

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Security Studies

Master Thesis

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**Evolution of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East**

**Case of intervention in Syria**

Master Thesis

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Study programme: International Security Studies

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Year of the defence: 2020

**Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed literature and resources.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague

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## References

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## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis focuses on the evolution of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East. In order to assess the transformation of the approach pursued in foreign affairs and delineate the tools employed in this new emerging era, the first direct military involvement of Turkey in 2016, in the Syrian conflict, is discussed in details.

The current state of affairs in the region is of particular interest to all regional and international stakeholders. Turkey, since the beginning of Erdoğan's rule, has gained increased visibility and managed to heighten its image globally by employing a liberal approach. Tangible results in neighbouring states, from the employment of soft power, have been limited. The primary goal is to provide an examination of the evolution of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and reasons attributed to a dramatic change and incline towards a realist approach. This thesis is expected to contribute to the existing research on Turkish foreign policy and to prepare the grounds for further inquiry of this topic in the light of new developments.

This work presents substantial historical background information of Turkish foreign policy, since the establishment of the modern republic, which provides the reader with a careful examination of its key features. Domestic dynamics and political developments, instruments and approaches to foreign policy are analysed in order to depict an overall picture and offer a broader understanding of the role of Turkey in global and regional affairs, an area of high interest to the international community. As such, this study analyses the stance of an important regional actor, which stands between the Eastern and Western worlds. The case study of intervention in Syria, considered a pivotal point, explores the first direct military involvement in conflict. This dissertation assesses the influence of internal politics and leadership on foreign policy outcomes.

This dissertation uses process tracing and qualitative methods of research to assess the case. The combination of realist and liberal approaches, with the careful exploration of the psychological model is used to discover the reasons behind the shift in Turkish foreign policy, especially in the region.

## Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na vývoj turecké zahraniční politiky na Středním východě. Za účelem posouzení transformace přístupu uplatňovaného v zahraničních záležitostech a vymezení nástrojů použitých v této nově vznikající éře se podrobně diskutuje o prvním přímém vojenském zapojení Turecka v roce 2016 do konfliktu v Sýrii.

Současný stav v regionu je obzvláště zajímavý pro všechny regionální a mezinárodní zúčastněné strany. Od začátku Erdoğanovy vlády se Turecko zviditelnilo a dokázalo globálně zvýšit svůj dojem na ostatní aktéry pomocí liberálního přístupu. Pokud jde o používání takzvaných „soft tools“, hmatatelné výsledky v sousedních státech jsou omezené. Hlavním cílem práce je prozkoumat vývoj turecké zahraniční politiky na Blízkém východě a důvody, které se přičítají dramatické změně a zároveň inklinují k realistickému přístupu. Očekává se, že tato práce přispěje ke stávajícímu výzkumu turecké zahraniční politiky a připraví podklady pro další zkoumání tohoto tématu ve světle nového vývoje.

Tato práce také představuje podstatné historické základní informace o turecké zahraniční politice od vzniku moderní republiky, která čtenáři pečlivě přiblíží její klíčové rysy. Domácí dynamika a politický vývoj, nástroje a přístupy k zahraniční politice jsou analyzovány s cílem znázornit celkový obraz role Turecka a nabídnout širší pochopení úlohy Turecka v globálních a regionálních záležitostech, což je oblast vysokého zájmu mezinárodního společenství. Tato studie jako taková analyzuje postoj důležitého regionálního aktéra, který stojí mezi východním a západním světem. Případová studie intervence v Sýrii, považovaná za stěžejní bod, zkoumá první přímé vojenské zapojení do konfliktu. Tato diplomová práce hodnotí vliv vnitřní politiky a vedení na výsledky zahraniční politiky.

Tato dizertační práce využívá k vyhodnocení případu sledování procesů a kvalitativní metody výzkumu. Kombinace realistických a liberálních přístupů s pečlivým prozkoumáním psychologického modelu je využita k odhalení příčin posunu turecké zahraniční politiky, zejména v tomto regionu.

**Keywords:**

Turkey, Syria, foreign policy, Kurdish minority, great power, soft power, military engagement

**Klíčová slova**

Turecko, Sýrie, zahraniční politika, kurdská menšina, velká moc, měkká síla, vojenské zapojení

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## **Introduction**

The international community is always packed with events and new developments. The collapse and dismay of the Ottoman Empire is a crucial moment in history. The status quo was disturbed and the whole dynamics shifted. After the long and agonizing end of one of the greatest empires, new concerns emerged. More specifically, on how would the region look like and what would be the new dynamics.

Atatürk, a staunch military officer, consistently fought for the establishment of the modern Turkish republic. Turkey found itself in a new era where it needed to determine its geopolitical position in the region and the role it would play considering unfolding events. The newly formed country suffered from backwardness, attached to Islamic practices and a dire economic situation; as such it was in no conditions to pursue ambitious goals. Rather it had to focus most efforts internally to achieve progress. This is why there were a serious of reforms, based on the Western models, which at the time were the great powers of the world.

Turkish foreign policy at the time aimed to grow closer ties with the West. Longing for the status and prestige the country had, was and is still vivid among the society. The legacy of the Kemalist era was a secularist state, completely detached from Islam, which was looking West, the area where it found inspiration and saw its future.

The Western approach was followed until Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his chief advisor on foreign policy issues, Ahmet Davutoğlu ascended to power. The new incumbents foresaw a radical transformation and model of foreign policy. On the foundations of the novel approach laid two important principles: ‘strategic depth’ and ‘zero-problems’ with neighbours. In other words, influence was to be exercised through soft power. Especially the focus would not be anymore only on the West, but the whole world.

However, in 2016, there is a stark change from this previous approach. Turkey assumes an active role and resorts to hard power in order to advance its goals.

In this work the intervention in Syria will be examined as a case study. By doing so, I attempt to examine the change in Turkish foreign policy stance.

This study will examine the different areas of concern for Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East region and wider, considering the case study of Syrian intervention as a pivotal event that marks a departure from previous practice.

Bilateral relations with Syria have always been marked by enmity and amity. I believe that the examination of foreign policy tools, historical ties, evolution of relations can demonstrate why a different course was pursued.

The main objectives of this work are as follows:

1. to understand the basis of modern Turkish foreign policy and how it came about
2. to examine the first set of changes that happened with the ascend to power of Erdoğan's party
3. to discuss internal domestic issues that have influenced and shaped foreign relations
4. to analyse and determine the overall dynamics behind Turkish foreign policy change in the Middle East

Turkish foreign policy is a relatively discussed topic in academia. However the novelty of this work is that it brings together two important instances: attempts to pinpoint the changes in Turkish foreign policy but including the intervention in Syria as a case study as a pivotal point for Turkish foreign policy. We have major changes occurring, a series of domestic issues, as well as a rising imminent threats right across the border.

The aim of this thesis is to further contribute to the existing literature of Turkish foreign policy. This work is intended to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of Turkish foreign policy, specifically, the shift from a country that relied only on peaceful tools for influence, into one that assumed a much more assertive stance by resorting to hard power. The examination of the topic is based on high-level politics.

The main question this dissertation tries to answer is: what were the reasons behind Turkish foreign policy shift and security implications of this. I will begin my analysis with providing a deep understanding of Turkish foreign policy dynamics, then, I will use the case study of intervention in Syria to exemplify changes, from which the reasons behind the shift should become evident. Equally important, is to be able to understand what this transformation means for the security and stability of the region and beyond.

Alongside the main question, a variety of topics and sub questions will be covered. Does this change mean that foreign policy action is driven on personalistic terms and is the dismissal of Davutoğlu an attempt of Erdoğan to acquire more power

in general and especially on foreign policy matters? Who and what drives Turkish foreign policy and decision-making at the present? Has this shift been an attempt of restoring and increasing Turkey's role and reputation in the region as a regional power? Can the shift be seen as Turkey breaking away from the West and a rapprochement with the East, particularly the Middle East, because of AKP's perceived Islamist incline?

Further topics that will be touched upon briefly are: possible perceived security threats that shape Turkish foreign policy, economic interests and aspirations for a strong and influential economy, identity and the attempted projections for regional power, as well as the role or influence of external powers in the change of Turkish foreign policy.

The hypothesis of this thesis is: Domestic developments and personal aspirations of centralized leadership, amount to foreign policy changes. Events in the internal realm and personal visualizations of leaders in regards with the future of Turkey are considered in this research as independent variables, and the foreign policy outcome based on these two is the dependent variable.

My assumption is that higher concentration of power in Erdoğan's hands will lead to behavioural changes, in order to see more fungible results and push away imminent threats to national security and are detrimental to the country's interests.

The drastic change in Turkey's attitude has raised no little concern worldwide. Developments in Turkey and the role it tries to assume are followed carefully, due to geographical proximity with Europe and membership in NATO. American and Turkish differing views on the approach towards the resolution of the conflict hampers peace and stability in the area, increasing human suffrage. Syria is one of the most pressing international challenges at the moment. I believe that the analysis of Turkish foreign policy change can be indicative of the further role and actions Ankara is willing to pursue. Especially as long as Erdoğan is still in power because the understanding of his nature is a crucial factor in determining outcomes.

The structure of the thesis will be the following, in order to exhibit all the gathered resources. After the introduction, the methodology and literature review will be presented. These parts will provide the reader with the necessary theoretical information giving a general perspective of the issue, later the tools used in the conduct of this study and the literature will acquaint the reader more with the existing research. Following is a list of abbreviations supplied to the reader.

Chapter 1 provides overall background information on the establishment of the Republic, with great focus on Atatürk's reforms, as many of the recent developments have deeply transformed his legacy and the role of the military in politics.

Chapter 2 is initially devoted to the figure of Erdoğan and the examination of this unconventional leader as a crucial part for this work. Accordingly, the exploration of the period of the rule of the AKP provides a deep understanding of domestic affairs and developments, plus the driving forces behind and tools employed in foreign policy.

Chapter 3 discusses the relations between Syria and Turkey as an attempt to familiarize the reader with the state of relations between the two countries, touching upon the main factors that have influenced interactions.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the exploration of the case study of the first direct military intervention in the region, the culmination of the evolution of the approach towards the Middle East.

The analysis of the findings is presented, followed up by concluding remarks and further topics for debate. A full list of the used resources is provided for at the end on the bibliography session.

## **Methodology and Literature Review**

This section outlines the way this research was conducted and the tools used. The theoretical approaches employed include a combination of realist and liberal theories. This work focuses on foreign policy outcomes, specifically on the close examination of events of crucial importance and the behaviours of key actors in the international system. As Alden & Aran (2012) argue the main focus in foreign policy analysis is decision-making, all instances, actors or enabling conditions that lead towards these decisions.

The use of qualitative methods helps trace important occurrences and relevant historical events that have influenced the course of Turkish foreign policy. This kind of approach helps the reader understand developing issues in a comprehensive manner and dive in the reasons why certain events have come about a specific way. I have tested the variables using the process tracing method. This method helps test the dependent and independent variables by exploring direct causal factors, and exclude intervening or enabling factors. It is important and useful because it helps trace the elements that have influenced results. This work combines historical research methods and descriptive methods, specifically case study research. Most importantly, the tools employed help trace similarities from past experience and pinpoint fallacies in decision-making. The first method facilitates the assessment of foreign policy in continuum and provides an in-depth understanding of the state of affairs within Turkey. The second method provides for the specific analysis of the Syrian case, specifically sweeping events domestically and ever-changing dynamics in the region and wider.

### **i. Realism**

One of the most prominent and widespread theories, part of the traditional schools of thought, which tries to make sense of international relations, is the realist theory. It is one of the oldest traditions and for a long time it has provided explanations of state of affairs at the global level and why certain interactions occur the way they do. I believe it is still one of the most important and relevant theories, and as such will use it in this work to advance and elaborate on my own propositions. Despite variations it is one of the most explicative and encompassing theories. It highly explains the unchangeable nature of relations among states; rather they seem to be working on a loop, manifesting similar traits and patterns from time to time.

