

Theoretical Analysis of Turkey as a Regional Power*

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Turkey has been presented as a role model, especially during the Arab uprisings, for the Middle East with its democratic system together with Muslim population. However, comparison of Gezi protests of summer 2013 with demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia, created question marks over Turkey's regional role as a role model and a leading actor. From this perspective paper aims to analyze Turkey's role as a regional power. Although, in the 2000s Turkey with its increasing trade relations, economic diversity and dynamism, stability due to one party government and evolution of its foreign policy into a more soft power rather than a hard power became more of a regional power, its role as a stabilizing actor with a diplomatic leadership pushing for more multilateral cooperation and showing economic, military, political and cultural superiority is questionable. Besides, one needs to accept that when regions have intensified relations with great powers, it is more difficult for the regional power wanna-bes to be effective i.e. Middle East. Thus, this paper will focus on not only Turkey's stabilizing effect, multilateral cooperation and superiority but also its relations with great powers i.e. the USA and Russia.

What is a regional power?

Although in 1999 Huntington made the prediction that global politics will pass through one or two uni-multipolar decades before it enters a truly multipolar 21st century, regions will play an important role in the future world order. Today we are living in a world of regions that there is an emerging regional architecture of world politics and that a multiregional system is in the making.¹ However, definition of a regional power is difficult to attain. Throughout the years especially after the end of the Cold War, when it was more convenient for the regional powers to develop within various regions i.e. Middle East, Black Sea, there were a number of definitions made for a regional power. In general a regional power was understood as a state that a) is a part of a region which is geographically, economically and political – ideationally delimited, b) articulates the pretension of a leading position in the region, c) influences the geopolitical delimitation and the political ideational construction of the region, d) displays the material, organizational and ideological resources for regional power projection, e) is economically, politically and culturally interconnected within the region, f) truly has great influence in regional affairs, g) exerts this influence by means of regional governance structures, h) defines the regional security agenda in a significant way, i) is recognized as a leading state or at least respected by other states inside and outside of the region, j) is integrated in inter-regional and global forums and institutions where it acts, at least in a rudimentary way, as a representative of regional states.² For example, IBSA countries (India, Brasil and South Africa) are committed to securing a redistribution of power, wealth and privilege in the global economy. Also

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¹ D. Nolte, How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics, *Review of International Studies* (2010), 36, 881–901

² D. Flesmes, Brazil: Strategic Options in the Changing World Order, p. 93 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

they are struggling for the recognition of developing countries as full and equal partners in society of states³, which purvey other countries to follow them.

There is no coherent theory on which the idea of regional power is based. The common ground shared by all academics dealing with the topic is that regional powers are actors with significant power capabilities which are to a comparatively high degree, exerted in their regional context.⁴ A regional power, in addition to its economic and military weight, may also possess non-material resources, such as exemplary political and social values, cultural attraction, quality political leadership at home and a sound diplomatic reputation abroad.⁵ Therefore, the status of a regional power also depends on the acceptance of this status by others. The role of ideas, norms and perceptions are important as well.⁶ If a state wants to hold the leadership position in a region, to be perceived as a regional power, it needs to focus on not only, demographic, military, geographic characteristics but also economic including GDP, growth competitiveness index, and income inequality, human development, socio- economic standard including education system and culture, norms and values.⁷

You can claim great power status but membership of the club of great powers is a social category that depends on recognition by others-by your peers in the club, but also by smaller and weaker states willing to accept the legitimacy and authority of those at the top of international hierarchy.⁸

Another problem in defining regional power is that it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between regional powers and middle powers. Middle power is a term used in the discipline of IR to describe states that do not have great power status but have international influence.⁹ Keohane¹⁰ defined middle powers as states whose leaders recognize that they cannot act effectively alone but that they may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group. However regional powers should have the means of power resources and in contradiction to middle powers they may be a great power on a world scale in addition to their regional standing.¹¹ However, Buzan and Waever depart from this idea and differentiate between superpowers and great powers which act and have an impact at the global level and regional powers whose influence may be large in their regions but is not considered much at the global level.¹²

In order to be a regional power a country needs to be a leader meaning having political influence in diplomatic forums, having responsibility for regional security, maintaining order in the region,

³ D. Nolte, How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics, *Review of International Studies* (2010), 36, 881–901

⁴ M. Beck, Israel: Regional politics in a highly fragmented region, p. 130 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

⁵ D. Geldenhuys, South Africa: The idea-driven foreign policy of a regional power, p. 151 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

⁶ D. Flesmes and D. Lemke, Findings and perspectives of regional power research, p. 313 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

