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Changing Geopolitics and Turkish Foreign Policy

von
Hüseyin Bağcı

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Hüseyin Bağcı



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Changing Geopolitics and Turkish Foreign Policy

1. Introduction

Geopolitical characters are one of the basic elements that Turkish foreign policy makers have had to take into consideration because of the strategic location of Turkey. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate Turkish foreign policy from geopolitical perspective.

In this paper, it is argued that geopolitics is still relevant to analyze relations of states but its extent to explain them changes according to the state whose relations are analyzed and the partner state with which it establishes relations. Geopolitics is tackled as a term which refers to the importance of geography in affecting political relations between nations. However it should be evaluated in more comprehensive way according to the current developments such as globalization, emergence of new actors in international arena which make difficult to assess relations separately.

The term geopolitics will be defined in the following chapter, in order to make meaning of geopolitics explicit. The second chapter focused on Turkey's geopolitical features and in the following chapter its relations with the global powers and with its immediate neighbors will be evaluated. The each section will evaluate the following issues without considering chronological information:

- a) geopolitical importance of Turkey for the partner country;
- b) importance of that country;
- c) Turkey's self image about its geopolitical importance for that country;
- d) basic points in relations which are designed according to these considerations. This will enable the readers to find out to what extent relations comply with geopolitical considerations.

2. Understanding Geopolitics

Geopolitics refers to importance of geography in affecting relations of countries and policy makers' decisions regarding both foreign and domestic policy. According to Sloan and Gray, "one of the aims of geopolitics is to emphasize that political predominance is a question not just having power in the sense of human or material resources, but also of the geographical context within which that power is exercised."¹ However geography does not determine all strategies of foreign and domestic policies but "geography or geographical configurations present opportunities for policy makers and politicians."² Geography of a country may give it an additional power. Policy makers should know to evaluate and use them.

In this framework, how does a state use geopolitics? According to Colin Flint, "*the manner in which a country orientates itself toward the world is called a geopolitical code*".³ While defining geopolitical code, a policy-maker decides its position from the geopolitical perspective, assesses opportunities and weaknesses that the geography of his country presents. Then he may design a foreign policy which determines the geopolitical code of the country. Flint continues expressing that there are five main calculations which are important in defining countries' geopolitical codes:

- a) *who are our current and potential allies;*
- b) *who are our current and potential enemies;*
- c) *how can we maintain our allies and nurture potential allies;*
- d) *how can we counter our current enemies and emerging threats;*

e) *how do we justify the four calculations above to our public and to the global community.*"⁴

Maintaining current and potential allies or countering enemies require a number of means. According to Flint, economic ties, cultural exchange, educational scholarship and military connections may be means of an attempt to maintain allies. There are military and non-military means (sanctions, boycotts, diplomacy etc.) which can be used to counter enemies.⁵ These means may transform positions of states into an ally or enemy.

Geopolitical codes vary according to scales in which states develop foreign policy. According to Flint, "for many countries their main concern is with their immediate neighborhood. Are they friend or enemy?"⁶ The first scale is neighborhood. In the regional scale, states develop a foreign policy towards expanding their influence beyond their immediate neighbors.⁷ Some countries, mostly world leaders, have global geopolitical codes and they spend much "diplomatic energy to make sure countries are 'on-board' the world leader's agenda."⁸ These scales define a country's influence area which is determined by its geopolitics.

Finally, the term geopolitics should be evaluated within more comprehensive perspective, consists of economic, military, cultural, educational, diplomatic relations besides politics. Foreign policies of countries consist of elements from these areas and are affected by geopolitical position of the country.

