



**International Relations  
Multidisciplinary  
Doctoral School**

## **COLLECTION OF THE THESES**

**Zoltán EGERESI**

**Neo-Ottomanist Hegemonic Order and its Implications on Ankara's  
Foreign Policy in the Balkans**

**Supervisors:**

**László Csicsmann, Dr. Habil  
Erzsébet N. Rózsa, Dr. Habil.**

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## 1. Introduction and hypotheses

Probably the first questions that arise when one starts to depict Turkish foreign policy (TFP) towards the Balkans are ‘*what does Turkey really do in the region and what does it really want to achieve?*’ which practically means that research may focus on the *tools* and the *object* of Ankara’s external ambitions. Nevertheless, for the author, to reveal the *cause* seemed to be more relevant because it may provide a deeper understanding of Turkish foreign policy’s nature, motives and makes its prediction easier.

Re-emergence as a powerful regional actor was a sign of a turn in TFP under the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) rule. The AKP being in the power since 2002 has produced probably one of the most debated and discussed contemporary foreign policies during the last more than a decade. This debate, or these debates – presented in a given chapter – preliminary rather focused on Ankara’s EU accession, later its stance towards its Western partners and its search for new allies. It is safe to say that the majority of scholars have chosen the Middle East as a case study to test and analyse Turkey’s foreign relations and their changing dynamics. The Arab Spring, and its tremendous effects in 2011 put Turkey, again in the centre of analysis and promoted it, again, to become a model for democratizing Arab countries. The ‘Turkish model,’ later Ankara’s growing difficulties in the Middle Eastern neighbours, especially the Syrian war has kept Turkey an important focal point of IR and FPA literature. However, Turkey’s growing leverage on its neighbours during the last 10-15 years also affected its relations with south-eastern European countries.

News, articles, policy papers focusing on Turkey’s activism in the Balkans began to be frequently published / issued after the recently-nominated, new Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu’s visit in Sarajevo in fall 2009. At a conference organized in the Bosnian capital, he elaborated his ideas about Turkey’s historical mission in the Balkans and the need to reinstate good intraregional relations. His speech brought back Turkey to the spotlight (at least in the Balkans’ context) and gave an impetus to political analysts, researchers and journalists to work on Turkish foreign policy in South-Eastern Europe. Ankara’s successes in the region – as a facilitator of the rapprochement between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, trade agreements, almost immediate recognition and support of Kosovo, spectacular expansion of Turkish organizations etc. – provided enough ground for speculations and researches about the features of Ankara’s ambitions in the region. The public interest increased even in Hungary, as the issue was presented in various articles and lectures.

It has become obvious that although the relations between Turkey and the Balkans<sup>1</sup> provide an excellent ground for a thesis presenting and discussing the history of Turkish foreign policy with a historian's tools and point of view, it, however, could not be enough to explain the current relations adequately. History and the developments of bi- and multilateral relations, the notion of Balkans and Ottoman heritage occupy an important part of this dissertation. Nevertheless, simply revealing the various conflicts of the last century, immigration waves, wars and Turkey's current activities in a linear manner would have narrowed the scope of the thesis and hide important social and political changes in the country's recent history. Nonetheless, the author admits that more extended researches and prospective publications about the history of relations between the Balkans and Turkey would strengthen the Hungarian *Balkanologie*.

These findings also pointed out the importance of two notions: *power* and *dynamism*. The preliminary assumption of the research – Turkey's hegemony or dominance over various countries directly put *power* into the heart of this research project. Nevertheless, further fieldworks convinced the Author, that scope from predominantly inter-state relations should be switched to domestic level. Power that runs and shapes politics within a country shapes its foreign policy as well. In a country like Turkey, where power struggle was so apparent during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (relatively frequent coup d'états, regimes changes) and successive hegemonic and counter-hegemonic project dominated the political landscape from the Young Turks to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP. That is why the Author decided to highlight the changes of Turkish domestic political structure which influences the country's foreign activism. This focal point – the nature of power in the domestic Turkish context – made it indispensable to turn towards a theory that has adequate explanatory force to understand the dynamics of internal factors and features of Turkish foreign policy. The dynamics also suggested orienting

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<sup>1</sup> The Author has to address the problem of definition of the 'Balkans.' A number of approaches exist that defines the region geographically, politically and consequently gives different country groupings for it. According to some perceptions, even Turkey shall be considered as a Balkan country which also underlines the country's relevance for the region (some five percent of Turkey, including the half of Istanbul and its metropolitan area is also located in the geographical Balkan area). Without presenting the literature about the possible definition of the region the Author defines the Balkans as a political-geographical area consisting of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. The Author does not consider Greece to be part of this analytical country grouping. Its reason is twofold. Firstly, it is linked to the fact that during the Cold War, Greece's history and development started to diverge from Socialist Balkan states (that now, after a long period of transition, intend to catch up to Athens). Secondly, Greek-Turkish relations are more intensive due to the permanent problems such as the dispute about the exact delimitation of the Aegean Sea border and more importantly, because of the Cyprus issue. The involvement of this issue would extend the limits of present thesis. Slovenia is not considered as a Balkan country, either. Due to its different history – it was a core part of Austria for centuries – and the lack of Ottoman conquest, it shall be put to other country group such as Central Europe.

towards a theoretical framework that can explain the causes of changes in Turkish foreign policy.

