίδης Σ., 2009, pp. 21-22).

He continues that:

“The government of Democratic Party, leaded by Adnan Menderes alloows in this period the political Islam to re-emerge in Turkish society... Thus, it seems that one could set the birth of Neo-ottomanism generally and the birth of neo-ottomanist imperial model of turkish foreign policy in this period. Its birth is also related to the Brittish support given during this period in Turkey to challenge again its rights in Cuprus, which it gave up in the Lausanne Treaty in 1923... The neo-ottomanist model, as far as Turkish foreign policy concerns, was not contradicting actually with Kemalism, since Kemalist Turkey was characterized of having expansionist aspirations in the 1930’s... Necmettin Erbakan could be considered as the “father” of Turkish political Islam... Erdoğan’s AKP success ows greatly to the perception of such idea by Erbakan: The idea of constructing a regime pole, based on Islam, able to challenge Kemalism...” (Κωνσταντινίδης Σ., 2009, pp. 25-27).

He is of the view that Turkey provides the moral duty of the protection of Turkish and...
Muslim minorities in the Balkans in order to justify their growing influence in the region and also the geopolitical position of the country as a diplomatic weapon to promote its European aspirations. His argument is Turkey’s over-activity against Greece’s inactivity:

“Turkey takes advantage of the problems Greece faces in the region, as in the case of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, in order to develop preferential relations with them. In general, Turkey returns to the Balkans using its Islamic and ottoman counter, as this are part of the neo-ottomanist model of Turkish foreign policy. A third counter is geopolitics, through which the Balkans are associated also with the European aspirations of Turkey...The character of Turkish foreign policy is Neo-ottomanist in islamo-ottoman tradition’s respect...In Greek-Turkish issues and the Cyprus issue, Turkish foreign policy is hard and expansionist...The Greek reactions to Ankara’s expansionist policy are still lukewarm. Essentially, Greece’s support to Turkey’s European accession, and not only that, is provided without an advantage” (Κωνσταντινίδης Σ., 2009, pp. 39-40).

Theodoros Batrakoulis (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, σσ. 70,73,84) claims that the collapse of the Soviet Union activated nostalgia for the Ottoman past and consequently a framework of re-establishment of Ottoman Empire and Islam in the Balkans. The axes of Turkish foreign policy formulated by “Strategic Depth”, geographic and historic depth of Turkey, aim, according to him, at Greece’s isolation from the Cyprus to the Balkans and full Greek allegiance to Turkey’s demands (!). In his exact words:

“In 1989, there was a re-emergence of ethno-religious minorities in Europe, as for almost half a century their problems had been undermined in the bipolar international
system... As far as the Balkan Peninsula concerned, from the early years followed the fall of socialistic regimes, Ankara created a framework of reconnection with the Ottoman past, the Turkish population and the Islamic communities of the region. It could be considered as a geopolitical phenomenon of dedicated atavism... Focusing on Turkish foreign policy, it could be considered as an issue of re-Islamism and re-Ottomanism... There is a consensus that, in the last three decades, Turkey turns towards a re-Islamism, which continues Ottoman tradition. Furthermore, it could play a role complementary to that of the Western countries in the Balkans, mainly because of their remarkable Muslim populations. From the early 1990’s, Turkey has made systematic effort to construct a favorable to her “Muslim arc”, which starts from the Turkish and Muslim minority of Bulgaria and Greek Thrace and passing by FYROM and Kosovo, ends to Albania...” (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, pp. 70-73).

For today’s Neo-ottomanism he remarked that:

“Nevertheless, Turkey has, as we have seen, a neo-ottoman geostrategic plan. Ankara aims at Greece’s isolation from Cyprus to the Balkans and full Greek allegiance to Turkey... Thrace is a goal of revisionist/expansionist policy of the Turkish regime, in which there is a peculiar coexistence of Islamo-democrats-Kemalist-Military... Ankara aims with its propaganda to persuade the international actors that, in the Greek Thrace, lives a solid Turkish community, which is under pressure from the Greek state, and evoke a territorial issue...” (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, pp. 84-85).

The second one, “Strategic Depth, Living Space and Genocides”, adopts an extreme attitude towards the writer of “Strategic Depth”, Ahmet Davutoğlu and his aspirations. The author (Μεγαλοκονόμος Μ., 2010, σσ. 17,21-25) even compares “Strategic Depth” with “Mein Kampf” (!), clearly comparing thus Davutoğlu with
Hitler:

“Nevertheless, the manifested recognition of the work of Ahmet Davutoğlu and his obvious revisionism reminds automatically the elder of other admiration and recognition from the West manifestations towards the greatest revisionist of middle war period...” (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, p. 15).

He believes that the contemporary socio-political conditions are similar with that before the outbreak of the second World War:

“The circumstances are suitable for clashes, when there are great reversals, like the one, which took place twenty years ago, from bipolarity to one pole system and then to multi-polarity. These changes (as both “Strategic Depth” and “Mein Kampf” refer) do not last forever. So, any advantage by these circumstances should be taken quickly and in time... The present circumstances of enormous globalization are, in this respect, unique in history of global economy... The Third Reich considered similarly as a “chance”, the time, when before the war, their main rival, France had also the same problems...” (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, pp. 20-22).

Also his references to Lebensraum (Μεγαλοκονόμος Μ., 2010, σ. 32), to the variability of borders, to the challenges for Greece and the Balkans all resemble, according to the author, with that of Hitler’s policy:

“Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” underlined always a number of secondary malformations, as far as the definition of the European territory concerned in order to continue displeasure, through which the National-socialistic Movement survived before the Second World War. In the example of Greek-Turkish relations, it is characteristic how the sense of being underclass is expressed by Ahmet Davutoğlu for the fact that the Aegean islands were given to Greece after the Second World War... Davutoğlu, referring to the borders of the Middle East, added that:
“none should consider that the borders are permanent, because someone draws the borders...”. The same wrote Hitler in “Mein Kampf”, almost identical: “The borders of the states are defined by humans and change by humans...” (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, pp. 24-25,32).

He also believes that the enhanced regional and global role that Davutoğlu demands for his country is overweening and hazardous (Μεγαλοκονόμος Μ., 2010, σ. 50):

In addition to that, he is suspicious of the intentions and consequences of Turkey’s duty for the protection of all Turkish and Muslim minorities, in several regions:

“The “protection” internationally of the minorities who interest Turkey, with a change that refers to the Islamic population, reminds us intensively of Hitler’s: "The Movement (National-socialistic) should be aware that as guards of the highest form of human nature in this world, we also have the highest duties; and it could succeed it better as long as it is conscious that it helps the German people to understand their race” (Μπατρακούλης Θ., 2009, pp. 76-77).

He claims that Greece and other ex-Ottoman states are under threat of extinction or assimilation by the growing neo-ottoman influence (Μεγαλοκονόμος Μ., 2010, σσ. 31,77-78).

While Stavros Lygeros in “Islamist Terrorism, USA and Neo-ottomanism” adopts a detached -in a sense- approach of Neo-ottomanism, except for the characterizing of Turkish foreign policy as “having imperial grandeur” (Λυγερός Σ., 2010, σ. 200), he examines mainly the soundness of his arguments and concludes that neo-ottomanist theory is based on a idealization of Ottoman era (Λυγερός Σ., 2010, σ. 201). In his exact words:

“As theorist of Neo-ottomanism he visualizes and as Foreign Minister he tries to construct a peripheral system, whose center and in the role of hegemony would be his
country. He idealizes Ottoman Empire and presents it as a decisive and regulatory factor of historical development in the wider region, in order to promote his strategy. He even searches for ancestry also in the ancient civilizations of the region, in order to support his argument. Arbitrarily, he states that the Ottoman Empire compounded in the course of time these civilizations... The Turkish Foreign Minister uses as a vehicle the co-existence in the context of the Ottoman Empire, which resents in an ideal way as a common history...” (Λυγερός Σ., 2010, pp. 201-202).

He also observes that reflective diplomacy is not enough to resolve conflicts with Greece and Cyprus (Λυγερός Σ., 2010, σ. 207):

“The only serious exceptions in the diplomatic scene, which Ahmet Davutoğlu has set up with the title “zero problems with the neighbors” are their relations with Greece and Cyprus. This is not random. Greek-Turkish issues and the Cyprus issue are live problems with real stakes and not superstitions or conflicts for the past... Therefore, while in all other diplomatic fronts the Turkish diplomacy has shown great flexibility, in both fronts concerning Hellenism it appears flexible in the rhetoric level, but inflexible in essence”. (Λυγερός Σ., 2010, p. 207)

On the whole, the Greek approach of emerging Neo-ottomanism is on the one hand xenophobic, suspicious, nationalistic and passionate, on the other hand a dispassionate approach examines the validity of Davutoğlu’s arguments in forming such theory, raises some issues of intellectual inconsistency and expresses skepticism on goals and practices of their own country’s foreign policy.

b) Turkish view

Although Ahmet Davutoğlu does not accept the title of “reviver” of Neo-
ottomanism in Turkey, it is widely accepted that he initiated a new era in Turkish foreign policy, whether one accepts the term Neo-ottomanism or not. Cengiz Çandar explains that “Neo-ottomanism” can easily be considered by Turkey’s neighboring countries and regions as “expansionism”. Therefore, Ahmet Davutoğlu disapproves such a characterization (Çandar C., 2009, p. 5).

It is remarkable that there is variability among Turkish press columnists, analysts and professors regarding the definition of Neo-ottomanism in today’s Turkish policy. On the one hand, there is one group which is in favor of the new foreign policy line, on the other hand there is another which expresses its skepticism and differentiation towards new Turkish foreign policy. What is surprising though is some analyses which compare Davutoğlu’s with Atatürk’s foreign policy.

Bülent Aras observes that there is continuity between Özal’s “Neo-ottomanism” and Davutoğlu’s foreign policy initiatives. However, he is not characterizing Turkish contemporary foreign policy as purely neo-ottomanist. He considers that the Ottoman heritage discourse paves the way for a more effective communication and co-operation between Turkey and neighboring countries and regions. He also emphasizes that

“Turkey’s foreign policy in neighboring regions does not assume a hegemonic role for Turkey but targets an inclusive approach for building peace and security based on the dynamics within these regions” (Aras B., Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy, 2009, p. 7).

Thus, defending formal foreign policy objectives against multiple critics. He is also of the view that Turkey should pay attention both to Muslim and non-Muslim
neighbors, if it is to become a global actor (Aras B., What is the "strategic depth"


According to Kınıklıoğlu (Kınıklıoğlu S., 2007), Neo-ottomanism, which is
mainly a reconciliation with the Ottoman past, emerged as a response to globalization
challenges. In that sense, Turkey through its effort to deal with identity challenges,
rediscovered its Ottoman past.

For Taspinar, Neo-ottomanism constitutes today the rehabilitation of the
Ottoman past in the sense of tolerance to multi-culturalism, not a strategic plan for
territorial rehabilitation of the Ottoman Empire (Taspinar Ö., Dancing with the
Kurds, 2008). Taspinar recognizes a connection between Özal’s Neo-ottomanism and
the newly emerged Neo-ottomanism, which is defined as a re-conceptualization of
Turkish identity taking account of its Ottoman heritage and a pro-active foreign
policy (Taspinar Ö., Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist foreign policy, 2008). Taspinar is
also of the view that Turkey aims at ensuring its sphere of influence in former
Ottoman regions, where national and economic interests meet, at political, economic,
diplomatic and cultural level. Furthermore, Neo-ottomanism, according to him,
considers Turkey as a central rather than peripheral country as its location is at
the center of the wider region of international interest (Taspinar Ö., Turkey's Middle

In her article “Looking to the East”, Aslı Aydintasbas understands the term
“Neo-Ottomanism” as a new axis in Turkish foreign politics set by the government
towards the East, without undermining its Western ties. In her phrase “The sleeping
giant – a member of NATO and a candidate for EU membership - now seems eager for
“a new role” includes all AKP’s aspirations for enjoying a role as a regional power and a global actor. It gives a sense of grandeur, which is compatible with Neo-ottomanism. However, she remarks that there should be a balance between secularism and Islam solidarity (Aydintasbas A., 2009).