3. Importance of Turkey's Geopolitical Location and Turkey's Foreign Policy – In Search of an Active Foreign Policy

Turkey is located at a very special point, having different geographical characteristics and offering opportunities and difficulties. Yasemin Çelik emphasizes the importance of geographical features of Turkey, expressing that its territories rest on Asia and Europe and it borders the Middle East, post-Soviet states and the EU. Turkey is also surrounded on three dimensions with seas (the Black Sea, Aegean Sea and Mediterranean), a natural passage between Europe and Asia and it controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits.⁹

Mustafa Aydın also adds some different characteristics, stating that Turkey is located at the crossroads of land connections between Europe, Asia and Africa; it is surrounded by many different neighbors with different characteristics, regimes, ideologies and aims.¹⁰ According to him, “a country's border may be a source of strength and weakness depending on their length, the number and intentions of neighbors and the relative power available to the affected parties.”¹¹ Turkey's neighbors have characteristics that lead to insecurity feelings and this urges Turkey to establish alliances or to seek a membership in alliances.¹² Turkey's security concerns not only limit its foreign policy alternatives but also are used by policy-makers as a legitimizing tool.

Geographic location of a country is affected not only by regional developments but also by world-wide systemic characteristics. Baskın Oran expresses that Turkey is located at the point in which world power axes divide the world into two parts.¹³ For example during the Cold War, Turkey was located just at the Western border of the Soviet Union. In current times a North-South axis – a different one, based on economic differences – takes the place of former axis which was stemming from ideological differences.¹⁴ This led to important changes in agenda of Turkish foreign policy.

Geopolitics of Turkey has offered it both advantages and disadvantages. Aydın expresses that “Turkey, thanks to her geo-strategic location (...) has been able to play a role in world politics for greater than her size, population, economic strength would indicate.”¹⁵ With its geographical position, Turkey always has more bargaining points in negotiations with the great powers. Moreover it is located between natural resources-rich regions and oil-needing markets. This situation gives it a chance of having a role in transporting natural resources between regions. Every transportation project increases efficiency and importance of Turkey in the international arena.

The geography also causes some disadvantages such as the fact that Turkey may be a target for some terrorist groups, organized crime, trafficking or

migration which use Turkish lands to pass from one region to another.

Besides these issues, geopolitics of a country can be used by policy-makers in different manners such as producing external problems in an international arena. Oran also claims that a country such as Turkey – which has important economic problems – may conduct a securitization policy if it thinks that usage of its geopolitical position may provide economic aid, it tries to use this position artificially and to create a security crisis¹⁶.

The importance of geopolitical position for Turkey also raises the issues of the need to conduct more active policy and this creates a convergence between foreign policy principles such as preserving status-quo and requirements of following more active policy. Turkey is always pro-status-quo power and avoids following revisionist policies. This policy seems to decrease its efficiency. However, according to Okman, changes in its near region such as last intervention in Iraq (20 March 2003), seem to offer opportunities to Turkey to increase its strategic initiative in the long run.¹⁷

These kinds of discussions on the potential of Turkey as a more active actor in the region also took place before 2003. Pınar Bilgin states that a “central state” metaphor is used to express the potential of Turkey to have a more central place in world politics by military officials and civilian authors, even by Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan.¹⁸ This metaphor was inspired from Mackinder's theory. Mackinder, firstly in 1904 defines a pivotal area which is redefined in 1919, expressing that “Heartland includes the Baltic Sea, the navigable middle and lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Persia, Tibet and Mongolia (...)”¹⁹; an inner crescent (Germany, Austria, the Ottoman Empire, India and China) and an outer crescent (Great Britain, South Africa, Australia, the USA, Canada, Spain, Japan).²⁰ According to him, “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island [Asia, Europe, Africa]; Who rules the World Island commands the World”.²¹ As it was seen, Mackinder attached importance to the region surrounding Turkey and according to Bilgin, this was evaluated by many politicians and strategists to emphasize the place of Turkey in world politics.²²

Ahmet Davutoğlu, chief advisor to Turkish Prime Minister, also expresses the need of conducting more active policy. According to him, after the Cold War Turkey emerged as a bridge country and with its special geopolitical location, it has “the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously and controls an area of influence in its immediate environs”.²³ Turkey should redefine geopolitics, and its

geopolitical location should not be seen as a strategy of defending borders and status-quo.²⁴ Instead, it should be seen as a tool to transform regional efficiency into global efficiency.²⁵ He also expresses that “A central country with such an optimal geographic location can not define itself in a defensive manner”.²⁶ Given this framework, according to him, Turkey should have a new position of providing security for itself and its neighbors and it “should guarantee its own security and stability by taking a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs.”²⁷