The classical realist theory, best represented by Hans Morgenthau, holds that “the desire for more power lies in the flawed nature of humanity and that states are repeatedly involved in a struggle to increase their capabilities” (Elman, 2008, p. 17). As Morgenthau (1985) argues about understanding foreign policy outputs, we need to put ourselves in the vests of the decision-makers and from that perspective, look at the different alternatives at hand (p.5). He then poses that by assuming that there is a rational assessment and analysis of the possible scenarios, that leads to the making of a decision, similarly like leaders. And it is the confrontation of our assumption and the concrete facts that provides for the explanation of international politics (Morgenthau, 1985).

For classical realists, leaders are motivated by interest that is described in terms of power. Political realism, in Morgenthau’s terms, factors in the importance of political actions and assesses the inevitable pressure that exists between moral values and necessary actions for effective policy outcomes. Furthermore, states rarely are able to hide their real ambitions by veiling them as morality. What removes all doubts in this regard is taking into consideration national interests of states relative to power. The realist approach considers the state to be a unitary and rational actor, whose motivations are based on national interest (that is what moves foreign policy). This interest, they claim, is apparent and can be deduced from rational thinking and examining two instances: the material conditions and the details of the presented dilemmas.

In addition, the realist approach maintains that the external environment is what limits states’ actions despite its intentions (Spirtas, 1996). States might have good intentions per se, however, not always the desired outcomes can be achieved. This is, as Spirtas (1996) has noted, because of the “anarchic nature of the international system and importance of unintended consequences” (Spirtas, 1996, p. 388). States are afraid of being dominated by others and that is why they try to be self-sufficient, maximize their own capabilities, and are careful with whom they decide to work in cooperation with. However, if their own capabilities are not enough they will strive for cooperation with other states.

Game theory is what best depicts rationality in the realist tradition. States will apply a cost-benefit analysis of the viable scenarios at hand. The frames of different games will limit the degree of choices available and the variety of associated strategies to produce the best results, with the least costs. Cooperation or non-

cooperation among actors can generate a series of different scenarios from win-win (both sides will trade something but will gain another in return) to zero-sum sets (what one side will lose the other will gain) (Putnam, 1988, p. 427-460). There are many advantages in applying game theory. Worth mentioning is the fact that it takes in consideration the fact that since decision-making ultimately is the product of leaders' thoughts and perceptions, eventually they are the ones they set up the way and context for the development of discussion (Alden & Aran, 2012, 1-18).

Mearsheimer (2001) argues that power drives the international system and believes that a state's power is based on the size and strength of its military (p. 59). One of the strategies that can be employed from an endangered great power is to get another country to take on the load of deterring a hostile state, while itself remains on the side, named as buck-passing (Mearsheimer, 2001). In order to be successful, buck-passers might engage in diplomatic relations with the perpetrator state in order to pass on the focus to the buck-catcher.

However, the buck-passer might also need to build up its own capabilities just in case things might not work out as envisaged. Additionally, conflicts occur between revisionist states and great powers are in search of possibilities to increase their power and sweep opportunities when they can, because there is the potential of shifting power in their favour and states are never satisfied no matter how much power they have (Mearsheimer, 2001).

## **ii. Liberalism**

One of the other most widespread schools of thought in international relations is liberalism. With the unfolding of events in the international arena, traditional theories of IR somehow lost their explanatory power. Most noticeably, the notion of exercising power through the means put forward in traditional theories changed.

The most important and relevant for a portion of this thesis is the concept of soft power, which was initially coined by Joseph Nye. The rise of soft power came in line with the changes occurring in the international arena. He argues that in modern times using "force directly for economic gains is too costly and dangerous for great powers" (Nye, 1990a, p. 159). In this respect he argues that states could no longer recourse to traditional means for acquiring or projecting power and forcing upon others their wishes. The advantage of soft power rests "on the ability to set the

political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences other express” (Nye, 2007, p. 62).

Nye (1990a) argues that even though military power might not retain its once major role it still is an important source for individual states in negotiations. There is an increased interdependence among global actors, as a result of technological advancements and globalization. Economic benefits and interdependence, as such, constrain and guide foreign policy choices of states.

When looking at global affairs, it became more interesting from the perspective of great powers to lure states into getting the desired results, rather than using hard power. To employ this approach, according to Nye (1990b) states need to attract through “culture, ideology and institutions” (p. 46). Soft power instead enables legitimacy from others and lowers chances for facing opposition. He argues furthermore, that if states can enable institutions through which they can channel or constrain activities of the other than it is more convenient to do so. Nowadays, states resort to a variety of instruments for ranging from diplomatic channels to open threats of economic sanctions. Also, the employment of force has become more deplorable.

### **iii. Psychological model**

This type of approach maintains that humans in leading positions are the ultimate decision-makers of foreign policy. They filter information, decide on the priority of issues, and ultimately, take action based on the information they have at hand. Specifically, this model takes in consideration and tries to assess the influence that human psychology, distinguishing here “individual perceptions, human cognition, personality and dynamics of group decision-making”, has on foreign policy outputs (Alden & Aran, 2012, p. 19-25).

This model acknowledges that the world is multifaceted, where there is a huge flow of information, which most of the time is imperfect. Furthermore Alden & Aran (2012) argue that advocates of this model through perception and cognition, they put together a picture of the situation, and personally evaluate the background where matters evolve and produce “a definition of the situation”. However, meanings ascribed to situations that they have developed not always ought to be truthful.

Proponents of this approach argue that foreign policy decision-making cannot be analysed only by considering the state as a unitary actor (Snyder, Bruck & Sapin, 2002). Instead, as Snyder, Bruck & Sapin (2002) argue, the black box of information

should be opened and the complex dynamics developing within the state recognized, including here, individual prejudices and formal bureaucratic procedures, which should be taken into consideration when examining foreign policy. Their study underlines the dominant role of human agency in the development of strategies. They recognize that leaders take decisions based on the information that they have at hand, which can be fragmented, plus their own insights, personal beliefs and biases, which can contribute to the further misrepresentation of reality and decision-making.

Robert Jervis (1968) is another important author that has studied the role that perception or misperception plays in foreign policy decision-making. He argues that leaders when analysing their own behaviour path, need to make a list of the possible scenarios how others might act. However, he posits that actors “might misperceive others’ actions and intentions” (Jervis, 1968, p.454).

Irving Janis and Leon Mann (1977) have proposed a model based on the motives of actors. They stress the fact that leaders are human beings with emotions that aim to settle inner dilemmas, which are exacerbated during times of crisis. Because in these stressful times, judgement gets blurred, leaving no space for uncertainty and a tendency for increased hostile behaviours.

Robert Axelrod (1976) developed the term ‘cognitive map’. He argued that the correlation between leaders and the spaces they operate in could best be explained through this concept (Axelrod, 1976). A cognitive map is a mixture of personal insights, bias and lessons from the past that lead to a decision.

Foreign policy guided by personalistic traits of leaders, try to explain policy choices through these traits, because sometimes certain decisions can seem to be irrational, however, from a further look into details, an array of the intrinsic reasons of how this decision came about, can emerge.

It is true that it is very difficult to completely understand the psychology of humans and leaders in particular, especially conservative ones. However, I believe it is possible to make sense of strategies by building up and exposing certain underlying patterns. The model, where I have based my work, trying to explain Turkish foreign policy shift, is a combination of the psychological model and the realist theory (rational thought). I believe that by analysing the issue in the light of these two approaches, I can clearly pinpoint the reasons for the change that has occurred. Most importantly, this comprehensive approach helps make sense of the series of unfolding events.

#### **iv. Literature review**

Turkish foreign policy has drastically changed twice within two decades. Initially, it drastically changed when Erdoğan came to power and Davutoğlu was his chief advisor. They put forward a clear approach and plan of foreign policy that would be based on the liberal principle of soft power. Majorly, Davutoğlu believed that this way Turkey would be able to maximize its national interest and raise its international position and be an influential actor in regional and international affairs.

The thesis is focused on the foreign policy shift that happened in 2016, marked with the active military engaged in Syria. As such, it focuses on domestic politics, but also on regional and global interactions. Additionally, this work examines in details characteristics of previous foreign policy approaches, in order to substantiate for the changes that have occurred.

This work however, suffers from certain weaknesses. Most importantly, the lack of access to key Turkish documents, because of the confidentiality clause, forces the analyses to be based only on the available data, open sources information and publications. Furthermore, the inability of whoever to actually dive into the deepest psychological drivers and motivations of a leader further restrains the research. However, it is possible to outline certain behavioural similarities throughout the years or when putting together personal profiles of leaders.

The data used in this research has been gathered from a variety sources. Primary sources have been included to provide official stances or strategies and projections for future objectives to be obtained. For example, the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey provides formal positions and delineates the country's intended goals to be fulfilled during terms in office. Secondary sources comprise prominent books and scholarly articles, either local or international authors.

The reason why I believe the range of sources I have used is important because the conjunction of different authors provides for diverse thoughts, which is essential when analysing an issue that is influenced from a series of domestic and global factors. Furthermore, news articles or online sources provide for a wider coverage of occurring events and criss-crossing information from a variety of sources is essential in producing a full and detailed research.

Research a few years back shows that the academia was confident that despite domestic fluctuations and problematics, Turkish leaders were pursuing a foreign policy that brought them closer to the West (Turan, 2012). They were applying

nationwide reforms to further negotiations with the EU, but at the same time desired rapprochement with the Middle East. However, as Caliskan & Waldman (2017) point out, relations with the West were not glorified like they used to during previous governments.

Turkish desires to gain back the great power status the country had once have been persistent throughout the last century. Chapter one of this thesis is focused on the historical background of the country until modern times, including here developments in the internal and external domains, hence a series of historical books or articles have been used to gather the necessary information.

The first subchapter talks about the huge reformations of the country under Atatürk's rule. The works of Ortayli and Kucukkaya, Howard and Cagaptay are used to explain the radical changes, which aspects were affected and the key principles the new system worked with, especially secularism (Ortayli & Kucukkaya 2012; Howard, 2016; Cagaptay, 2020). The work of İnönü (1998) provides the personal experiences of the then Prime Minister İnönü and the interactions Turkey had with nearby countries, namely ameliorated relations with its historical adversary, Greece.

The second subchapter touches upon the build-up of events that led to the first coup carried out by military. In this period there are important developments happening. Firstly, Turkey joins NATO (NATO, n.d.), which is a key development for the security dynamics of the region, as well as global, at a time when global powers are establishing respective spheres of influence during the Cold War. Secondly, problems with neighbouring Greece arise over Cyprus. Thirdly, the first military coup takes place. This information provided to the reader touches upon crucial events that have marked and shaped Turkish domestic and foreign policies, and still do so to this day.

The next subchapter talks about the political instability the country has experienced during the 70s and 80s. The already delicate situation over Cyprus further deteriorated, with heated rhetoric and direct warnings from the US that action on the island would be unacceptable. The information provided relies on the correspondence between Lyndon Johnson and İsmet İnönü (1966). On the internal realm, political consensus was low, and for the first time was created a party with Islamic character. All of which ultimately led to the second coup and substantial constitutional amendments based on the document of the new constitution of 1982.

The last part of this chapter discusses the relative opening up of the Turkish economy (BSEC, 1992) and overall liberalization during the era of Turgut Özal (Rodrik, 1990). Of crucial importance here was the reintroduction of religion and the acknowledgement that it could not be left on the sidelines of the public realm (Öniş, 2004). His abrupt death, economic turmoil, political scandals and the deadly earthquake of 1999 paved the way for the new political changes about to happen.

