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Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse in the 2000s: "The New Turkey"

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Abstract

The Justice and Development Party (JDP), which came to power in 2002 and has been ruling Turkey since then, represents a turning point for both Turkish political life and Turkish foreign policy. Starting from the first years, the government has introduced Turkey a new style of politics and constructed a new internal and foreign policy discourse. "The New Turkey" rhetoric is a concept frequently highlighted by the President Erdogan and the Prime Minister Davutoglu in the recent years and has become more popular after the presidency election. With this rhetoric, the JPD government relates the old Turkey with the military coups and the military's influence on politics while connoting the new Turkey with civilian democracy and national will. On the foreign policy side, the new Turkey is connotated with more activity in world affairs, playing an influential role in regional conflict resolution, participating in all global arenas, as well as reaching the top ten economies worldwide. The New Turkey is related with "2023 Vision", which refers to the goal list to achieve by the centennial of the founding of the Turkish Republic. "The New Turkey" is seeking for a more active, powerful regional and global player role. It is on one hand new and tries to break the ties off with the 20th century Turkey, but on the contrary it builds the ties with the more past, like the Ottoman Empire period. This discourse provides the privilege of exerting dominance over the former one. What is negative is always belong to the past Turkey, everything about The New Turkey is always positive, good and legitimate. This paper will try to examine the Turkish foreign policy discourse under JDP's rule. The deconstruction of "The New Turkey" discourse will help to analyze how the Turkish government meticulously constructs a political language.

Introduction

Turkey, who has been pursuing a more active role in world affairs since the early 2000s, has experienced remarkable turning points within the last thirteen years. The conservative JDP ruled the country for three terms starting from 2002 and after losing the majority of

the parliament required to establish a single-party government again in the last elections held on 7th June 2015 and the failure to constitute a coalition government, Turkey faces new elections that will be held in November.

JDP's era in Turkish political life represents not only stabilization of politics but also an economic growth especially in the first years. However, it is the era with many internal and international discussions about the democracy and foreign policy. As well as the government was trying to consolidate its authority within the country, Turkey started to seek for a regional leader position in the international arena. In this context, JDP has deployed a foreign policy discourse, trying to construct a world which Turkey would have dominant power.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism argues that global politics is guided by the actors' intersubjectively shared ideas, norms and values. It emphasizes the intersubjective dimension of knowledge, the social aspect of human existence and the role of shared ideas that forms an ideational structure shaping behavior.[1] Constructivism offers not only physical power but also discoursive power need to be studied in order to understand global politics. It accepts that ideas are a form of power.[2] This means that power is related with both physical and social realities. Constructivism asserts that the world is socially constructed, and discourse assumes an important role in this construction.

As Schmidt and Radaelli describe, discourse is a set of policy ideas and values in terms of content and is a process of interaction concentrated on policy formulation and communication in terms of usage.[3] Discourse, they argue, represents not only the policy ideas that speak to the soundness and appropriateness of policy programmes but also the interactive processes of policy formulation and communication that serve to form and

[1] Dale C. Copeland, The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism, Constructivism and International Relations, Ed.: Stefano Guzzini, Anna Leander, Routledge, 2006, pp.1-20, p. 3.
[2] Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism", International Security , Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 1998, p. 177.
[3] Vivien A. Schmidt, Claudio M. Radaelli, Policy Change and Discourse in Europe: Conceptual and Methodological Issues, West European Politics, Vol. 27, No. 2, March 2004, pp. 183-210, p. 184.

convey those policy ideas. This definition of discourse encompass all language, narrative, or communicative action without prejudging the kind of ontological or epistemological approach.[4]

As Foucault underlines, there is a strong relation between discourse and power. He argues, in any society, there are various relations of power which establish, characterize and diffuse the social body, while signaling that these relations of power cannot be constituted, implemented and condensed themselves; the production, dissemination, collection of discourse is the one that makes it possible. "There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth."[5]

Following this Foucauldian approach, it can be argued that discourse plays an important role for JDP to exercise and consolidate its power not only within the country, but also in international politics. This paper will attempt to analyze Turkish Foreign Policy discourse in the 2000s, under JDP's rule, especially focusing on "The New Turkey" rhetoric, while looking from a constructivist approach to international relations. It will discuss how JDP constructs the world by the use of language, how it constructs reality discursively.