New principles for Turkey’s new foreign policy are also defined: 1) promoting civil liberties without undermining security; 2) zero problem policy toward

Turkey’s neighbors; 3) developing relations with the neighboring regions and beyond;²⁸ 4) adherence to a multi-dimensional policy; 5) rhythmic diplomacy²⁹ (“wherever there is a problem in the world, Turkey will have a stance on that issue and will actively have something to say”³⁰). He claims that Turkey’s aim is to transform the country from a central country into a global power.³¹ Election of Turkey as one of the UN Security Council non-permanent members on 17th October, 2008 may be a result of this policy.

In this framework, under the effects of differences in international environments and in vision of policy makers, it seems that geopolitics has gained more importance in recent years in Turkish foreign policy.

4. Turkish Foreign Policy in Global Scale – Relations with the United States

Throughout the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy was characterized by Ankara’s close alliance with Washington. Turkey had a role as the southern flank of the NATO against the Soviet expansionism.³² In exchange, Turkey received guarantee of protection from Soviet threat under the NATO umbrella and significant amount of military and economic aid in order to strengthen its defense.³³ In the post-Cold War period, the US-Turkey relationship is questioned in both Turkey and in the United States because it seems that Turkey’s alliances with the United States has lost its sustaining rationale which was containing the Soviet Union.³⁴

However, in the post-Cold War era, Turkey’s importance, stemming from its geopolitical character has still been emphasized by different authors. Işıl Kazan emphasizes Turkey’s geopolitical insulator position in issues of WMDs and missile defense.³⁵ Cengiz Çandar and Graham Fuller express that in resolving Iraqi issue, in Middle East peace process, to influence Syria, Iran and Arab-Muslim world, to moderate Islamic movements, to prevent proliferation of the WMDs to Iran and Iraq, to spread democracy, the US needs Turkey.³⁶ Turkey also has a capacity of influencing Central Asia and the Caucasus and manipulating Uighur Turks of Eastern Turkestan within Xinjiang in China.³⁷ The US may encourage Turkey to ensure a balance between Russian and Chinese power in Central Asia.³⁸ Turkey is important for the US to provide security of energy transportation and for entry of the United States into oil- and gas-rich regions. More recently, Turkey can present a gateway to the Black Sea region for the United States.

How does Turkey present itself? In the webpage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the role of Turkey is emphasized in moderating tensions and exporting stability in its immediate region. Turkey is also a gateway to the vast and lucrative markets in Eurasia and Middle East.³⁹

In July 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül agreed

on a document, titled “The Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Strategic Partnership”. This document determines “areas of cooperation on common interest including Iraq, the Middle East, the Israeli-Arab conflict, Iran’s nuclear program, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan as well as cooperation in energy security, fight against terrorism and spread of WMD, the just settlement of the Cyprus issue under the aegis of the UN (...) in economic, scientific and technological fields.”⁴⁰ It is clearly seen that points expressed in the document, geopolitical considerations stated above and Turkey’s aspiration about itself in its relations with the US are coinciding.

Finally, regarding Turkey’s perceptions on the US, it can be stated that the US is the world’s only superpower; hence it gives importance to establishing friendly relations with the US. If it became hostile, Washington could damage Ankara’s position on many issues. The US support in diplomatic issues is of vital importance.

Currently, Davutoğlu expresses that the US had to face new challenges as a superpower while Turkey is located at the heart of these sensitive regions and this has a strengthening effect in the US-Turkey relations which “has a solid geopolitical foundation, strong historic background and an institutionalized framework.”⁴¹ Moreover Turkey, according to him, “as a middle-sized central country, (...) needs the strategic weight of a continental superpower within the parameters of the internal balance of power of Afro-Eurasia.”⁴² He also states that “from a geopolitical perspective, it (the US-Turkey relations) carries almost all characteristics of a relationship between a continental superpower and a central country having the most optimal geopolitical position in Afro-Eurasia”.⁴³