The second chapter focuses on the rise to power of the AKP, the popular figure of Erdoğan and his new policies. The first part of the chapter covers how the AKP surfaced during a tough period for Turkish history. The country was immersed in one of the deepest economic crises it has experienced. The works of Dufour & Orhangazi (2009), Akyüz & Boratov (2003) and Alper (2001) are used to provide the different aspects of the economic situation. It was precisely during this period of time that the country was deeply yearning for salvation, a new figure to aid the community and end the dire condition.

The official website of the President of Turkey provides informational background for Erdoğan's early beginnings. Alongside, Howard (2016) and Cagaptay (2020) works for Erdoğan's profile further contribute to the understanding of his figure. News articles from Hürriyet (2014; 2020) and Yeni Şafak (2020) help understand one of the important figures that has influenced Erdoğan's perceptions: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek.

The second subchapter discusses a pivotal event for the newly established AKP that influenced relations with the US. Together with, domestic difficulties, the rise to power of the AKP occurs when the world superpower has initiated preparations for military intervention in Iraq. Due to proximity, the US requested Turkish cooperation (Çakır, 2016). The works of Türkmen and Cagaptay are used to discuss different stances regarding Turkey's role and positioning in the region with the unfolding of events in Iraq. Türkmen (2010) argues that the position of Turkey in the region have been shaped by developments over the Iraq issue, where Ankara was forced to sort of play the role of a mediator. Instead, Cagaptay (2020) argues that unfolding events in Iraq, instead strained Turkish alliance with the USA, a key international and regional player, by veiling disengagement in war efforts as the will of the population.

In the third subchapter, relations and the 'friendship' between Erdoğan and Gülen are explored. The once amicable and mutually beneficial relations are

described (Phillips, 2017; Buğra & Savaşkan, 2014). However, the official website of the Gülen Movement negates for any sort of alliance between the two, rather referring to their relationship as ‘peaceful coexistence’ (Yilmaz, n.d.).

In the following subchapter is outlined the work of Ahmet Davutoğlu. Since he was Erdoğan’s foreign policy chief advisor and later Foreign Minister, his work is key in the analysis provided in this thesis. His book “Strategic Depth” is analysed in details and key points presented, as it has been labelled as a sort of “Bible” for Turkish foreign policy (Bienek, 2015). This work is extremely important in understanding how was the practice of Turkish foreign policy and from there, be able to acknowledge and distinguish changes that occurred further on.

The following part explains based on Davutoğlu’s principle, the areas to which Turkey has extended its soft power capacities and the degree of its success (Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013; Selçuk, 2013; Yüzbaşıoğlu, 2018). There are however, limitations to Turkish foreign policy. Even though some countries might be willing and accepting of Turkish investments and economic support, others, such as former Ottoman Empire territories or Middle Eastern countries are not very keen to implement measures put forward by Turkey.

The fifth subchapter examines the relations between the European Union and Turkey. Affiliation towards Western values and politics was one of the foundations of the modern state. Despite prejudice, as Kaya & Kentel (2005), Düzgit (2012) and Kösebalaban (2002) argue, the case of Turkey should be seen on the light of added value to the European community, as an example of how Western lifestyle, democratic principles and Islamic values could all coexist. With a particular focus on European identity, Düzgit and Kaya & Kentel emphasize that this is an ever-changing concept that can be shaped accordingly to accommodate different aspects. The prolongation of negotiations and concrete steps towards accession have upset Turkish leaders and society, as such diverting focus and efforts elsewhere.

This subchapter touches upon the role of Turkey as a mediator in the region. The analysis is based also on the information presented in previous subchapters, where it is visible that Turkey aimed to position itself firmly in the region and show that it is capable of carrying out the role of the mediator in conflicts. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey considers of primary importance the issues of conflict resolution and mediation. The official website of the ministry and an analysis of Davutoğlu are used to argue official intentions and ambitions. The works of Mitchell

(2015) and Šulik (n.d.) are used to provide different insights to this issue. Šulik (n.d.) posits that Turkey's role as a mediator is constrained from further progress for a series of reasons. Mitchell (2015) argues that Turkey's desire to be a mediator in the region exceeded its capacities and unfolding events have proved its limitations on playing such a role.

In the following section, the reader is provided with information on key local developments that signal domestic changes. First, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases are two important judicial proceedings, with a number of cases that led to the arrest and trial of multiple people, with different backgrounds, but that had one thing in common: they were believed to have relations with the 'deep-state' and were considered of being engaged in unlawful activities with the sole aim of undermining the central power. These cases drew on major international attention.

Second, protests at Gezi Park. Another important event were the series of protests against the project for the development of the area around Gezi Park. These demonstrations, specifically the forceful shutdown of peaceful protestors, are of crucial importance because they signify a crack in the system, setback from healthy processes, democratic principles and values. Arat discusses a wide range of changes that have occurred during the AKP rule, while Yardimci Geyikci stresses that the resorting to force and attempt to shut down the protests were simply evidence of inevitable changes that had been a long way coming.

Third, the failed coup attempt in 2016 further restricted an already unsteady political environment. It marked the beginning of a series of unfolding events and a change of scenery domestically and beyond. To shed light on the events that happened on the night of the coup I present both of Erdoğan's speeches from CNN Türk and NTV during and immediately after the failed attempt. The two live broadcasted speeches are very important in showing the national support that Erdoğan enjoys and how he managed to increase his popularity amidst seizing back control after widespread chaos.

In the third chapter, relations between Syria and Turkey will be examined during different periods, including factors that have influenced relations. Initially, the Kurdish issue is presented to the reader, explaining the evolving nature of a persistent issue that affects Turkey, as well as, Syria, Iran and Iraq. This is why I present the Kurdish nationalist movement. The works of Romano (2006) and Marcus (2009) help to establish a historical timeline on the progress of the Kurdish issue in Turkey and

beyond. Their work contributes in the understanding of one of the top issues in the Turkish domestic agenda that has also considerably shaped relations towards neighbouring states.

The next session is devoted to the evolution of Turkish-Syrian bilateral relations. An arguable topic is the Alexandretta or Hatay province. The work of Khadduri provides information on the status of this area. Furthermore, official declassified documents from the CIA (1947) offer gathered intelligence information at the time.

The last chapter carefully examines the case study for the mounting developments and changes that led to Turkish direct military involvement in Syria. A series of pivotal events will be discussed. There are presented step-by-step key efforts and actions taken in deflating tensions in Syria.

Hinnebusch (2013) explains that bilateral relations have been volatile. The first part provides an analysis of the diplomatic efforts in resolving the Syrian crisis. In this regards the works of Carnegie Middle East Centre, official documentation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Minister Davutoğlu's own exploration of the situation are used.

The next part focuses in one of the key regional and global humanitarian crisis: Syrian refugees. The report from the International Crisis Group, articles from Erdogan and Rygiel, Baban & Ilcan are used to highlight the impact and the meaning the refugee crisis has had for Turkey and wider. The works of Rygiel, Baban & Ilcan (2016), the International Crisis Group (2013) and Memisoglu & Ilgit (2016) are used to explain the dynamics between Turkey and the EU in ensuring humanitarian relief in Syria. The refugee crisis has had a huge impact in Ankara's relations with the EU. The International Crisis Group (2013) argues that the burden of the inflow should be shared between Turkey and EU member states. Rygiel, Baban & Ilcan (2016) argue that the EU has instead distanced itself from assuming responsibility for the refugees and leaving it to Turkey. On another note, Memisoglu & Ilgit (2016) present local dynamics in Turkey regarding the humanitarian crisis and argue that local and international events have shaped policy choices.

Increasing confrontations require a careful understanding of the emergence of ISIS and exploration of the Kurdish factor. Işıksal's (2018) study posits that the motive for Ankara's initial support for the revolution in Syria was because one of the most prominent opposition groups had Islamic bases. He argues that the Turkish

foreign policy approach in Syria failed due to multiple mistakes of essential importance. They failed to distinguish the status quo that had been achieved and supported by global great powers with the support of domestic partners.

In this subchapter will be discussed Turkish actions towards Syria since the eruption of the crisis. The works of Ayata and Khan are used as interesting pieces for understanding Turkish foreign policy. Ayata (2015) claims that the Turkish actions in the region come as an attempt to present itself as an autonomous actor of global affairs and there have been limitations for achieving its goal. Khan's work (2015) points that the changes and tumultuous situation in the Middle East were seen as a great opportunity by the Turkish side to positively interfere in Arab states' affairs. Imai (2018) provides valuable insights in explaining that Syrian domestic events have affected bilateral relations and led to the change in Turkish foreign policy.

On the other hand, Dal (2017) presents opposing views that diversify the debate. He argues that intervention was a necessity as the effects of the Syrian crisis had started to spill over other countries.

There are differing opinions regarding the course of Turkish foreign policy. Whether it is in continuum or it has drastically changed. After the analysis of the variety of sources it becomes clear that in effect there is a change in the approach of foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, but not necessarily of goals.

## List of Abbreviations

TAF	Turkish Armed Forces
CHP	Republican People's Party
DP	Democrat Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty
USA	United States of America
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
MSP	National Salvation Party
MNP	National Order Party
RP	Welfare Party
FP	Virtue Party
AKP	Justice and Development Party
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
EU	European Union
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SHP	Social Democratic Populist Party
HEP	People's Labour Party
GAP	Southeast Anatolia Development Project
SNC	Syrian National Council
ISIS	Islamic State in Syria
PYD	Democratic Union Party
YPG	People's Protection Units

## **1. History of the modern Turkish Republic: From Atatürk to Erdoğan**

In this section I will present a preview of Turkish history from the establishment of the Republic until the AKP came to power. It covers domestic politics as well as relations with key actors of regional and international politics that have had an impact on the country and how they have evolved. I believe it is important to touch upon previous experiences in order to be able to trace how things have changed and be able to make a better assessment of the current state of affairs.

### **1.1 Atatürk and the modern Turkish Republic**

After the end of the First World War the Ottoman Empire collapsed. This initiated the dismemberment of the former empire. What were left were a weak and fragile Turkey and the newly formed states that gained their independence. Mustafa Kemal Pasha (nicknamed afterwards Atatürk *in Turkish* literally ‘Father of the Turks’) is the founder of the modern Turkish state in 1923. He caught the right moment and initiated efforts for the establishment of the Republic. Atatürk was an officer of the Ottoman Empire. He was an admirer of the Enlightenment period in many ways. He found inspiration for statecraft in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Ortayli & Kucukkaya, 2012, p.71-73), most notably, the social contract. From his work, Atatürk was mainly attracted to the idea that sovereignty pertains to people and their will (Bertram, 2002). His thoughts were a mixture of Enlightenment and Positivism (Mugaloglu, 2018, p.265), with a dose of political pragmatism. He was a centralist ruler, not in the sense that he was ruthless or suppressing of people, but instead he governed with ‘an iron fist’, and power was centralized in his hands. This was also because there was no viable opposition. Ataturk was the leader of the only party present at the time: the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*).

The focal point of Ataturk’s work after the long struggle for the establishment of the republic was reconstruction of the country, since it had suffered major destructions upon the wars fought, including here internal displacement of people, dire economic situation and brittle political institutions (Howard, 2016, p. 93). He made numerous reforms to modernize Turkey, which he believed would foster economic and educational progress, two of the major problems present at the time. Most of the country was illiterate and living in rural areas. A drastic change was the

change of the capital from Constantinople (Istanbul) to Ankara. This was a sign of the desire to break free from the past, as Constantinople had been the crib of the Ottoman Empire.