⁷ D. Flesmes, *Conceptualizing regional power in international relations: lessons from the South African case*, GIGA Working Papers, no 53

⁸ D. Nolte, How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics, *Review of International Studies* (2010), 36, 881–901

⁹ D. Flesmes, Brazil: Strategic Options in the Changing World Order, p. 95 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

¹⁰ R. Keohane, Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics, *International Organization* (1969) 23:2, 291-310

¹¹ D. Nolte, How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics, *Review of International Studies* (2010), 36, 881–901

¹² D. Flesmes, Brazil: Strategic Options in the Changing World Order, p. 94 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

stabilizing or at least peacemaking in its region.¹³ Thus, a regional power should be interconnected to the region, influence political – ideational construction of the region, influence regional governance structures, define a common regional identity, provide a collective good for the region, define the regional security agenda, be integrated in interregional and global forums, be in a leading position recognized by others.¹⁴ The leadership position can be analyzed from three perspectives i) intellectual leadership, entailing offering fresh ideas, new perspectives and creative ways of conceptualizing problems, ii) entrepreneurial leadership, including selling the creative ideas of intellectual leadership, creation of international norms, agenda setting, facilitation of negotiations and agreement and formation of coalitions, iii) implementation leadership, meaning setting an example for the others.¹⁵

It needs to be emphasized that foreign policy agenda setting which is a part of entrepreneurial leadership is difficult in 21st century since there is a growing number of other actors that also seek to be a part of the agenda setting. The changing dynamics of global threats not only exposes states vulnerability to them but also its inability to singularly deal with all transnational threats.¹⁶ The room to maneuver and leverage is slowly diminishing and often states have to contend with relative rather than absolute gains.¹⁷ Regional powers are increasingly operating in a different environment and the trend is towards a multilateral approach in foreign policy making. As a result of emphasis on multilateralism led to a shift in foreign policy discussions from substantive policy frameworks to a focus on coordination, coherence, comprehensiveness and joined up policy making.¹⁸ Thus regional powers favor a multilateral and cooperative approach in international politics.¹⁹

Multilateral relations in the international system make us think about the power types that states can assert in their regions regarding their neighbors; soft power and hard power are the two aspects constitute the overall strength of the regional power. Although hard power consists of mainly military power, soft power means in the regional competition, the establishment of the credibility of regional social cohesion, special cultural charisma, and the residents of creativity and attractiveness of the area outside forces on the regional culture, government public service, the regional government human qualities and other non-material elements. Emphasis on the soft power is crucial for the good image of the region which covers a wide range such as improving human quality, enhance government capacity, and develop cultural characteristics of the region.²⁰ From this perspective constructivism can be used to understand the regional powers. According to constructivism actors' preferences are shaped by their identities and the role of regional leadership is closely connected to the identity of political actors. Since world regions are characterized not only by

¹³ D. Nolte, How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics, *Review of International Studies* (2010), 36, 881–901

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ D. Geldenhuys, South Africa: The idea-driven foreign policy of a regional power, p. 153 in D. Flemes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

¹⁶ S. Bava, India: Foreign policy strategy between interests and ideas, p.116 in D. Flemes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

¹⁷ S. Bava, p. 113

¹⁸ D. Chandler, *The Death of Foreign Policy*, 2007 <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/3474> accessed on 19.06.2014

¹⁹ D. Nolte, How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics, *Review of International Studies* (2010), 36, 881–901

²⁰ Y. Yan, Reflections on the Theory of Regional Soft Power Problems, *Cross-cultural Communication*, (2014) 10:2,57-61

material factors, such as geographic conditions but also by a common history, related languages and shared values.²¹

Other main IR theories such as institutionalism and realism dealt with regional powers as well and according to institutionalism cooperation with neighboring countries is a prominent tool for dealing with challenges in the international system. Thus, institutionalists emphasize regional integration as a major strategy for coping with problems in the region and at the global level. But realists support the idea that regional powers are prominent among those actors who attempt to challenge US control of international affairs and/or US in specific regional policies/politics.²² It is difficult to differentiate between the realist, institutionalist and constructivist perspectives in defining regional powers. Therefore, we have to accept that a state can be counted as a regional power when it is able to police its borders, prevent other actors to intervene in the region and also make other states accept its legitimacy as a regional power. A regional power may seek to assert its power within the region precisely because it sees this as central to its global status, role or power: the extra regional status that may come from being seen as a successful regional power or the provider of a stable regional order; the role as representative of the region and of its interests and values: or the power aggregation that may follow from the successful creation of a supportive regional coalition.²³

Based on three main theories that has been discussed and in spite of the confusion of defining regional power, Flesmes uses four criteria to classify regional powers; i) formulation of the claim to leadership, ii) possession of necessary power resources, iii) employment of foreign policy instruments and iv) acceptance.²⁴ But we need to be aware of the possibility that in one region there may be more than one state which can fit into all these criteria i.e. Middle East. Therefore we should be careful when it comes to defining a regional power in some regions that are studied in the international system.

