

# **International Journal of Turcologia**

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# International Journal of Turcologia

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# The Sunni Identity Of Ak Party Governments In Syria And Egypt Policies

*Pınar Özden Cankara\**

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## **Abstract**

Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party-AK Party) defines its identity as a conservative democratic party whereas most of its founding members come from conservative Islamic backgrounds. The two most controversial subjects in Turkey have been the priority given to the Middle East and the composition of Turkish foreign policy's traditional approach in the last fifteen years since they came to power. AK Party has analyzed the alteration in the international system and tried to be a rising power in its region. However, the Arab Spring has led to a power gap and political instability in the Middle East where international relations are based on the balance of power. AK Party has tried to establish a field of dominance across Iran, which is the most powerful regional rival to be able to fill in this gap. However, the social events have become so unpredictable in Syria that not only regional powers but also non-regional powerful agents including Russia, USA, UK and France have involved in the problem. AK Party has tried to favor the transformation of Egypt and Syria by supporting the Sunni-Salafi groups. Thus, Turkey has become isolated in the region. The aim of this study is to analyze the background of the political ideology of AK Party's pragmatist policy.

## **Key Words**

AK Party, Arap Spring, Syria, Egypt, Islam.

## *Introduction*

Political movements point to some territories whose borders are determinable around the movement-idealized arguments. Turkish nationalism leans back on Caucasia and Central Asia

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whereas conservative Islamism refers to a geopolitical region where this movement dreams of dominance. The movement appeals to the entire Muslim world and establishes a sphere of influence by building a line of defense against the marginalized worlds of Christianity and Judaism, which are perceived as threats. Just like other Islamist thinkers in other geographies, Turkish conservative Islamists draw attention to the problems of the Islamic geography and suggest establishing an Islamic unity for the solution of the existing problems. However, Turkish conservative Islamists dissent from other Islamist thinkers in that they believe Turkey must be the leader of the unity. The determination of the scope that Turkish conservative Islamists address to is possible with a detailed analysis of the thoughts of the prominent representatives of this movement. In the present study, we will try to determine the geopolitical borders of the movement through the articles on the Muslim world written by Cevat Rifat Atilhan, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Salih Özcan and Sezai Karakoç.

Conservative Islamism concentrates on both system analysis and the domestic and foreign affairs of Turkey. The thinkers of the movement have delivered their opinions on the Muslim world in their periodicals. The conservative Islamist thinkers criticized the governments for the failure to establish satisfactory relations with the Islamic world during the times of the Democrat Party (DP), Justice Party (AP) and Motherland Party (ANAP), which defined themselves as conservatives and came to power alone. The foreign policies of these governments show the three parties acted within the bounds of the international system of the era and abstained from coming up against global powers. Thus, the interests of these governments in the problems of the Middle Eastern and African Muslim countries were either highly restricted or shaped within the axis of the allied powers just like the engagement

with the American policies during the times of Adnan Menderes and Turgut Ozal. However, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party-AK Party) differs from the three parties and deviates from the direction of the conventional Turkish foreign policies in that it has approached to the problems of the Islamic world more sensitively and even come into conflict with the American policies for this cause.

AK Party has shaped domestic and foreign policies of Turkey as from 2012, forming governments three times successively and enabling the charter members of the party to have the chance to realize the dream Turkey of the previous conservative Islamist thinkers. AK Party's founding staff has tried to follow a dream, which has been conceptualized by conservative Islamist ideologists since the 1940s, that prescribes to recover from the stagnant Middle Eastern and Northern African authoritarianism in order to awaken and liberate the Muslim world and even to become the leader of it.

The Middle Eastern and Northern African countries have some characteristics in common as they became colonized following the First World War and gained independence after considerable exertions. Turkey was once occupied and but never became a colony. Despite its Muslim-dominated population, the country managed to be completely integrated into the Western-type liberal democracy in 1923, which is the most significant characteristic that distinguishes Turkey from the other Muslim countries in the region. Turkey struggled against the West for independence and later gained recognition as an independent country with equal status at international system while the Muslim world was decadent. Turkish conservative Islamist ideologists have taken the panoramic photos of the Muslim societies as from the 1940s to make the suggestion that the Middle Eastern and Northern African peoples experience

some awakening and revival to struggle for independence, just as Turkey did, and they gather under the same roof of the Islamic unity against reoccupation after they have gained independence. Turkey is to be the leader of the unity as a role model thanks to the experience from the Ottoman times. Ideologists have regarded the post-1970s statesmen of the Muslim societies as the persons that fail to understand their people and abuse societies with the aim of maintaining their power.