The domestic changes affected the country's foreign policy in a great manner. One of the main theoretical questions of the thesis is that how domestic political (power) transformation shapes a country's foreign policy goals, tools and characteristics. The other one is related to how international world order influences the nature of the domestic power, and consequently the foreign policy.

In this context this thesis intends to provide adequate answers to the question of 1) *whether Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian theory can be as a theoretical framework* in the analysing the Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans. This piece would make an attempt to elaborate 2) *why and how Turkish foreign policy has changed during the AKP-era*, especially after the nomination of Davutoğlu. The thesis 3) *reflects to the current debate about Turkish foreign policy* conflicts with its traditional Western allies and its reorientation towards its 'newly found' neighbourhood. In this respect, this work 4) *evaluates Ankara's foreign policy* as well.

To answer these questions and achieve these goals, this dissertation is divided into three main parts. The first one portrays the methodology and hypotheses, elaborates the theoretical foundations and gives an overview about the debates on TFP. In the second main chapter, the Author presents the AKP's political emergence and the internal power transformation that features the period between 2002 and 2018. Although the dissertation outlines the historical background of the political trajectory of Islamist parties, it rather focuses on this 16-year-long period which starts 3 November 2002 by the electoral victory of the AKP and lasts until the 24 June 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections which cemented the AKP's power and introduced the presidential system in Turkey creating a cornerstone in the process of hegemony building. This chapter elaborates the features of the AKP's hegemony in Turkey and its neo-Ottoman political cultural characteristics. This section also shows how neoliberal world order affected Turkey. The third part establishes the links between the party's hegemony and its foreign policy towards the Balkans. This chapter explains why usually Muslim communities play a central role in Turkey's ambitions and how Turkish decision-makers portray the Balkans. It analyses the activities of Turkish foreign policy institutions and the non-governmental actors' role in representing Ankara's interests. Furthermore, this chapter also address the economic relations between Balkan countries and Turkey.

By writing this thesis, the Author intended to contribute to development on Social Sciences. The following elements played the role in choosing the topic.

### **1) Testing theory**

This thesis's theoretical framework offers a unique case and approach to explain current political dynamics within Turkey and its foreign policy making, especially towards the Balkans. Gramsci's political materialist theory about hegemony and the construction of hegemonic bloc is not unknown in the Hungarian and international literature, however, in Hungary its 'application' is very limited. There is no Hungarian translation of his famous *Prisons notebooks*; only some chapters or parts were published that is far inadequate to make extended research in Hungarian about his theory that explains why his idea had very limited effects on Hungarian researches. Nonetheless, his ideas have a valuable explanatory capability to reveal and understand AKP's domestic politics in Turkey, and some dimensions of its foreign policy. Nevertheless, it is just one side of the coin.

The 're-invention of Gramsci' by American IR theorists helped to redefine its preliminary, rather society-oriented theory. Robert W. Cox has changed the previous scope by broadening to the global level. He and his followers offered a system-level analytical framework based on permanent change and movement refusing a static approach and admitting the relevance of dynamism. This theory explaining the world order by the US neoliberal hegemony that other states intend to adapt and realize their own (neoliberal) hegemonic projects creates a valuable opportunity to analyse Turkish foreign policy at system-level. By combining these two theories, it provides a case for expanding 'usual' theoretical frameworks. Finally, the poor representation of Neo-Gramscian theory in Hungarian literature also legitimizes the Author's choice that could contribute to broaden the tools for conceptualizing and understanding a given country's foreign policy.

### **2) Importance of Turkey**

Turkey as a middle-power has a particular role in current international relations. Possessing with a strategic location, it occupies the interception of three conflict zones that shapes contemporary international relations. Nowadays, one of these regions seems to be rather peaceful – the Balkans where two bloody wars were taking place in the 1990's. Other two regions, the Caucasus and the Middle East constitute a

troublesome neighbourhood for Turkey. Ankara's involvement in the Syrian war also strengthened its leverage in the international field. As a host of more than 3 million refugees, it was a key actor in handling the 2015 refugee crisis that also affected Hungary. Turkey could give a fresh impetus to the EU accession negotiations benefitting from the crisis.

Furthermore Ankara conducts a rather proactive foreign policy in order to influence of the outcome of current political processes at adjacent territories. Its position, its ambitions also increase the country's importance within the international community: the AKP's government growing activities passed the border of the neighbouring regions, and even its 'traditional' partners like the US, EU or Central Asia. Now, Ankara targets Africa, Latin-America and Far-East. During recent years, Turkish foreign policy tools were diversified; e. g. the Turkish Development Agency's (TIKA) performance was rocketing. The foreign policy is just one field that makes Turkey an excellent field of research. The social and political transformation that occurs in the country throughout the Justice and Development Party rule is a particular phenomenon in the Muslim World. Probably Turkey is the Muslim state that made the most steps towards democracy even if this process does not avoid ambiguities and nowadays one can see more authoritarian tendencies in the country that advances to the presidential system. Despite the difficulties this feature offers a unique case to analyse this transformation effects on foreign policy pursuit.