The Turkish society was split between two groups: the first wanted an Islamic democracy, where religion would still widely be part of the state (a continuation of the caliphate), and the second wanted a complete departure from previous practice and a new beginning with a clean slate, where sovereignty belonged to the people (Howard, 2016, p. 95). Atatürk belonged to the second group of affiliates, willing to establish a secular state, which marked a clear departure from previous practice, something never witnessed before in Turkey. Additionally, he envisaged a country leaning towards the Western way of governance, while also incorporating a European lifestyle and culture. This was portrayed as well in the way people had to dress. It was prohibited to wear typical Ottoman attire, such as turbans or veils for women and fez for men (p.96). In this period, Turkey began to culturally and ideologically distance itself from the conservative mindset, practices and traditions embedded in the Middle East, which were regarded by the Turkish revolutionaries as the core problem for the underdeveloped society that had caused the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

This is when Turkey started to be associated more to global Western great powers. Attempts to instill a Western approach, even though it was Atatürk's aspiration, it did not get implemented easily, as nationalist feelings cannot be eradicated quickly. The foundations of Atatürk's republic were a mixture of Western great powers, where he gathered pieces from different European states and incorporated them into Turkey. The secular approach was based on the French model of governance, although not entirely the same. Similarly, there was no place for religion in public life and governmental affairs, politics or education "laïcité. "The model of the constitution was extracted from Belgium, the civil code from Switzerland, penal code from Italy and commercial code from Germany" (Cagaptay, 2020, p. 12). Atatürk's efforts to include pieces from the West into its own state come as part of a wider project of restoring the country to its great power status again.

Atatürk did not eradicate or ban religion entirely from the country. However, he had a strong grip and view on religion and political affairs. This was a revolutionary change when taking in consideration that one of the greatest expressions of the Ottoman Empire's Islam was Sufism. The system Atatürk instilled basically organised the conduct of religious practices and marginalized people who had at their

core identity Islam. The practices were to be carried out in the private sphere, eliminating the pressures of religious entities from politics (Cagaptay, 2020, p. 26-28). The marginalization was envisaged in the law because Islamic communities or fraternities were banned and all their goods were confiscated. This was seen as a way to tackle cultural backwardness and leave no space for any possible insurgent religious groups that could undermine national unity. Additionally, the language of prayers switched from Arabic to Turkish (although it changed later). This was perceived as a revolutionary measure because the holy language of Islam is considered to be Arabic.

The cabinet founded a new ministry. The *Diyanet* or the Ministry for Religious Affairs was established to oversee and discipline the practice of Islam from mosques to imams, throughout the Turkish territory. Its duties comprised the handling of religious heritage and the regulation of all aspects of the Muslim community. Despite the secularization process, the way Atatürk perceived and felt about Islam overall is still questioned among scholars.

The system he had established came to be known later on as Kemalism. İsmet İnönü was the first Prime Minister of Turkey during Atatürk's rule and later his successor, as the second President of Turkey. As İnönü mentions in his book (1998), with memories when he served as Prime Minister, he had mostly been busy with internal matters; however there were certain pressing foreign policy issues to be dealt with (İnönü, 1998). Due to its fragile state after the establishment of the republic, Turkey felt endangered from its neighbours, namely Bulgaria and Italy, because the latter back then controlled the Dodecanese islands, as such sharing maritime borders with Turkey. Despite these two, Ankara had friendly relations with its other neighbours, including here Greece. İnönü and Eleftherios Venizelos, Former Prime Minister of Greece, had expressed their willingness in growing closer ties between their countries. The historical visit of Venizelos in 1930 to Ankara marked a pivotal moment in bilateral relations, along with İnönü's visit in 1931 to Athens (Turkish Embassy in Athens, 2019). In 1934, as a way to promote regional balances Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia signed the Balkan Pact (Türkeş, 1994). This treaty was a security arrangement finalized to contain any Bulgarian aspirations for territories, since it was unsatisfied with the outcome of World War I. Despite the deep appreciation for the West, Atatürk did not entirely turn his back to the Eastern power since the beginning, as he needed funding to undertake his projects. The Communist

Soviet Union was mesmerized from “Turkey’s Liberation War, as they mistakenly perceived it as an anti-imperialist struggle” (Cagaptay, 2020, p.11).

## **1.2 From Atatürk’s death until the first coup**

Ataturk’s death, in 1938, was a major loss for the country. İnönü followed in his footsteps and his legacy when appointed President. He is also another potent figure of Turkish history. His two main concerns were democracy and cooperation with the West. Locally, during İnönü’s governance, power was still centralized, the country continued to be affiliated to the West and sought security in them.

With the beginning of the Second World War, Turkey decided to remain neutral and not engage against Nazi Germany. İnönü took this stance because it knew that the country did not possess the adequate capacities to counter German forces. Neutrality persisted almost until the end of the conflict. However, things changed when Turkey estimated that Nazi Germany would not be able to resist much longer. This is why İnönü made a strategic move and declared open war, while at the same time allying with the US. After the end of the war, the country was yearning for political alternatives and change.

In 1950, the first opposition the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Partisi*) won the elections. Its leaders Celâl Bayar became President and Adnan Menderes Prime Minister. Their focus was concentrated not only on economical development, but also on taking a more liberal stance towards Islam (Yeni Şafak, 2019). Turkey started to feel threatened from the Soviet Union because the latter aspired to Turkish territories in the north-eastern region. This imminent threat sufficed to ally with the USA, which was a global superpower. The USA launched the Truman doctrine that consisted of financial support to Greece and Turkey, in order to contain the Soviet threat and prevent the fall of these countries under its sphere of influence. During Bayar and Menderes’ leadership Turkey joined NATO in 1952 (NATO, n.d). Turkey wanted to be under the US security umbrella and as such didn’t have a problem aligning its foreign policy with it.

Bilateral relations with its neighbour, Greece, started to get strained due to the rise of the Cyprus problem. This brought changes to the US-Turkish relations as well. After Cyprus gained independence, Cyprus, Great Britain, Greece and Turkey signed a Treaty of Guarantee in 1960. This agreement assured the integrity of the island

under these states and *de facto* guaranteed the protection of Turkish and Greek communities respectively by Ankara and Athens. Meanwhile, this same year, there is the first of a series of military coups d'état in Turkey. Menderes' government was ousted from office, his party outlawed and he was given the death penalty. The coup happened because the government at the time was allegedly an oppressive one that due to heightened tensions could result in a civil war (Daily Sabah, 2014).

### **1.3 The unstable 70s and 80s**

İsmet İnönü was re-elected Prime Minister. During his second time in office the situation in Cyprus worsened when conflict between the Cypriot Greek and Turkish communities arose between 1963-64. US President Lyndon Johnson and İnönü had a series of correspondence exchange regarding the Cyprus issue. Washington warned Ankara on not undertaking any military action on the island (Johnson & İnönü, 1966). The Cyprus issue has since then persisted to have an impact on bilateral relations. Despite frictions, Turkey managed to count on American security during the Cold War.

The 70s were a tumultuous period for Turkish politics. Governments were short-lived and the country was marked with political instability. In 1972, the National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi) was founded. Its leader was Necmettin Erbakan. The manifesto of the party encouraged the Turkish people to recourse to national salvation and adhere to the larger Muslim community by breaking free from European great powers. Erbakan's party was particularly influential among Turkish immigrants in Europe. Turkish authorities dissolved Erbakan's party because seen as a threat to secularism. However, he established numerous parties with Islamic character, all of which were declared illegal at some point including here: National Order Party (*Millî Nizam Partisi*), Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) or Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), whose one of the founding members was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (AA, 2020).

The unstable political situation culminated with the next coup d'état of 1980 carried out by General Kenan Evren and a series of other bureaucrats. The military intervention this time happened due to the economic distress, political dysfunction and perceived step back from secularism that had paralyzed the country (Howard, 2016, p. 161-162). Evren was elected President of the republic and served for seven years in office from 1982-1989. In 1982, there were certain constitutional

amendments, which limited the exercise of democracy. They envisaged an absolute adherence to secularism. Changes included increased military powers and principles regarding fundamental rights and freedoms, which were still guaranteed, however, amendments comprised a limitation for those rights in case of threats to national security and interest (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982). The military considered that the previous concessions and unlimited exercise of those rights were the reason for radical rhetoric that led to the need of undertaking a coup. This concession was made as an attempt to integrate secularism and instruction of traditional moral and civil values.

#### **1.4 The 90s until the emergence of the AKP**

Evren was succeeded by Turgut Özal, who had served as Prime Minister under his Presidency. Özal's figure is associated with the opening up to global markets, economic liberalization and reforms, the timing and political grounds were not quite favourable (Rodrik, 1990). He conducted inclusive policies towards European, Middle Eastern and Saudi markets, however, constantly bearing in mind, the role that Islam could play in domestic politics, because he believed that it was unnatural for Islam to be excluded from the political scenery, since it was part of most Turkish people's private life and philosophy (Öniş, 2004).

During his governance, Ankara reinforced its commitment to Washington, even with supporting the Iraq conflict. During the 90s, Turkey strengthened ties with Balkan states and states in the Black Sea region. This culminated with the formation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, "a political and economic initiative first in its kind, with twelve member states: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine" (BSEC, 1992). Political integration did not materialize substantially within this organization, but the initiative in itself was a sign of Turkey's desire to interact with new actors. Unfortunately, in 1993 President Turgut Özal suffered a heart attack and passed away abruptly in Ankara (Cowell, 1993).

Süleyman Demirel succeeded him and Tansu Çiller was elected Prime Minister, the first female to hold such a position. The vacuum provided from concessions made during Özal's governance provided the perfect opening for Muslim followers, such as Erbakan, to pursue a more active political role. In 1996, he resurfaces into political life and becomes Prime Minister as the result of an

arrangement with Çiller, even though she was not very fond of Islamists. During Erbakan's rule the debate over the role of Islam, and its place in the public sphere and politics, intensified. Once more, due to concerns over secularism being under threat, the National Security Council in 1997 issued a memorandum called "February 28 Process" or "a post-modern coup" (Daily Sabah, 2018). This document condemned the actions of certain groups with Islamist character as a threat to democracy and secularism and it "brought very important political, economic and social reforms in the country" (Ekinçi, 2016).

After the coup, Mesut Yılmaz was appointed Prime Minister from President Demirel. However, he was short-lived and Bülent Ecevit succeeded him. His success in the 1999 elections was also due to the capture of Abdullh Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan's Worker Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*). Öcalan's arrest was carried out by a joint mission with the US. Still, even Ecevit did not last much in-office because of the 1999 heavy earthquake that hit the Turkish city of Izmit and the financial crisis that hit the country shortly after. This is when the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) under Erdoğan's leadership gained momentum. Turkish foreign policy during the 90s can be described as a continued engagement with Western European powers and the USA, while at the same time finding new cooperation partners.

## **2. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the rule of the AKP**

Erdoğan came at a time when the country was yearning for changes and drastic ones, due to the dire situation in the country. The economic crisis that hit the country in 2001 is one of the hardest challenges this sector has faced in Turkey. Initially efforts began as an attempt to help lower the inflation rate in the country (Dufour.& Orhangazi, 2009). However, this did not bring the desired outcome.

The country was unstable in many aspects, especially regarding “public finances and the banking sector” (Akyüz & Boratav, 2003, p. 1550). This was a liquidity crisis that slowed down the Turkish economy and raised interest rates (Alper, 2001). People were disappointed from the way secular parties were conducting politics, where mostly were corrupted.

Erdoğan proposed an alternative figure where he was presented as a moderately religious person with a clean background, offering a clear plan and strategies for economic growth. Most importantly, he portrayed the figure of a simple man, charismatic, who is close to the people, understands their concerns and shares their view for the future. The AKP presented devoted Muslims the unprecedented opportunity to act freely without fearing repercussions. It gave them back their dignity, which was almost rendered to the ground by previous governments.