While, for Keyman, the adoption of a new foreign policy in Turkey is just one aspect of a series of transformations and changes in order to meet the EU and international politics’ demands (Keyman F., 2010, p. 17).

Professor Ali Arslan, however, does not acknowledge contemporary Turkish foreign policy as “Neo-ottomanist”. He considers it as “a return to the foreign policy followed during the time of the country’s founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk”. He also supports that EU’s negative stance towards Turkey’s membership has re-activated Turkey’s pro-active foreign policy. He concludes that “Turkey relies on tactical Ottomanism” rather than Neo-ottomanism and that any reference to previous multi-ethnic co-existence should not be regarded as Neo-ottomanism (Yavuz E., 2009).

Similarly, for Oran, Turkey’s foreign policy is compatible with Kemalist Tradition and Neo-ottomanism. He holds that Kemalist foreign policy favored “strong Westernism and good neighbourliness” (Oran B., 2010).

In addition to that, Zahedi and Bacik in their article “Kemalism Is Dead, Long Live Kemalism” also supports that AKP’s policy has proved to be “a defender of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk”, as its policies towards civil liberties, minority rights, the control of military and the development of a free market, all fulfill Ataturk’s vision (Zahedi D. & Bacik G., 2010).

On the other hand, Mumcu states that the “New Turkish Foreign Policy” is not
quite new. He dates it back to post-cold war era. What he finds as an innovation is “the change in Turkey’s relations towards other civilizations”. He also marks a discrimination between Muslim and non-Muslim nations (Mumcu Ö., 2010, p. 15).

On the contrary, Burak Bekdil, columnist of Hurriyet, claims that Neo-ottomanism is rather conservative and xenophobic than progressive. He adds that today’s Neo-ottomanism is deprived of its multiculturalism and is focused on religion and its practice, while it is characterized from times to times by pragmatism. He also states that Davutoğlu’s aspirations for a leading regional role are rather naive. He is obviously a representative of the secular side of Turkish society expressing his concerns for Turkey’s shifting foreign policy (Bekdil B., Why neo-Ottomanism is bad for Turkey, 2009).

On the other hand, Yusuf Kanli considers Neo-ottomanism as an initiative of Turkey’s government to gain cultural and political influence in the neighboring at least region, even characterizes it as a “pax-Ottomana” project. However, he remarks that such aspirations would not probably become true as Neo-ottomanism lacks, according to him, full support of EU and regional powers (Kanli Y., Turkey, an honest broker?, 2009).

For Soner Cagaptay, Neo-ottomanism is a “misnomer” for Turkish foreign policy, which he characterizes as pro-Arab and which is interpreting, as he see it, the world in terms of religion and economic interests (Cagaptay S., 2009).

As already said, there is a variability of opinions in Turkish society, as itself is not homophonous and monolithic. Defenders of traditional secular state fear that Turkey not only is keeping gradually distance from the West, but also that Turkish
foreign policy deconstructs Turkey’s secular character and changes it to an Islamist one, which could easily turn to radical Islamism. In that sense, contemporary Turkish foreign policy, so-called “Neo-ottomanism” is considered as a threat for democracy and society. On the other side, supporters of new Turkish foreign policy are overenthusiastic, as they consider all the opportunities given for their country in the cultural, political and mainly economic sector, as a result of the enhanced role of Turkey in the region. However, there are also skepticism among them about the duration and the effectiveness of such an “experiment”, that Turkey should confirm its role in the region and the neighboring regions in order to benefit from these relations. There are also a few people who claim that today’s foreign policy is fulfilling the vision of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. This could be explained in the sense that Ataturk’s as well as Davutoğlu’s vision is to create a strong, respectful Turkey that would become a model country for the region. Otherwise, Davutoğlu’s openness is obviously different form Ataturk’s objectives for domestic security and stability.

c) International view

The re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy, widely known as Neo-ottomanism, “has generated a wary response on the part of Ankara’s traditional Western allies” (Torbakov I. & Ojanen H., Is Turkey emerging as an independent regional power?, 2009, p. 3). Most of the times Neo-ottomanism has been interpreted as a turn from Western orientation to a fully Eastern orientation of Turkish foreign policy. Furthermore, Turkey’s aspirations for an enhanced regional and global role
has caused serious concern as the “West” understands it as a threat for contemporary balance of power. However, there is also the other side, which regards Davutoğlu’s policy as pure pragmatism or a reaction to EU’s skepticism to full membership of Turkey.

Torbakov and Ojanen (Torbakov I. & Ojanen H., Is Turkey emerging as an independent regional power?., 2009, p. 4) state that such a policy is “rather complementary than contradictory” to Western orientation of Turkey. Turkey has not changed and should not, according to them, change its EU-orientation. They also characterize this policy as “Middle Easternization” rather than “Neo-ottomanism”, which is considered as a “vainglorious neo-imperial ideology” mistakenly attributed to Turkey’s openness to the East.

According to Murinson, Neo-ottomanism was given birth by Turgut Özal, while under Davutoğlu’s doctrine, reached its maturity. Davutoğlu’s doctrine is considered to be a combination of Özal’s Neo-ottomanism as Ottoman legacy is considered again as a “soft power” instrument of Turkey’s policy, Erbakan’s “multi-dimensional” foreign policy, as contemporary Turkish foreign policy is intended to embrace both the East and the West and Davutoğlu’s geopolitics approach, as strategic importance of certain regions is taken under consideration in foreign policy decision-making (Murinson A., 2006, p. 947).

For Dario D’ Urso, Neo-ottomanism is considered as an offensive term, usually used by AKP opponents, as it is obviously connected with imperial aspirations. However, he acknowledges a shift of axis as far as Turkish foreign policy is concerned. He prefers the term “re-orientation” of Turkey’s strategic interests,
which are more or less defined by pragmatism, so does Turkish foreign policy (D’Urso D., 2010, pp. 16-17).

For Meral and Paris, Turkey’s ambitions for a central role in the Middle East and also the enhancement of economic ties with their neighborhood is something far from Neo-ottomanism, which is considered as a combination of mild Islamism and Turkish nationalism. They observe that pro-active foreign policy was adopted since Cem’s era. External pressure, however, led to re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy (Meral Z. & Paris J., 2010, p. 78).

According to Danforth the term “Neo-ottomanism” initiated during Özal’s era, was used either in a positive (Cengiz Çandar) or a negative way (Balkan writers), suggesting a tolerance at multicultural identities within a region in the former case or Turkish imperialism in the latter. Today’s Neo-ottomanism, for Danforth, is focused on enhancing its strategic relations with Muslim and non-Muslim neighbors and not overemphasizing US and NATO ties. In that sense, he believes that Davutoğlu’s Neo-Ottomanism is comparable with Özalist Neo-ottomanism and the non-alignment of Atatürk and İnönü (Danforth N., 2008, pp. 90-91,94).

Having all things concerned, we could say that Neo-ottomanism is a valid term, but not actually in the sense that Neo-ottomanism firstly emerged under Özal. The term “Neo-ottomanism” is a political theory, which characterizes Turkey’s closer relations in political, economic, social and cultural level with countries or regions once belonged to the Ottoman Empire and Turkey’s aspirations to expand its influence to regions with which they have a common Ottoman past. It is a compromise between Kemalism and political Islam, in the sense that it does not
deny Turkey’s western orientation and democratization process, however it also embraces the East, that is, other Muslim countries in its neighborhood. However, the importance of geopolitics and geo-economics in contemporary policy making should also be considered as an important aspect of today’s Neo-ottomanism. Turkey is not drifting away from the West, but it sets other areas of interest as well. Turkey does not have aspirations of reviving the Ottoman Empire in terms of territorial expansion. However, it does have aspirations for political and economic influence. Turkey is not losing its identity, but recognizes and accepts all its aspects as a multicultural and multi-ethnic state.

In an overview of the sources given, we could say that the term “Neo-Ottomanism” has been perceived by different political and national environments either as a theory or as pragmatism. As far as the Turkish view concerned, we could say that the majority of the journalists referring to it belong to the secular, Kemalist political side. The opponents of Neo-ottomanism, associate the term with backwardness, a re-Islamism process and opportunism. So, it reminds us of its negative connotations, given by the time of its birth.

On the other hand, the Greek side, mainly the conservative intellectuals and Journalists, clearly relate Neo-ottomanism to irredentism and consider it as a direct threat for the sovereignty of their country. However, these are not the only part of society, who raises criticism on the emergence of this assertive policy. What it is remarkable, however, is that other than conservative analysts also stand critical to the term and its practice. They show their skepticism on their own country’s limited political initiatives towards a stronger representation in regional and global affairs and
examine the validity and feasibility of Neo-ottomanism.

The international side, however, is quite skeptic of Turkey’s new foreign policy either they recognize it as Neo-ottomanism or not. In the first case, while they recognize the term, they give it a different meaning, rather a combination of mild Islamism and Turkish nationalism. In the second case, today’s Neo-ottomanism is considered as pragmatism. However, all agree and insist –as a form of exhortation, advice, warn towards Turkey-that Turkey should keep its Western orientation.

The modifications of Turkish Foreign Policy

Until early 1980’s, the dominant ideology of Turkey was Kemalism, which aimed at Westernization of Turkey, that is the process of adopting the western political system and western customs. This orientation has been proved by the membership or candidateship of Turkey for Western organizations, so as to turn the Turkish Republic from a declining ex-Empire to an up-to-date democratic western state. The other main principle was keeping the status quo, that is keeping the national borders safe and secure from any external factors. Ottoman past was denied as a symbol of the Empire’s disintegration (Taspınar Ö., Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism, 2008, pp. 2,5).

On the contrary, Özal not only initiated a discussion about Ottoman heritage, but also claimed its role in forming Turkish identity (Ataman M., 2002, pp. 122,125). As Özal stated,
“It is evident that our present cultural synthesis has evolved throughout this history as a result of the interaction of the cultural heritage of the land, as well as our Islamic and pre-Islamic cultures” (Özal T., 1991, p. 2), suggesting Neo-ottomanism as a way to re-identify Turkish nation. Özal through a re-conceptualization of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” stressed the role of Islam and Turkish nationalism for the position of Turks in international politics. He even claimed a role for Turkey as the dominant power of Islamic world and signed a lot of international agreements with the Islamic world, Eastern European, Eastern Asian countries and the United States (Ataman M., 2002, p. 132). He also supported the movement for cultural freedom of the Kurds. His initiative for the establishment of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was another step towards his aim at building regional cooperation. However, he was also intended to strengthen relations with the West as well, but not as an inferior member-state. His main objectives were economic re-structuring and political strengthening within the region. Özal also challenged the intervention of the military in political affairs. Although Turkey applied for EU membership during Özal’s era, for Özal, the integration of Turkey in Europe was not a purpose of its own, but an important step towards economic and political development of the country (Danforth N., 2008, p. 89)

The succeeding governments aimed at restoring the traditional Kemalism, retained though aspects of Özal’s policy, that they considered as compatible with the official state ideology. Tansu Çiller’s speech on “Turkish foreign policy in its dynamic tradition” (Çiller T., 1996) is characteristic of Çiller’s foreign policy aims and principles. She stressed that “respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial
integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states” are key elements of Turkish foreign policy. The last one “non-interference” principle is repeated many times throughout her speech. While she contradicts the “non-interference” principle with its opposite, as she lets us understand, characterizing the latter as “adventurism”. On the other hand, she considers Turkish foreign policy as “multifaceted” and is proud of Turkey’s membership in many organizations like NATO, OECD, OIC, BSEC, the Council of Europe, the Economic Co-operation Organization. However, for Çiller, what defines relations with other countries is not just geography and history, but also satisfying mutual interests.