JDP's Foreign Policy

It is widely believed that the year 2002 is a milestone for Turkish political life. JDP, The Justice and Development Party, came to power that year after some coalition governments and started to rule the country with a single-party government for three terms. The party is a conservative right wing party, with the baggage of the political Islamist views of its politicians in the past, yet positioning itself as a conservative center-right party rather than an Islamist one. At first, the party aroused suspicions for having a secret agenda of establishing an Islamic regime in Turkey because of the former Islamist reputation. Starting from the early days, JDP's both internal and foreign policies have not

[4] Ibid, p. 193.
[5] Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, Ed.: Colin Gordon, New York, Pantheon Books, p. 93.

only been subject to intensive discussion among the Turkish scholars but also debates among the world academia on Turkish foreign policy and the possibility of being a role model in the Middle East region have been observed.

JDP's high interest to the Middle East region and the Arab World has raised the debates whether there is an "axis shift" in the Turkish foreign policy, while evoking "Neo-Ottomanism" discussions. Axis shift is used to refer converting the direction of the Turkish foreign policy from the West, where Turkey has turned her face starting from the modernization process in the Ottoman period, to the East. It is used to blame the government of giving priority to the Eastern world while ignoring the relations with the Western world, such as the relations with the European Union. On the other hand, the party has faced the claim of pursuing a Neo-Ottoman foreign policy, trying to revive the Ottoman Empire. Yet, the party rejects these claims and argues that it implements a multi-dimensional foreign policy rather than an axis shift or Neo-Ottomanism. Suat Kınıklıoglu, JDP's former Deputy Chairman for External Affairs, for instance, argues that Turkey's neighborhood policy is realistic and based on genuine interests, not some romantic neo-Ottoman nostalgia. He notes that there is a neo-Ottoman revival in the cultural field, yet the foreign policy initiatives should not be considered as the products of an imperialist agenda. He emphasizes that Turkey's neighborhood policy under JDP government is devised to reintegrate Turkey into its immediate neighborhoods, including the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean.[6]

It is noteworthy to stress that JDP has introduced Turkish foreign policy with a new style of diplomacy. The new principles of Turkish foreign policy have been conveyed by Ahmet Davutoglu. Davutoglu is the former Chief Advisor on Foreign Policy and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and has become the Prime Minister of the JDP government as well as the head of the party when the party's leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan was elected President. As a former academician, Davutoglu constructed a foreign policy in a

[6] Suat Kınıklıoğlu, "'Neo-Ottoman' Turkey?", 12.03.2009, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/kiniklioglu2/English, (10.07.2015).

theoretical framework. This framework is based on the one hand a Kantian idealism emphasizing the ethical values, and a geopolitical attitude following reel-politik on the other. It also includes a historical and cultural view and integration models aiming economic and political cooperation.[7] Davutoglu offers an integrated foreign policy approach. He argues that Turkey has multiple regional identities. This enables Turkey to perform an integrated foreign policy which covers a large field from the Middle East peace process to Caucasian stability.[8]

Davutoglu's work, which was first published in 2001, the Strategic Depth, is a kind of road-map for Turkish foreign policy in JDP's era. Turkey, Davutoglu argues, faces the responsibility to create a new and meaningful combination of her historical depth and her strategic depth, while putting this combination into practice in accordance with her geographical depth.[9]