### **3) Balkans' relevance for Hungary**

Choosing Turkey's relations with the Balkans as a central *problematique* of the research was highly linked to Hungary. As a Hungarian researcher, the author wanted to focus on an issue which is not just geographically located close to Hungary but may concern his country's public opinion, academic community and even decision-makers. Turkey's current activities influence a region with which Hungary shares common history. Due to the geographical proximity, Hungary's foreign policy based on its own strategic interests, meets the Turkish one and it may lead to cooperation or even competition. In order to understand Turkey's growing ambitions in the region, it cannot be analysed without extensive research and understanding the internal processes and their effects on foreign policy making. Various centres focusing on the region, such as the valuable work of the Geographical Department of University of Pécs contributed to understand the internal demographic, economic and socio-political



development in the Balkans. The Author believes that putting the scope on Ankara in the regional context may also help to understand the internal tendencies.

#### **4) Following Orientalist tradition**

The other, Hungary-related aspect was the willingness to follow the Orientalist line in the country's scientific history. Although the author considers himself as a political scientist, he intends to channel its research focus to the East. Started with ÁrmínVámbéry, Ottoman Empire – as Turkey can be considered as its hereditary – was a key element for Hungarian orientalists in order to understand our history and culture. Furthermore, during communist era Hungarian Turkologists such as György Németh conducted their researches in Bulgaria's Turkish inhabited regions. The political scientist approach used in the dissertation intends to broaden and in the same time to follow this Orientalist tradition.

#### **5) Author personal stance**

Closely linked to the above mentioned reasoning, the author personal interest also influenced why he has chosen this topic. A number of years ago, as simple university student he started to deal with Turkish minority living in the Balkans, and later he turned towards Turkey. Meanwhile, he preserved his interest towards Turkish minority groups and the Balkans as a whole which convinced him to bring together these topics in a dissertation. Due to his researches which were realized – alongside with long hours spent in various libraries and archives – as extended field researches in Balkans countries and in Turkey itself, the author hopes that information and sources gathered by previous years may contribute to his deeper understanding of the region and Turkey's domestic and foreign policy.

The thesis focuses on the AKP's rise and the transformation of power at the domestic level that led to a significant change of Turkish foreign policy. This development paved the way for a new vision in cultural and identity policy and the change of traditional orientation and tools in foreign policy making. Thus, the central argumentation concerning the internal effects on Turkish foreign policy is based on the following hypothesis:

*H1: The emergence of AKP as an internal hegemon creates a Neo-Ottoman regime what shapes its foreign policy.*

Neo-Ottomanism may be placed in the centre of contemporary Turkish cultural policies; however, it is just one side of the coin. The effects of internal changes on foreign policy are not independent from the changes in the international system. As the Author presented, a number of works argues that the adjustment in the global structure or regional sub-structure shaped Ankara's international relations. He also argues that these developments also affected the Turkish society and domestic politics as well. The Author states that the main effects are linked to the neoliberal turn in economy, beginning by the Özal era in the mid-1980s and lasting nowadays.

This neoliberal turn has transformed the society and strengthened the Central-Anatolian business elites during the 1980s and 1990s as well as it contributed to the changes in the political landscape. The emergence of the Anatolian Tigers was a prelude of political adjustment; however, every Turkish government's aim was to establish investment-friendly conditions in the country. Despite the gradual opening to international markets and accepting a rather export oriented trade policy, these years were troublesome for Turkish economy. Ankara had to face several crises in 1994, 1999, 2000 and 2001. The last one particularly damaged the reputation of the government parties and contributed in a great manner to the electoral victory of the AKP in 2002.

Since this electoral victory, the Justice and Development Party has managed to keep the power and follow a neoliberal policy by opening its markets, affiliating with the EU, benefiting from FDI and the positive effects of growing trade. Various business associations also could take advantage from this neoliberal turn that the government also supported. Not surprisingly, the economy or economic interests also have appeared as important features of the AKP.

The Author argues that the global structure's most important effects on Turkey was the 'victory' of Neoliberalism that linked more the country to the international economy and contributed to the last decades' political changes as well. Having a neoliberal party at power, representation of neoliberal economic values in foreign policy also gain momentum. The interconnection of the social changes as the effects of the global structure influences the contemporary Turkish foreign policy. Consequently, the thesis formulates the second hypothesis of the dissertation as:

*H2: The AKP's hegemony is a derivate of the neoliberal global structure that affects its foreign policy by the growing role of the economy.*

The Author argues that although the need to tackle the growing global and regional challenges affects Turkish foreign policy, however, its embedment to the international system, and the international neoliberal system compelled the country to be active in its international relations. The emergence of pro-neoliberal classes in Turkey also affected its foreign policy as the economy has become more and more important in diplomatic relations. Consequently, the neoliberal world order pushed Ankara towards a more opened and active, trade- and investment-oriented foreign policy.

## 2. Methodology

The research is based on qualitative methodology and the extensive research of primary and secondary sources and their analyses by Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian theoretical framework. The time frame of the research limited the possible use of sources. As it focuses on the AKP's period (more exactly from November 2002 to the implementation of the presidential system after June 2018), it could not use confidential documents, strategies but rely on contemporary, open sources.