According to Ismail Cem (Cevik I. & Kanli Y., 1999)

“Turkey is a multi-regional country... not a “regional power”... that would mean Turkey is a power in one region; a powerful country in the Balkans, for example. Turkey is multinational power. It is powerful in the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus. Turkey has many problems in different geographic areas, but besides this, Turkey has many opportunities in the same geographic regions”.

It is evident that there is continuity in Turkish foreign policy since then as the concept of multiple dimensions of Turkish foreign policy, its potential role as a peace mediator in several regions and also its interests beyond its traditional borders, are all referred in that interview of Foreign Minister, Ismail Cem. What is missing is the reference to the Ottoman legacy as a legitimizing basis for Turkey’s assertive policy.

In the post 9/11 era, Turkey understands its role “across a vast area from the Adriatic to Central Asia” and also as a “link between the West and the Islamic world, as a modern and secular state with a predominantly Muslim population of Turkish
characteristics”, as ambassador Soylemez remarked (Soylemez Y., 2001). The re-emergence of the Turkish model revives Turkey’s regional ambitions and their documentation on the basis of former Ottoman ties.

It seems that there is a continuity in the process of transforming foreign policy-making according to the needs of domestic, regional and global environment. Under AKP rule this process “reached its peak” (Aktaş Yelken G., 2010, p. 41).

The main vision of contemporary Turkish leadership is that Turkey should possess the status it deserves regarding its geopolitical and geostrategic importance, as well as its long history in the region. In this respect, Turkey rediscovers its cultural and civilizational affinities with neighboring countries and regions and also the limits of engagement with these countries considering the opportunities given. In addition to that, the preservation of stability and security within the region is of major importance for the Turkish leadership. Turkey also envisions itself as not only a regional mediator, but also a promoter of regional cooperation and dialogue and a constructor of new regional order. Even more, Turkish leadership is intended to transform Turkey from a central country within a certain region to a power of global range (Aras B. & Gorener A., 2010, pp. 81-85 ˙Aktaş Yelken G., 2010, p. 39,52).

Davutoğlu states that “Turkey is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country all at the same” (Davutoğlu A., 2010, p. 35). In that sense, a review of Turkish foreign policy in a Neo-ottomanist context towards the aforementioned regions is what follows.
Turkey-Balkans

The end of Cold War was followed by the emergence of new states, new borders, new economical and political opportunities, new ideas, and new conflicts. In the Balkans, Turkey not only because of its past, but also because of its position had such a potential to become the peace-maker country and stabilizing factor in the region (Kut Ş., 2000, p. 74). As Alan Cowell reported in New York Times:

“With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of power of its former Eastern European allies, Turkey has been seen by the United States and other Western nations as a potential regional anchor” (Cowell A., Turkey Faces Moral Crisis Over Bosnia, 1992),

thus reflecting the contemporary common sense.

There is a consensus that the emergence of a new international order encouraged Neo-Ottomanist rhetoric (Kut Ş., 2000, p. 88). In the same article, Cowell pointed out that the long Ottoman rule over the Balkans “has left deep regional suspicions that the Ottoman’s successors might be scheming to fill the post-cold-war vacuum with renewed dreams of imperial glory” (Cowell A., Turkey Faces Moral Crisis Over
Bosnia, 1992). However, more than hegemonic aspirations attracted Turkey’s attention to the region. Stability and security in the Balkans was important for Turkey’s security too. The Balkans located between Western Europe and Eurasia, attracted Europe, USA and Russia, due also to its energy routes. Therefore, Turkey aimed at preventing any regional power to “dominate” the region. Turkey’s economic interests (trade, transportation, tourism) within the region would otherwise be put at risk. In addition to that, great concern about possible migration waves towards Turkey and a possible uprising of Kurdish separatists are all factors justifying Turkey’s interest for the region (Türkeş M., 2004, p. 198) (Larrabee S. & Lesser I., Relations with Greece and the Balkans, 2003, pp. 94, 96).

The exodus of a great number of Turks from Bulgaria in 1989, as they were forced to adopt Bulgarian names and they were deprived of their properties illegally (Kamm H., 4.10.1987), caused a new discourse on who is to blame for the repatriation of refugees and their violated property rights (Haberman C., 22.6.1989). As Davutoğlu observed “whenever there is a crisis in the Balkans...they look to Istanbul” (Davutoğlu A., Unofficial Transcript of Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu's Speech: Principles of Turkish foreign policy, 2009). In general, Turkey’s policy for its minorities in the Balkans was to encourage integration of them into the countries they were living in, keeping though their cultural, linguistic and religious
Turkey chose to adopt a multinational rather than a unilateral policy towards the Balkans. Firstly, Turkey acted towards a peaceful solution to the problem of Yugoslavia, supporting the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. As such a solution was inevitable, Turkey recognized their independence and developed close relations with the newly independent –ex-Yugoslavian- states: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia and FYROM. As scholar Türkeş stated: “Turkey had to play the role of honest mediator to achieve regional stability” (Türkeş M., 2004, p. 204). Therefore, Turkey having recognized the Bosnian war as a great destabilizing factor for the region, tried to put the issue on the international agenda in order to find a solution.

However, Turkey’s actions towards this end, particularly Turkey’s interest on the Bosnian Muslims, caused great suspicion and criticism, as fears of Turkish hegemonic aspirations have risen throughout the region. The Greek side, in particular, understood Turkey’s active policy in the Balkans “as an attempt to establish a “Muslim arc” on Greece’s northern border”, as Lesser and Larrabee (Larrabee S. & Lesser I., Relations with Greece and the Balkans, 2003, p. 95) observed. As journalist
Chuck Sudetic remarks:

“Though it is billed as an effort to end the war in Bosnia, the trip is clearly intended to put Europe on notice that Ankara has a strong interest in Macedonia and other Balkan countries that emerged from the Ottoman Empire after the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913” (Sudetic C., 1993).

While the Western media interpreted Turkey’s active policy through an Orthodox (Greece-Serbia-Russia) – Muslim (Turkey, Bulgaria, FYROM, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania) dispute axis (Türkeş M., 2004, p. 203). In that sense, journalist Engelberg pointed out:

“Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia all of which have at various times asserted territorial claims to Macedonia, would seize parts of that country as the violence increased, according to a possible scenario suggested by C.I.A.. Turkey and perhaps other Muslim nations might then jump in to support Muslim Albania, such thinking goes, while Orthodox Greece would ally itself with the Orthodox Serbs” (Engelberg S., 25.4.1993)

However, Turkey, as a NATO Member, joined in the organization’s air strike against the Serbian side by sending aircrafts and troops. During the Bosnian War the Train and Equip Programme was implemented. At the end of war, Turkey supported the
Dayton Agreement (Kut Ş., 2000, p. 83).

Turkish relations with the Balkans came to stagnancy after Özal’s death, when attention was paid rather to domestic politics than to the Balkans. Major economic problems hinder a commercial and political bloom in the region. Turkish Balkan policy was also affected by the governmental changes in Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece. In particular, Greece’s change of foreign policy caused great concern to its neighboring country, as its influence within the region was increasing at Turkey’s expense (Kut Ş., 2000, p. 75).

Priority given to Europeanization of the Balkans or associations with the NATO faded Neo-ottoman ideology during 1990’s. Nevertheless, Turkey welcomed and clearly supported EU and NATO membership of any of the Balkan states (Türkeş M., 2004, p. 206). “The Balkans should realize that their long term future is in EU membership and European integration”, as ambassador Soylemez remarked (Soylemez Y., 2001).

The change of government in 1997 and the undertaking of Foreign Ministry by Ismail Cem entered a new period for Turkey’s Balkan policy. He emphasized his intentions to make the Balkans an area of major priority for Turkey (Kut Ş., 2000, pp. 74-76). He claimed a more active role for Turkey regarding the Balkan region both during peaceful and tense periods as a state “with insight into the Balkans, with Balkan experience” and also as a “Balkan country” (Cevik I. & Kanli Y., 1999)
During the outbreak of the Kosovo conflict in 1998, Turkey insisted that the rights not only of Albanians but also of Turks and other minorities be respected. When the violence increased in Kosovo, Turkey joined an international intervention, in accordance with international organizations, the USA and the EU, so as not to provoke Balkan countries (Türkeş M., 2004, p. 205). After the NATO intervention, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Cem and later President Demirel went to Kosovo. Such a movement was considered as Turkey’s struggle to confirm relations with the region. It was added that Turkey had tried to protect its influence in Kosovo through the Turkish minority and to search for new opportunities for Turkish firms in the reconstruction of Kosovo.

Turkey participated in the Foreign Affairs Ministers Conference in Cologne on 10 June 1999 that convened in order to adopt the Stability Pact. The Turkish President joined the constituent meeting of the SP in Sarajevo in July 1999. Turkey also hosted the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of South Eastern European Countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia) in Istanbul in June 1998. Turkish President Demirel is one of the founders of the Balkan Political Club, “formulated as a result of several meetings in Sofia in 2001 with the participation of 40 founding members from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia. It aimed to bring cooperation and peace to the Balkans” (Eroglu Z., 2005, pp. 78-79).
All the above could be considered as key steps of the Turkish governments to emphasize the European and Balkan -at the same time- character of their country and also their ability to influence such developments. Süleyman Demirel at the 9th International Conference of the Balkan Political Club emphasized that

“the settlement of conflicts, overcoming economic difficulties and ensuring the political stability and rule of law in the region is a priority we all share”

(Demirel S., 2006),

confirming thus his country’s role as a regional power and a peace-maker.

Turkey’s Foreign policy has not changed dramatically as far as the Balkans concerned, since Erdoğan took up power. His main concerns are still political stability and security in the region. However, Turkey’s role in this objective has become quite prominent.

Current Turkey’s Balkan policy is defined clearly by the Minister of Foreign Affairs through a speech given on “Relations with the Balkan region”,

“developing relations to the highest level with the Balkan countries, with which Turkey has historic, cultural and humanitarian ties; enhancing the existing atmosphere of regional peace and stability; keeping the transportation connection of Turkey with Western and Central
Europe open” (Davutoğlu A., Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs),

and another one on the Conference “Ottoman legacy and Balkan Muslim Communities today”,

“The Balkan region is a buffer zone in a geopolitical sense….The Balkan region has been a region of transaction in the geo-economic sense...The Balkan region is a geo-cultural interaction region…If you have a region with the three characteristics ....either you can be the center of world politics or you will have to be the victim of world competition...Ottoman history is the history of the Balkan region...We can reestablish this success through creating an original ownership, through creating a new multicultural coexistence and through establishing a new economic zone...” (Davutoğlu A., "Ottoman legacy and Balkan Muslim Communities today", 2009)

Turkish foreign policy is based on the Ottoman legacy discourse, its main interests within the region are in geopolitics and geo-economics and even in reviving multiculturalism, so as to provide stability and security to the region. In such an environment can political and economic cooperation flourish. Turkey’s activities towards this aim are following:

In recent years, Turkey has strengthened its military and defense links with all Western Balkan countries. Turkey has invested successfully in Albania, FYROM and Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainly in the communication, banking, construction, mining
and retail sectors. Free trade agreement have been signed between Turkey and most Balkan countries during the last decade. Moreover, Turkey has greatly supported educational improvement and cultural initiatives within the Balkans. A reconstruction of historic Ottoman monuments is under way, while schools and universities have been built due to Turkish initiative (Petrovic Z. & Reljic D., 2011, p. 166). Added to that, scholarships to undergraduate and postgraduate students and language study courses have been offered in Serbia. It is also well-known that Turkey has supported Albanian education and military training for years. Similarly, FYROM has been provided with military equipment and training due to the Turkish contribution.