The Arab Spring is a social event that has started with the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor and rallied many supporters very quickly for civil commotions in other Middle Eastern and Northern African countries. With the Arab Spring, peoples today dream of human-rights-based egalitarian and libertarian countries with guaranteed human rights. Vast masses of people receive no shares from economic and political facts in the countries where social events evolve into violence. In the process of quickly changing events, AK Party has determined position for the leaders and peoples of these countries and prepared a recipe for liberation, which is what conservative Islamist ideologists have mentioned for many years.

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the ideological ground of AK Party's supports for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Salafi groups in Syria, via the perceptions of the conservative-Islamists-shaped geopolitical region. We also aim to prove the effect of the Sunni-Islam identity in the determination of foreign policies during the AK Party governments.

### *1. Conservative Islamist Thinkers'*

#### *Sunni-Islam-Originated Geopolitical Region*

In an article published in *Sebilürreşad*, Cevat Rifat Atilhan, one of the prominent representatives of conservative Isla-

mism, states that the Islamic world has learned lessons from the past and thus entered into the process of awakening. The main problem of the Muslim world is the deprivation of a unity for common actions. However, Turks gathered these peoples under a single roof and exalted the honor of Islam. Atilhan asserts international organizations have aimed to destroy the position of Turks, having tried to corrupt the moral values of the Ottoman Empire for many years as from the Tanzimat period<sup>1</sup> However, Islamic nations have become freed from the colonial oppression one by one. Atilhan believes the Muslim world still regards Turkey as a source of hope because Turks served the Islamic world as a leader for many years. Atilhan claims Jews follow some cunning policies for spoiling the relationship between Turks and the Arab world<sup>2</sup> Salih Özcan, yet another pioneer of the movement, points that Turks spread Islam on a large geography from China to Europe as from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and expelled the crusaders from the holy lands<sup>3</sup>. Özcan also believes Turkey will take the lead of the Islamic unity<sup>4</sup>.

Esref Edip states the Muslim world took a great opportunity for establishing an Islamic bloc, for which Turkey was capable of serving as a leader, in 1960s when the Cold War was highly fierce and the international system was divided into two as democracy and communism fronts. Edip argues Iran and Pakistan supported Turkey in that period but Egypt and other Arab countries avoided cooperation, suggesting that the Muslim world be united against both communism and Jew threats, which are the common enemies of all Muslim nations<sup>5</sup>.

Sezai Karakoc has supported the Asian and African awakening against imperialism<sup>6</sup>. Underlining that oppressed nations are in danger of extinction due to the chemical weapons of the Western countries, Karakoc asserts such nations are in

need of a unifying element, which could be nothing but Islam<sup>7</sup>.

Karakoc thinks and protests the fact that Americans and Russians expose Muslims to inferior treatment. Stating that Muslims are oppressed by Russia in the Central Asia and by USA in the Middle East, Karakoc argues China and India treat the Muslim population under their rules similarly. Apart from major countries, some smaller states such as Bulgaria, Greece, Philippines, and even Ethiopia have hostile attitudes toward Muslims. Karakoc emphasizes Gaza has been occupied by Israel since 1967 and Palestinian Muslims are deprived of freedom and suffer from various kinds of affronts. He criticizes the indifference of major countries, stating "allegedly civilized European countries never refer to the return of the freedom for our poor brothers as if these negative circumstances were very normal and they neglect this constant tragedy and pretend to be unaware". However, Karakoc still believes hopefully that derogatory treatments against Muslims will come to an end by virtue of awakening to fight for freedom<sup>8</sup>.