Besides bilateral relations between the US and Turkey, when NATO–Turkey relations are considered, a similar discussion regarding Turkey’s importance in the post-Cold War era takes place. Oran, about the role of Turkey in Euro-Atlantic security, expresses

that while Turkey was a flank country during the Cold War, in the new era it becomes a “front country” to counter new threats such as migration, terrorism and instability.⁴⁴ In 1996 Javier Solana, then NATO’s Secretary-General, expressed “in a world of rapid change, Turkey’s partnership in the Alliance is more vital than ever.”⁴⁵ Turkey also tries to attach importance to its ability to counter these newly emerging threats. In the webpage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is expressed that “Turkey has been a staunch ally of the NATO and considers the Alliance as the linchpin of Trans-Atlantic ties and Euro-Atlantic security, of which Turkey is an integral part.”⁴⁶ In this context, Turkey defines its position as a country which is a security provider in a volatile region and it is added that “Given the nature of its geo-strategic location and

the prevailing global security conditions, Turkey is obliged to maintain a realistic deterrence capability. The ultimate aim is to transform the Turkish military into a modern, smaller and professional force, with higher deployability and fire power.”⁴⁷ By this expression Turkey seems to continue to use its geopolitical position as a bargaining matter. Davutoğlu also states that Turkey has a geopolitical importance regarding NATO’s new missions.⁴⁸ In order to gain capacity to be influential, Turkey should conduct an active foreign policy in its immediate region.⁴⁹ While conducting such policies, it should try to harmonize its regional policies with NATO’s global mission.⁵⁰

In this comprehensive framework, the geopolitical considerations have potential to be influential in the US/NATO relations with Turkey.

5. Turkish Foreign Policy in Global Scale – Relations with the European Union

European Union countries and Turkey were found in the same bloc and had similar security policies during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War period, Turkey’s role in the Western Ally was started to be questioned. The EU also entered into a new phase of architectural debate of redefining its security and security structure. According to Hale, the main shadow over Turkey’s position in the Western alliance arose from these new security plans of the EU.⁵¹ In this process Europeanization of European defense without Turkey came on the agenda.⁵² Hüseyin Bağcı states that in the formation process of the ESDP (before 2001 – Ankara Document), the EU’s general approach towards Turkey has for a long time been in a negative manner because of concerns of member states on the issues of preservation of the autonomy/ identity dimension of the ESDP project and the EU’s perception of Turkey as a security consumer.⁵³ Turkey’s and European Union’s views regarding the place of Turkey are significantly divergent and controversial. Turkish policy makers prefer to see Turkey as a part of Europe; however EU policy makers insist that Turkey is ‘non-Europe’, such as the Mediterranean or the Middle East.⁵⁴

On the other hand, Turkey is important for the European Union because of its geographic proximity. Turkey has crucial roles to play in establishing trade, transport and energy routes linking Europe with the Middle East, Transcaucasia and Central

Asia⁵⁵ In addition to transporting and stability-providing role, Turkey is important for Europe to cope with newly emerging threats such as smuggling or terrorism. Turkey has also a major geopolitical importance for the EU because of its potential to be an energy-transit country and to provide greater energy security.⁵⁶

Turkey uses the metaphor of a bridge between regions and emphasizes a kind of role in spreading European values, being a source of inspiration for other nations. In “Synopsis of Turkish Foreign Policy”, it is claimed that it has peaceful relations in a multitude of geographies and can make a major contribution to the harmony among cultures within the EU and beyond.⁵⁷

Even though the integration and candidacy process of Turkey into the EU continues, discussions on Turkey’s geopolitical importance for Europe take place. It can be understood that the EU seems to ignore Turkey’s geopolitical location because it is excluded from the ESDP project in its initial terms despite Turkey’s potential in overcoming new security issues. Turkey also perceives the EU not as a tool to ensure its security but as to achieve an encouraging factor in its Westernizing – civilizational project and economic/ political development. Geopolitics seems not to be less influential in relations between the European Union and Turkey.