Furthermore, Turkey provides training for young Bosnia and Herzegovina military professionals, scholarships to Bosnia and Herzegovina nationals for the Turkish military high school or the military academy (Petrovic Z. & Reljic D., 2011, p. 167) (Larrabee S. & Lesser I., 2003, pp. 94-96).

Recently, due to the Turkish contribution, the Serbian Parliament apologized for the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 and both Serbian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian Presidency gave signs of reconciliation. However, rhetoric on Turkey’s longing for its Ottoman grandeur and the perception that Turkey favors the Bosnian side hinder closer ties with the region (Kart E., 2010).

Turkey-Greece
It is common knowledge that Greece and Turkey have a legacy of conflicts during their long neighborliness. However, tension periods were followed by period of cooperation and understanding. Each country has been of major strategic importance for the other. According to the scholar Tsakonas, most of the conflicting issues that created Aegean dispute are not only issues of geostrategic importance, but also of geo-economics (Τσάκωνας Π., 2006, σ. 126).

The great outbreak between Turkish-Greek relations happened in 1974, when Turkish troops invaded in the Cyprus Island and the militarized the northern part of it. It was the time when the Greek press first referred to the term “Neo-ottomanism”, thus characterizing Turkey’s use of hard power. For the following years a series of naval challenges in the Aegean took place intensifying hostility between the two countries. The same year, 1974, a Turkish hydrographic ship reached Greek continental shelf followed by 32 military ships, but a turmoil was prevented.

Another challenge was during the summer of 1976, when the hydrographic ship, “Sismic”, reached almost the center of the Aegean Sea. (Ευσταθιάδης Σ., 4.6.2006) .

On March 1987 the hydrographic ship “Piri Reis” followed by five military ships reached even the Athos peninsula. The two countries came to the brink of war.

Journalist Alan Cowell reported for the *New York Times*:
“The crisis seemed to pull Greece and Turkey, who are nominal allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, back from the brink of hostilities. On Friday both sides threatened military action in a test of wills over the right to drill for oil in disputed Aegean waters…The critical development in easing the crisis, foreign diplomats said, came Friday night when Prime Minister Turgut Ozal of Turkey, under pressure from the United States and other NATO nations, ordered a Turkish seismic research vessel to avoid the disputed waters around three Greek Aegean islands, Lesbos, Lemnos and Samothrace…Mr. Papandreou told reporters today that he felt “restricted optimism” about the crisis …” (Cowell A., Greeks and Turks ease Aegean crisis, 29.3.1987).

Following the crisis of 1987, a meeting of Turkish and Greek Prime Minister in Davos, Özal and Papandreou respectively, initiated a dialogue between the two countries, at least on “low” politics issues. However, the so-called “Davos spirit” faded out as no initiative has been taken by either Greece or Turkey (Bahcheli T., 2000, p. 147 ‘Larrabee S. & Lesser I., , 2003, p. 73-74).

In early 1990’s, during the Bosnian war Turkey’s active policy in the Balkans was regarded by the Greek side as an indirect way of extending their influence to the North of Greek territory and the Balkans in general. In addition to that, some Greeks even imagined that Turkey’s ultimate plan in internationalizing the issue of the
Muslim minority of Greece and presenting themselves as protectors of the minority was the restoration of Turkish sovereignty in Western Thrace (Larrabee S. & Lesser I., Relations with Greece and the Balkans, 2003, p. 95). Since, Turkey has joined all peace-making initiatives of international organizations and also Greece’s influence was increasing in the region, at least for the second half of the decade, such a threat was averted.

However, a new series of challenges has risen since that time, mainly concerning the Aegean. The ratification by the Greek Parliament on 1 June 1994 of the International Law of the Sea, which acknowledged to the countries who signed it the right to establish territorial seas of “a maximum breadth of twelve miles from the baselines” (Bahcheli T., 2000, p. 134), was followed a week later by a Turkish resolution that extension of Greek territorial seas to twelve miles, would be considered as a *casus belli*. In reality, Greek extension of its territorial sea in the Aegean beyond six miles, even in twelve, would block Turkey’s access to its major ports. The territorial extension applies also to aircraft. The Greek proposal for a ten-mile airspace was totally rejected, as airspace should correspond to its territorial seas six miles. FIR intervention is another “hot” issue. Turkish state aircrafts often go through the Greek territory, while military aircrafts have no flight plans. Aerial challenges between the two countries have not stopped until today. This *casus belli* rhetoric has been an obstacle in any attempt of solving the Aegean dispute (Bahcheli
In 1996 Turkey and Greece faced another major crisis over an Aegean islet off the Turkish coast, known as Imia/Kardak, when Turkish journalists on 27th January 1996 lowered the Greek flag and raised a Turkish one on the Imia. The next day the Greek Navy lowered the Turkish one and raised a Greek flag. Turkish military ships and aircraft were moving beyond the six miles, thus they violated Greek territory. The crisis was deescalated with the withdrawal of both forces from the area. The Greek view was that Greek sovereignty was challenged over this matter. Later, the Turkish leaders announced a list of uninhabited Aegean islets, challenging thus their sovereignty, known as “gray areas” (Bahcheli T., 2000, p. 136).

According to Richard Holbrooke, American diplomat and former US Minister of Foreign Affairs,

“Greek-Turkish relation saw signs of reviving of hostility and passion between both countries, hidden in nationalist form, signs similar to that which had poisoned the Balkans and parts of the Central Europe in post-Cold war Europe...” (Παπαχελάς Α., 10.5.1998).

The Turkish-Greek relations reached a dead end when it became known that it was the Greek government that provided finally a shelter to the expelled PKK
leader, Abdullah Öcalan at its embassy in Nairobi. Although this involvement of the Greeks to Turkey’s “internal” problems infuriated the Turkish side and, confirmed, according to their view, Greece’s relations with PKK terrorism on plans against Turkey, an open conflict was prevented (Bahcheli T., 2000, p. 144).

In addition to that the “earthquake diplomacy” developed, when both countries experienced earthquakes, aid was given by both sides and consequently changed the climate in Greek-Turkish Relations. In 1999 Helsinki Summit, Greece lifted finally its veto on Turkey’s candidacy for EU membership. However, only on the condition that there should be a settlement of all Aegean issues by the International Court of Justice until 2004 and also that there wouldn’t be any restriction concerning Cyprus’ accession, whether there would be a solution to the Cyprus issue or not. In this respect, Turkish accession to the European Union “is by no means a foregone conclusion”, as I. Lesser noted (Lesser I., Greece's New Geopolitical Environment, 2005, p. 350). It was expected by the Greek side that an EU candidate country would adopt a milder policy towards an EU member state, in particular, Greece (Τσάκωνας Π., 2006, σσ. 135-136).
As early as 2000 the Foreign Ministers of Greece and Turkey, G. Papandreou and I. Cem respectively, signed a number of bilateral agreements on low politics issues, such as tourism, civilization, environment, trade, multidimensional cooperation, organized crime, migration, drug smuggling and terrorism. In this respect, the *Confidence Building Measures* dialogue reactivated between the two countries. At first, measures were taken just for the strategic section, later both countries consented that there should be also measures concerning tension scaling and good neighborliness (Τσάκωνας Π., 2006, σσ. 138-139).

In 2002-2003 negotiations started between Turkey and Greece in order to come to an end with the Aegean and others disputes. In this respect, Ismail Cem, Minister of Foreign Affairs reported that:

“What I envisage here is a different method of addressing the issue of Cyprus…What would facilitate a positive outcome would be for each party to respect the other’s main sensitivity…” (Cem I., 14.5.2002)

Turkey, under AKP rule, was intended to solve the Cyprus issue, a main obstacle for Turkey’s EU accession (Robins P., 2007, p. 297). However, neither this process nor the revision of the Annan Plan for Cyprus, were meant to end up this dispute.

Also, in 2004, a change of Greek government abolished the time limit of 2004 for the resolution of the Aegean dispute or the Cyprus issue implemented to Turkey. As a result of that, Turkey has more time to enter its reforms into force and solve disputes with neighboring countries. Greece has adopted a milder attitude towards
Turkish challenges (Ευθυμίου Π., 16.1.2005). We could say that there is a Greece-Cyprus-Turkey disputes’ axis and their solutions.

Overall, Turkey’s foreign policy could be characterized as assertive. On the other hand, Greece’s concern on possible threats of its sovereignty, has led to an overextension of equipment. Although most of their disputes are presented as threats of territorial integrity for each other, however Papachelas claimed (Παπαχελάς Α., Ο πόλεμος του πετρελαίου στο Αιγαίο, 2000) that the main factor for Turkish-Greek conflicts is the existence or possible existence of an amount of oil resources within the Aegean. In that sense, both countries claim for themselves their share and their living space in the region.

Recently, Turkish pro-active foreign policy has raised great criticism, skepticism and extravagant statements as far as Turkey’s intentions concerned. Neo-ottomanist discourse rises again and is again associated with irredentism, at least by conservative circles of intellectuals.

Turkey-Middle East

Turkey traditionally followed a non-involvement and non-interference status in the Middle East. However, the governorship and presidency of Turgut Özal initiated a more active policy towards the region. His involvement in the Gulf War, his embargo on Iraq after the invasion in Kuwait, his engagement with Israel, as Syria and Iran were considered as PKK supporters, are all examples of this shift.
(Martin L., 2006, p. 191). He also promoted successfully Turkish investment in the Middle East and vice versa. Özal also showed great concern for the safety and repatriation of Iraqi Kurds after the rebellion against Saddam Husayn (Kirisci K., 2000, pp. 39-40). Özal’s death was followed by a restoration of former conservative thoughts for the Middle East. Turkey adopted a reactive policy towards its challenges in the Middle East, which was considered as the major threat for its territorial integrity. However, Erbakan’s openness to Islamic groups like Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood and Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front, as also his relations with Iran and Libya, challenged not only the domestic political system, but also the Arab world. Eventually, Erbakan was forced to resign under the pressure of military and dominant foreign policy makers (Kirisci K., 2000, pp. 42-43).

Succeeding conciliation governments also adopted the diplomatic way of dealing with Middle East conflicts. However, it was not a successful one (Knudsen E., 2003, p. 211).

AKP’s rise to power initiated a new conception for Turkish-Middle East relations by promoting dialogue, conflicts resolution and democratic reforms in the region. Turkey is intended to play a role of regional leader and protector, based on
soft power and democratization, an example country for reforms, which combines secularism and Islamic values, a bridge state, which connects East with the West and also a global player role, as regional conflicts like those of the Middle East affect global politics, global economy and so global security and stability (Aras B. & Gorener A., 2010, p. 81).

Turkey has realized at least after Özal’s engagement with the region, the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of Iraq. Turkey’s neutrality during Iraq-Iran war provided the country with an increasing energy transit and cross-border trade. As the embargo on Iraq after the Kuwait invasion became less tense, Turkey re-activated trade and energy transit routes with Iraq. After the latest invasion in Iraq in 2003, Turkey was intended not only to contribute to Iraq’s reconstruction, but also to have a reason on political “reconstruction” of Iraq. Turkey’s interest on Iraq is based not only on the fact that it is a border country for Turkey, but also for its Kurdish and Turcoman population. The de facto existence of an autonomous Kurdish government in Northern Iraq has been considered until recently as a threat for Turkey, as it used to be a shelter for PKK fighters, as a recognized autonomous Kurdistan would be a successful example for Turkish Kurds and Kurds of Southeast Anatolia to demand an enhanced autonomy, as the location of a rich oil source would be under Kurdish control (Martin L., 2006, pp. 199-203 & Bal I., Instability in the Middle East and the relevant role of the PKK, 2004, pp. 354-355). Also, Turkey’s rhetoric on the
Turcomans’ interests pointed to an expansion of political influence in the region. Turkey’s recent visit in Iraq and their approach with Kurdistan Regional Government has entered a new era for Turkey’s regional policy (Hale W., 2009, p. 147).