This it analyses the speeches and writings of Turkish decision-makers. Ahmet Davutoğlu – who was probably the main actor in shaping Ankara's external relations during the given period – active publishing activities helped to outline the TFP. His academic background and writings, especially his famous volume *Stratejik Derinlik* paved the way to understand his view about the region as advisor, later on as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The speeches of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as Prime Minister, later as President of the Republic also made a compelling contribution to the thesis. The discourse-analysis reveals the political elite's perception of the Balkans and the way how this image is constructed. Certainly, political statements shall be the object of deep analysis and shall be questioned as various intentions are in their background, however, the construction of an image and its use in public speeches emerges as an orientation point for the researcher.

Turkish state institutions' and civil organisations' publications, statements and news also helped the research. Usually these online sources portrayed the scope and nature of the given organisation's activities. Annual reports of the TİKA, the TDV were the most useful from this respect.

Interrelated with the discourse analysis of political leaders' oral or written statements and speeches, field researches in Turkey and in various Balkans countries also represent a valuable contribution to the work. Meetings and discussions with scholars, journalists,

representatives of the administration and politicians represented a useful experience for the work. Obviously the outcome of these meeting varies in a wide range, and invite to a severe analysis and criticism. Nevertheless, the acquired knowledge about the TFP cannot be neglected. These trips also facilitated to use primary and secondary sources written in Turkish language that would not have been possible to find in Hungary.

Official statistical data provided by relevant statistical institutes and governmental institutions were also essential contributions. Statistical data show the change in economic relations, the effects of the various agreements in boosting trade and investment. These highlighted the importance of Balkans for Turkey, at least in economic terms.

Although the thesis focuses on contemporary issues, it could not neglect the past which influences the AKP's domestic and foreign policies greatly. Thus, history books helped to describe the importance of the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman heritage for the current political situation and narratives. Books and articles dealing with the Turkey's history in the 20th century also contributed to the better understanding of the AKP's hegemony project.

Secondary sources were crucial in defining the hypotheses, outlining the research questions and understanding the debate(s) about TFP in the literature review. Furthermore, they also contributed to mapping the TFP's institutional background.

- 1) books
- 2) journal papers
- 3) political analyses
- 4) newspaper articles

The qualitative analysis of a number of primary and secondary sources hopefully may provide adequate tools to justify H1 and H2. The timeframe of the research covers six AKP governments that may provide enough samples for the dissertation. During these six governments the conduct of Turkish foreign policy has changed simultaneously with the emergence of AKP as a hegemon in Turkey. This change also affected Turkey's relations with Balkan states, as Turkish presence has become more visible and the international scientific community also started to focus on Turkish activities. During the last fifteen years, Ankara's diplomacy has produced a great number of events, programmes and foreign policy tools to possess a relatively big sample to analyse.

### 3. Research findings

This piece intended to reveal the internal dynamics of Turkish domestic politics by utilising Antonio Gramsci's theoretical framework about hegemony, reflecting on the neo-Gramscianist writings on neo-liberal hegemony and analysing these dynamics' effects on Turkey's foreign policy in the Balkans. It argued that the AKP under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was successful in becoming a counter-hegemonic actor based on the rising Islamist classes and capital. While it accommodated the neo-liberal economic policy and embedded Turkey into the neo-liberal, globalising world order, it gained enough social legitimacy and power to counter the traditional veto players such as the military and top courts, which served as the last bastions of Kemalist elites. Later, the AKP also defeated the opponents within the Islamist field, most prominently the Gülenist movement and weakened the position of Islamist and nationalist parties (such as the Saadet Partisi, MHP or İYİ) by absorbing the majority of Islamist and conservative voters into its hegemonic bloc.

The AKP was successful in creating its own electoral hegemony. This was based on several factors, such as a perpetual ability to manage political crises and to set the national agenda. It also could benefit from steady economic development and stable growth, especially in the first years of power (until 2007). Later, Turkish economic performance remained sustainable despite internal difficulties (e.g. the decline in of tourism, the devaluation of YTL, the deteriorating business climate, etc.), which did not harm its popularity to a great degree. The government's large-scale infrastructure, education and healthcare programmes also convinced the deprived social classes that the only viable option for them was to keep the AKP in power.

After the emergence of the AKP as a governmental party in 2002, scholars did not predict a long future based on the party's Islamic roots and the fate of its predecessors – banned regularly by the Constitutional Court and removed from power by the army. Although the AKP established a remarkably strong presence in the parliament, with only one opposition party (the Republican People's Party, or CHP), the Kemalist elite and especially the TSK were deeply suspicious of the party's rhetoric, along with its domestic and foreign policy endeavours. Past experiences of the shutting down of former Islamist parties oriented the AKP leadership to use a more pro-European discourse and follow an EU-compliant policy-making strategy. Accompanied by remarkable economic growth, this policy ensured electoral victory in the following elections. Steady economic growth stabilised the

party's position at home, which was rewarded by the start of EU accession negotiations in 2005.

After tackling the threat imposed by the Kemalist establishment – namely the memorandum in April 2007 and the so-called ‘constitutional coup’ attempt by the chief prosecutor and Constitutional Court in 2008 – the AKP continued to increase its influence. This process was – at least indirectly – helped by various investigations and probes, like the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases. These contributed to weakening the opposition forces, as (retired) generals, university presidents, leftist politicians, intellectuals and journalists were detained and later sentenced to prison. These affairs silenced many of the critics of the government. Moreover, they also influenced the relations between the AKP and the army by easing the transformation of the latter's leadership. The next wave of internal fights started at the end of 2013: probes were launched by the judiciary, however this time they aimed at targeting pro-government circles and this step led to a government crisis. This attempt was reframed as a coup attempt by the so-called ‘parallel state’ – the Gülenist movement – and was dealt with through the mass dismissal of suspected Gülenists from state institutions and an open ‘war’ against the movement. This internal struggle culminated in the 15<sup>th</sup> July coup attempt associated with the movement, which ultimately failed and paved the way towards even harsher retaliations and the almost complete annihilation of the movement.