Davutoglu suggests that Turkey's foreign policy today is shaped by three methodological and five operational principles. The first methodological principle is its "visionary approach" to the issues which means to leave the "crisis oriented" attitude that was common during the Cold War era. The second methodological principle is to ground Turkish foreign policy on a "consistent and systematic" framework around the world. The last one is the adoption of a new discourse and diplomatic style. This new diplomatic style and discourse have extended Turkey's soft power within the region. On the other hand, establishing the balance between security and democracy is the first operational principle Davutoglu designs. He proposes "zero problems towards neighbors" as the second principle. The third operational principle is proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy. This principle intents to get measures before crisis occur. The other principles

[7] Çağrı Erhan, Türk Dış Politikasının Güncel Sorunları, İmaj Yayıncılık, 2010, p. 3.
[8] Bülent Aras, Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy, SETA Policy Brief, May 2009, Brief No: 32, p. 7-8.
[9] Ahmet Davutoğlu, Stratejik Derinlik , İstanbul, Küre Yayınları , 2013, 88. Baskı , p. 563.

are loyalty to a multi-dimensional foreign policy and rhythmic diplomacy, which means Turkey's assuming a more active role in international relations.[10]

As Erhan denotes, Davutoglu's efforts persuaded the JDP leadership that Turkey has the capability to become a global power, if it becomes a regional superpower first. Davutoglu foresees that Turkey's soft power instruments in her foreign policy towards neighbouring regions, including the Middle East, if efficiently used, would yield her to be a global actor. Considering Turkey as the most important country in terms of economy, military power and culture in a vast area extending from central Europe to China, Davutoglu believes that Turkey can establish an "order" in its vicinity. In this context, the Middle East, with its geographic closeness as well as economic and cultural affiliation to Turkey, is the major region to increase Turkey's activism.[11]

JDP's enthusiastic and dynamic foreign policy, combined with the boom in the growing economy, seemed to be impressive at its first years. Turkey expanded her soft power, especially within the Middle East region till the first years of the Arab Spring.

In JDP's era, "identity" has found more ground in the Turkish foreign policy. It is the first time in Turkey's politics that a government which identifies itself with an alternative identity rather than the traditional elite is observed and this situation has also reflected on foreign policy. Turkey in this era, has started to present this identity to the Western system which she is a part of, as well as her geostrategic significance. In a world, where identity politics gains more importance globally, the rule of a party which puts its identity forward and which uses identity in foreign politics in Turkey represents a new style in foreign policy, it is the novelty of JPD's foreign policy.[12]

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[10] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy", Foreign Policy, 20 May 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy?page=0,1, (17.10.2011).

[11] Çağrı Erhan, Turkey's New Activism in the Middle East, International Conference In cooperation with the German 'Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik', 29-30 June 2010, p. 2, http://www.sogde.org/framescontent/projekte/2010/conference_berlin_turkey/erhan_beitrag.pdf, (15.08.2015).

[12] İlhan Uzgel, "Türkiye de, Dış Politikası da Değişiyor", Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası, Ed. Habibe Özdal, Osman Bahadır Dinçer, Mehmet Yegin, Cilt 2, Ankara, USAK Yayınları, 2010, s. 293-294.

It is a common comment in the Turkish international relations academia that with JDP, the foreign policy language and narrative of Turkey has shifted explicitly. The main signals of this shift are the "new concepts" that are put into usage in this era. Concepts like 'good relations with neighbours' (or Davutoglu's zero-problems with neighbours), 'cooperation between civilizations', 'historical dimension', 'visionary aspect' provide to create a new foreign policy discourse. Actually, all of these concepts are not created by JDP only, but they become popular in JDP era.[13]

One of the remarkable developments in Turkish political life in the recent years is the democratic reconciliation in the Kurdish problem. The government initiated a democratic peace process in order to constitute the social peace within the country, especially with the Kurdish citizens. As it is known, Turkey has faced a great terror problem started in the 1980s. The government declared that peaceful means would be used in order to solve this problem, rather than the military operations. The New Turkey would be expected to be a unified one, where all the citizens enjoy the same rights regardless of their ethnic origin. Unfortunately, this peace process has come to an end today. Nowadays, Turkey witnesses PKK's (the Kurdistan Workers' Party) bombing and killing police forces and soldiers, the military's operations towards PKK every single day.