Turkish aspirations to actively contribute to political stability in Iraq has been realized through engagement with UN Security Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Iraq’s neighbors and ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. In that sense, journalist Zeynalov remarked that “The increasing number of Turkish officials in international institutions is proof of Turkey’s rising profile in the world” (Zeynalov M., 21.11.2010). It was also Turkish initiative that mobilized the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference to ensure that Iraq’s national elections in 2005 would be fair (Aras B. & Gorener A., 2010, pp. 87-88).

Turkey’s relations with Hamas and Fatah have raised sharp criticism. However, Davutoğlu’s intention was to prevent an engagement of Hamas with Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis and also support reconciliation between them (Aras B. & Gorener A., 2010, p.87)

As far as relation with Iran concerned, there is a rivalry between Iran and Turkey both in geo-politics and geo-economics, in particular energy politics. Both countries are interested in alternative pipeline routes from Caucasus and Central Asia. However, Turkey does not have any energy resources of its own and aims at ending energy dependency on Russia (Kirisci K., 2000, p. 44). On the other hand, Iranian relations with PKK, as Iran was blamed for hidden support of PKK by providing equipment, health aid, economical support, military training, weapons and shelter,
destabilized the region (Martin L., 2006, p. 206). Iran’s accusations of Turkish support on Iranian opponents added to that. Also close relations between Turks and the Azeri minority of Iran evoked fears of pan-Turkist movements.

Another conflict is Iran’s radical Islam to Turkey’s democracy. In 1997, Turkey and Iran cut off even their diplomatic relations under the pressure of Iranian ambassador on Turkey to implement Sharia² (Martin L., 2006, p. 207 ‘Kirisci K., 2000, pp. 51-52). The political climate between the two countries changed after the rise of AKP in power. This change possibly led criticism on Turkey’s turning to the East and spread fears of adoption of Iranian radicalism by Turkey. Common PKK threat even led to a “security cooperation memorandum” in 2008 between the two countries (Hale W., 2009, p. 154). However, as Kirisci remarks,

“Whatever the bilateral problems and regime differences, pragmatism and non-confrontation usually prevail in Turkish-Iranian ties” (Kirisci K., 2000, p. 52).

It is thus more realistic to consider that it was common economic (pipeline politics), military (against PKK attacks) and defense (development of weapons of massive destruction) challenges that brought the two countries closer, rather than religion.

2. *Sharia* is the religious law of Islam, which deals with many issues of everyday life, is considered to “derive from the Quran and the sayings, practices and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed”, for Turkey, which follows the liberal school of Islamic thought, implementation of *Sharia* is considered anachronistic, (Johnson T., 2010)

Turkey following the “zero problems with the neighbors” policy and the vision for regional “security” aims at facing all these challenges. Abdullah Gül stated in
interview for Stephen Kinzer of *The Guardian* that

“*Iran had a right to develop nuclear energy but not nuclear weapons…Our values are different, but having a good relationship helps the stability of the region*” (Gül, 2008).

For Turkish- Syrian relations a turn of climate was usual. Syrian relations with PKK, economic support and military training of the major threat for Turkey’s sovereignty, escalated relations between the two countries. Also, the water resources dispute, the dispute for the Hatay province, an ex-Ottoman province, which is located in Turkish-Syrian borders, the possession of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, are also considered as destabilizing factors. Turkey and Syria even came to the brink of war in 1998, when Turkish military mobilized towards Turkish-Syrian borders, so that Syria expel Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader from Damascus. That was what Syria actually did. This decision initiated a new era in Turkish-Syrian relations, as military, economic and political cooperation was, since then, under discussion. In this respect, during the last years Turkey and Syria signed a free trade agreement and expressed their intentions to promote together peace and stability in the region (Kirisci K., 2000, pp. 46-47 `Martin L., 2006, pp. 211-215 `Knudsen E., 2003, pp. 206-211 `Aras B. & Gorener A., 2010, pp. 87-89).

In this respect C.Phillips reported for *The Guardian* that

“*In what marks a significant turnaround in relations, not only have the prospects for*
conflict evaporated but also Damascus and Ankara find themselves in an ever closer integrated relationship with economic, political and even military ties strengthening each year...” (Phillips C., 1.10.2009).

He also emphasized that

“Syria remains only one strand (admittedly a useful one) of a wider realist Turkish foreign policy... Turkey, in contrast, is an essential ingredient in Syria’s plans for international rehabilitation and economic recovery” (Phillips C., 1.10.2009).

Turkey has also led the resolution process of the Syrian-Israeli conflicts, but didn’t manage to solve it. On the other hand, Turkish-Syrian relations have made an unexpected progress even in the division of Tigris and Euphrates waters, leaving aside for the time the Alexandretta/Hatay dispute (Hale W., 2009, p. 153).

Turkey’s relations with Israel are on the base of geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic interests. Not until middle 1990’s did relations between Turkey and Israel make any progress. Turkey’s decision to take Palestinians’ side during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 1980’s led to the coolness of relations. However, Turkey and Israel in 1996 have signed a series of agreements on military training, cooperation, equipment improvement and free trade. It was considered that Turkey turned to Israel as a result of EU rejection to start accession negotiations process, so as to prevent political isolation.
Close relations between Turkey and Israel caused great concern not only to Syria, Iran and Iraq, but also to the Arab world (Martin L., 2006, pp. 217-218). However, the AKP government, as soon as it was firstly formed, faced a serious challenge: whether they should criticize Israeli hostilities towards the Palestinians or adopt a more pragmatist stance. For the first years, Erdoğan chose the latter (Robins P., 2007, pp. 299-300). Recently, Turkey, confirming thus its role as a peace mediator in the region, initiated a series of activities, so that disputes between Israel and Syria and also—most ambitious—Israel and Palestinian would be solved. In this framework, did Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan characterize Shimon Peres’ attacks in Gaza as “crimes against humanity” at the World Economic Forum at Davos. Turkish-Israeli relations have become quite tense in the last years, challenging thus their relations with the USA, the other partner of Israel.

Turkish relations with the Arab countries have been mainly trade relations. The secular character of Turkey and also its engagement with NATO and EU were not compatible with the Arab character (Knudsen E., 2003, p. 205).

Until the Gulf War Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were the main supplier of oil for Turkey, while Turkey provided them agricultural products. In addition to that, a number of Turkish construction companies were activating in the region. During the Gulf War all these activities reduced to a remarkable extent (Kirisci K., 2000, p. 50).

3. Turks considered Arab nationalism as a reaction to declining Ottoman Empire, (Bal I., Instability in the Middle East and the relevant role of the PKK, 2004, p. 356)

In the post 9/11 era, Turkey, supported by the USA, has presented itself as a role model for the Muslim world and lately for the Arab world in particular. However, it
was Turkey’s refusal to support with military means the Iraq invasion in 2003, that was considered as a positive factor in the strengthening of relations with the Arab world. Also, Turkey’s enhanced role in OIC and economic prospects to the West added to that (Onis Z. & Yilmaz S., 2009, p. 10). Turkey has recently expressed its intentions to become “a source of inspiration” for the Arab world. In Abdullah Gül’s exact words:

“Our main task must start with breaking this deep-rooted alienation of the Islamic world as far as democracy and development are concerned...In recent years, Turkey has become a source of inspiration as a shining world of vibrant democracy and a flourishing free-market economy” (Gül, Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2010)

Knudsen has remarked the potential of Turkey to become a regional power and to spread its influence on political economic and cultural level, connecting East with the West rather than ignoring West for the East (Knudsen E., 2003, p. 213).

Turkey-Caucasus-Turkic Republics

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of eight independent countries in Caucasus and Central Asia region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize their independence. On the one hand, political and economic relations with these countries could be a realistic goal. On the other hand, Turkey was deprived of its strategic role as a Western stronghold against the Soviets and Communism in general. As a result of the political vacuum that emerged, Turkey
had the opportunity to present itself as the model country for the newly independent Caucasian and Central Asian states, supported however by the West and strongly encouraged by the USA. Turkey considered it as an opportunity to enhance the country’s status as a regional power and prove itself as a strategic partner for the West. While, the latter having realized the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the region was intended to have access in it through Turkey and prevent an Iranian influence and consequently Islamic fundamentalism, in the region (Winrow G., 2000, pp. 116-117 ˙ Aydin M., 2003, pp. 139, 141-142 ˙ Onis Z., 2001, pp. 66,68 ˙ Baran Z., 2004, pp. 269-270 ˙ Bal I., Turkish model as a foreign policy instrument in post Cold war era, 2004, pp. 329-330).

Therefore, the Turkish political system was presented as an ideal model for all these newly emerged, Muslim mainly, republics, as it was the only Muslim, secular state with a proximity, a developed market economy and co-operation to the West, and also a multi-party system (Bal I., Turkish model as a foreign policy instrument in post Cold war era, 2004, p. 331).

In that sense, Turkey could provide itself as an example for political and economic transformation to the region, according to the Western standards, adopted though by a Muslim country. Furthermore, Turkey had cultural and linguistic affinities with some of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. So, cooperation and understanding seemed more feasible. To this aim, Turkey took certain initiatives.

A Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency supported investments in the region. In 1992 the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was established as a Turkish
initiative for the promotion of economic, commercial and political cooperation among the countries of the Black Sea region and included almost all Caucasian and Central Asian countries (Baran Z., Turkey and the Caucasus, 2004, pp. 270-271). Turkey also supported the integration of the Caucasus and Central Asia in the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. As a NATO member, Turkey also supported a *Partnership for Peace* program of NATO, while they provided military training and equipment to Azerbaijan and Georgia. Turkey’s relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia continue until today. Also, Turkey constructed telecommunications and air links and also provided scholarships for university students, colleges in every Republic and training courses for diplomats and businessmen (Winrow G., 2000, p. 117).

However, the “Turkish model” did not live up to the expectations neither of Turkey nor of the Turkic Republics⁴, Iran confirmed that there was no intention of them to play a leading role in Central Asia, so threat of radicalism was over, and Western countries, decided to have direct control of power and economic benefits in the region, rather through Turkey (Onis Z., 2001, p. 69).

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4. The Republics realized that Turkish economy was not an ideal one and also they were not very keen on democratic reforms (Bal I., Turkish model as a foreign policy instrument in post Cold war era, 2004, pp. 338-339)

Also, Russia reaffirmed two years after the collapse of the Union its interest on its “Near abroad”⁵. A great asset was Russian minority in the region, the long years
established economic and political system of Russia and also mistrust of Turkey’s power, success and intentions. On the other hand, Turkey’s intervening in domestic politics of the Turkic republics caused great criticism, as it revived fears of Pan-Turkism and also created an image of political control over the Republics, who have recently become independent (Aydin M., 2003, pp. 144-145).

As a result of all that Turkey’s effectiveness of the “Turkish model” and popularity of the country in the region decreased significantly and Turkey’s objectives for the Central Asian countries remained inactive. Turkey’s activity within the region was limited at regional or international organizations’ initiatives. However, rivalry between Russian Euro-asianism and Turkish Neo-ottomanism also prevailed in the Caucasus, as Russia took Armenia’s side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while Turkey supported Azerbaijan.

Both Turkey and Russia soon realized that their influence in the region was limited and focused on Western-oriented policies (Tanrisever O., 2006, σ. 170). However, the 9/11 events and the global war against terrorism “revived” the Turkish Model, which was called to materialize “Great Middle East Initiative”^6.

5. This term is used to define, in this case, Russia’s sphere of influence, (Onis Z., Turkey and post-Soviet states: Potential and limits of regional power influence, 2001, p. 70)

6. In this initiative, which aims at promoting liberal democracy, market economy and educational reforms, Turkey is considered to apply it and play the role of the peace mediator in regional conflicts (Bal I., Turkish model as a foreign policy instrument in post Cold war era, 2004, p. 343)

Turkey during a period of widespread Islamophobia was presented as an intercultural mediator (Onis Z. & Yilmaz S., 2009, p. 11). It is evident thus that Turkey’s
position at the center of Eurasia is of major importance for global politics, global security and energy resources (Turan G., Turan I., & Bal I., 2004, pp. 296-297).