The 2010 constitutional referendum also enhanced the growth of AKP's power as it made it more difficult to ban political parties and changed the Constitutional Court's statute. The general elections in June 2011 granted the highest share of votes in the party's history, nearly 50 percent. Although the second half of the third Erdoğan government's term resulted in unprecedented social unrest and corruption scandals, the AKP managed to overcome these challenges and even won the local elections in March 2014. This era culminated in Erdoğan's victory at the presidential elections in August 2014. He could save its position after the 2015 June elections when the AKP could not seize the simple majority. The snap elections in November secured the party a comfortable majority in the TBMM but the Turkish ‘war on terror’ launched in July 2015 led to the gradual destabilisation of the country, growing insecurity, perpetual attacks by PKK/TAK, ISIS and other terrorist groups. Although the coup attempt in 2016 did not achieve its goal; the increasing authoritarian tendencies, spreading violence and the gradual crackdown on Kurdish political movements with the constitutional change opened a new chapter in the modern history of Turkey.

The AKP was able to win consecutive elections since 2002 which is a unique case for the establishment of the Turkish multi-party system in 1950. There was no other party or leader that could stay in power for more than fifteen years and survived a great number of ‘coup attempts’ from the judiciary to the military ones, as well as defeat various internal adversaries, like the Fethullah Gülen movement. The party’s electoral success played a key role in maintaining its hegemonic position. It helped the AKP to acquire the majority in the parliament, to gain almost two-thirds of the municipalities and acquire the presidential post after 2007 (firstly for Abdullah Gül in 2007, later for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2014). Thus, the electoral victories based on 35-50 percent of votes provided the opportunity to boost its popularity among vast parts of the society, to seize key institutions and control over the state apparatus, create economic and media dominance; in summary, to create a hegemonic bloc.

Its hegemonic project based on Islamist circles combined with neo-liberal economic policies was successful. The emergence of the Islamist middle classes can be described as a slow process of war, a passive revolution of a counter-hegemonic force that intended to occupy the hegemonic position of the Kemalist elite. This process could not avoid the perennial coercive forces of the state as Islamist parties (along with others) were regularly marginalised since the 1970s. Nonetheless, the AKP as a depositary of pro-market economy, religious, conservative groups won the elections in 2002, which opened a way a gradual change without violent events – e.g. without a war of manoeuvre – that finally resulted in the establishment of cultural hegemony. This can be characterised as neo-Ottomanism due to the use of religion and the Ottoman legacy in the field of cultural policy. Nevertheless, the AKP’s hegemonic project cannot be declared as a finished one in Turkey. The ambiguities of its hegemonic project are represented by the struggle between the AKP and the existing – but obviously declining – Kemalist elites, leftist groups, and Gülenists. The clashes over power in recent years led to the increasing authoritarianism in Turkish domestic politics characterised by one politician’s growing power. This politician, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has managed to transform the country’s political system from a parliamentary to a presidential one and to centralise the state in an increasingly authoritarian way.

The author described the neo-Ottomanist characteristics of the AKP’s cultural policy focusing on the mighty imperial past with strong religious connotations and a type of ‘Kulturkampf’ (cultural war) against the Kemalist heritage. Contrary to the common belief, the AKP’s foreign policy was less neo-Ottomanist (in terms of irredentism,

revisionism towards former imperial lands and aggressive spread of Islam) because its turn towards its 'near abroad' (essentially the post-Ottoman territories) stemmed from the neo-liberal turn in the Turkish economy and the need for a more autonomous foreign policy in an more and more insecure, multipolar world. The AKP's pro-active foreign policy advocated globalisation, economic opening and boosted the image of the country and the self-confidence of an emerging global player. Turkey joined the G20 in 2002, was able to start the European Union accession negotiations in 2005, whereas it launched a new initiative with Spain called the Alliance of Civilisations promoting intercultural (inter-civilisational) dialogue. In the same year, it was elected to the UN Security Council as a temporary member for 2009-2011, it also managed to position itself as one of the main depositaries of human rights for a while and one of the leaders of the Muslim countries, and via a fast-growing net of institutions, such as the TİKA, YTB and the Yunus Emre Institutes emerged as an important actor not just in the former Ottoman territories but in the entire Muslim world.

The government was ready to use foreign policy as a tool for its election purposes. At the beginning of the AKP's era, EU accession was a major goal, thus seeking good relations with EU members states appeared on the party's agenda. After 2006, when the accession negotiations lost their momentum due to the dead-end of the Cyprus issue, the AKP gradually withdrew from emphasising the EU's role, or even started to use a more critical approach stating that the 'Christian bloc' has been using double standards and had an anti-Turkey or anti-Islam stance. The 2009 municipal election campaign coincided with the Davos crisis and the deterioration of Israeli diplomatic relations, which boosted the support of Erdoğan within Turkey and in the Arab world as well. The Mavi Marmara flotilla issue was also used by the AKP to strengthen its popularity by benefiting from anti-Israeli sentiments before the 2011 elections.