6. Relations with Immediate Neighbors – the Russian Federation

In geopolitical terms, Russia and Turkey are historic rivals. The Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia competed for regional supremacy in the region and during the Cold War, these two actors were found in adversary blocs. In the post-Cold War era, there are still controversies between two countries, stemming from their geopolitical location. They are found in the same region and have similar objectives that make them rival in some issues:

- Rivalry in the post-Soviet geography: the exclusion of external powers from the former Soviet space is one of the main objectives of Russia while Turkey has historic ties with these countries and would like to use its ties to be influential in this region.
- Mutual recrimination of support to ethnic separatist movements⁵⁸
- The competition over the Caspian Sea oil pipelines. The Western companies support Turkey as an alternative route from the Caspian and this leads to create competition with Gazprom.⁵⁹
- Issues of deployment of Russian military equipment in the Northern Caucasus, military bases in Armenia while naval superiority of Turkey in the Black sea; sale of S-300 air defense missiles to Greek Cypriot government⁶⁰
- effect of frozen conflicts, different views on the Azerbaijan-Armenia problem;
- Threats, posed by oil-tanker traffic through the Straits to the human, material, environmental and maritime security.⁶¹

Despite these problems, these two countries are important for each other because of a number of factors. According to Ayhan Kamel, for Russia Turkey is important because of its control over the Straits, its geopolitical position in the Middle East, its potential of being a large market for Russia.⁶² Russia is also important because it has an important arsenal of arms and armament, including nuclear weapons and important natural resources and high technology.⁶³

In this framework, rapprochement has been seen in Russian-Turkish relations in recent years. According to Kınıklıoğlu and Morkva, Turkey's new foreign policy principle of "normalization with the neighborhood" significantly affects these improvements in relations.⁶⁴ This foreign policy vision also gives importance to stability in the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus and Mediterranean region which is also important for Russia. New developments in their *near region* bring them together on some issues such as terrorism, the US invasion of Iraq, destabilizing factors⁶⁵ Kınıklıoğlu and Morkva also express that the two countries relations are based on defensive motivations against high instability potentials in their immediate region and "also defensive regarding the shaping of a new Europe that appears to exclude the two regional powers."⁶⁶ In addition to them, Russia and Turkey have important economic and commercial relations. According to Kınıklıoğlu and Morkva, "The true engine behind the deepening of Turkish-Russian relations is the growing trade dimension."⁶⁷ Turkey imports an important amount of oil and gas from Russia. Another factor behind the rapprochement between the two countries is growing number of tourist visiting Turkey.

Table-1: Turkey –Russian Federation Foreign Trade (1000\$)⁶⁸

YEARS	EXPORT	IMPORT	BALANCE	TOTAL
2003	1.367.591	5.451.316	-4.083.725	6.818.907
2004	1.859.187	9.033.138	-7.173.951	10.892.325
2005	2.377.050	12.905.620	-10.528.570	156.282.850
2006	3.237.611	17.806.239	-14.568.628	21.043.850
2007	4.727.197	23.506.019	-18.778.822	28.233.216

Source: the Undersecretary of Foreign Trade

Under the effect of many factors, rivalry between two actors in their immediate regions seems to be a geopolitical fait accompli. However, new developments such as destabilizing factors and entry of great powers into the region bring the two countries together. Bağcı also expressed that "Russian and Turkish national interests are coinciding more than

they ever have in the last 150 years of the two countries' relations"⁶⁹ and cooperation is emphasized more than confrontation in Russia. This new perspective in Turkey, their similar position in some issues and intensification of economic and political relations seem to affect them to reconcile the geopolitical competition.

7. Relations with Immediate Neighbors – the Southern Caucasus

The region is very important for Turkey because of its significant characteristics such as geographical proximity, ethnic and historical ties with these countries, Turkish citizens from Caucasus origin, important energy resources, ethno-territorial conflicts and Armenian claims.