M. Aydin remarked that “The pipeline network is one of the key factors in securing and maintaining influence throughout the region” (Aydin M., 2003, p. 150). Turkey’s aspirations for the expansion of its regional influence, aim at having full control of such a pipeline network and thus becoming the most important energy transit country. In this framework, Turkey signed an agreement with Georgia and Azerbaijan for the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 1999. This agreement aimed at assuring that the natural resources “would be developed and transported along commercially viable, secure and environmentally safe routes” (Baran Z., The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Turkey, 2005, p. 103).

The pipeline starts from Baku, passed through Georgia and ends up to the port of Ceyhan, in the Mediterranean, connecting thus Central Asia and Caucasus with the markets of the Western Europe (Baran Z., The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Turkey, 2005, pp. 107). Another route is Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum or Shah Deniz gas pipeline, which transports Azerbaijani gas to the Southern Europe, while there is a project under discussion for Shah Deniz II. A recent project also under discussion is the Nabucco pipeline, with its complementary Italy-Turkey-Greece Interconnector and Trans Adriatic Pipeline, which is going to transport gas from the Caspian Sea or Iraq and Egypt to Central Europe. There is also the South Stream project, which aims to transfer gas from Russia to the Middle East through a Black Sea route. While intensification of relations between Turkey and the most energy rich countries, like Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan is a top priority for energy politics of
Turkey (Larrabee S., 2011, p. 106).

Turkey’s objectives in following such an assertive energy policy are not only covering domestic energy needs and diversifying energy resources, but also reflect to the country’s vision to promote regional integration and sustainable stability (Laciner S., 2009). In this framework should Turkey’s position towards the Georgia crisis in 2008 be considered. According to Balcer (Balcer A., 2009, p. 83), the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, whose goal is to end regional conflicts with the aid of Turkish-Russian factor and to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia, is an example of Davutoğlu’s proactive policy. While, Turkey’s rapprochement attempt with Armenia was intended not only to solve out a frozen conflict in the region and provide stability and security to pipelines routes, but also become a success story for Turkey’s foreign policy (Saivetz C., 2009, p. 105).

Turkey’s “zero problems with the neighbors” policy and their role as a peace mediator in neighboring countries’ internal conflicts is expected to be accepted by the EU and the US in the short term and increase Turkey’s influence in Caucasus and Central Asia in the long term (Balcer A., 2009, pp. 82-83).

7. Turkey criticized Russia’s attack on Georgia, when the latter challenged South Ossetia’s sovereignty, (Onis Z. & Yılmaz S., 2009, p. 18).

8. Rapprochement didn’t go well as Turkey insisted on connecting the welfare of Turkish-Armenian relations with the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, (Meral Z. & Paris J., 2010, pp. 108-109)

As scholar Laçiner stated in Hurriyet:

“The Turks, in the existing scheme of things, are concentrating more on

59
“the political and strategic means of pipelines than the economic dimensions of these projects” (Laçiner S., Turkey's pipeline politics, 2009).

Turkey-Russia

Turkey until the collapse of the Soviet Union operated as a buffer-zone between Western-oriented Europe and Communist states. Since the collapse of the Union, Turkey warmed up relations with neighboring regions of Caucasus and Central Asia, ex-Communist states, however, some of them of Turkic origin. Russia only two years after the deconstruction of Soviet Union, claimed its role in its “Near abroad”. Russia claimed its economic and political interests in Central Asia and Caucasus and its intention to intervene in the region, whenever there is a conflict, as a peace-making force (Tanrisever O., 2006, pp. 155-156,163).

This objective blatantly contradicted Turkey’s “Model” of governance, which aimed at economic liberation and democratization process for the region, under the guidance and influence of Turkic Republic. In that sense, Russia’s support of Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and support of PKK, as a response to Turkey’s support for Chechnya’s separatists could be considered as tension exacerbating factors.

In late 1990’s both Turkey and Russia realized that they have common economic interests, in that sense co-operation rather than rivalry would be more beneficial for their bilateral relations. The effective economic relations of the two countries soon led to the improvement of political relations between them. In this
framework of cooperation and understanding a series of agreements has been signed between the two countries on economic and energy transit issues, as well as on terrorism, private information service and diplomatic passports (Tanrisever O., 2006, pp. 174,178). The successful partnership was confirmed with a protocol for military cooperation and military training (Tanrisever O., 2006, p. 181). While a “Joint Declaration on Strengthening of Friendship and Multiplan Cooperation” in 2004 was directed to deeper relationship between the two countries. In that sense Abdullah Gül stated in Today’s Zaman:

“…In this new era, our economic and commercial ties serve as the driving force behind our relations and a remarkable improvement can be seen in this field... With this in mind, I believe there are currently no political problems between the two countries... The stances both countries have developed toward international and regional issue overlap to a large extent. Regular consultation mechanisms are continuously employed at various levels between our foreign services…” (GÜL, 11.2.2009)

However, Turkey’s strengthening of relations with Russia, also meant an increase in Turkey’s dependency on Russia. Russia is the second most important trade partner and the first energy supplier for Turkey, as also an important market for the construction field. Russia also supports Turkey’s development of nuclear power (Larrabee S., 2011, pp. 111-112).

However, this is considered as detrimental in the long term for its regional aspirations. In this respect, what Turkey considers as its “strategic depth” is at least in the case of Caucasus and Central Asia considered by Russia as its sphere of influence. It seems that a new form of co-existence has emerged between the two countries. On
the one hand, there is economic and military cooperation between them. On the other hand, there is a competition between the two ex-Empires in the field of energy and soft power (Torbakov I., Making Sense of the Current Phase of Turkish-Russian Relations, 2007, p.3).

Amanda Paul, journalist for Today’s Zaman characterizes Turkish-Russian relations as related on pragmatism:

“While Turkey and Russia are getting closer and strengthening economic ties, it is still far from being a “strategic partnership” but more a result of common interests, which still very much tips in Russia’s favor, and Turkey should take care that Russia does not, as it is prone to, manipulate economic interests in order to create pressure on the political relationship” (Paul A., 17.2.2010)

Although Blue Stream is one of the most important energy supplier for Turkey, many other projects for pipelines has been under discussion, excluding Russia (Onis Z. & Yilmaz S., Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era, 2009, p. 10).

While Russia has proposed its own projects instead of EU or US supported ones: to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan proposed the Baku-Novorossisk pipeline, to the Nabucco Pipeline the South Stream Pipeline, to the Samsun-Ceyhan Pipeline the Burgas-Alexandroupolis project was supported (Saivetz C., 2009, p. 97), Balcer A., 2009, p. 85, Torbakov I., Making Sense of the Current Phase of Turkish-Russian Relations, 2007, p. 8).

Turkey implementing its “rhythmic diplomacy” tries to keep a balance between Russia and EU and US projects. Although a top priority in energy politics is
finding alternative routes or alternative energy sources, which are not linked with Russia, Turkey, as a potential energy hub, keeps in touch with Russian supply routes.

Turkey-US

Turkey’s relations with the US have always been of major importance in formation of Turkish foreign policy, while Turkey also has been a strategic partner for the US and NATO in respect of security, co-operation and Turkey’s geopolitical role (Lesser I., 2006, pp. 101-102). During the Cold War Turkey served as a buffer zone preserving any Communist intervention in the Western-oriented world. Since the end of the Cold war Turkey has served as an important ally of the US, as its location at the center of a troublesome Middle East-Caucasus-Balkans axis and its Westernization process have been compatible with US interests. According to Bal (Bal I., Turkey-USA Relations and Impacts of 2003 Iraq War, 2004, p. 126), US support for Turkey’s EU membership should be regarded as a way for the USA “to monitor and influence developments within the EU”. Also, Turkey as well as USA is a member of international organizations like NATO, OECD, OSCE, G-20. Eurasia has been a region of increasing importance for regional and global security. Furthermore, this region emerged as an abundant source of energy resources. Turkey’s defense challenges, as the country is positioned in a troublesome neighborhood, whereas some of its countries developed or intended to develop weapons of massive destruction, have been faced to an important extent with the aid of the US factor. In addition to that US support was extended beyond the security sphere of influence,
when that was needed, such was the case of US support for Turkey’s pipeline projects (Lesser I., 2006, pp. 105-107 ´Bal I., Turkey-USA Reltions and Impacts of 2003 Iraq War, 2004, p. 130). The vagueness of political framework after the collapse of the Soviet Union forced Turkey to redefine its foreign policy, break its traditional neutrality toward external affairs and adopted an assertive foreign policy.

Özal’s neo-liberal orientation of economy, according to the US-model, political and diplomatic cooperation characterized relations of the two countries. Not only did Turkey involve actively in the Iraq crisis, but also took part in the multilateral talks’ working groups, thus was officially recognized as an important regional actor (Lesser I., , 2000, p. 206). Furthermore, Turkey’s role has been enhanced as the country was seen as an ideal model for democratization, political and economical engagement with the West for the newly emerged Turkic Republics (Bal I., Turkey-USA Reltions and Impacts of 2003 Iraq War, 2004, p. 125).

Also, Turkey’s location was strategic for pipeline politics too, as Turkey is an important energy transit and consumer country. (Lesser I., Beyond "Bridge or Barrier": Turkey's Evolving Security Relations with the West, 2000, p. 205-209). Turkey has supported US war against global terrorism. In fact, Turkey in this circumstances was presented by the US again as a model country for the Muslim world -as it was a secular, however Muslim, state with democratic principles- , in order to promote democratic reforms in the region, peace process and become a communication and financial bridge between East and the West. However, Turkey’s refusal to let US troops start the Iraq invasion through Turkish territory in 2003, was considered as a key step towards differentiation of interests between the two
countries. Such decision is often interpreted within an Islamic context, as the AKP has been already in power. In that sense, it was not sensible for a country secular, though Muslim, which has been presented as a Model country for the region, to attack areas mainly inhabited by Muslim populations (Robins P., 2007, p. 294).

Nevertheless, military and civilian logistic support reached Iraq through Turkish territory or airspace. While, the ‘Model partnership” discourse, initiated by President Barrack Obama and warmly accepted and supported by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, aimed at confirming strong US-Turkish political, diplomatic and economic ties. In this respect, scholar I. Lesser refers in Today’s Zaman that:

“Obama’s visit managed to dispel some of the pervasive suspicion in US-Turkish relations – no small accomplishment. Much remains to be done, both bilaterally and in a transatlantic setting, to give these public diplomacy gains strategic meaning” (Lesser I., 17.4.2009).

Also, Davutoğlu’s speech at the 28th Annual Conference on US-Turkish relations organized by ATC-DEIK on June 2009 reflected such common vision:

“We are not here not as officials but as an ATC family…..President Obama came to Turkey in April and made a very good, indeed an excellent speech in the parliament and he used a new terminology regarding Turkish-American relations…this time he preferred to use the term “Model partnership”…I thought that President Obama wanted to underline the unique character of this relationship…Now when we bring these two, being the unique characters of
Turkey and the US together, we see that because of these unique characters our relation is unique as well...For global and regional peace we need each other. Therefore, we should not only focus on the existing conjectural issue, but we have to have a long term strategic vision...Therefore, this relationship is a model partnership, because of this unique supportive character” (Davutoğlu, 2009)

On the contrary, a serious development with a negative impact on Turkish-US relations was the break-up of Turkish-Israeli relations. The Turkish-Israeli relations have been supported or even promoted by the United States, as they serve its own defense interests in Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean (Lesser I., 2006, p. 111). What is remarkable is that Turkey’s decision has made it clear that the country is not a US representative in the region, but also can act unilaterally (Bal I., Turkey-USA Relations and Impacts of 2003 Iraq War, 2004, p. 149 ‘Noivo D., 2010, p. 30 ‘Onis Z. & Yilmaz S., 2009, p. 12).In that sense, Semih Idiz pointed out in Hurriyet that:

“One could even say at this stage that the normalization of Turkish-Israeli ties has become a kind of a precondition for the normalization of Turkish-US ties, and until that happens it seems that Ankara’s relations with Washington will not carry the “strategic value” they may have had in the past....In the mean while the Obama administration and the Erdogan government will try and muddle through in an effort to ensure that ties are not totally disrupted, given the many vital issue that make it essential that both countries are still cooperating...this can hardly be called a “strategic relationship” anymore” (Idiz S., 2.9.2010).