Recently, the 2017 referendum also showed the readiness to sacrifice diplomatic relations for domestic gains: the Turkish government weathered the conflict with the Netherlands by insisting on pursuing rallies on its territory despite the prohibition of the Hague. The AKP implemented sanctions and used belligerent rhetoric against the Netherlands after Dutch authorities prevented its ministers Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya from speaking at rallies of the Turkish diaspora.

The foreign policy discourse, especially under Ahmet Davutoğlu, highly reflected on the Ottoman past, values and glory that could be of use for domestic political purposes. Turkey's foreign policy towards the Balkans also gained a new context: the good relations



with this region, especially the close cooperation with the Muslims granted the AKP more popularity in the religious electorate and was also convincing at least in a limited manner for the voters who had any Balkan affiliation. This Ottoman cause received strong incentives from Bosnia, which was easy to interlink with the role of Islam. As the Yugoslav wars revitalised the discourse about identity and Islam not just in the Balkans but in the whole world, Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist party, the Refah's politicians and charity organisations, such as the İHH, closely followed the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and intended to send aid (which however resulted in a corruption scandal). The Bosniaks were described as Muslim people of the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans. The writings and ideas of the Bosniak leader, Aliya Izetbegović gained momentum in Turkey even during the AKP's era, and soon became a reference point (e.g. new publishing of his writings, or Erdoğan's good personal relations with his son, Bakir Izetbegović). Furthermore, the genocide of Srebrenica appeared in Turkish politics and media. Srebrenica has become a *lieu de mémoire* for pious Turkish Muslims, and commemorations are held for every anniversary not just in the Balkans but in Turkey as well.

The Balkans retain a unique place in the neo-Ottoman discourse. As İlber Ortaylı pointed out, the Ottoman Empire was also a Balkan Empire and the Ottoman rule had greater effects on the region compared to that on the Middle East; subsequently, one could argue that the Balkans had a greater reverse impact on the Ottoman Empire and later on the history of Turkey. The more Ottomanness is linked to multiculturalism and religion, the more the Muslim people of the Balkans gain ground in the AKP's Ottomanism. Moreover, several centuries of Ottoman rule (approximately 550 years in Macedonia, 500 years in Bulgaria, some 400 years in Serbia and Bosnia) produced an immense 'constructed heritage' in the form of bridges, caravanserais, mosques, hamams, etc., which are specific mementos of Turkey and its cultural impact.

From this respect, Balkans is more important for Turkey than Turkey is for the Balkans. It has no real hard power leverage, especially after the 2016 coup attempt when the Turkish military was decimated and almost half of the admiralty and brigadier levels were dismissed or detained. Despite sending its troops, Turkey's military presence in a rather stable region (compared to the 1990s and early 2000s) can be identified as a soft power tool to demonstrate its commitment towards 'its brethren' and assure the Turkish electorate about the country's allegiance to its kin. Even if Turkey makes gains against the PKK in southeast Turkey and against the PYD in Afrin or northern Syria, the above-

mentioned internal purges and lack of (experienced) commanders weaken the image and the real capabilities of the (omni)potent TSK.

The AKP's goal of ensuring good economic relations and boosting trade and investment also delineates the limits of Turkish foreign policy. Economic interests have a great leverage on Ankara's approach to the Balkans. The success of these policies are linked to the growing statistical figures (e.g. volume and value of trade, investments, number of companies), but one can conclude that neither the Balkans plays a crucial role for Turkey nor is Turkey a major economic actor for the region after analysing the data. Only 5-6 percent of Turkish trade goes to the Balkans (the Western Balkans' share is even less) and it has been declining during the AKP's era, highlighting that the economic importance of the Balkans does not grow as fast as Turkey's economic relations with other regions and countries. If one looks at the other side, similar patterns can be outlined. The share of Turkey's export and import for Balkan countries is also small, in every case it is less than 10 percent, and with the exception of some countries, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania, it is decreasing.

The internal problems and features of the region and Turkey itself explain these dynamics. First of all, the Balkan region is so fragmented and divided among small states that it is more vulnerable to external political powers but less attractive for external investors. Their internal troubles, corruption (their weak performance in competitive indexes has already been shown) and market size are the main factors that makes Turkish companies' activities more limited.

Furthermore, Turkey's economic performance also has its own limits and affects its relations with the region. The years after 2013/2015 have seen more and more economic challenges for Turkey, like the devaluation of the Turkish lira despite the yearly 4-5% GDP growth led by the construction sector. The economic struggles of the country also reduce its potential for investments and trade with southeast Europe.

Turkish activism in the Balkans, even after Davutoğlu fell from power, is an outcome of the internal economic, social and political changes of the country. Turkey's main activities in the region did not change after May 2016, the same institutions continue their tasks in roughly the same manner. Bosnia and Herzegovina and other Balkan countries, like Macedonia or Kosovo, play an important role in Turkish domestic politics and for the AKP's decision makers, especially Erdoğan. Srebrenica has been used as a tool for mobilising the more religious electorate and it is also a tool in order to build the feeling of collective belonging among various Muslim communities.