The webpage of the Turkish Foreign Ministry emphasizes the position of the region – the intersection point of the energy and transport routes and energy resources. In the webpage, it is also expressed that Turkey has close political, economic, social and cultural ties with the people of the region.⁷⁰ Davutoğlu also claims that the Caucasus is located inside Turkey's Near Land Basin which is one of Turkey's geopolitical influence areas.⁷¹ In the post Cold War period, during the initial years Turkey was not ready to establish important ties with the region and had some problems about regional balances.⁷² A comprehensive policy towards the region could not be developed, Turkey focused on the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict.⁷³ According to Davutoğlu, first of all a multi-dimensional and a holistic approach towards the region should be developed.⁷⁴ This holistic approach gives Turkey an opportunity of being influential in the North Middle East, composed of the East Anatolia, the Gulf-Mediterranean region, including Azerbaijan oil and water resources and North Iraqi oil.⁷⁵ More comprehensively, Turkey should develop a "Western Asia policy" to provide security in Turkey and to use economic resources effectively.⁷⁶

Under this framework, Turkey's foreign policy is designed so as to develop widespread cooperation in the region with all three states; maintaining the

stability and security in the region, supporting efforts towards democratization, developing free market economies and to pursue political reforms; developing and enhancing mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation.⁷⁷

Regarding frozen conflicts in the region, Turkey cannot be influential as an actor, having no capability of resolving them. However it, according to Sabri Sayari, succeeded in maintaining its presence in the Turkic republics, especially in Azerbaijan and economic and cultural interaction has increased significantly in the post-Cold War era.⁷⁸ Economic relations which are reinvigorated by the transportation issue of energy resources through BTC pipeline and other pipelines and transportation projects such as BTE Natural Gas Pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project increase the importance of the region for Turkey and of Turkey for the region. Turkey defines these countries (except Armenia) as allies and tries to nurture its relations with these countries through economic relations and cultural ties, whereas it imposes economic sanctions against Armenia to counter its adversary policies. However, Abdullah Gül, the president of Turkey visited Yerevan to see the World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey on 5th October, 2008. According to Bağcı, after this gesture, Turkey, under the framework of the "zero problem policy toward Turkey's neighbors", will make many attempts which aim to integrate Armenia and strengthen the regional cooperation both bilaterally and in the international arena.⁷⁹ As a different means to counter enemies, Turkey has begun to seek to transform its ongoing enemy into a friend country.

8. Relations with Immediate Neighbors – the Black Sea Region

This region is very important for Turkey as a littoral country and has a potential of establishing co-operation between other littoral states and of posing important threats such as unresolved ethnic conflicts, the presence of terrorist groups, energy security issues and organized crime. Newly emerging issues such as attempts of great powers (the US, the EU and NATO) to enter into the region raises the significance of the region. Davutoğlu also expresses that the Black Sea region may provide Turkey with the opportunity to enter into North and East Europe from one direction and into the Caucasus and Central Asia from other direction.⁸⁰ This basin is also important to establish economic relations besides providing military advantages.⁸¹

Regarding Turkey's position, first of all, it opposes the extension of NATO's Operation Active Endeavour from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Under this Operation, NATO ships deploy in the Mediterranean to control the sea and to prevent

terrorist activities in the region. Turkey opposes such an operation program in the Black Sea because it, according to Kınıklıoğlu and Morkva, sees no need for NATO to enter into the region.⁸² The existing bodies are adequate and in concert with NATO operations and for Turkey, a regional initiative must include Russia.⁸³ According to Turkey, the organization in the region which undertakes the tasks of the Operation of Active Endeavor is the Black Sea Harmony which "is a naval operation initiated by Turkey in March 2004 in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions 1373, 1540 and 1566 and aims at deterring terrorism and asymmetric threats worldwide and ensuring the security of the Turkish Straits."⁸⁴ In December 2006 Russia also joined Operation Black Sea Harmony.

Another initiative of Turkey in the region is "The Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group-BLACKSEAFOR" which is established to enhance peace and stability, to increase regional co-operation

and to improve good relationship.⁸⁵ BLACK-SEAFOR establishment agreement was signed by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine on 2nd April 2001. This force is also tried to show as an alternative to the Operation Active Endeavor.