In line with the opinions of these thinkers, AK Party bureaucrats place emphasis on the importance of Islamic unity and remark Turkey can be a model for oppressed Muslim countries. AK Party governments have focused on the regional problems of the Middle East and Northern Africa in foreign policies and steered away from the EU membership motivation during the second term of government. The awakening and rebirth questions of the Muslim world have again become current issues right after the outbreak of social events, which is called the Arab Spring, in the Middle Eastern and Northern African countries. Inspired by the political stance of Necip Fazil Kısakürek and Sezai Karakoc, AK Party's decision makers have shown a supporting approach to the Middle Eastern and Northern African people's demand for democracy, lead-

ing Turkey to follow an active policy and try to gain political dominance in this geopolitical region.

## *2. AK Party's Approaches to the Governments of Morsi and Sisi in Egypt*

Turkey and Egypt are the two powerful states that have claimed the title of the Middle East leadership as from the 1950s. Prior to the Arab Spring, Hosni Mubarak and Recep Tayyip Erdogan both assumed position for the Palestine problem and played first chair of the region. However, the Arab Spring resulted in a disappointment for the Mubarak regime when people shouting pro-revolutionary slogans descended on Tahrir Square to exclaim they no more want to see the rule of Mubarak. On 12-15 September 2011, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan paid some official visits with a crowded committee including ministers, bureaucrats and businessmen to Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Erdogan was welcomed in Egypt with the slogans including "redeemer of Islam", "Erdogan the precious of Allah", and "Turkey and Egypt stand together to remove the blockade"<sup>9</sup>. Erdogan appeared on a private TV show in Egypt and uttered<sup>10</sup>: "Secularism is never same as atheism, do *not* be afraid of it. I suggest preparing secular Constitution in Egypt". However, Mahmoud Ghuzlan, the spokesman of the Muslim Brotherhood, stated they considered Erdogan's suggestion as interference in their internal affairs and "other countries experiences should not be cloned"<sup>11</sup>.

Erdogan joined the meeting of the Arab League's foreign ministers and addressed Arab nations<sup>12</sup>: "It is high time we, who have shared the same fate and same geography of meaning, established common future again". Erdogan also stated he welcomed the recent Arab Spring developments because

freedom, democracy and human rights must be improved for everyone. We can infer from Erdogan's statements that Turkey supported the anti-Mubarak civil commotion and regarded it as a part of democracy since Mubarak made no transition. After the collapse of the Mubarak regime, the Freedom and Justice Party, which is the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, took the opportunity with 38% of the vote to come to power legitimately. The Muslim Brotherhood was always excluded from the government as from its foundation in the pre-Arab Spring period and their leader, Sayyid Qutb, was executed by President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The organization conducted some social solidarity activities and abstained from politics for a long time. The biggest Arab-Spring-induced change in Egypt was the chance for the Muslim Brotherhood to appear in the political arena. The AK Party government assumed a positive attitude toward the transition that enabled the organization with the Sunni-Islam doctrine to come to power in Egypt. Mohamed Morsi put his stamp on history as the first elected president of Egypt.

Egypt's democracy experience lasted for one year only and the June 2013 protests occurred against Morsi for his 'Islamist' policies on the one-year anniversary of his inauguration as president. Egypt drew reactions for the 2012 referendum on the new Constitution, which was named 'the Muslim Brotherhood Constitution' and criticized harshly in that Morsi aimed to govern the country in an antidemocratic way of radical Islamism. The statement in Article 2 that "Islam is the religion of the state and Sharia provisions are the sources of laws" was interpreted that Morsi intended to rule the country with the Islamic law<sup>13</sup>. Anti-Morsi liberals, secularists and Coptic Christians made same comments<sup>14</sup> about the new Constitution as the Western and Israeli press<sup>15</sup>. However, this article was al-

ready included in the 1971 Constitution and added to the 2013 Constitution draft with no amendments<sup>16</sup>. Amr Moussa, the former secretary general of the Arab League, stated that he thought the constituent assembly's hasty attempts to prepare new Constitution<sup>17</sup> were pointless whereas yet another opponent, Mohamed el-Baradei, asserted the new Constitution draft would go into the garbage of history<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, the draft was criticized seriously for the articles regarding freedom of religion, women's rights and civilian-soldier relationship that it failed to reflect the spirit of the revolution<sup>19</sup>.