But the power projection of Turkey to Muslim communities has its own limits as well. There is a strong difference between the Balkan countries in this respect. In the Western Balkans, while the Diyanet supports its kin these Muslim communities rather look up to their states and align themselves rather with their respective capitals than with Ankara. In these countries Turkey appears as a strong supporter of religious communities by providing publishing (translation), aid packages for religious events, exchange for students, religious personnel and financial help via various ways, especially constructing or renovating mosques. The interference in these communities' internal affairs has remained limited, and the mediation between conflicting factions of these communities did not reach a breakthrough (see the case of Serbia). The co-optation to the AKP's hegemonic bloc was strengthened by establishing close links between various congregations in the Balkan countries and Turkey. These inter-community relations were boosted by the Diyanet local muftis and the Turkish towns as well. By building these bridges, the commitment of Turkey has become more tangible and noticeable. However, the Diyanet's moves are under suspicion, even if the support is welcomed. There is a strong difference between the Muslim communities in the Balkans and Turkey: in the Balkan countries, they are autonomous, the state does not interfere in their affairs (or does not intend to interfere), which in turn has led more internal conflicts between their leaderships, while on the other side the Bosphorus the Diyanet works as a state institution with an appointed (and not an elected) leader, meaning its activities are part of state policy.

Bulgaria and Romania constitute a different group compared to the Western Balkans. The majority of their Muslims are Turks. These countries allowed Turkey during the 1990s to act as a kin state in the field of religion. Thus Ankara managed to gain a strong institutional leverage, especially in education because the imam-hatip schools are run by the Diyanet. Furthermore, imams sent from Turkey are also present. The Diyanet mediation in the case of the conflict over the leadership of Chief Muftiate was also handled with its help.

From this perspective, Albania is a special case. After many decades of strong anti-religious policies, the country in the early 1990s welcomed the support of various Muslim countries and faith-based religious networks. Turkey, and more importantly the Gülenist movement, were successful in gaining ground in this context and emerged as a partner in (re)building the Islamic education system. It has become not the only one, but one of the most important actors in this field.

The co-option of these Muslim communities into the Turkish state is happening via governmental and non-governmental actors. The above-mentioned state organs, like the Diyanet, the TİKA development agency, the Maarif Vakfi and so on follow the same logic in creating leverage and supporting the Ottoman-constructed legacy and Muslim communities. Non-governmental actors also participated in these endeavours. The various Balkan immigrant communities participate rather indirectly in foreign policy making because of their influence for the higher ranks is rather negligible. However, via twin town programmes, through electoral tourism and participation as well as political campaigns and protests they are able to influence the public opinion and gain leverage over the electoral performance of the Turkish parties, especially in Bulgaria where the Turkish minority live in greater number.

The various Islamist charity organisations and faith-based networks are more tangibly linked to the state's endeavours. There projects are often realised in close cooperation with Turkish state institutions (TİKA, Diyanet) and through twin town projects. Faith-based Islamic networks also contributed to the strengthening of Islam education in these countries in line with the principles of Hanafi Islam that the Diyanet supports.

Turkey did not generally change its foreign policy towards the Balkans during the AKP era compared to the 1990s. It follows the main principles of seeking security and promoting 'Ottoman Islam' alongside upholding every aspect of the Ottoman heritage. This in practice entails the support of 'local' or 'traditional' Islam, which is different from the new Wahabbi influences of the 1990s and 2000s. Thus, Turkey emerged as a historical partner for these communities, even if there are strong domestic political considerations behind Ankara's aid. Nevertheless, despite the growing Turkish institutional network, the vast amount of invested money in building soft power capabilities, Ankara has acquired a limited number of local allies, even if these countries' governments usually seek to establish good political and economic relations with their emerging middle power neighbour.

Good relations with the Islamic communities' leaders, the Turkish political parties (except the MRF) and Izetbegović's SDA and some intellectual circles represent the main strongholds of the AKP in the Balkans, which can be used for domestic occasions as well. Nonetheless, the Turkish leadership's gains in secular countries and mainly secular communities has marked limits (the best example of which is the antipathy towards the AKP among Bulgarian Turks), even if it behaves as a kin state for the religious Muslims. Thus Turkey has remained a strong centre of gravity for the religious institutions.

This focus on Ottoman heritage and Islam in foreign relations can cause dissent among the Christian population. Due to the different nation-building processes, the perceptions about the shared history may be the opposite for these communities, thus they do not see Turkish endeavours in too positive a light. This is especially true in Bosnia, where the Republika Srpska's political leadership is more sensitive to Ankara's pro-Bosniak stance. The pro-Muslim discourse of Turkish politicians has led to diplomatic conflicts with Serbia or Bosnia (Serbian part) on several occasions; Turkey sometimes behaves like an elephant in a china shop by not paying enough attention to this sensitivity. While the current hegemonic bloc relies strongly upon this discourse for domestic reasons, it is fair to say that there will be no change in the prospective future and the probability of diplomatic crises will remain high.

The Balkan countries have also felt the spill-over effect of the internal troubles of Turkey and are involved in the fight over domestic hegemony. The government pushes toward weakening or closing down Gülenist institutions and networks abroad. This war presented a dilemma for these states in the Balkans. Despite some people's extradition the movement's organisations have remained intact for the most part. This also suggests that Ankara may not be the main reference point for the countries of the region.