It is obvious then that there is a shift on Turkey’s model partnership with the United States, however, not a complete shift of interests and orientation.
Turkey-EU

There is a consensus that Neo-ottomanism is just a reaction to EU’s skepticism for Turkish membership. Therefore, it is essential that a brief overview to Turkey’s EU accession long history is given.

Turkey’s ambivalent relationship with the EU dates back to 1959, when Turkey applied for associate membership to the European Economic Community. In 1964 the Ankara Agreement was signed, which brought up expectations for possible membership of Turkey. However, Turkey’s first application to accede EU made in 1987 by Turgut Özal was rejected. Although a Customs Union between EU and Turkey was established in 1995, Turkey was not going to be recognized as a candidate member until 1999. The accession negotiations started only in 2005. In this context, Turkey should open and close 35 chapters in order to become a full member.

Although some of them have opened most of them are blocked by EU members and only a limited number is closed. EU’s skepticism is considered to be based more on the definition of European identity rather than on Turkey’s fulfillment of Copenhagen criteria. What is also important is that there is one thing “An EU which stops at the Bosporus…than one which pushes into Central Asia and embraces the Middle East” (Walker J., 2007). On the other hand, Turkey’s frustration is reflected to its new foreign policy. Also, negative representations by Western media of Turkey’s internal political crisis and the argument of imperative resolution of Cyprus
issue, as a precondition for Turkey’s accession, added to that. Although EU accession still is considered as a major factor of Turkish foreign policy, it has lost its position as first priority initiative (Onis Z. & Yilmaz S., 2009, pp. 13-14 ’Noivo D., 2010, pp. 25-27).

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu clearly stated:

“Turkey is no reorienting its foreign policy, as some argue nowadays...Membership in the EU is Turkey’s strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era...” (Davutoğlu A., Turkish Foreign Policy and the EU in 2010, 2010)

Neo-ottomanism has been regarded as an aggressive foreign policy both in 1990’s and in contemporary Turkey. It has been associated with expansionist aspirations, as statements like “From Adriatic to China” defining thus Turkey’s extension of interests and also Özal’s prediction that the 21st century would be “the century of the Turks”, could easily be misinterpreted. However, what is important to remember is that Özal believed that his political and economic interaction with Eurasia, Middle East and other region, with which they have cultural ties, would give Turkey economic development and political; power, so that they would have another chance to challenge EU membership an enhanced status (Laciner S., The Journal of Turkish Weekly, 2009).

Although Neo-ottomanism faded out gradually in the succeeding governments, the European orientation of Turkey remained. After the absolute turn to Islamism and Islamic countries during Erbakan’s government, it was Erdoğan’s foreign policy that turned the country from Europhobia to Europhilia. What is remarkable is his
insisting on EU’s commitment to name a date, after which negotiations could start (Robins P., 2007, p. 292).

On the other hand, Neo-ottomanism today is not that euro-centric, on the contrary, we could say that embrace multiple regions interests (Fisher Onar N., 2009). Today Turkey having understood its important geopolitical position, having a strong economy and an improving democratization process aims at strengthening or even developing economic, political, diplomatic ties with neighboring countries and regions. This policy, characterized as “economic interdependence” as an experimental opening of Turkish economy to other than European market. Therefore, a “rhythmic diplomacy” and a “balance of security” are also main principles of Turkish foreign policy. However, what is most worrying for the EU is Turkey’s Neo-ottomanist rhetoric, as it is often connected with irredentism and a total shift of Turkish foreign policy to rediscover its “Muslim” self (Noivo D., 2010, p. 28). Turkish relations with Hamas, re-strengthening of relations with Syria and Iran and also coolness of relations between Turkey and Israel reflect such tendency. Daniel Steinvorth reported for Der Spiegel that

“As European opposition to EU membership for Turkey grows, Ankara is looking to forge closer ties to its neighbors…Europe, with its fondness for criticizing Turkey, is increasingly become yesterday’s ideal” (Steinvorth D., 11.12.2009).

The majority of the press warns the politicians that there is high possibility that they could lose Turkey as a security and economic partner and so consequences could be quite harsh for the European Union. On the other hand, they are of the view that Turkey has, actually, no other alternative than the EU and soon they would
realize that. It is evident then, that a negative or positive stance of Turkey towards Europe is defined by the effectiveness of its diplomacy (Noivo D., 2010, p. 28).

The challenges for Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkey’s re-orientation as a regional power and an important global actor has caused serious concern to its allies and also to countries with which they have conflicting interests. This enhanced status has also created new opportunities and new obligations for the country. It is vital that a new strategic plan should be implemented in order to face all challenges and take advantage of all opportunities given.

Turkey’s Western orientation has been differentiated recently. This has caused a discourse that “Europe is losing Turkey” and is gradually adopting radical Islam. Another view was that Turkey is drafting away from Europe and the West in general as a reaction to EU’s negative stance for Turkey’s full membership. However, Turkish leadership of foreign affairs denies any shift from Turkey’s main priority, EU membership.

EU has implemented a number of reforms, so that Turkey could join the Union as a full member. The Copenhagen criteria in brief include “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union” (Morelli V., 2011, p. 1). Although Turkey has successfully promoted democratization process and economic development, there are also main obstacles to achieve its goal, most
important are human rights, the Kurdish and the Cyprus issue.

The human rights performance is considered to be quite low in Turkey. There have been reported unlawful killings, cases of torture and abuse by security forces, also imprisonment of conscientious objectors (Amnesty International, 2010, p.2). European Parliament. Human Rights Committee, 2010, p.5,10-12). Despite improvements on prison conditions, they remain poor, overcrowded and with insufficient staff. There were reports that state officials could have influenced the independence of the judiciary through their statements. While, close relationships between judges and prosecutors continued to hinder the right to a fair trial (European Court of Human Rights, 2011). The government has limited the freedom of expression through the use of constitutional restrictions and numerous laws (Hammarberg T., 2011). Press freedom has declined and there are also limitations on Internet freedom. Courts and an independent board ordered telecommunications providers to block access to Web sites on numerous occasions. However, the media criticized government leaders and policies daily and in many cases adopted an offensive role with respect to the government (Kanli Y., Empire of fear or the AKP's Turkey, 12.11.2009). Violence against women, including honor killings and rape, remain a widespread problem (Human Rights Watch, 2011). While, child marriage
persists reaching a 37% on average and increasing to 68% in Southeast Anatolia, despite laws prohibiting it (Emeksiz I., 5.10.2010 ‘BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, 2011, p. 1).

As far as minority rights concerned, ethnic religious and linguistic minorities (Alevis, Yezidis, Assyrians, Catholics, Protestants, Kurds, Jafaris, Circassians, Laz, or Roma) not referred to the Lausanne Treaty, are not recognized as such, thus depriving them of certain rights. In addition to that they are continually under pressure to assimilate (BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, 2011, pp. 37-38 ‘Jarosławski S., 2008).

The Cyprus issue, whose resolution is a major priority for the EU, is another obstacle for Turkey’s foreign policy. It seems as if the Cyprus issue is blocking Turkey’s accession. Although negotiations have started, a limit number of chapters of acquis have opened and only a few closed successfully. Cyprus is a full member of the EU and recognition of all member states is a necessary component of the accession process. Turkey is also obliged to open its ports and air bases to the Greek-Cypriot side of the island. Turkey was also called to remove its military forces from the island. Turkey’s negative stance towards these obligations “froze” practically negotiations with Europe in the recent years. While, political analysis of the issue observes that no solution of the Cyprus problem would be equivalent to no full EU membership for Turkey (Morelli V., 2011, pp. 2-9 ‘Kutlay M., 2009 ‘The Economist-Special report, 2010).
The Kurdish issue, is also connected with human rights, stability and security in the country and the region, which are prerequisites for the country’s development. The Kurdish minority of Turkey represents a large ethnic and linguistic group. Until recently, Kurds did not have the right to publicly or politically express their Kurdish identity or speak Kurdish in the public domain, otherwise there was the risk of censure, harassment, or prosecution. Latest constitution reforms has abolished such discriminations. Turkish Kurds mainly through their parliamentary members demand that the Kurdish dominated regions in Southeast Turkey should have an autonomy status, that Kurdish education should be in Kurdish language, also that they should not be excluded from Turkish citizenship in the new Constitution for not belonging to the Turkish ethnicity (Barkey H. & Kadioglu D., Carnegie Endowment, 2011 Larrabbe S. & Tol G., 2011, pp. 148, 150).

An unsuccessful solution to the problem and incomplete response to the Kurdish requests through the new Constitution could be risky, as there is always the possibility of an uprising of the domestic Kurdish minority, challenging thus constitutional legitimacy, political stability and Turkey’s vision to provide itself as a successful democracy, which should be an example for the reforms in the Middle East
Another challenge for Turkey is the PKK attacks. A war started in 1984, officially ended after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, however in practice they still organize small-scale border attacks against Turkish targets. A solution of the Kurdish issue without taking account of the PKK side is inevitable. However, entering dialogue process with the PKK is an ambitious and not easily accessible project (Larrabbe S. & Tol G., 2011, p. 150; Yetkin M., 29.9.2011).

On the other hand, relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds have warmed up, as both sides realized the benefits of co-operation, especially in the economic sector (Barkey H., Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq, 2010, p.2-3). Some analysts show this development as an indirect way to solve the Kurdish issue (Özerkan F., 2010). Civilian control of military intervention in politics has added greatly to this approach (Yinanç B., 1.4.2011), as their perception that recognition of Kurdistan Regional Government would threaten Turkey’s security, stability and territorial integrity, was widespread in the country until recently (Larrabbe S. & Tol G., 2011, pp. 144-145). Also, Turkey’s foreign policy principles for “zero-problems” with neighbors, maintaining “security balance” in the region and “developing relations with
neighboring regions”, all reflect to this political movement. Also, Turkey’s economic expansion to its neighboring Northern Iraq is remarkable. The majority of their imports come from Turkey. Numerable construction and oil exploration Turkish companies operate in this region (Fielding-Smith A., 14.4.2010). Turkey is considered as one of the most important gateways to Iraqi oil. Therefore, ensuring security and stability in the region is of vital importance for Turkey (Hale W., 2009, p. 146).

In terms of geo-politics and geo-economics Turkey is facing great challenges with its neighboring states of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Israel. Turkey faces challenges of political legitimacy through the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, of national security as neighboring countries possess ballistic missiles, of sovereignty through the rise of Kurdish nationalism (Martin L., 2006, p. 196).

On the one hand, Turkey is dependent on the Middle East to a great extent for its energy resources, on the other hand the region is the largest energy source in the world. In this respect, Turkey’s role as a peace mediator in the region is not only important, but also vital for its own interests.

This applies mainly to Iraq (Hale W., 2009, p. 146). Although relations between Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government has been improved in the
recent years, KRG’s claims for incorporation of Kirkuk remain unsolved (Hale W., 2009, p. 148; Barkey H., Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq, 2010, p. 4). The existence of a strong and stable government in Iraq, could thus not only provide regional peace and stability, but also encourage economic development and the realization of Nabucco Pipeline Project (Hale W., 2009, pp. 146). Also, Turkey’s rapprochement with Armenia towards a solution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict aimed also at plurality and diversification of pipeline routes.