### **2.1. Erdoğan’s early life**

Erdoğan was born in Istanbul, in the Kasımpaşa neighbourhood in 1954 (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, n.d.). He comes from a working-class family with religious affiliations. The reason why I have mentioned even the neighbourhood where he was born is because the people born and raised in this area have some distinguishable characteristics. They hold in very high regards honour and are very straightforward and well-known for its ‘tough guys’. This area is also identified as poor with low-living standards compared to the rest.

Erdoğan initially attended one of the Imam Hatip high schools, which were a number of limited high schools for vocational teaching of religion and whose graduates could afterwards only pursue studies in theology. However, he graduated from another high school because of the desire to pursue a career in politics (Cagaptay, 2020). He graduated from Marmara University from the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (PRT, n.d.).

Erdoğan was raised yearning for a change in the political system, where at the time, he was part of the constrained and marginalized section of the society. People like himself had always felt the persecution that religious people faced in Turkey. Not being able to engage with religion in public constrained very much their lives and shaped their perceptions of the world. They would alienate the majority of the system and picture them as the “evil other” that rips them off their of their belief system. As such, this shows that Erdoğan’s upbringing was not easy, due to his family’s setting and the political scenery of the time.

One of his favourite authors was Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, who was a Turkish poet with Islamist ideologies. However, there is a major difference between the two, because unlike Erdoğan, Kısakürek comes from a wealthy family, who received his education in France, which would let one believe he would grow to have Western aspirations. However, this was not the case. The way he perceived what democracy comprised there was no room for opposing views or free institutions (Singer, 2013, p. 82). Instead, once assuming power, the government reserved the right to act as they saw fit for the “greater good”. He even idolized him and his work. On multiple occasions he has openly praised Kısakürek’s contribution to Turkey (Yeni Şafak, 2020; Hürriyet, 2020), even by saying: “If Turkey is today this big and new country, this is also to the contribution of Necip Fazıl” (Altuncu, 2014).

Despite challenges, Erdoğan has started to be active in politics from a young age, since 1969. He was a member of the National View Association (Millî Görüş Teşkilatı), which was a youth organization and think tank for the MSP and MNP (Heper & Toktaş, 2003, p. 160). Later on, he was heading the Beyoğlu Youth Branch. And in 1984, he joined again the political setting by becoming the Head of Beyoğlu’s District of RP.

In 1994, he ran in the local elections in Istanbul and won. From 1994 until 1998 Erdoğan has been mayor of Istanbul. He was quite successful during this time in office. In 1997, during a visit in the Siirt province he recited a poem from Ziya Gökalp, a Turkish poet that reminisced the Young Turk’s revolution (Howard, 2016, p. 188). This caused problems for Erdoğan. He was jailed on the premises that the poem he had recited was deemed to have religious character and challenged the country’s secularist system, by promoting religious hatred and igniting conflict. His conviction automatically ended his duty as mayor and banned him from racing in elections, seemingly to end his political career. He served his time in prison and when

set free he came to see that there were troubling issues with the FP, since it was outlawed on grounds of infringing the secularism principle. At this point, Erbakan and his supporters established a new party the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi).

## **2.2. Beginnings of the AKP**

On the other hand, Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül broke free and established their own party the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). Gül assumed the leadership of the party given Erdoğan's ban. The initials of the acronym for AKP, 'ak' means white in Turkish, which is a very fine choice. It bears significance for the public it was being introduced to. The AKP won the general elections in 2002 and Abdullah Gül was elected Prime Minister of Turkey. Erdoğan was successful in elections because people hoped for a solution to the corrupt politicians at the time. However, the ultimate goal of the AKP was to reinstate Erdoğan into politics. A series of tactics were followed to enable this. Initially, they made sure to cancel the ban that prohibited him from taking part in politics. Afterwards, he assumed again the leadership of the party, joined the Parliament and became Prime Minister, all by early 2003.

Abdullah Gül and Erdoğan were invited to travel to Washington and did so in 2002, while Erdoğan still was not vested in his official role. This visit took place to discuss the possibility of stationing troops on Turkish territory and the establishment of a base that would be used in case of necessity to undertake an operation in Iraq. During their visit they assured the US government officials that if the situation required so, Turkey would provide military support for the intervention in Iraq (Çakır, 2016, p. 196-237).

However, this decision was not welcomed from the military. Top military officials were against such a scenario. Both Gül and Erdoğan were very ingenious to let the ultimate decision to be taken by the members of the Parliament, because the motion was dismissed, and in the eyes of the world, they had had no other choice but to abide by the willingness of the representatives of people and refute support to the US. Nevertheless, this had repercussions on Turkish-US relations. They were alienated by the American society.

The AKP has been successful in its public discourse of morality and public order, not specifically linking it to Islam but directly appealing the majority. The ascend to power of the AKP did raise questions and worries across Europe. Leaders

all around were worried about the kind of governance, policy choices and actions the new party would pursue, in particular with regard to foreign policy. Erdoğan carefully presented to them that what he was pursuing was a mixture of moderate Islamic conservatism and democratic values, which in his view was more suitable to the Turkish society rather than the strictly secular system.

To address in details the unfolding events in Iraq exceeds the aims of this work, however, the war in Iraq is important for two points. First, the stance Turkey took was a direct implementation of the ‘strategic depth’ and ‘zero-problems with neighbours’ principles (Türkmen, 2010). Ankara’s involvement in Iraq would have been disadvantageous. It did not comply with the role and image the country was trying to build. Second, the US was displeased with Turkey’s inaction and failure to provide assistance to the former (Cagaptay, 2020). When the military involvement in Iraq began, the AKP had just come to power, and involvement in what has turned into a protracted conflict, would have affected the government’s image in the eyes of the region and the world, definitely interfering with its aspirations. Instead, Ankara was engaged in pursuing the role of a mediator with countries throughout the region, in order to diminish risks enhanced by instability.

### **2.3. Erdoğan and Gülen**

One of the major supporters in Erdoğan’s victorious endeavours has been Fetullah Gülen (*hoca* or teacher) through his Gülen Movement or ‘Hizmet’. Gülen is a Turkish Islamic preacher, theologian and imam. The “Hizmet is a transnational religious and social movement, which advocates for a tolerant Islam, based on the principles of altruism, hard work, and education” (Phillips, 2017, p.21). It does not have a well-defined structure, leadership or affiliation; however, it is one of the largest and most widespread Turkish Muslim organizations in the world. Its spiritual and moral leader is precisely Gülen. It has roots all around the world, with branches in all continents. It has such an extensive network also to the financial tools at its disposal.

Erdoğan and Gülen got along well because the latter provided support to his party, both financially and logistically. This was a mutually satisfactory unwritten agreement between the two, where supporters of Gülen provided political support for the party and heightened the image of Islamists to the world, where they were seen as highly dedicated people and retaining high moral values.

In return, they were appointed at high-level institutions and key positions, such as: ministries and courts etc. Jointly they worked to control most of the public administration and employ their own supporters that would provide them free access to all important institutions without facing any obstacles. They have managed especially to get inside the police departments and prosecutor's office (Buğra & Savaşkan, 2014, p. 109-110). However, Gülen could not continue his activities for long in Turkey. His apparent Islamic affiliations were seen as problematic and a direct threat to the secularism of the country. In order to escape prosecution and imprisonment he decided to escape and live in exile in Pennsylvania, USA, where he resides even nowadays. His fled did not give an end to his movement or its activities because he still continued their conduct remotely.

This apparent 'friendship' however, is not perceived the same from everyone. The tacit benefits from both sides seemingly are not acknowledged from both sides. Particularly, on the official website of the Gülen Movement, actors are perceived to have had differing points of view and roots, rather they are portrayed to have peacefully coexisted (Yilmaz, n.d.).

The Gülen movement counted on thousands of followers and grew considerably during the years. Among its sympathizers rank important businessman, well-known in Turkey and abroad. Its fundamental role has been to educate the younger generation. Its instructive institutions include all levels from kindergartens to universities. Alongside educational institutions, the rhetoric used from the movement includes new technologies, with his own personalized website where Gülen spreads his ideas, thoughts through different pieces of writings or videos, or what used to be the famous "Zaman" newspaper or TV channel Samanyolu.

#### **2.4. Strategic depth**

I think it is very important to touch upon the work of Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book "Strategy and depth" (*Stratejik ve Derinlik*) because it has inspired the foreign policy course of Turkey. Understanding his work means to understand most of the Turkish foreign policy, specifically during his terms as advisor and Minister of Foreign Affairs. His approach has produced many international pacts and agreements, encouraged Middle Eastern and wider partnerships that have granted Turkey a primary force and presence even in regions that seemed very far away from its sphere of influence. He has foreseen an expanding influence, however, not an aggressive

one. Under his guidance, Turkey vowed to recourse to international bodies in peacefully pursuance of its interests globally.

Davutoğlu's work includes perceptions about the real world and the adaptability of these approaches. He argues that a state's geographical analysis is one of the most important parts for creating effective and valid strategies overall. In order, for these strategies to be long lasting, it is important to create a bridge between the past, the present and the future. He presents concrete and specific strategies to make advancements in all regions.

When analysing constant variables such as, history, geography, population, and culture and he concludes that by the product of these forces Turkey holds strong foundations and has the potential to convert them into real power. However, no matter what the potential strategic advantages, the ability to change them into real power bears substantial risks (Davutoğlu, 2001). He meticulously points out that Turkey's geographical position constrains its foreign policy choices, in that it should not be only one-dimensional and focused only in one region. On the contrary, it should be expanding on multiple fronts. He considers that there are important close-by regions that are key to Turkey developing its full potential and improve its international position. Found in between two continents, consequentially it cannot be associated only to one single region. As he posits "Turkey holds a special position. Its geography gives it a specific central country status, which differs from other central countries." (Davutoğlu, 2007, p.78). Turkey should focus and concentrate most importantly in nearby lands, seas and continents. More specifically, the Balkans, Middle Eastern countries and the Caucasus; the Adriatic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea; Europe, North Africa and especially, countries from the post-Soviet bloc (Central, East and South Asia).

Davutoğlu (2001) argues that no matter what past experiences and armed conflicts, Turkey's approach should be based on more actively promoting its culture and jointly put to use the economic, military and technological capacities to its fullest. Appropriate strategic thinking and planning can be attained only through the expression of the highest political willingness and commitment. If one of these three experiences blocks then the potential advantages start to work in disfavour and turn into risks. Furthermore, he claims that certain countries, due to the historical experiences, geographical positions and external factors would like to self-isolate from the outside world and only look inwards their countries, however, that is not

achievable, and even if executed it proves counterproductive. Turkey is included in this group of countries. The best way to overcome any internal flaws is to open up to the external world. Davutoğlu considered the previously employed approach to be faulty. In his view, certain countries, comprising here Turkey, have the potential to “play a principal role in the region and beyond because of their cultural and historical legacy” (Davutoğlu, 2007, p. 79).

The major role of Davutoğlu’s policy was to grant Turkey more international visibility. What was once upon a time Atatürk’s approach only focused in domestic recovery and restructuring with a keen interest only on Western practice, which drastically changed. The strategic depth of Turkey, as viewed by Davutoğlu and employed by Erdoğan, has been a multi-lateral approach, extending interactions with key countries and restoring Turkey’s dignity around the world. Furthermore, he outlined five criteria that need to be fulfilled, in order to make any advancement. Firstly, democracy and security should be at balance, as they work hand-in-hand; secondly, it should be employed a “zero problem policy with its neighbours”; thirdly, improve relations with neighbours and further; fourthly, devotion to the multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy, where bilateral relations are aimed to foster cooperation not race among parties and fifthly, the pursuit of “rhythmic diplomacy” (Davutoğlu, 2007, p.79-84).