All in all, one can say that economic rise, stability in politics, increasing soft power, stabilizing role in the region, increasing cooperation at a multilateral level both at the regional and global levels, and diplomatic leadership can be elements of regional power definition. The rest of the paper focuses on all these elements in the case of Turkey in the 2000s. There have been debates on Turkey's role as a model in especially the Middle East, increasing multilateral efforts both in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions and both political and academic debates on Turkey's increasing regional and even global power. Especially it has been argued that Turkey's Arab neighbors were not keen on building ties with Turkey since it was a friend of Israel and an ally of the USA, the election victory of the AKP in 2002 and the Turkish parliamentarians' decision to block access to US forces destined for Iraq in 2003 dramatically changed perceptions about Turkey.²⁵

The paper will look at the roles that Turkey played in its region i.e. the Mediterranean and the Black Sea especially since 2005 with a special focus on not only Turkey's desired stabilizing effect, multilateral cooperation and superiority but also its relations with great powers i.e. the USA and Russia. The following part of the paper will analyze regional efforts of Turkey in the Black Sea and

²¹ M. Beck, Israel: Regional politics in a highly fragmented region, p. 133 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

²² M. Beck, p. 131-132

²³ A. Hurrell, Regional powers and the global system from a historical perspective, p. 20 in D. Flesmes (ed), *Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

²⁴ D. Flesmes, Conceptualizing regional power in international relations: lessons from the South African case, *GIGA Working Papers*, no 53

²⁵ K. Barysch, Can Turkey combine EU accession and regional leadership?, *Centre for European Reform Policy Brief*, 2010

then in the third part of the paper Turkey's policies in the Mediterranean during the Arab revolts will be analyzed.

Black Sea and the Caucasus

Black Sea and the Caucasus were closed regions for Turkey during the Cold War era. It was only possible for Turkey to establish relations with the regional countries after the end of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War left Turkey like a fish out of water and initially, she tried to take the opportunity to establish relations with the Turkish speaking nations in the region, in the Caucasus and the Central Asia such as Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan with which Turkey also has cultural, religious and ethnic ties,²⁶ while positioning herself in the center of regional cooperation in the Black Sea region connecting the Middle East, Caucasus, the Balkans and Europe.²⁷ In the 1990s, Turkey's main aim was to create a zone of influence to lead the regional countries towards the integration with the EU and increase her influence in the region and beyond.²⁸

However the international conjuncture in the 1990s were not conducive enough for Turkey's aims in the region which is characterized by a) the ethnic separatist movements by Chechens and Kurds, b) possible NATO bases in Georgia and Azerbaijan, c) change in the naval balance in the Black Sea, d) Russia's peacekeeper role in the CIS, e) natural gas and oil pipelines, and f) regime regarding the Straits created a mutual mistrust towards each other.

In 2000s the relations in the region especially with Russia were improved and the increase in EU's attention to the region created better cooperation opportunities for Turkey in the Black Sea and the Caucasus. In the Black Sea region, the EU emphasizes gas and oil projects, electricity network interconnections, the Black Sea Ring Corridor, the Black Sea Pan European Transport Area, TRACECA²⁹, linking Central Asia and the Caucasus, and projects on environmental protection. The Bucharest Convention and Black Sea Environmental Program attracted attention, leading to a communication published by the EU Commission on the environment in the Danube and Black Sea Region. Among all the EU initiated projects, Turkey has been mostly interested in the TRACECA and became a part of the program in 2002. Turkey lays special emphasis on this program with an aim to increase her share and role in regional transport while decreasing the traffic at the straits. Besides Turkey is a part of the Black Sea Cross Border initiative and some cities at the Black Sea coast, i.e. Istanbul, Tekirdağ, Kocaeli, Zonguldak, Kastamonu, Samsun and Trabzon are covered by the Black Sea Basin Program.³⁰

Other policy area that Turkey paid attention to was the energy policy and in spite of the objections of Russia, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was constructed with a belief that Georgia's territorial integrity would be guaranteed with this pipeline due to the international interests in security of energy supply to the West. However, Turkey's position regarding the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has been rather

²⁶ N. Pamir, "Energy and Pipeline Security in The Black Sea and Caspian Sea Regions: Challenges and Solutions", in *The Black Sea Region Cooperation and Security Building*, ed. Oleksandr Pavliuk and Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, (East West Institute, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 2004), 142.