As for Turkey's approach, SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research), a non-governmental organization that supports AK Party's political doctrines, have shown a positive attitude to the 2012 Constitution of Egypt in their report. For instance, Ismail Numan Telci argues the Constitution preparation was proceeding normally and able to satisfy the demands of the revolution to a large degree till the opponents sabotaged the process<sup>20</sup>. Abdullah Aydogan Kalabalik regards the relevant Constitution as libertarian, believing it guarantees democracy<sup>21</sup>.

The Egyptian army took the control of the country on 3 July 2013 on the ground that no political consensus was reached and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the minister of defense and chair of general staff, grabbed the power. Adly Mansour, the head of constitutional court, became the temporary president. However, no settlement was established and anti-coup demonstrations occurred. The members of the Muslim Brotherhood were taken into custody. USA, EU and some other Western states remarked they were worried about the latest developments in Egypt but they avoided labeling the intervention as a military coup. UK assumed such an attitude that they appeared to believe "what is done is done and we should look ahead". The

African Union defined the intervention as a coup d'état and suspended Egypt's membership. EU called for the formation of a legitimate government as the acts of violence ascended and EU's ministers of foreign affairs suggested Morsi be freed. John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, also issued a call for disengaging the imprisoned Egyptian politicians<sup>22</sup>.

Turkey have objected to the coup-induced power shift in Egypt since the very beginning and regarded it as an antidemocratic action. The Prime Minister Erdogan used the word 'tyrant' for el-Sisi in an interview for CNN International in July of 2014. Later, Egypt summoned Turkey's charge d'affaires, Alper Bosuter, in Cairo and expressed their disturbance about Erdogan's definition for Sisi<sup>23</sup>. In the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, Erdogan explicitly criticized that the Western world stayed mute to the military coup and Sisi's accession as president<sup>24</sup>. Turkey objected strictly to the verdict on the execution of Mohamed Morsi and 105 other pro-ikhwan prisoners. Furthermore, Erdogan suggested recognizing Morsi as the president of Egypt instead of Sisi, who took the power by force<sup>25</sup>.

Erdogan supported pro-democracy demonstrations and demands in the context of Egypt's Arab Spring experience. However, Turkish opposition parties and the Western and Israeli press assessed Turkey's attitude as 'pursuing an Islamist policy' since the improvement of Egyptian democracy gave an Islamist organization the chance to come to power. AK Party's attitude is actually in compliance with the doctrines of their ideology, which derives from a conservative Islamist tradition. Thus, Turkish conservative Islamist thinkers have always been in close contact with the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, President Erdogan criticized that the international organizations, includ-

ing the UN, stayed indifferent to the antidemocratic events in Egypt, uttering<sup>26</sup> “we are to show respect to elections if we are for democracy and or what the UN is for if we support those who have taken the power via a coup?”.

Turkey objected recurrently to Sisi’s accession after an antidemocratic military intervention. However, the 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey led the AK Party government to develop a different perception of foreign policy. The coup attempt enabled the AK Part government to realize they were dragged into deep loneliness after they assumed a nonobjective attitude to the Palestine tension with Israel; the relations with Russia almost came to an end after a Russian warplane was shot down for violating Turkey’s airspace; the Turkey-Armenia border gate stayed sealed due to the unresolvable problems between the two states; Turkey drop into a conflict of interests because of the USA’s supports for the Kurdish groups in Syria; they became frustrated with the struggles for the membership in the EU; and they had a refugee-induced political tension with Germany. At the Conference of the First 100 Days the 65<sup>th</sup> Government of Turkey, held in September of 2016, the Prime Minister Binali Yildirim expressed they would change the foreign policy although he already stated on 11 July 2016 that they had no reasons to quarrel with Iraq, Syria and Egypt<sup>27</sup>. Some important excerpts from Yildirim’s speech at the conference are as follows: “Our relations with Russia were once poor. However, we later improved the relations with Russia and Iran. We are struggling to normalize our relations with Syria and Egypt. Turkey has pushed to normalize the relations in the foreign policy.” We can infer from Yildirim’s statements that the AK Party government is determined to establish sustainable foreign policy<sup>28</sup>.