The successful outcomes in Turkish foreign policy have been the result of a close interaction among the variety of domestic stakeholders. Most importantly, under his leadership, Turkey worked as a guardian of Muslims all around the globe, especially by providing financial assistance through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı*).

#### **2.4.1. Turkish soft power**

The successful engagement with soft power has been due to two factors: better domestic economic situation and commercial extension to Middle Eastern and post-Soviet markets but not only. However, there are also limitations to the extent soft power can be employed, especially in countries that used to be part of the Ottoman Empire or Arab countries. The first because they are reminded of past experiences and do not want to fall back and the second because they believe that even though Turkey is a Muslim majority country, Islam is not incorporated into politics or practiced as in other countries of the region (Bienek, 2015).

Notably, Turkish soap operas have increased even more the country's visibility, as there have been many successful productions airing almost all around the world. In this respect, these productions are the second most exported and generate the second highest revenues in the world (Hurriyet Daily News, 2017). Yörük and Vatikiotis (2013) have carried out a study precisely examining the attractiveness and extent to which Turkish soap operas can be used as a tool in exercising influence in different areas, especially neighbouring countries. It was found that the soap operas appeal to a wide audience, however, not necessarily this influence is translated into concrete influence of strategic decisions (Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013).

Undeniably, another tool of Turkey's soft power is Turkish Airlines. The country's carrier is one of the most-renowned worldwide companies in the service sector. Erdoğan has turned Istanbul into an international hub, hosting the largest airport in the world. It gained this status when the third airport of the city, Istanbul Airport started operations in 2019, with flights in over 120 countries and 300 destinations worldwide (Delal, 2019). The national flagship carrier contributes to the promotion of the country. Its good name not only brings home economical benefits, but also political ones. Selçuk (2013) has explored the power of Turkish Airlines and more interestingly, its inclusion for aiding foreign policy specifically in Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Gulf countries. The study showed that in the Middle East the airline mitigates the goal of peaceful coexistence with the liberalization of the visa regime and the ease of rules of commerce.

The number of Turkish embassies and missions around the world has drastically increased since the AKP's ascend to power. It has amplified presence especially in Africa (Yüzbaşıoğlu, 2018). The role of diplomatic representations in upholding Turkey's national interest and work towards higher engagement in international politics.

#### **2.4.2. The EU and Turkey**

Turkey would not be described as the typical European country aspiring to EU integration. European identity is a loosely defined concept. It continuously changes and is constantly shaped through the contribution of its members and prospective members (Düzgit, 2012; Kaya & Kentel, 2005). The case of Turkey is of a specific nature; a country found in between the Eastern and Western worlds, functioning on secularist democratic principles but at the same time combining Islamic values. This

can be both challenging and beneficial for the EU. Kaya & Kentel (2005) argued that the cultural diversity that Turkish people would bring to the EU would be mutually beneficial, increasing inclusivity and fairness, and at the same time the presence of Muslim principles would not defy value systems, instead they would help promote tolerance. On the same line, Kösebalaban (2002) argued that member states should take on the case of Turkey as a particular model showing that Western values and Islam can live in harmony, without one being a threat to the other. Turkey's integration would help promote peace and stability for the region (Diez, 2005).

The prospect for European integration, especially during the 90s has incentivised Turkey to undertake certain reforms. People were also strongly supporting this process. However, since the EU has dragged on for a very long period of time the opening of accession talks, this has made Turkey grow apart from the Union's values. Ultimately, the figure of Erdoğan is not much different from other right populist figures that we have seen growing, especially in Eastern European countries that are full members of the EU.

In order to become a full EU member, countries need to undergo local transformations to meet the Copenhagen criteria, where explicitly countries have to make progress in "democracy output, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities" (Emerson, 2004, p.1). If we consider at what point these countries were with the democratization process when they started off their integration processes, Turkey was not lagging very behind with its own efforts. There were a number of different circumstances that hindered advancements of negotiations. Firstly, there fierce objections from France and Germany, which can be blamed on religion affiliations as well. Secondly, the global economic crisis of 2008, had severe repercussions worldwide, but especially the EU was left quite susceptible and facing a lot of problems within its own borders, that the enlargement prospects seemed dimmer.

There have been a series of positive reforms in the country. Especially during Erdoğan's first term in office, the country witnessed an enormous wave of reforms in the domain of human rights. For example, Turkey abrogated the death penalty and retreated from executing Abdullah Öcalan after his capture in 1999, after multiple calls from the EU. One of the prerequisites is to remove military influence from politics and leave the power to civilian control. The desire to accelerate the fulfilment of this condition in Turkey proved to be flawed. This is a prerequisite that has been

employed from other countries as well, because the presence of military control is seen as hindering the democratic process (Flam, 2004). It is a right demand to decrease the military's power, however, there were no reassurances or check and balance mechanisms in place to make sure this second condition would be fulfilled. Additionally, time showed that the main obstacle to Turkey's democratisation process was not the presence of the military in politics. For a long time the country has tried to satisfy the EU's requests.

Turkey has often had disagreements with several member states but relations peaked when Turkey's membership prospects were blocked due to the Cyprus issue. The protracted process forced Ankara to grow apart from the EU and focus efforts elsewhere. It started to shift its attention and intensify activities with neighbouring Muslim countries (Cagaptay, 2020). But at the same time, Turkey also has not lived up to previous commitments, especially with the fall back on democratic principles (Ertuğrul & Yılmaz, 2018). However, on this note, neither side can afford to completely alienate the other (Pierini, 2019).

#### **2.4.3. Turkey as a Mediator**

One of Turkey's official goals and efforts in the internationally is in the area conflict resolution and mediation. The geographical position of the country makes Turkey a unique country in the world to unite the East and the West, the Muslim community with the rest of the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, n.d.b). Regional and international dynamics have vastly changed over the course of the years. There are past conflict still persistent and new ones emerging. Alongside geography, Turkey's economic boom has positively contributed to the advancement of such goals. Senkyr (2010), a regional representative of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, argued that the boom in Turkish economy had definitely increased its ambitions across regions. This booms necessitated a foreign policy shift in order to accommodate and keep up with economic advancement. He reinforced that its geographical position, at a crossroads among regions, makes Turkey an important player for both the East and the West (Senkyr, 2010).

Davutoğlu recalls Turkey's contribution in a series of conflict resolution efforts and mediation initiatives, such as: crisis in Bosnia, countries that experienced the Arab Spring or the Friends of Mediation, jointly organized with Finland (Davutoğlu, n.d.). In this regard, Davutoğlu (n.d.) argues there are four aspects that

need to be taken in consideration in mediation: psychological, intellectual, ethical and methodological. Successful mediation enables heightened security in all areas and promotes peace and stability worldwide. Additionally, Turkey's strategic position and access to "Western political and security structures" facilitate engagement in conciliation.

Šulik (n.d.) examines the suitability of Turkey for the mediating role. Mediation is not an easy task and it requires a series of qualities in order to achieve concrete results. In a series of protracted conflicts Ankara cannot engage in conciliatory efforts because it cannot be an impartial actor, due to its own historical conflicts (Šulik, n.d.).

Mitchell (2015) analyses the role of Ankara in helping overcome animosities between Syria and Israel and the USA and Iran. The role of Ankara to mediate the hatreds between Syria and Israel were seen as a great opportunity due to the growing collaboration with Bashar al-Assad and the "old strategic partnership" with Jerusalem (Mitchell, 2015). Turkey's membership in NATO, offers to help contain Iran's development of a nuclear program and covert diplomatic efforts to come to an agreement with Teheran seemed tempting to the USA. The break of relations with Assad, growing tensions and anti-Semitic rhetoric with Israel, an unfavourable agreement with Iran and frictions with the White House are all events that have hampered Ankara's mediating efforts (Mitchell, 2015).

Despite Davutoğlu's and Erdoğan's desire in mediating international conflicts, Turkey's troubled relations with a series of international actors complicates the attainability and sustainability of this goal. Memories of the experiences during the Ottoman Empire's rule are still fresh among previously areas of influence. Additionally, the incompatibility with Middle Eastern countries on the permeability of Islam in politics and pertaining to different Islamic branches makes Turkey to be seen with a sceptical eye.

## **2.5. Domestic Problematics**

Aspirations and projects written on paper to provide for a better and more prosperous future for Turkey all seemed very appealing. The Turkish society seemed satisfied with the new moderate leader that had offered concrete plans and had provided for substantial changes and progress. Erdoğan complied with one of his essential electoral promises to achieve economic development and deliver better

conditions to the people. However, Turkish society has been split and continues to be so across different lines. On the one hand, there are Erdoğan's sympathizers and supporters; on the other there are Kemalists and nationalists that disagree with his policies; and on the other there are Gülenists and followers of the '*hocaefendi*' that have permeated across different spheres. In the following parts are presented three important events that have influenced the course of domestic politics. This split in the society translates in power shared among different groups.

### **2.5.1. Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases**

Since the establishment of the modern state, there have been numerous heated confrontations between the military and the civilian population. The Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases have been the initial tentative to start the elimination of the country from opponents of the system put underway by Erdoğan. One of the first obstacles interfering with his projects were the secular Kemalists, who still reminisced Atatürk and his legacy and were leaning towards the West.

Gülen continued strengthening Erdoğan's power until recent years. He played a key role during the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials. The Ergenekon trials were a series of proceedings of high-level public figures such as: actors of the military establishment, politicians, journalists and academicians (BBC, 2013a). They were accused of being a terrorist organisation, whose members had conspiratorial plots against the government. Ergenekon trials put together a series of individual cases. Amnesty International deemed the Ergenekon trials as "one of the most important court cases in history" and a symbol of "missed opportunities and justice denied" (Amnesty International, n.d.). The accused were portrayed as being part of "deep state" structures that supposedly were preparing to negatively affect the country by promoting a serious crisis and chaotic situation with the aim to create an unstable environment to hinder development (BBC, 2013b).

The 'deep state' has been believed to be a structure within the Turkish society, as a network of high bureaucrats, lawyers, military staff and so on, loyal followers of Atatürk's principles, that is believed to have been engaged throughout the years in unlawful activities and might be the cause of multiple mysterious deaths and disappearances (Park, 2008). The significance of these proceedings was that it started to reduce the military's ability to interfere with politics. The "fairness" of these proceedings raised worrisome questions about the judiciary branch. Namely, the

Ergenekon trials marked the beginning of the end of the “Kemalist model of checks and balances to keep the different bodies accountable (BBC, 2013a).”

The whole Ergenekon case began with an investigation in a squatter in Ümraniye on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007, with allegations that in there were twenty-seven hand grenades. The owner of the grenades was thought to be a retired non-commissioned officer named Oktay Yıldırım. Along with him there were several other individuals who were detained. The first indictment was prepared from judges Zekeriya Öz, Mehmet Ali Pekgüzel and Nihat Taşkın. Judge Zekeriya Öz dived deeper into the investigations and uncovered details of previously unknown networks and connections of the ‘deep state’ (Esayan, 2013, p. 30). This is when she was accused of having tampered online evidence in favour of the defendants. And in this respect, she was further accused of having the intention of partaking in a terrorist organisation, conspiring to destroy the Turkish government. She fled the country and is considered a fugitive under Turkish law. While the two other judges were kept under arrest and their cases labelled as “FETÖ trials” (which I will tackle in more details further on)(Kanal B, 2019).

After the Ergenekon trials, the most prominent trial case, which shook the country and the public opinion domestically and internationally (Bilefsky, 2009; Hürriyet Daily News, 2016; Deutsche Welle, 2010), is known as Sledgehammer (*Balyoz Harekatı*).