²⁷ Ç. Üstün, "The Turkish Perception on the Black Sea Region: A Historical Analysis", *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies*, , 67-84 (2008)

²⁸ B. Gokay, "The Politics of Oil in the Back Sea Area: Turkey and Regional power Rivalries", in *Politics of the Black Sea Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, ed. Tunc Aybak, (I.B. Tauris: London, 2001), 18.

²⁹ TRACECA program is an EU funded (partly) project on construction of a transport corridor between Europe, Caucasus and Asia.

³⁰ European Commission, Cross-border cooperation programmes 2007–2013, Brussels, 2007 http://eeas.europa.eu/russia/docs/cbc_russia_2007_en.pdf accessed on 19.06.2014

different than her balanced position in the case of Georgia. Although Turkey has been supporting the importance of international response to the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, she has been in close relations with Azerbaijan which prevented her to act as a mediator in the OSCE Minsk Group, even though she wanted to in the early 1990s. Especially after the exercise of embargo towards Armenia and suspension of diplomatic relations with Armenia, Turkey rather became an actor than a mediator in this conflict.³¹ In the 1990s Turkey perceived Armenian-Greek rapprochement as a threat to its security concerns. However in 2000 both Turkey and Armenia took some steps with an aim to normalize the relations between two countries such as establishment of Turkish-Armenian Peace Commission. After the 5 day War in Georgia, Turkey took some further steps in establishing a Platform for the regional countries under the name of Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform to create positive relations between Armenia, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Russia. It is strongly argued that the normalization of relations between Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan and resolution of the existing conflicts will certainly bring economic prosperity in the region and increase the export and import capabilities of these three countries while creating the trade in some important commodities such as the export of gas from Azerbaijan to Armenia and of electricity from Armenia to Turkey.³²

One should also state that Turkey's relations with Russia were determining Turkey's position in the region. Turkey's relations with Russia have been increased especially starting with the 1980s due to the Turkish businessmen's efforts to find an alternative to the western markets. In the 1990s, the political relations with Russia have suffered due to Turkey's efforts to reconnect with the other Black Sea and the Caucasus countries. Russia perceived this as a threat to its own sphere of influence. The agreement on BTC pipeline also had some negative effects on the relations. However the trade and economic links between Russia and Turkey continued to increase during the 1990s and the increasing trade continued in the 2000s. In 1997 the export value was 2.056.547.000\$ and in 2009 this value is increased to 3.202.327.000 \$. Also increasing trend is observed in the imports as well; that in 1997 the import value was 2.174.258.000 \$ which increased to 19.447.911.000 \$ in 2009.³³

In the 1990s Russia stated that it is one of the biggest powers in the world which needs to protect its interests in its neighborhood while strengthening its ties with the East and the West at the same time.³⁴ In this context energy relations between Russia and the neighboring regions became one of the main topics which outshined the disputes over the straits and Turkey's efforts to reshape its relations in Russia's sphere of influence. During the years as the economic links and trade relations developed between Russia and Turkey, the issues such as Kurdish and Chechen separatist groups, Armenian disputes were overcome.

The energy trade between Russia and Turkey started in the 1980s and in 2010 to facilitate all the trade and economic relations including trade and investments in construction, energy and agricultural sectors, while increasing the cultural ties between Russian and Turkish societies the visas have been lifted between Russian Federation and Turkish Republic.

³¹ Ç. Üstün, "Europeanisation of foreign policy: The Case of Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Black Sea Region", *of Southeast Europe and Black Sea Studies*, 10, 225-242 (2010)

³² Evgeny Palyakov, "Changing Trade Patterns after Conflict Resolution in South Caucasus", *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, no 2593, (April 2001): 36

³³ TUIK http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?tb_id=12&ust_id=4

³⁴ E. Büyükkıncı, "Soğuk Savastan Günümüze Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri [Turkey – Russia Relations from Cold War till today], p. 695 in *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi [Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy]*, ed. Faruk Sönmezoğlu (Istanbul: Der Yayınları), 2004

Mediterranean

In the south Turkey has been prioritizing its relations with the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern countries in the last decade while trying to solve its riddles with the Middle Eastern neighbors and increasing relations with southern Mediterranean countries. Especially relations with Syria with which Turkey had most problems improved in the beginning of the 2000s. In the 1990s, water and PKK have been the main problems between two countries. The bone of contention between Syria and Turkey was the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Those two rivers originate within Turkish borders but they flow down to Syria and Iraq. Thus, these two rivers are the most important water resources for three countries. Therefore, when Turkey wanted to build the SAP on the Euphrates that became a problem with Syria. The demands of Syria were that the Euphrates and Tigris rivers should be recognised as international waters and the level of water being given by Turkey to Syria should be increased. Thus, Syria, seek to discuss this issue under the UN framework.³⁵