### *3. The Transformation of the Anti-Assad Protests into A Civil War and Turkey's Supports for Salafi Groups in Syria*

Shortly after the Tunisian street vendor Bouazizi's self-immolation on 17 December 2010, Hasan Ali Akleh enacted a self-immolation to protest the Assad regime on 26 January 2011. A shopkeeper was beaten by the police in Damascus on 17 February 2011 and around 1500 people poured into the streets to protest police violence. People marched on the streets of Dera on March 6 to shout "we will overthrow the regime" and they started to stage mass demonstrations as from March 15. Assad reacted to the street demonstrations with the state's military forces, using his tanks against his people. The rebels started to gather under the roof of the National Council as their political wing and of the Free Syrian Army as their armed wing. Realizing that he might fail to keep the control of the country, Assad made a promise for reforms and on the other hand he kept trying to eliminate the opposition by force. The Syrian rebels assembled a meeting in Istanbul on 11 September 2011 with the aim of organizing various opposition fractions under a single roof<sup>29</sup>.

The Syrian National Council promulgated their establishment on 2 October 2011. In the meanwhile, the Group of Friends of the Syrian People was created with Turkey's attempts. However, Turkey suspended Turkish Embassy in Damascus on 26 March 2012 since no peace was established in Syria until then. Assad's forces shot down a Turkish military jet in the international airspace on 22 June 2012 and Turkey threatened the Assad regime to respond acutely in case of recurrence of violation. The Kurdish National Council in Syria was established on 12 July 2012. After Assad retreated from the northern part of the country, PYD and other Kurdish groups

grabbed this territory. Turkey responded immediately after a mortar shell from Assad's fighters hit Akcakale of Sanliurfa. After the latest developments in the border line, Turkish National Assembly approved the resolution for military action of Turkish soldiers in foreign countries<sup>30</sup>.

Syria's post-Arab-Spring situation of a civil war became not only a political issue for Turkey but a matter of security as well. However, the AK Party governments aimed to break the ice and improve the relations with Syria in the pre-Spring period. Bashar el-Assad and his wife, Asma el-Assad, paid a visit to Turkey as a diplomatic move in August of 2008<sup>31</sup>. The visit had widespread national and international media coverage. In the meeting of Turkey and Syria Strategic Cooperation Council, held in December of 2009 in Damascus, Erdogan of Turkey called Assad 'my respectable brother', stating Syria was the second home for Turks and their gate into the Middle East. He further placed special emphasis in the importance of the Turkey-Syria relations, declaring Turkey as the gate of Syria into Europe<sup>32</sup>. Turkey-Syria relations were mostly in a positive atmosphere just until the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

Turkey always labeled the civil movements in the Northern Africa and Middle East as true demands for democracy. Integrated into the Western-type liberal economic and political system as from 1923, Turkey intended to be a good model and supported the political transformation of the region. Thus, Turkey called Assad for some Constitutional reforms in the very beginning of the Arab Spring. Assad remarked in a telephone conversation with Erdogan that he would amend Article 8 of the Constitution of Syria to terminate the one-party hegemony of the Ba'ath Party<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, Assad announced to grant an amnesty for all former members of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>34</sup>.

Turkey rationally decided to support the Salafi groups in Syria shortly after realizing Assad could never make satisfactory reforms. Some Sunni-Salafi countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan agreed on suspending Assad from active politics whereas Shia countries, Iran and Lebanon, focused with Iraq and Russia on the necessity of Assad's continuation in office<sup>35</sup>. Turkey's policy concentrated first on the integration of opposition groups, suggesting the international system implement sanctions against Syria. Assad started to lose legitimacy and committed human rights violation against the rebels while the acts of violence were ascending in Syria. Turkey tried to draw the UN's attention to Syria's human tragedy<sup>36</sup>.

Ahmet Davutoglu, the former minister of foreign affairs of Turkey, stated in 2012 that Turkey would stand together with the Syrian people against Assad and predicted the Assad regime would be overthrown within a couple of weeks or months<sup>37</sup>. On 7 January 2012, Erdogan made some statements in the group meeting of his party as follows<sup>38</sup>: "Syria is never an ordinary neighbor for us; we will never be indifferent to the latest events in Syria and leave the Syrian people in the lurch; Republican People's Party (CHP) may support the Ba'ath Party because they share the same mentality but we will never back tyrants; we will be in solidarity with the oppressed people of Syria". The following passage is from a report that was published on the official website of AK Party on 21 June 2012<sup>39</sup>.