While, Turkish-Israeli relations, a strategic partner both for Turkey and US, has reached a critical point by now, putting thus at risk also US-Turkish relations. Turkey’s initiative for bringing face to face Israeli and Palestinians into a dialogue process for their disputes, met little success. Turkey’s sympathy for Palestinians, protests against Iraqi attacks in Gaza, recently expressed at Prime Ministerial level, but mainly the Mavi Marmara incident have dynamited relations between both countries (Villelabeitia I., 2011). Turkey also intervened as a mediator in the Israeli-Syrian dispute on the Golan Heights. However, governmental change in Israel abrupt this process (Hale W., 2009, pp. 149, 151).

As far as Turkish-Iranian relations concerned, their enhanced relations caused
fear of the Western powers that Turkey is turning to radical Islam and intense concern
of the neighboring countries for an imbalance of power and share of energy resources
in the region. Turkey’s relations with Iran follow an economy-security axis
(Punsmann Gültekin B., 20.2.2011). On the one hand, Iran serves as an important
energy supplier for Turkey, is an alternative to Russian energy dependency and favors
Turkey’s ambitions for becoming the most important energy transit route to Europe.
On the other hand, both Turkey and Iran agreed that Iraq’s partition would benefit the
emergence of an independent Kurdish state, which would be disastrous for regional
peace and security. Added to that, PKK attacks to both countries led to “security
cooperation” between Iran and Turkey against the common enemy. However,
Turkey’s main challenge in its relations with Iran is Iran’s nuclear programme (Hale

The political fragility of the region serves as an excellent chance for Turkey to
materialize its role as a regional power through its peace-making efforts and
economical and political agreements, as also as a global actor, as some regional
conflicts reflect also to global politics.

Lastly, the most recent incidents are to be discussed, as both have a dynamic
and challenge Turkey’s regional role. The Arab Spring is a series of uprisings in
Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria against the contemporary regime. It is considered both by supporters and opponents of Erdogan that such an environment paved the way for the Turkish Prime Minister to “test” his role as a regional leader and a peace mediator. While, Erdogan’s warnings on Assad’s regime to pull out his troops and bring peace and stability to his country is just an example of this potential role. Furthermore, Erdogan aims at preventing any Kurdish uprising. Although the people embraced his movement to visit those places and express his sympathy and support (Saleh Y., 2011) (Logan J., 2011), the press is quite critical of this (Bekdil B., Dear Arab brothers: Yes, you may borrow our prime minister!, 2011), as they observe the vulnerability of “zero problems with neighbors” and “security balance” policy (Idiz S., FM Davutoglu returns to the drawing board, 2011).

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has already stressed the major geostrategic importance of Cyprus for Turkey, as it can

“Influence strategic links between Asia and Africa, Europe and Africa and Europe and Asia... No global or peripheral power, who does strategic calculations in the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Aegean, Suez Strait, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf can ignore Cyprus” (Davutoğlu A., 2010).

Recently the Cyprus government began drilling for natural gas in its exclusive economic zone, southern of Cyprus. Turkey responded that such an action would be illegal and that it would hinder Turkey-Cyprus negotiations for a resolution (Kambas M., 2011). Turkey also claimed that they also have economic benefits and interests in the area and they even tried to prevent such activity by sending complementary naval force to the region. The outcome of all this mobilization is yet unknown.
On the whole, Turkey’s foreign policy, because of its multi-dimensional character, has opened many fronts or intervened in already open fronts, thus facing multi-dimensional challenges, as well. Turkey’s peace-making initiatives, like those between Israeli and Palestinians and Israeli and Syrians, has not borne any fruits yet. However, any negative development could affect Turkey’s stability as well, as a Middle East country and a mediator. A consensus from both disputing sides is not to be taken for granted. On the other hand, Turkey has broken up traditional partnerships, like the one with US, in order to fix relations with the Arab world. However, this is far from “rhythmic diplomacy”. Also, Turkey could hardly succeed in solving out regional disputes, unless it solves its internal problems first, as some internal problems, like its own disputes with neighboring countries and mainly the Kurdish issue, are also regional problems. Lastly, Turkey’s most serious challenge is to face all the previously referred challenges in order to become a real regional power.

Conclusions
The aim of this dissertation was to define the term “Neo-ottomanism”, its nature, the time of its emergence and the implications of it in Turkish foreign policy for the last two, at least, decades. Neo-ottomanism is based on the Ottoman legacy and the way it can affect or affects Turkish politics and society. The main argument is that Turks today, successors of a glorious Ottoman past, should redefine their position in regional and global politics, a prominent one, which derives from the successful past. The strengthening of ties with former Ottoman provinces, with which they share cultural, linguistic, religious characteristics, but most important a common past, in political, financial, diplomatic and cultural level, is the way through which Turkey would reaffirm its historical oriented role as a central, not peripheral country.

This discourse emerged more or less as a result of Turkey’s political and strategic redefinition after the end of the Cold war and ideological challenges after the dynamic outbreak of the Kurdish issue. It was Turgut Özal who initiated it, opening thus new horizons of political and economic activity, as he established relations with regions and countries beyond the traditional ones since the early Republic. However, Özal’s intention was to strengthen the country’s political status, as Turkey would be presented as the center of a regional political co-existence, and enhance Turkey’s economy, as he would develop economic interdependence, so that Turkey can apply with an upgraded status this time for EU accession. EU membership was considered as the political recognition of Turkey’s European identity and a prerequisite for the development of a strong economy. However, Turkey’s aspirations were soon associated with irredentism.
There is a consensus that the contemporary Minister of Foreign Affairs and advisor of Turkish Prime Minister since his first election, Ahmet Davutoğlu, is reviving Neo-ottomanism through his theory and practice of foreign policy. However, he denies such a characterization, as it has negative connotations. His “Strategic Depth” doctrine is based on the idea that Turkey’s historical and geographical depth prescribe for Turkey a central regional role and an enhanced status in global politics. His main principles for Turkish foreign policy are a) ensuring security in the region and in internal affairs, as a destabilized environment affects political health and development b) having zero problems with neighbors and even solving conflicts between neighbors as a third party, proving thus the country’s central role c) developing relations with neighboring regions and beyond, proving thus that Turkey is not just a bridge between East and West d) adopting a multi-dimensional foreign policy rather than a monolithic one, e) having rhythmic diplomacy, proving Turkey as an important global actor. His strengthening of relations with the Islamic world has evoked criticism throughout the EU and US that Turkey is drifting away from Europe and turns to the East. However, Turkey’s Western orientation has not changed, what it lacks is its enthusiasm.

However, Turkey’s relations with other regions or individual countries have changed throughout the period under discussion. The political vacuum created as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union has reformed Turkish foreign policy, as it no longer consist the Western buffer zone against Communism, new independent states have emerged and the New World Order dictates new challenges. In this framework, Turkey decides to adopt a proactive foreign policy, re-discovers its
historical, cultural, linguistic affiliation with neighboring regions like the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia and religious ties with the Arab World and also its position as a Middle East country. Furthermore, Turkey redefines relations with traditional rivals like Greece and Russia and traditional allies, like the USA. Even more Turkey intensifies its efforts for EU accession.

In the Balkans, the support of all Muslim populations and of all minorities in turbulent times has caused great concern and fears of imposed political influence, while during peace periods Turkey’s initiatives for reconstruction are welcomed. What is still irritating is Turkey’s intervention in internal political affairs of the region. On the other hand, the Turkish model proposed for the political technical economic construction of Caucasus and Central Asia met little success in early 1990’s, while Turkey is today one of the most important energy transit countries and energy consumer of natural resources deriving from this region. Turkey’s ambition to become an energy hub, has led to a strategic partnership with the most important energy supply countries.

As far as relations with the Middle East and the Arab world concerned, Turkey has been presented as a model country, a secular and Muslim country, with democratic institutions and Islamic values, open to Western markets, at least three times during the period under consideration: the first was after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the second after the 9/11 incidents, the third as a result of Turkey’s new foreign policy. Turkey’s peace-making efforts for both its disputes with regional countries and for interregional conflicts, its coolness with Israel, its enhanced role in OIC and its contacts with other regional organizations, all added to Turkey’s central role in the
region.

In Greek-Turkish relations Neo-ottomanist and Turkey’s assertive policy in general has evoked a lot of tension. Turkey’s proactive policy had been characterized “Neo-ottomanist” since Turkey’s invasion in Cyprus in 1974 and the existence of Turkish troops on the island. Also, Turkey’s support for the Muslims in the Balkans has been considered as an irredentist movement from the Greek side. So, do Davutoğlu’s statements for a reconstruction of the Balkans, based on a common Ottoman past, today. On the other hand, the casus belli declaration and naval and airspace challenges, prevented a “zero problems with the neighbors” reality.

For Russian-Turkish relations, Neo-ottomanism has been the ideological rival of Russia’s Euro-asianism. However, Russian-Turkish relations are based since late 1990’s on pragmatism. On the one hand, they are trade partners and cooperate in the military field, on the other hand there is a rivalry in the energy section.

As far as Turkish-US relations concerned, Turkey’s foreign policy has been more or less in tune with that of the United States, at least until recently. Thus, Turkey’s Neo-ottomanism served US interests in the Middle East, as Turkey has been presented as a model country towards reforms, peace and democratization, in Eurasia, so as to prevent a threat of radical Islam, in the Islamic world in general. However, Turkey’s latest unilateral initiatives in the Middle East have caused serious concerns for the future of their relations.

For Turkish-EU relations Neo-ottomanist has been regarded as an alternative or re-action to Euro-skepticism. In fact, Neo-ottomanist during Özal’s era was considered as an initiative aimed at developing a competitive economy and enhancing
the country’s political status, so that they could challenge EU membership again, however not as a second class country. However, it would be too simplistic to consider Neo-ottomanism today as a reaction to EU long pending membership. Although Western orientation has not shifted, EU is not considered as a first priority policy anymore. This is what leads Europeans observers to believe that Turkey is drifting away from the West.

However, Neo-ottomanism through its multi-dimensional character does give many opportunities, but it also faces some serious challenges. The most important ones, lie on Turkey’s formation of the Republic and its imminent Constitution reform. They are associated with the definition of Turkish citizenship and the decision on whether or not the Kurds should be regarded as full citizens of the country. However, Neo-ottomanism is related to multiculturalism and peaceful multi-ethnic co-existence. So, a negative outcome in this section of Constitution’s reform would be regarded as self-cancellation of Neo-ottomanist policy. On the other hand, it is hard to understand that a country protests against the violation of human rights in other countries, while itself has reports on various human rights violations. Also, Turkey’s effectiveness as a peace mediator has not born any fruits yet. While, Assad’s, a friend and ally of Turkey, growing aggressiveness in Syria, raises serious doubts on that. While, Turkey’s assertiveness is regarded lately as shifting from “zero problems with neighbors” policy in dealing with regional conflicts.

In, conclusion based on the issues discussed in this dissertation, we could say that Neo-ottomanism has emerged as a term used to define Turkey’s assertive foreign policy and mainly Turkey’s turn to other than the European regions for political
cultural and economic cooperation. Also, Neo-ottomanism underlines Turkey’s central role for the region and the global affairs, as a successor of the Ottoman grandeur. It is a compromise between Kemalism and political Islam, thus combining democratic characteristics with Islamic values. Turgut Özal, the initiator of Neo-ottomanism, had to face post-Cold war challenges, in order to reconstruct Turkey’s economy and political status, while Davutoğlu, who is at the control of one of the most important economies of the world, wishes to redeem at political and diplomatic level such success. However, the success of this policy lies on the success of Turkey’s diplomatic initiatives.

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