However as long as Abdullah Öcalan, resided in Damascus³⁶, and the terrorist activities of the PKK continued to find support in Syria, the water problem was not solved between these two countries.³⁷ Only after A. Öcalan's expulsion from Damascus a new era in relations between Turkey and Syria was initiated and negotiations on water started. In 2007, two countries signed 'Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation between Turkey and Syria' concerning 'Politics and Security', 'Economy' and 'Energy and Water' and deepening of the cooperation between the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) and the Syrian Oil Company and progress in visits and opinion exchange in the field of water were agreed. Also, Turkey designed a 'Three Staged Plan' based on the fact that the Euphrates and the Tigris make up a single transboundary river system and envisages the preparation of common inventories of water and land resources for a final allocation of water between the riparian states. Finally in 2009, Turkey and Syria signed an agreement on lifting the visa between two countries and also signed a bilateral cooperation accord under which top ministers from the two countries will meet each year. Therefore, it can be argued that the end of the terrorist threat, increase in economic and trade links at the border helped the creation of friendly neighboring relations which flourished cultural, social and political relations as well. In the same framework Turkey increased its economic and cultural relations with the southern Mediterranean countries which led to agreements on ending the visa requirements with Libya, Jordan and Tunisia as well. Also Turkey and Iran have the visa agreement which allows their citizens to travel freely.

In the last decade Turkey has been trying to improve its relations with the southern neighbors. In the 1980s and the 1990s the Middle Eastern neighbors were perceived as the troubled areas and Turkey tried to refrain itself from being engaged in the conflicts in the region. However in the 2000s through its cultural, economic and trade links Turkey has been working hard to create a friendly environment in the region. In this framework Turkey also emphasized its role in the Middle East and the resolution of conflict between Israel and Palestine. In relations with Israel, Turkey's main concern has been PA and the peace process. In the previous decades, Turkey tried to stay out of the conflict between Israel and PA as much as possible. However, after Turkey's candidacy to the EU was announced and after the accession negotiations started, Turkey started to perceive Palestine question as an area of

³⁵ Y. G. Yıldız, *Oyun içinde Oyun Büyük Ortadoğu*, (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2004), 268.

³⁶ 'Syria's role in our fight is very powerful and permanent.' H. Cemal, *Kürtler*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2004), 41.

³⁷ H. Cemal, *Kürtler*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2004), 107.

responsibility and opportunity to claim a constructive role in the region.³⁸ However in the last decade it is observed that Turkey's foreign policy has moved more towards the Palestine and some disputes with Israel have been observed in the political arena. But one needs to observe that although the political and diplomatic problems occupied the agenda the economic and trade relations as well as the military and security relations continued during the Turkey-Israel diplomatic struggles. In 2009, the extent of bilateral trade between Israel and Turkey was \$2.5 billion³⁹ and Turkey is listed as one of the main trading partners of Israel both in imports and exports⁴⁰

After (PKK leader) Öcalan was expelled from Syria and the Adana Agreement was signed, relations with Syria started to prosper. In 2004, the two countries signed a free trade agreement, and in 2007 the Turkish-Syrian Business Council was established. Cultural exchanges between Turkey and Syria began, and trade volume increased to 2.3 billion €. Turkey's relations with Syria were not the only case where Turkey and the regional countries got closer. The share of trade with regional countries increased to %19 in 2008 from %9 of the 1990s. Therefore, by 2010 Turkey had established the "Close Neighbors Economic and Trade Association Council" with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, which aimed to establish a FTA among these countries. Also, similar to the EU policies towards its neighbors, Turkey emphasized flows of people, trade and ideas to establish a more stable, interdependent and integrated region.

Since the 2002 elections in Turkey, Turkish foreign policy has been based on 5 principles: a balance between security and democracy, a zero problem policy towards neighbors, increasing relations with neighbors, multi-dimensional foreign policy and rhythmic diplomacy. The main concerns of Turkey in the region have been security, dialogue, economic interdependence and cultural coexistence. Hence, foreign policy has not been a series of bilateral relations only, but mutually reinforcing and interlocking processes. In the 1990s, due to the political vacuum in the region, Turkey was a supporter of the status quo protection policies. In the 2000s, a policy focused on balance and diversification through active engagement in the region was accepted. This change of course was a result of the change in government in 2002, but regional political changes facilitated Turkey's dynamic policy towards the region as well. Among these perceived regional changes were a decrease in Arab nationalism, political and economic crises, a decrease of legitimacy of governments in these neighboring countries and an increase in political Islam.