"AK Party sees the tragedy in Syria as a mutual problem of two brothers. We wish our Syrian brothers would reach peace and quiet as soon as possible. The Islamic brotherhood is the identity of Turkey's policy on Syria. AK Party argues that the problems of Muslim people, especially of Palestine, are of a particular interest to Turkey and Turkey has the right to inter-

fere in these problems. The Ba'ath regime is usurping people's future. Turkey follows a people-oriented policy and helping the Syrian people is a matter of conscience".

The Turkey-Syria relations have been unsettled since Syria's downing of a Turkish RF-4E Phantom jet aircraft without any warning on alleged border violation on 22 July 2012<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, Turkish jets shot down an Mi-17 helicopter of Syrian Air Forces after warning for air space violation on 16 September 2013<sup>41</sup>. Thus, Syria's Arab Spring experience has become a matter of border security for the AK Party government.

Erdogan suggested no Muslim people or countries support such cruelty soon after civil commotions turned into a war in Syria<sup>42</sup>. Turkey's Syria policy evolved in parallel with the developments in the region. Turkey downed an MIG-23 of Syria for airspace violation near Hatay border in accordance with the rules of engagement on 23 March 2014<sup>43</sup>. In the same year, the AK Party government allowed the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga across border to fight ISIS in Kobane<sup>44</sup>. Two Syrian aircrafts were downed by Turkey for airspace violation on 16 May 2015 and 16 October 2015<sup>45</sup>.

Turkey's border with Syria became insecure and Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in accordance with Article 51 of UN Charter in case Kurdish groups' created a geopolitical passage and ISIS captured important parts of Syria whereas Russia and Iran emerged as two powerful agents in the region. Turkey performed the 216-day-long operation together with the Free Syrian Army and liberated Jarabulus, al-Rai and al-Bab from ISIS. The operation stopped ISIS and prevented pro-Syrian regime forces and YPG fighters from advancing, precluding the creation of a Kurdish passage by uniting the cantons of Afrin and Kobane<sup>46</sup>.

In the meanwhile, Turkey gained a crucial experience by using mechanized infantry corps, tank and artillery corps, air forces and unmanned aerial vehicles. The knowledge obtained from the operation will probably make a positive contribution to Turkey's defense industry<sup>47</sup>. After the completion of Operation Euphrates Shield, President Erdogan remarked Turkey would launch new operations under different names to fight the Europe-backed terrorist organizations. Pointing to the continuation of Turkey's Syria Strategy, he further stated the forthcoming months will be spring for Turkey and Turkish people but a deadly winter for terrorists<sup>48</sup>.

Turkey-Russia relations have been damaged after Turkey's downing a Russian warplane on its border with Syria whereas Turkey-Iran relations have become a matter of regional competition since Iran attempted to fill in the power gap in the region with Shia militias. Russia's deployment of S-400 air defense system in Latakia in 2015 has changed the dynamics in Syria<sup>49</sup>. The regional agents have increased their activities in Syria as from 2016: Iran has sent revolutionary guards and mercenaries to the region and spent vast amounts of money to support Assad whereas Hezbollah has kept its position as the second most crowded pro-Assad regime group while Russia has continued airstrikes in the region. USA has regarded the Kurdish groups, particularly YPG, as important partners in the fight against ISIS. Germany has contributed to the training of the Kurdish groups in addition to USA's ammunition distribution to YPG<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, France has played an active role in the region since the November 2015 Paris attacks and taken part in the USA-led coalition<sup>51</sup>. France and USA have made an agreement to perform joint operations in case of locating chemical weapon storage facilities<sup>52</sup>. In the light of all these developments, Turkey has abandoned the goal of being

a playmaker in the region but proved it has a capacity to ruin the plans excluding Turkey.