Turkey also avoids taking sides in any Russia versus West struggle for influence in the region while it does not oppose the integration of countries in the region into Euro-Atlantic structures. Turkey proposes to separate maritime security from the larger debate on the wider Black Sea security, emphasizing that Black Sea security should be immune from asymmetric threats and within six littoral states regional solutions to the existing and potential threats should be found.

One of the most important issues for Turkey is stability in the region. Kınıklıoğlu and Morkva express that Turkey wishes to see rather stability than democracy, but at the same time to avoid having an image of not to care about democracy in the region.⁸⁶ Turkey has concerns regarding that the new currents – like orange and rose revolutions – may lead to instability in the region.

Turkey also gives great importance to the preservation of the Montreux Convention on the eve of emergence of revision discussions. The Convention restricts the number, type and length of stay of the warships of non-Black Sea states to the region and it is seen as crucial to preserve Turkey's sovereignty over Straits.⁸⁷ Unlike its position in the past, Russia also supports the preservation of the Convention. On the eve of the current events, preservation of the Convention and balancing Russian and American position regarding the passage rights through the Straits gained more importance.

Finally another initiative is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization - BSEC which was

established on 25th June 1992 by Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. The organization aims at “fostering interaction and harmony among the Member States, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity encouraging friendly and good-neighborly relations in the Black Sea region”.⁸⁸ During 16 years after its establishment, the project has had not any considerable effect on economic relations between the countries in the region. However, Hale expresses that the organization is not only an economic entity but has political aims. The organization is “based on the idea that if regional countries develop economic interdependence, they would become politically more cooperative – (proved to be a) too optimistic ambition.”⁸⁹ Nonetheless the BSEC has a potential of being a platform between member states.

As a littoral country, the Black Sea is very important for Turkey's security and it tries to be an influential actor in the region. All these initiatives show its attempts to affect regional development. After the recent conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation, Turkey proposed a Caucasus Platform which brings all partners in the Caucasus together to make a contribution to peace, security and stability in the region and include a joint mechanism for problem-solving and crisis management. An initial organizational meeting of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform led by Turkey took place on 4th and 5th of December in 2008 in Helsinki, Finland as part of an OSCE⁹⁰ summit. The Platform was welcomed by all parties in the region. Moreover this initiative, Turkey's support for peace and stability, its ongoing contacts with all parties and emerging relations with Armenia raised Turkey's importance and led to develop a foreign policy towards expanding its influence beyond their immediate neighbors as a country which has a geopolitical code in regional scale. 9

9. Relations with Immediate Neighbors- the Middle East

Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East is mostly determined by its security concerns stemming from instability and insecurity in the region, especially emerged after the Iraqi war. In the web page of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs it is emphasized to be a major source of instability and conflagration and have important economic and energy potential among other features of the region.⁹¹

In the region, Turkey generally follows cautious and conservative foreign policies and avoids to be drawn into regional conflicts, except its policies during Turgut Özal's presidency and Erbakan's prime ministry terms.⁹² According to Meliha Altunışık, Turkey pursues a foreign policy based on status-quo, territorial integrity, balance of power, multipolarity, balance in relations between Western allies and balance policy between different groups.⁹³