It must be mentioned that both the accession process of Turkey to the EU and the Turkish Parliament's rejection of the March 1 motion increased the prestige of Turkey among the regional countries. It has been argued that the Arab world began to take a closer interest in Turkey after Turkey started its accession negotiations in 2005. A number of public opinion surveys and statements of regional leaders underlined the importance of Turkey-EU relations in order to create a stable and developed region. It is believed that Turkey's increasing positive perception in the region, which falls under the ENP, can be used as a positive tool by the EU. %80 of the respondents in a TESEV survey have positive views on Turkey's role in the region and %66 believe that Turkey can be a model for the Middle Eastern countries. This has been an important change since the 1990s regarding Turkey's role

³⁸ B. Aras, R. K. Polat, 'Turkey and the Middle East: frontiers of the new geographic imagination', Australian Journal of International Affairs, vol 61, iss 4, (2007):478

³⁹ O. Coren, Turkey hints at review of Israel trade, but no sign yet of boycott, Haaretz, 2 June 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/turkey-hints-at-review-of-israel-trade-but-no-sign-yet-of-boycott-1.293659> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴⁰ European Union, Trade in goods with Israel, European Commission DG for Trade, 2014, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113402.pdf accessed on 19 June 2014

in the region. Also, these changes created some concerns over Turkey's position as a NATO ally and questions on Turkey's orientation towards the East or the West began to be asked. Although some American and European observers argued that Turkey is turning away from its historic western orientation, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu clearly argued that the more Turkey strains its bow in Asia, the further its arrow will extend into Europe.

In this period Turkey also manifested its intentions to act as mediator in the regional conflicts, i.e. Israel and Syria. Turkey has been involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also, through economic, social and humanitarian projects. This has been another change in Turkey's non-intervention policy in the region. These changes in Turkish policy towards the region were not welcomed by some regional actors, i.e. Egypt and Abbas, and Iran. However, especially after the Mavi Marmara incident, Turkey's role as a mediator has ostensibly failed.

In 2010 and 2011 the region went through crucial times once more. On the one hand, Arab revolts have complicated regional politics and relations among the actors have become more polarized. On the other hand, the ballistic missile shield to be built under the NATO umbrella has become an issue in not only Turkey's neighborhood but also between Turkey and its western partners. Following long debates and hesitancy, during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, Turkey accepted the concept of a NATO missile shield to be built mainly against threats coming from the Middle East. Although the document on the missile shield did not specify names of countries or groups perceived as threats, most of the commentators on the subject have concluded that this shield was especially thought to protect the west against possible Iranian missiles. Therefore, Turkey's prospering relations with the regional countries and its attachment to the western organizations and security complex created questions on drifting foreign policy. Turkey's attitude during the War in Iraq was seen as more compatible with that of some EU member states, which also wanted no part in the armed conflict. The EU has emphasized the importance of creating a region without dividing lines. Turkey's policy over Iraq was seen as leaning toward this method. However, NATO member Turkey, by accepting the missile shield, opted for a policy that potentially creates dividing lines between the region and the west.

As the revolts started and the leaders of the North African countries were challenged by the masses and forced to step down, Turkey and the US started to coordinate once more. During the revolts, leaders such as Mubarak, Qaddafi, Ben Ali, Abdullah Saleh - the very political leaders with whom the Turkish government had set up bilateral political, economic and social relations - had to step down, and Turkey, while supporting democratization, had to make contacts with the new leaders of these countries. In this environment, the relations with the USA have been crucial once more, due to its historical leverage in the region.

Libya has been the first case to test Turkey's policies, since Libya is essential not only in terms of political relations but also regarding the economic and financial investments of Turkish business people in that country. It has been argued that 18.4 million dollars' worth of projects and 100 million dollars in cash in Libyan banks were threatened during the revolts. Initially, Turkey opposed NATO intervention in Libya, in line with its position on non-intervention by foreign forces in the region, but approved of humanitarian aid. As the international reaction increased in line with UN Security Council resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, authorizing countries to take measures to stop the violence against civilians, Turkey agreed to participate in NATO operations.

Following Libya, Turkey supported a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Syrian regime. In the Syrian case, Turkey put efforts into facilitating the stepping down of Assad while simultaneously establishing a political relation with the opposition groups. As the crisis continued and Assad did not step down, Turkey's rhetoric approached that of the Americans. These developments have complicated Middle Eastern politics, and the international system, historical memory, systemic influences and domestic political changes affect both positively and negatively the relations among the states in the region. The spread of unrest in the region caused some questioning of the dynamic and multi approach Turkish foreign policy. As an ally of the US and a candidate of the EU, Turkey has emphasized democratization and human rights and has aligned itself with western policies. Some observers argued that this alignment put Turkey back into western circles and forced it to leave behind the new policies adopted in 2002.