President Erdogan has always used the same concepts -conscience, justice, equity and civilization- in his remarks on the troubles of the Muslim people in Syria, Iraq and Myanmar. He has further emphasized that focusing of these troubles is a responsibility of Turkey as the Ottoman Empire showed many examples of standing by oppressed people<sup>53</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

Turkey's right-wing conservative Islamist movement has been worried about the territories lost by the Ottoman Empire since the declaration of the Republic. The issue of abolition of the caliphate is of particular importance for the movement. Believing the loss of the leadership of the Muslim world is one of the biggest mistakes of the Republic, conservative Islamists designate a geopolitical region out of the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, Turkish Islamist thinkers assert the Muslim world will be freed from the Western oppression and invasion by means of an Islamic unity for which they envisage Turkey as the leader.

AK Party has deviated from the direction of the conventional Turkish foreign policy and come closer to the conservative Islamist trend since the inauguration of Ahmet Davutoglu as the minister of foreign affairs although the Party defines itself as a conservative central party. Davutoglu was certainly *not* the only decision maker. Erdogan and Abdullah Gül have also played considerable roles as prime ministers and presidents in AK Party's foreign policy shift. AK Party's critical decision makers come from conservative Islamist backgrounds. Thus, they have tried to follow an active policy within the geopolitical territory of their ideology since they came to the power.

The Arab Spring has enabled to follow such a policy in the early years.

Egypt and Syria are the two significant issues in which Turkey has followed an identity policy referring to some universal values such as democracy and human rights. However, Turkey's choice of identity policy has brought it into conflicts with USA and European countries in Egypt and with Russia, Iran and USA again in Syria. Turkey's insufficient defense industry and dependence on outside energy restrain its skill variety despite being a medium-sized country in the Middle East. Thus, Turkey is unable to possess the qualification of a playmaker and act independently in the geography of the Muslim world. However, both regional and global powers must take Turkey into consideration as a key country in their Egypt and Syria policies. Governments may disguise themselves in various ideological identities just as Russia sometimes masquerades as Slavic nationalist. Thus, we may regard Turkey's choice of an identity policy in foreign affairs as noncontradictory and Turkey is supposed to accept the potential positive and negative effects of such a choice. Aware of the potential risks, Turkey has vowed to create a more sustainable foreign policy rather than an identity policy after the domestic crisis of the 2016 coup attempt.

### *(Endnotes)*

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- <sup>8</sup> Sezai Karakoc, "Büyük Onur ve Özgürlük Savaşı", **Diriliş**, VII. Dönem, Sayı: 83, 1990, Yıl: 30, p. 1, 15.
- <sup>9</sup> Erdogan's visit had widespread coverage in the European press with the following headlines: "Erdogan Wishes to Introduce Himself as New Voice of Muslim World" (Times); "Erdogan's Visit to Boost Turkey's Power and Isolate Israel in Region" (The Guardian); "US Worries about Turkey-Israel Clash" (FT), "Islam's New Caliph?" (Die Welt); "Erdogan: Prince of Middle East" (Berliner Morgenpost); "Egypt Welcomes Erdogan as New Hero of Arabs" (Corriere della Sera); "Ankara Takes Steps for Palestine" (La Repubblica). These headlines show the West regard AK Party's intention to take an active role in the Middle East as the attempt to play first chair in the region. The Israeli press mentioned Erdogan's visit as follows: "Erdogan: New Saladin" (Israeli Hayom); "Erdogan says Israel Damages its Legitimacy" (Jerusalem Post); "Turkey's PM Attacks on Israel from Egypt. Welcomed Like a Rock Star" (Yedioth Ahronot); "Erdogan in Cairo: Israel's Aggressiveness Threatens Future of Israel" (Haaretz); "Israel Imperils its Future" (Maariv); "Israel to Pay For Terrorist Attacks" Source: "Erdoğan'ın Gezisi Yazılı Basının Manşetlerinde", **Habertürk**, 14 September 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/669442-yeni-halife-erdogan> (Date of Access: 15.10.2015). The Israeli presses draw attention to Erdogan's statements on Palestine, interpreting Erdogan's visit as a step to being the leader of the Muslim world.
- <sup>10</sup> "I suggest Egypt creating secular Constitution because secularism is not the enemy of religion. Do not be afraid of secularism. I hope Egypt will have a secular regime and my statements of secularism will help change Egyptian people's views on secularism. The Constitution of Turkey defines secularism as the state of treating all religions equally. Secularism is by no means same as atheism. I, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, am a Muslim but not a secularist. I am the prime minister of a secular state" Source: "Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Arap Baharı Turu", <http://www.siyasetdergisi.com.tr/Haber/BASBAKANR-DO%C4%9EAN%E2%80%99DAN-%>, (Date of Access: 15.10.2015).
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- <sup>24</sup> "The democratic states of the UN just sit back and watch a president elected by popular votes has been removed by a military coup and people have been killed when they have poured into streets to call the junta to account for their usurped votes. The person who has staged the coup is being legalized. We are to show respect to elections if we are for democracy and or I wonder what the UN is for if we support those who have taken the power via a coup." Source: "Erdoğan BM'ye Hitap Etti", **Milliyet**, 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-bm-ye-hitap-ediyor/dunya/detay/1945298/default.htm>, (Date of Access: 15.10.2015).