The origins of this case date back to 2003. According to a series of documents presented to the prosecution Çetin Doğan, a retired general that had served under the First Army (Haberler, n.d.) (land army that safeguards Turkey’s borders with Bulgaria and Greece) had designed actions to undermine the government. Once more, there are deliberate direct accusations to the military for complots to undermine the state authority, another friction among politics and the military establishment. There were a series of allegations, including here: plans to detonate bombs in Beyazıt and Fatih Mosques, with the aim of forcing martial law, cause a Turkish jet crash in the Greek airspace to fuel people after a coup and so forth (Hürriyet, 2012). Allegedly, these plans had been presented and coup attempts practiced during the workshop. A series of CD recordings and documents were the incriminating evidence of the allegations. There were a series of flaws in the evidence presented. Most notably, the documents contained a series of entity names that were not compatible with their previous names at the time the complots were thought of being instigated, or they contained reference

of military units that were inexistent, or mistakenly used military language (Rodrik, 2011).

The allegations of both the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases are not to be completely dismissed. Certainly, in between the accused there have been people engaged in unlawful behaviours, while others have been indicted because of disapproval towards the AKP. There are a lot of discrepancies in both cases that have not been able to be justified. For the Ergenekon case, there has been no concrete proof in the first place of the very existence of this supposedly terrorist organization. As described in a very detailed investigative paper written by Gareth H. Jenkins (2009) where he puts that “the indictments are so full of contradictions, rumours, speculation, misinformation, illogicality, absurdities and untruths that they are not even internally consistent or coherent” (Jenkins, 2009, p.11).

Overall, Erdoğan has undertaken multiple attempts to clean out the country and remove from the public scene people that he perceived as his opponents or dissidents, mainly people who could halt his aspirations, hinder the achievement of his goals or whose views were at some point incompatible with his, as will be the case presented in the next part.

### **2.5.2. Gezi Park Protests**

In this chapter there will be presented and analysed the occurrences in 2013 at Gezi Park in Istanbul Turkey. This is an important event in Turkish domestic politics, but meaningful and indicative of overall upcoming changes.

Demonstrations began in summer 2013, when people rushed to the streets against a government launched project to urbanize the green area of Gezi Park, near Taksim Square in Istanbul. It envisaged the building of a new shopping centre and the restoration of the old barracks that had been destroyed in the 40s (Hahn, 2018). Initially, the remonstrations were peaceful, with people exercising their basic right to protest. However, events took a bitter turn. The police resorted to force to shutdown the protests and disperse protestors, who pertained to groups of the society with different backgrounds.

Arat (2013) argues that since the AKP came to power, several fundamental changes have occurred. They have permeated different aspects of life, either public or private, ranging from restriction on media outlets, imprisonment of reporters, retracted respect for the secular system, even limits for purchasing alcohol and so on

(Arat, 2013). Furthermore, the way peaceful protests were shut down, added to that other limitations have gravely undermined democratic principles.

Yardimci-Geyikci (2014) points out that the protests have marked political changes underway. Despite the brutal crackdown, the initiative and engagement in protests is healthy for the system and shows that democratic processes are in place.

Gezi Park protests were indicative of the initial ruptures occurring within the country. The violent acts of the government to suppress demonstrations were proof of the growing centralized power and individualistic decision-making.

### **2.5.3. Failed coup of 2016**

The night of July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in Turkey was filled with chaos and violence. There was a military operation on the way to overthrow the government of Erdoğan. There were aircrafts attacking government buildings, troops with tanks occupying main bridges and squares, shootings and bombings at “Atatürk airport” and the Chief of the Turkish General Staff, Hulusi Akar was kidnapped. Thousands of people were blocked and there was mounting panic with the surrounding uncertainty. An estimate of 300 people was killed in the firings that night.

Erdoğan was not in Ankara while all of these happened and his whereabouts were unknown. However, a few hours later he was broadcasted via Face Time to CNN Türk from Marmaris, a city in southwestern Turkey, and explained the situation to the public. In his addressing he explained that this was an orchestration of a faction of TAF, associated with the parallel structures running in the country (alias the Gülen movement) to undermine the unity and wholeness of the country (TRT World, 2017).

In this airing he called for people to rush into the streets and see what the factionists would do in their face. Shrewdly enough, he noted that the power of people is the strongest and that he has never witnessed anything that could supersede that force (TRT World, 2017). He vowed that the perpetrators would be held accountable; anyone who had attempted against the country’s democracy would face severe repercussions. After his call, thousands of people hastily filled the streets to oppose the coup attempt.

He flew back the same night, and made a historical TV appearance from “Atatürk airport” where he explained that the country was not anymore what it used to be. He openly blamed the coup on the parallel state, as their attempt to establish their own governance. Erdoğan appealed to the soldiers saying that it was

inadmissible to see them pointing guns at their very own people, parents, brothers and sisters and that the country would not be left in the hands of those invaders (NTV, 2016). It was openly emphasized that there had been initiated operations to completely clean up TAF from people that had tainted its image, and the ones who had, to be brought in front of justice.

Many questions surround the failed coup attempt of what actually happened that night. Whether it was an undertaking of the military establishment or whether it was his once ‘friend’, now rival in exile behind this plotting still remains vastly discussed around the world. However, the ramifications of this event are sweeping. After the coup attempt failed, it was instilled the state of emergency.

In May 2016, the Hizmet Movement had been declared as a terrorist organization (FETÖ). The so-called “friendship” between Erdoğan and Gülen was split definitely and led to diverging paths after the failed coup attempt. Thousands of “Gülenists” (members of the Gülen movement) were imprisoned, including here journalists, lawyers, teachers, military staff, judges and many more public servants. A series of court proceedings started named as “FETÖ trials”. The pro-Hizmet newspaper Zaman and Samanyolu TV channel were shutdown, even law firms. Based on a Report from the Human Rights Watch (2019) the trials have infringed principles of fair trials or basic rights to be enjoyed by detainees. Under Turkish jurisdiction the term ‘terrorism’ has extended to include many connotations.

Additionally, Ankara has on multiple occasions asked the US government to extradite Gülen. Washington has to this day not complied, on the grounds that there is not enough evidence proving that Gülen was the mastermind of the coup and involvement in terrorist activities. Alongside, embassies and diplomatic missions abroad started active engagement in diplomatic efforts, asking governments all around the world where the movement was working to shutdown and hand over to the Turkish authorities people that had been active within the Hizmet, now enlisted as terrorists.

Erdoğan and Gülen both had differing views on how the country should be ruled. The coup instilled the state of emergency and Erdoğan took this sweeping opportunity to alienate and clean his opponents from the political scene. In this regard, the Ergenekon trials had a particular significance. They proved that anyone who held contrasting views and opposed him would face repercussions, from tapping telephones or emails, to time in prison. The powers of the army were restrained and

the cleansing campaigns that followed the coup were a drastic change and an undertaking that no previous leader had dared to do. This meant that an important check of the government was lifted. Incumbents could now have an amplified range of action.

### **3. Relations between Turkey and Syria, Kurdish factor**

Bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria have been fluctuating throughout history. There have been moments of heated and conflictual relations, while others of even close cooperation. Needless to say that Syria has posed security challenges to Turkey's safety and stability, especially due to proximity. The Kurdish factor is key in understanding overall regional power dynamics and especially between Turkey and Syria.

#### **3.1. The Kurdish question in Turkey and beyond**

One of the other greatest domestic challenges in Turkey, aside from efforts in safeguarding the secularist nature of the country, has been and is the Kurdish minority residing in Turkey. They are largest ethnic group within the country, after the Turks. They pose an imminent security challenge because of occasional uprisings and separatist movements, prompting a tumultuous situation in the country, added to that fears of secession.

They are also present in Iran, Iraq and Syria. In each and every of these countries the Kurds have tried to gain autonomy with the ultimate aim of establishing the state of Kurdistan. Kurdish nationalist movements in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria have not been the same. Kurds across countries do not present a single united front. There is also a power struggle among the different factions and parties inside countries. In this section, I will focus mostly in the Kurds of Turkey and Syria and their nationalist movement. Their struggle is a crucial factor in bilateral relations.

Since the establishment of the Republic, the Kurdish population has mostly inhabited the eastern and southeastern areas of Turkey. In the Kemalist era, after the abolishment of the Islamic caliphate, the Kurds started to have more nationalist feelings that the state responds through repression. Atatürk's government completely refuted the existence of specific ethnic and cultural groups, because one of his governing principles was to preserve the unity of the country. The presence of minority groups was viewed as threatening the integrity of the country. This is why in 1925, Turkey undergoes a forceful assimilation process. This process included the prohibition of using any other language, besides Turkish, in instructive institutions and all other areas of public life, plus the transfer of the population from different high-density Kurdish areas into pre-dominantly Turkish regions to facilitate their assimilation.

In 1937-1938, there was a military revolt in the previously known province of Dersim (current Tunceli). The area was seen as problematic that needed to undergo reforms; populated by Alevî-Zaza, Armenian and Kurdish minorities. The locals resisted military subjugation and initiated attacks to local infrastructure, which was met with the reaction of the governmental forces. After a seemingly de-escalation of the conflict the situation ascended once more, with the ultimate goal to end the problem and subdue all disobedient (Kieser, 2011). However, the situation had perishing results, the cleansing operation that started left thousands of people dead. The Kurdish minority despite all efforts had experienced an insurmountable amount of sufferings and carnage. Most commonly by this time, Kurds were denominated as “mountainous Turks” (Romano, 2006).

The initiator of the nationalist movement of Kurds in Turkey was Abdullah Öcalan. He comes from a mixed family of Kurds and Turks. While growing up, his family did not have much income. A key trait of Öcalan, and his later supporters, is that they share the same difficult history on their shoulders: obstacles while growing up and an unwelcoming environment that prompted identity struggles in these youngsters (Marcus, 2009, p. 15-17). During the democratization and pluralisation process of Turkey in the 1960s, we have the first political groups that welcome and stress the importance of respecting basic human rights and freedoms to be enjoyed by minorities, including here Kurds. Turkish Kurds were inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology and were part of leftist political activity during the 70s that led to the establishment of the Kurdistan’s Worker’s Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê).

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Kurds had taken advantage of the Iran-Iraq war to strengthen their presence in the northern Iraq region. Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani were two of the key leaders of Iraqi Kurds respectively of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Democratic Union Party. Iraq had been arming the Kurds in Iran. The Iraqi central government believed the Kurdish political activities in the area were highly fragmented to contradict it. However, Iran had struck a deal with both Iraqi Kurdish leaders and had requested their collaborative efforts to rebel against Baghdad (CFR, n.d.).

The months preceding the Turkish military coup of 1980 are marked with a high degree of tensions in the southeastern region of Turkey. The Kurdish have seized many openings by this time, as the result of a fragmented political landscape that is already dealing with multiple problems. Following the coup, a period where the

Kurdish question assumes a high-relevance role on the political agenda begins, but this time the issue is framed as a violent conflict fuelling the southeastern region and prompting instability. The wave of repressive measures following the coup extensively impacted many Kurds on various levels, including here socio-political and cultural. At the time, there were massive arrests that saw thousands of Kurds imprisoned. The rules enforced during martial law constricted the Kurds to act more discretely. In the light of these events, the movement was transferred into Syrian territory as the only viable solution. The new constitution of 1982 reinforced the principles of Atatürk, to safeguard the integrity of the territory and wholeness of the country as one single nation, repudiating the existence of any other ethnic groups.