Conclusion

As it has been argued, being a regional power is dependent on a number of variables. In Turkish case if we take the following criteria; intellectual, entrepreneurial, and implementation leadership, in both Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions, Turkey's efforts such as Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform and its intentions to act as a mediator in the Middle East can be perceived as examples of intellectual leadership (attempts on creative ways of conceptualizing problems). As an example of entrepreneurial leadership, very much related with the intellectual one -creating international norms, agenda setting and formation of coalitions- one can see that Turkey has tried to facilitate agreements and set coalitions as a member of the UN Security Council during Iran nuclear talks. Regarding the implementation leadership, Turkey offered its system (parliamentarian, secular and democratic) as a model to both regions in the 2000s.

Another definition of regional power focusses on possession of necessary power resources, using foreign policy tools, claim to be the leader and acceptance by other countries. In terms of possession of necessary power resources, economic and military powers of Turkey stand out in its region. When data on GDP per capita and military expenditure are examined, Turkey stands out as one of the leader countries in both the Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions. In addition to these figures, active military numbers also show that Turkey, together with Russia and Iran, is one of the prominent countries in the region demonstrating hard power.

Country name	GDP per capita (USD)
Armenia	7,418
Azerbaijan	16,166
Egypt	10,872
Greece	26,041
Iran	15,732
Iraq	14,781
Moldova	4,219
Morocco	6,998
Russia	23,589
Tunisia	10,797
Georgia	6,808
Turkey	18,551

Source: World Bank, 2009-2013 GDP Per Capita, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>

Country name	Military Expenditure (m. US\$)
Tunisia	948
Armenia	427
Azerbaijan	3,440
Bulgaria	838
Greece	5,939
Moldova	244
Russia	87,836
Turkey	19,085
Egypt	4,255
Iraq	7,896
Israel	16,032
Lebanon	1,936

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure, http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database

In respect to employment of foreign policy tools Turkey is a member of various international and regional organizations which provides Turkey with the tools of soft and hard power. In addition to NATO, Council of Europe, OIC, and UN; since 2005 Turkey has an observer status in African Union, it took over the CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia) Chairmanship in 2010, it initiated BLACKSEAFOR and BSEC, in 2005 it became a member of Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, it established Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, it is a permanent observer of Organization of American States (OAS), it became a dialogue partner in SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) in 2012, and it became a signatory of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2010.

With all these in mind and increasing economic and trade links with the regional countries Turkey claimed to be a regional power in both regions. Regarding the Black Sea, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated that:

Making the Black Sea basin a place of peace and welfare is a strategic goal of Turkey. We established either high level cooperation councils or signed visa exemption and free trade agreements. We are decisive about turning the black sea in one economic basin starting the establishing a highway ring around the Black Sea..... Turkey's trade volume with the Black Sea region surged to 60 billion US\$ in 2012 from 10 billion US\$ in 2002.⁴¹

In the Mediterranean, Turkey planned to establish a logistics center in Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast, to allow exporters to continue to supply the Gulf markets as well as Africa.⁴² The share of Turkish trade with the Middle East expressed as a share of its total trade rose from 6% in 2002 to 16% in 2010. The total volume of trade with the Middle East went up from \$3.9 billion to \$23.6 billion during the same period. Also, the share of high-technology exports from Turkey to the Middle East in total exports slipped from 4% in 2002 to 3.5% in 2010.⁴³ However, it should be

⁴¹ Turkish FM slams blocking of fresh 'chapter' in EU policy alignment talks, Anadolu Agency, 21 June 2013, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/news/195726--turkish-fm-slams-blocking-of-fresh-chapter-in-eu-policy-alignment-talks> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴² T. Reid, Turkey's eastern trading bet pays off, Financial Times, 29 August 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/94646ab6-f1c5-11e1-bda3-00144feabdc0.html> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴³ Ö. Sanberk, How Strong is Turkey in the Middle East, The Journal of Turkish Weekly, 9 May 2012, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3621/how-strong-is-turkey-in-the-middle-east.html> accessed on 19 June 2014

remembered that Turkey still mainly exports to Europe (%55,78) and imports from Europe (%55,64).⁴⁴