The Old Turkey/ The New Turkey

"The New Turkey" rhetoric is often deployed by the President Erdogan and the Prime Minister Davutoglu in the recent years. Its popularity raised especially during the presidency election campaign and after the election. On 10th August 2014 Erdogan was elected the first President of Turkey. It is remarkable since Turkey had a parliamentary system political tradition and political culture, and the President was used to be elected by the parliament before. Being elected by people, brings a new kind of legitimacy to the President, who used to be impartial and not responsible and accelerates the Presidential system discussions within the country. It is noteworthy to address that "The New Turkey"

[13] Murat Yeşiltaş , Ali Balcı , "AK Parti Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası Sözlüğü: Kavramsal Bir Harita", Bilgi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi , Cilt 13, No: 2, Kış 2011, s. 10.

Erdogan imagines is a one that is governed by Presidential system, not a parliamentary one.

Stressing "The New Turkey" enables the JPD government to relate the old Turkey with the military coups and the military's influence on politics while connoting the new Turkey with civilian democracy and national will. The military has always been influential on politics in Turkey since the foundation of the Republic, and Turkey's democracy history witnessed two coup d'états and a military memorandum. In the 2000s, it is the first time that the military lost its influence on politics and it has been presented by JDP as a civilization of politics. It was shocking that many generals, commanders were arrested and sent to prisons for long years accused of planning a military coup against the government. Most of them were acquitted recently after staying long periods in prison.

On the foreign policy side, the new Turkey is connoted with more activity in world affairs, playing an influential role in regional conflict resolution, participating in all global arenas, as well as reaching the top ten economies worldwide. "The New Turkey" is related with "2023 Vision", which refers to the goal list to achieve by the centennial of the founding of the Turkish Republic. "The New Turkey" is seeking for a more active, powerful regional and global player role.

Davutoglu adapted a slogan while he was the Foreign Minister, referred to a well-known quote from modern Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk: "There is no defense of a line, but there is a defense of the surface. That surface is the entire homeland." The leader was describing his strategy in geometric and military terms during the Independence War before the Battle of Sakarya in 1921. Davutoglu transformed this famous quote into a new understanding of Turkish foreign policy: "There is no diplomacy of a line but there is the diplomacy of the surface. That surface is the entire globe."[14] This quote was used as

[14] Fulya Özerkan, 'Architect of Strategic Depth concept unveils new foreign policy', Hurriyet Daily News, 01.04.2010, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=architect-of-8216strategic-depth8217-concept-unveils-new-foreign-policy-manifesto-2010-01-04, (19.08.2015)

a motto in the official website of the ministry. This gives an idea about the ambitions of the new Turkish foreign policy.

New usually refers to good, better. New is the one that is not old. New is the one that invalidates the old one, or makes the old one irrelevant. New is the preferred, favorite. This discourse provides the privilege of exerting dominance over the former one. What is negative is always belong to the past Turkey, everything about The New Turkey is always positive, good and legitimate. Discourse is a form of power and here it is observed that JDP uses the concept "new" as a tool of consolidating its power and legitimacy.

It is remarkable to underline that while emphasizing her being new, she is also ancient, has a long cultural history and carries all the legacy she gets from her ancestors. The party tries to link The New Turkey to the old magnificient history, yet break the links with most of the 20th century's Turkey.

As Duran addresses, "the New Turkey" symbolizes the founding role of JDP, especially Erdogan; it refers to the goal of re-constituting the Republic. He denotes that, with the help of "the New Turkey" discourse, JDP has managed to locate Turkey to a new position internally and internationally.[15]

The New Turkey rhetoric is related with the "2023 Vision". 2023 is the centennial of the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The 2023 Vision is composed of the goals list in many different areas such as justice, science and technology, regional development, democratization, foreign policy, education, energy, customs and trade, national security, transportation and communication, economy.[16]

"The New Turkey" discourse is combined with the composition of an anthem also called as "The New Turkey". It was played for the first time at the opening ceremony of the

[15] Burhanettin Duran, "Yeni Türkiye Söyleminin Büyüsü", Sabah, 02/09/2014, http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/duran/2014/09/02/yeni-turkiye-soyleminin-buyusu, (16.07.2015).
[16] Ak Parti, https://www.akparti.org.tr/site/hedefler, (18.08.2015).