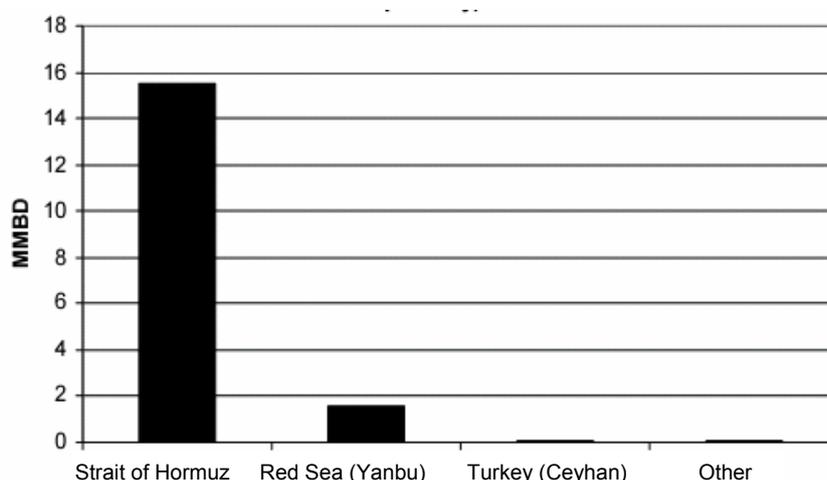
In recent years, Turkey tries to change its policies and to be more active actor in the region. Bülent Aras and Rabia Karakaya Polat also claim that Turkey follows new and more pro-active foreign policy towards Palestinian question, Iraq and Iran under the effects of domestic dynamics.⁹⁴ Bağcı also expresses that “since 2001, Turkey has a different approach towards the region. (...) It has found a much larger place in the region and [it] will not only appear as the West's staunch ally (...) but rather a staunch ally to the social political and economic changes in the Middle East”.⁹⁵ Davutoğlu states that Turkey has only very limited effect in region policies, but in the new term, the new government tries to overcome the barriers which prevent Turkey to extend its influence in the region.⁹⁶ He also adds that “Turkey's position should rest on four main principles: common security for the entire region, dialogue as a means of solving crises, economic

interdependence and cultural coexistence and plurality.”⁹⁷ According to him, Turkey can be a soft power actor with its democracy.⁹⁸

Regarding energy policies, Tekin and Walterova express that very little energy is exported from the

Middle East to the European Union through Turkey because of security developments in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East.⁹⁹ Therefore geopolitical importance of the country to the Middle Eastern producers is not certain.¹⁰⁰ (see: Table 2: Persian Gulf Oil Exports by Route – 2003¹⁰¹

Table 2: Persian Gulf Oil Exports by Route – 2003 (Million Barrels per Day)



Source: A. Necdet Pamir, “Turkey’s Energy Policies between East and West,” presentation on February 21, 2006, Bilkent University, <http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~crs/necdetpamir.ppt>.

Despite new developments and new foreign policy perception of decision-makers in Turkey, it seems not to be an influential actor when the proximity of the region, their common cultural and historical ties, its security concern and energy issues are considered. That may be because the great powers have

important considerations towards this oil- and gas-rich region and Turkey can only have that much influence they concede. Success of the new approach may depend on its accordance with great powers’ interests.

10. Conclusion

In current times, different types of relations between actors in the international community intersect. It becomes very difficult to evaluate one dimension without taking other elements of relations into consideration. In this context, geopolitics should not be limited with only political aspects. The term contains economic, military, political, cultural dimensions which are stemming from geographic conditions.

According to this geopolitical understanding, geopolitics is still relevant to analyze relations of states but its extent to explain relations changes

according to the state whose relations are analyzed. Geopolitical position of Turkey urges foreign policy makers to consider geopolitics. Especially in current terms, with new vision of “Strategic Depth” by Davutoğlu; effects of geopolitics seems to be more influential in relations of Turkey.

Extent of geopolitics to explain relations also changes according to partner states with which the country establishes relations. Effects of Turkey’s geopolitical position on its relations with diverse countries are different.

Table – 3: Effects of Geopolitics

States whose Geopolitics are MORE INFLUENTIAL on Relations with Turkey	States whose Geopolitics are LESS INFLUENTIAL on Relations with Turkey
United States of America	European Union
Southern Caucasus States	Russian Federation
Black Sea Region	Middle East States

Turkey-US relations are coincided with both countries geopolitical considerations. Turkey's policies towards the Southern Caucasus states and the Black Sea region seem to be convenient to geopolitical concerns of the states in the region. In relations with the EU, Turkey may have intense relations with the Union but these relations are not primarily designed according to geopolitics. In case of Russia, international developments and intensification of economic and political relations seem to reconcile the geopolitical competition between the two countries. In the Middle East case,

Turkey should be more influential than today but the international community may not leave any place for Turkey.

As Geoffrey Sloan and Colin S. Gray's expression, geography does not determine all strategies of foreign and domestic policies but geography or geographical configurations present opportunities for policy makers and politicians. The case of Turkey also shows that usage of these opportunities depend on partner countries and – in broader perspective – general circumstances of the international order.

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