As the last necessity to be considered as a regional power has been acceptance by the other countries. In 2010 and 2012 public opinion surveys done by TESEV, showed that approximately %60 of the Arab public saw Turkey as a model and believed Turkey could contribute positively to the transformation of Arab world.⁴⁵ In order to increase acceptance of the country in the region, Turkey also utilized soft power tools such as student exchange programs, increasing cultural exchange such as TV shows and broadcasting in Arabic. It has been observed that visitors to Turkey in 2002 from the Arab countries numbered 975,000, but by 2010, this figure had risen to 3.6 million.⁴⁶

All these developments increased Turkish confidence and made Turkey to feel like a regional power in the 2000s. However, since 2012 it has been observed that there is a decline in Turkey's potential role as a regional leader in its region, regarding both the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In the Black Sea region, especially during the Crimea crisis, Turkey has been quiet considering the previous statements of Turkish authorities. Turkey stated that it was deeply concerned about the annexation of Crimea but was also reluctant to assume a more aggressive stance.⁴⁷ It has been argued that the "revenge of geography" is forcing Ankara to return to Turkey's traditionally cautious diplomacy, based on a preference for multilateralism, while it maintains and deepens security arrangements with the West.⁴⁸ Also, there were comments which were linking Turkey's reluctant attitude in Crimea to the crisis in Syria and energy dependence of Turkey; stating that

"Turkey imports around 55% of its natural gas needs and 12% of its oil from Russia and it curiously turned to Russia for its first nuclear plant as well. Dependence on these resources has shaped Ankara's foreign policy toward Moscow and even though Russia has blocked international action against Assad regime in Damascus, effectively undermining Ankara's policy of helping Assad's opponents, Erdoğan has shied away from picking a fight with Putin."⁴⁹

In 2013 and 2014, especially in the Middle East there have been a number of developments that decreased Turkey's potential regional power in the region. Turkey's position against Assad regime, Russian and Iranian support of it and Assad's latest electoral victory, ethnic and religious separatist groups terrorist activities in Iraq i.e. ISIS, military coup in Egypt, military intervention in Libya affected negatively Turkey's desired role as a stabilizing actor in the middle east peace process. In the Black Sea region, Turkey's proposition of a regional multilateral cooperation through the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform after the 2008 Georgian War turned out to be an ineffectual effort. One reason for this disappointment have been Turkey's problematic relations with Armenia and the other being Russia's overwhelming role in the region.

⁴⁴ Observatory of Economic Complexity, Turkey, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/profile/country/tur/> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴⁵ K. Kirişçi, The Rise and Fall of Turkey as a Model for the Arab World, 15 August 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/08/15-rise-and-fall-turkey-model-middle-east> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴⁶ Ö. Sanberk, How Strong is Turkey in the Middle East, The Journal of Turkish Weekly, 9 May 2012, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3621/how-strong-is-turkey-in-the-middle-east.html> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴⁷ L. Adilgizi, Old rivals or regional partners: Russia, Turkey and Crimea, Al Jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/03/old-rivals-regional-partners-r-2014315144016585481.html> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴⁸ S. İdiz, Turkey faces 'geography's revenge' in Crimea, Al Monitor, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/turkey-crimea-policy-russia-strategy-tatars-geography-rights.html#> accessed on 19 June 2014

⁴⁹ S. Çağaptay and J. F. Jeffrey, Turkey's Muted Reaction to the Crimean Crisis, The Washington Institute Policy Analysis, Policy Watch 2219, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-muted-reaction-to-the-crimean-crisis> accessed on 19 June 2014

Therefore, it is important to take into account Russia and USA as the big powers in these regions before calling Turkey a regional power. Turkey's problematic relations with the USA, did indeed increase Turkey's credibility among the public in the region in 2003, however, it also decreased Turkey's ability to maneuver and military existence in the same region. NATO intervention in Libya also demonstrated that NATO membership is still an important part of Turkey's foreign policy instruments.

All in all, in the beginning of the 2000s stability and economic growth of Turkey did increase Turkey's possible leadership role. It is also crucial to emphasize the importance of democratization process that Turkey has been going through in those years as a result of accession negotiations with the EU. It has been significant for Turkey that it asserts its power in its region because it is important to its global status. The rationale has been that Turkey, having stable, constructive and a leading position in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions will be indispensable for the western countries which lack credibility in these regions. Turkey, as a continuation of its rhetoric of the 1990s sustained the bridge role between Europe and Asia. This requires though good relations with the western countries and the regional countries at the same time. Turkey's increasing relations with the Mediterranean countries, decreasing contact with the EU, its opposition to USA during the crisis episodes jeopardized its desired role as a bridge. Following the Libya crisis especially and then the Crimean crisis also decreased Turkey's credibility as a regional power.