New Turkey Strategic Research Center, which the President Erdogan also participated.[17] The anthem is about constructing the "great" Turkey, in the pursuit of becoming a global actor. It refers to the religious themes while referring Erdogan as the leader who gets his power from the God.

For the last elections held in June 2015, the Prime Minister and the Head of JDP Davutoglu prepared an election promises called "The New Turkey Contract: 2023".[18] Published in April 2015, the contract consisted of 100 articles. Article 2 says that "Progressing toward the Republic's centennial, the New Turkey will be the product of a comprehensive rejuvenation that speaks to changing needs of our time and our globalized space as well as the outcome of a process of Turkey's reconstruction since 2002". Article 4 emphasizes Turkey's ethnic, religious, sectarian and regional diversity and the rich inheritance of her ancient history. Safeguarding 'human dignity' as the most fundamental principle of the Republic of Turkey, JDP dates the respect for human dignity back to the Anatolian traditions and values in the 13th century and places it as a ground for its foreign policy (article 6-10). In article 18 JDP manifests its historic goal as "to turn the nation, with all its diverse components, into an active agent, not subject, of global community, and to transform the Turkish state, which derives its power from the people, into a pioneer, rather than passive follower, of history". This article demonstrates that Turkey is seeking for a more active, assertive regional and global player role within the international system. This manifesto shows that Turkey has been reconstructed by JDP not only physically but also linguistically.

The Last Elections: End of "the New Turkey" discourse?

After the rule of JDP's single-party government for three terms, JDP lost the majority that it needs to get to power alone in the elections held on 7th June 2015. The parliamentary elections were held in an environment of debates on the transition to a presidential system of government and to some extent achievement of internal

[17] Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'a 'Yeni Türkiye Marşı' ile Karşılama, Hürriyet, 11.04.2015, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/28703183.asp, (13.07.2015).
[18] Yeni Türkiye Sözleşmesi, https://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/yeni-turkiye-sozlesmesi-2023/73285#1, (12.08.2015).

reconciliation with the Kurds. Yet, this reconciliation has deteriorated just after the elections. Actually, JDP lost the majority it needed since Peoples' Democratic Party has exceeded the election threshold, which is as high as 10% and gained 80 representatives in the Grand Assembly.

So, here comes the question whether this signals an end or failure for "the New Turkey" discourse? Actually, it is hard to give a satisfactory response to this question. Politics is changing very fast in Turkey right now and the country is up to a new election. It is a bit early to make a meaningful foresight since there are plenty of ambiguities dominating Turkish politics today.

It is also noteworthy to mention that after the elections, "the New Turkey" slogan is used by JDP's opposition as well. Some newspapers use it as a response. Cumhuriyet columnist Cigdem Toker, for instance, calles JDP's decline in the elections as "The New Turkey".[19] This shows that the discourse is not only constructed and used by the government, but it can also be used against it by its opponents, too.

Conclusion

JDP introduced Turkey with a new style of foreign policy as well as a new foreign policy discourse. It attempted to construct and shape a world where Turkey assumes a more active, regional leader role. "The New Turkey" discourse has been employed to achieve this goal. It has been used in order to contribute to the production and reproduction of legitimacy, as well as the consolidation of power within the country and in the international level. The last elections seem to be a turndown for "The New Turkey", yet whether it will be used as a promise of stability for the upcoming elections is a remaining question.

[19] Çiğdem Toker, "Yeni Türkiye", Cumhuriyet, 08.06.2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/294213/Yeni_Turkiye.html, (23.07.2015).

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