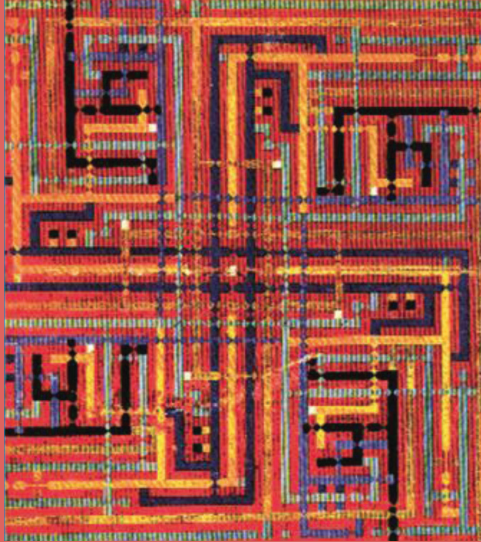
- <sup>25</sup> During his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Erdogan answered the questions on death penalty as follows: "As you may know, we have always objected to the coup in Egypt as from the very beginning. As a democrat politician of a democratic country, I may never be expected to approve a coup d'état. The pro-junta gang has already sentenced hundreds of anti-coup people to death penalty. Furthermore, the junta has recently condemned Morsi, who came to power with 52% of the popular vote, to death. I have always declared in international arenas that we never recognize Sisi the coup plotter as the president of Egypt. I would like to repeat it here: In the eye of Turkey, the president of Egypt is not Sisi but Morsi" Source: "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Mısır'ın cumhurbaşkanı Sisi değildir yine Mursi'dir", **Sabah**, 2015, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/webtv/dunya/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-misirin-cumhurbaskani-sisi-degildir-yine-mursidir>, (Date of Access: 15.10.2015). Before the coup was staged in Egypt, Ahmet Davutoglu, the former minister of foreign affairs of Turkey, expressed the same statement on 15 July 2013 that "The president of Egypt is always Morsi for us" Source: Anadolu Ajansı, *ibid*.
- <sup>26</sup> Here are some important excerpts from Erdogan's speech: "Those who protest murders in Iraq and Syria and object to the abolition of democracy in Egypt receive false charges and are accused immediately of promoting terrorism. Those who criticize some countries harshly for the lack of freedom of press today keep ignoring 16 journalists killed in Palestine and they remain indifferent to the oppression on the press. I would like to declare it clearly that he who takes no notice of killings of kids and innocent women take part in this inhumane crime. Furthermore, the modern world's double standards cause severe distrust in the eyes of large masses of people. People's distrust of United Nations and other international organizations tarnishes the sense of justice and discourages millions of people. Today's international terrorism feeds basically on this distrust. Double standards against the oppressed and the indifference to killings of kids supply oxygen for terrorism. Disappointed with the United Nations and other international organizations, masses of people are trapped by terrorism. The democratic states of the UN just sit back and watch the overthrowing of a legitimate president elected by popular vote whereas the coup plotter becomes legalized." Source: "Erdoğan'dan BM'de tarihi konuşma!", **Takvim**, 2014, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2014/09/24/erdogandan-bmde-tarihi-konusma>, (Date of Access: 30.09.2017). "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, BM Genel Kurulu'na hitap etti", <http://kdk.gov.tr/haber/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-bm-genel-kuruluna-hitap-etti/492>, (Erişim Tarihi: 20.20.2017).
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