Turkey has two main incentives to increase its leverage on the region. First, the AKP pushed towards co-opting its kin through neo-Ottoman cultural policy: emphasising the shared heritage, Ottoman legacy, importance of (Hanafi) Islam, etc. But only limited segments of the population were supportive, namely some parts of the religious circles and the Turkish minority groups. Second, Turkey's economic expansion based on the success of the AKP's neo-liberal policies was successful in many ways. Nevertheless, its importance in the Balkans has remained limited compared to major EU powers, like Germany and Italy, but even Austria and Hungary (in some cases). Furthermore, its economic difficulties weaken its opportunity to become a more pivotal economic actor in the Balkans.

## 4. Conclusion

- Conceptualising the scientific literature about Turkish foreign policy and identifying the main driving trends.
- Using a Gramscian and neo-Gramscian approach for Turkey and its foreign policy in a detailed and comprehensive manner.
- Describing the neo-Ottomanist cultural policy as a tool of hegemony making in Turkey.
- Explaining the importance of various Muslim peoples (especially the Bosniaks) in (daily) Turkish domestic politics instead of national minority groups (Turks in Bulgaria) by identifying the change in the kin policy of Turkey.
- Elaborating and updating the body of knowledge about the relevant Turkish foreign policy institutions.
- Analysing Ankara's foreign policy in a given region – in the Balkans, and not just in the Western Balkans – chosen as a case study and identifying its main tenets; by doing so, describing the Turkish economic (foreign trade) institutions and Ankara's incentives to strengthen its neo-liberal economic transformation.
- Revealing the main features of economic relations and outlining the importance of the region in economic terms to Turkey and vice versa, by claiming that despite the strong political emphasis Turkish capital has remained rather reluctant to enter the region.
- Highlighting how Albania and Kosovo are the most dependent on Turkish economic relations in the Balkans, and this economic dependence has some chance of being converted into certain political advantages.
- Identifying the importance of non-state groups in shaping Turkish foreign policy and perceptions, like the immigrant groups and associations in Turkey and their leverage, including the faith-based organisations (especially Gülenists) and charity organisations in the region.

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## 7. Conference participations of the Author

Conference title: Etnikai pártok, társadalmi, politikai törésvonalak Kelet-közép- és Délkelet-Európában

26/11/2010, Budapest, Kisebbségkutató Intézet

Title: *A Mozgalom a Jogokért és Szabadságért – etnikai párt Bulgáriában*

Conference title: Euromed forum for young researchers

13-15/04/2011, Istanbul, Kadir Has University

Title: *The Kurdish initiative: a new attempt for dialogue, different interpretations of modernism and nationalism*

Conference title: State, Society and Economy in the Modern Middle East

07-08/05/2011, London, School of Oriental and African Studies

Title: *Kurdish identity-making: instruments and possibilities during the last 100 years in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey* <http://www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/ssemme/file67904.pdf>

Conference title: IX. Vámbéry Ármin Emlékkonferencia

29-30/09/2011, Dunaszerdahely

Title: *A bulgáriai törökség 1989 után: közösségépítés határon innen és túl*

Conference title: XII. RODOSZ

02-04/12/2011, Kolozsvár

Title: *Törökországi iszlamista pártok: út a hatalomig?*

Conference title: EBES Conference

25-26/05/2012, Istanbul

Title: *Comparative Analysis of Turkey and Hungary's Economic Policy in South Eastern Europe*

Conference title: From War to Eternal Peace on the 100th Anniversary of the Balkan Wars: Good Neighborhood Relations in the Balkans

04-07/10/2012, Istanbul

Title: *Turkish Societal Actors and the Balkans: Associations and Cities in the Process of Bridge-making*

Conference title: XIII. RODOSZ

09-11/11/2012, Kolozsvár

Title: *Török fejlesztéspolitika: az új neooszmán soft power?*

Conference title: 6th International Balkan Forum

02-03/05/2013, Edirne, TASAM

Title: *Turkish and Hungarian minorities in the Balkans: a comparative analysis*

Conference title: Közép-Európa: együttműködés és versengés, Magyar Politikatudományi Társaság XIX. Vándorgyűlése

30/05 – 01/06/2013, Kolozsvár

Title: *Török nemzetpolitika: rokon népektől a diaszpóra felé?*

Conference title: 3. Dünya Türk Forumu  
28-30/05/2014, Edirne, TASAM  
Title: *Turkish Soft Power and Hungary*

Conference title: WOCMES  
18-22/08/2014, Ankara, Middle East Technical University  
Title: *Turkey and the Middle East: a neo-Gramscian Approach*

Conference title: POLITSCI'14  
10-12/12/2014, Istanbul, Istanbul University  
Title: *Hungary and Turkey: diverging or converging hegemonic projects?*

Conference title: New Order in the Middle East? Current Dynamics and the Role of External Actors in the MENA region  
13/12/2016, Budapest, Corvinus University  
Title: *Turkey – Russia Rapprochement: A Real Shift in Ankara's Foreign Policy?*

Conference title: Anna Lindh Conference  
23/03/2018, Budapest, National University of Public Service  
Title: *Turkey and the Mediterranean region*

Conference title: Taking Stock of the EU-Turkey Relations: Estranged but Interdependent Partners  
29/05/2018, Budapest, Central European University  
Title: *Turkey, domestic politics and their effects on EU-Turkey relations*