Syria during this tumultuous period was seen as a safe haven, people who were perceived as dissidents in Turkey would flee there, including here leftists, rightists, Turkish or Kurdish (Marcus, 2009, p. 52-75). Öcalan had found a new establishment for planning and carrying out operations, helped by Syrian Kurds. The Syrian territory was a good opportunity to recruit new members. However, this did not last too long as he did not have the right connections there and moved to Beirut, Lebanon. At the time the country was split between “Palestinian and Christian militias” (Marcus, 2009, p.52-75). As Marcus (2009) explains, the PKK members did not have any experience regarding warfare conduct; many got trained from a branch of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, skilled in guerrilla warfare. Having acquired the necessary training the PKK decided to undertake forceful military action. However, for Öcalan it was necessary to have an established position and some of his forces set up in northern Iraq, in order to undertake attacks and safely retreat. It was the perfect solution because of the extremely difficult mountainous terrain.

On March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1984 a guerrilla like warfare began in the southeastern region of Turkey. The initial efforts were directed towards elitist Kurds, deemed as collaborators of the regime and who dismissed overall the Kurdish case, until August 15<sup>th</sup>, when the first actions towards the military began. After the intensification of the conflict in villages, the government decided to conscribe people living there into the military, to help in war efforts. The PKK was very well equipped and seemingly even better than the army. The government’s response was immediate. There was a restructuring of the army, in many provinces was declared the extraordinary situation, new regional governors and the establishment of military bases throughout the mountains of Anatolia (Nocera, 2011). Alongside these efforts, President Özal even

issued a pardon or a “law of repentance”, to convince fighters to pull back from guerrilla fighting. The PKK has been quite popular during this period especially because of Turkish governments’ continuous refusal to acknowledge the reality and their existence.

The existence of a Kurdish reality has been vaguely initially admitted in the late 80s. The acknowledgement of their presence was sped up with the arrival of more than 70000 Iraqi Kurds into Turkish territory. This flood of refugees happened after Saddam Hussein’s regime used chemical weapons in 1988, the first attack of its kind in the Middle East, otherwise known as the Halabja massacre (Jonathan, 1988).

During Turgut Özal’s presidency a series steps forward were made in regards to the Kurdish issue. His death, which raised a lot of suspicion, came at a time where advancement were believed would be materialized and an important deal would be signed between the government and the Kurds, also there were allegations of the involvement of the ‘deep state’. As was discovered later on, Özal had not died of natural causes but rather there were traces of poisoning (Reuters, 2012).

After repeated attacks against the governments in Turkey, the PKK was designated as a terrorist organization. The US also enlisted it as a terrorist organization and sought the EU to do the same. Its leader Öcalan had fled the country and Turkish authorities carried out multiple operations to guarantee his capture. This was made possible through a US-backed operation in 1999, in Kenya that led to the capture of Öcalan.

The assimilation process in Turkey despite all the bloodshed it did not obtain its desired goal. It is true that it did play a major role in partially keeping the Kurdish population at bay for periods of time and continuous efforts have brought about a more cautious behaviour on the government’s side (Sagnic, 2010). As they frame it, the Kurdish people’s struggle in Turkey is to live peacefully in what they claim as their own land, in dignity and enjoying their basic human rights and freedoms and they believe their war is a just war justifying their ends (ABC Australia, 2007).

The Syrian government has allowed for the recruitment of Kurdish people to the PKK in order to pressure Ankara. During the Cold War, when Turkey joined NATO, a strategic alliance emerged between Syria and the Soviet Union. Since the PKK was based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology, of course it enjoyed the Soviet Union’s support, ultimately to influence Ankara. Great power politics were in play, with the US and the Soviet Union engaged in proxy wars as in this case.

A portion of Turkish Kurds was part of the leftist party the Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyal Demokrasi Partisi*). In 1990, some of the members decided to part ways with the party. Since this faction was against the PKK activities and thought armed conflict would not bring about the desired results saw the opportunity for the establishment of a new party, the People's Labour Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*), as a good opportunity to further their cause in a peaceful way. This was the first lawful party of the Kurds.

### **3.2. History of Turkish-Syrian relations**

This section provides background information and analysis of Turkish-Syrian relations. The transformation of interactions between Ankara and Damascus are tackled since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, most noticeably with the first dispute among parties.

### **3.3. The Alexandretta (Hatay) Dispute**

The Turkish-Syrian relations have been impacted also by what is called the dispute of Alexandretta or current Hatay province. This piece of land is now part of Turkey, however, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire until 1939, it had been under the protection and rule of French-mandated Syria, which Under the Treaty of Lausanne that led to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, France acted in Syria and Lebanon as a representative of the League of Nations through a Mandate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, n.d.a). The French guaranteed the preservation of this province, a key part of Syria. However, Turkey had never hidden its intentions over this territory. The negotiations to end France's governing mandate and grant Syria independence culminated in 1936 (Khadduri, 1945). After this, the Turkish government acted swiftly in expressing concerns for its population, which composed the predominant community. An irredentist rhetoric was pushed forward for the reunification of the Hatay province to Turkey.

However, this area was a mixture of different ethnicities. After multiple negotiations with France, exploiting its vulnerable condition at the time, Turkey managed to annex the region and settle an agreement. It was argued that this agreement was in violation with other previously settled agreements, which were still valid, on how the territory was to be managed (Sanjian, 1956). The annexation faced a high degree of disagreement and massive protests on the Syrian side (Jörum, 2014).

After the achieved agreement, the Second World War erupted and Syria was concerned about France's defeat. It gained full independence in 1945, but it was not formally recognized and considered a sovereign country until 1946. Turkey was concerned that no matter what kind of governance was established in Syria there would be no claims over Alexandretta. With the proclamation of independence, Syria had full control over the management of its foreign relations. As such, the issue did not cease to exist, rather it was claimed as a wrongfully appropriated territory. The issue reached a stalemate, where Turkey refused to acknowledge Syria's independence and Syria refused to give up claims over Alexandretta (CIA, 1947). Later on, the problem was resolved with the facilitation of Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, where countries re-established diplomatic relations even if the issue over Hatay was only put aside.

### **3.4. Syrian tumultuous domestic politics and approaches to Turkey**

In the period 1949-1954 there have been several military coups in Syria. In the first one, Husni al-Za'im took control over the government. During his brief rule there were positive developments in Turkish-Syrian relations. He announced that Syria had no claims over Alexandretta and Ankara recognized the government of Damascus. Then came the second military coup of Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi, where Za'im was ousted and killed.

The new government considered previous developments as treason that had put Syria in a difficult position. There was a deterioration of bilateral relations and developments were constrained in the light of the Cold War. Domestic public opinion in Syria was not in favour of collaboration with Turkey. Colonel Adib Shishakli, who completely alienated its neighbour, undertook the third coup. He put forward that Syria could not simply renounce its legitimate rights over Alexandretta and that consensus could be achieved if it was in good spirit and just for both parties. Growing domestic discontent eventually led to another coup. At this point domestic stances were split among groups that were for improvement of relations with Turkey and others against.

In 1955, there was a historical event in the region. Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran agreed on the formation of a new defensive organization, known otherwise as the Baghdad Pact, promoting peace in the Middle East (US department of State Archive, n.d.).

However, a series of events in the region weakened its existence, including here: the Suez Canal Crisis, invasion of the Sinai Peninsula, Iraqi revolution, civil unrest in Lebanon and so on. In 1959, Iraq officially broke away from the organization that led to its transformation into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). These kind of initiatives, which were led by Western powers or Turkey, were perceived with a bitter sense from Syria. Domestic instability and the presence of a NATO naval base in the city of Iskenderun, Hatay province, further complicate any thoughts or attempts to achieve practical advancements on the issue, let alone retrocession.

### **3.5. Water dispute and rapprochement**

Another important conflictual situation has been prompted over water resources. This issue largely influences peace and stability all over the region. The main dispute between Turkey and Syria, including Iraq, is over Euphrates-Tigris Rivers, whose initial sourcing begins in Turkey. In the 1950s, Turkey started building multiple water dams and putting forward the Southeast Anatolia Development Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*), a program for the development of these basins, at the same time aiding the economic sector. This initiative caused worrisome concerns for Syria and Iraq. They feared this would impact their water supply and quality.

The dispute reached a culmination point in 1998. There was a direct threat from Turkey to Syria that in case Damascus would not cease its support to the PKK, both logistically and providing a safe territory for its members, and financing its terrorist activities, they would initiate war.

This crisis led to the signing of the Adana Protocol, in which Syria agreed to expel Abdullah Öcalan, arrest its members, end financial support and exploitation of its territory by PKK militants (Aykan, 1999). After the capture of Öcalan, the PKK decided on a ceasefire, which lasted until 2004. Water disputes have been used as leverage to exacerbate already strained relations among neighbours. They do not constitute the sole reason for escalation into armed conflict (Dohrmann & Hatem, 2014). In the case of Turkey and Syria there were a series of other greater concerns and issues that influenced bilateral relations.

After the signing of the Adana protocol, bilateral relations experienced a remarkable improvement, even with the attending of back-then President, Ahmet

Necdet Sezer of Hafez-al Assad's (Bashar-al Assad's father) funeral. In 2004, President Bashar-al Assad visited Turkey stressing over the progress in bilateral relations. In 2005, the Prime Minister of Lebanon was killed; allegedly there was Syrian involvement in the case. This event brought Assad closer to Erdoğan and pursue even closer relations because it had been alienated from the West. Since Turkey was a full NATO member state, rapprochement helped him diverge international attention and avoid repercussions (Taspinar, 2008). Two other important developments were the adoption of a Free Trade Agreement and lifting of visa restrictions (Ministry of Trade, 2018). This period can be described as the golden period for bilateral relations that unfortunately did not last long. Despite previous disputes, rapprochement was made possible and as witnessed it was a matter of political will between the parties.

#### **4. Crisis in Syria: Case Study**

In 2011, when the Arab Spring movements began throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Syria was one of the states caught up in the demonstrations and people protesting to overthrow the Assad regime. However, unlike in most other countries, Assad began to heavily react against the demonstrators, leaving thousands of civilians dead. As Kohei Imai (2018) explains, bilateral relations between Ankara and Damascus prior to the eruption of internal conflict in Syria had reached a cooperative phase, with a series of liberalizing measures from both sides. However, the escalation of violence in Syria marks a setback in their interaction, with the likelihood of causing a shift in Turkish foreign policy, from liberal policies to realist practice.

##### **4.1. Diplomatic efforts**

Reliant on their friendly relations the Turkish government initially aimed at convincing and influencing the Syrian government in ceasing violent actions against its people, through diplomatic channels. This approach strived to peacefully resolve the crisis. Even Davutoğlu, the key figure in the promotion of peaceful relations and co-existence, visited Damascus to recommend the Assad regime to cease the armed confrontations between the government and the demonstrators, undertake reforms and possibly form a new government (BBC, 2011). This visit did not produce the desired outcomes; within hours the Syrian government sent tanks to Hama, one of the hot spots, to suppress some of the rebels.

Approximately six months after the eruption of Syrian demonstrations against the government in Damascus the largest Syrian opposition group abroad was created, known as the Syrian National Council (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2013). Its activists, mostly from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, were based in Turkey and were part of the opposition forces. Both Turkey and the US started covertly providing armament to the rebels (Cloud & Abdulrahim, 2013). The problem with the SNC was that they did not constitute a united front for all opposition groups.

After the failure of the Turkish request to end violence against civilians, Turkish-Syrian relations were reversed. Ankara antagonized Damascus and it turned from a partner into one of its principal adversaries, bringing back old animosities. The alienation started off with a series of escalatory measures on Turkey's side, such as:

continuous calls for advancing reforms or suspending diplomatic relations in 2012, by closing down the Turkish embassy (Phillips, 2012).

On April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 was held in Istanbul the second Conference of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People. This conference saw the participation of many countries and international organizations with an interest on conflict resolution, including here the UN, the Arab League, the EU, the OIC and so on (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, 2012). At the end, the Group made a series of commitments to provide assistance to the Syrian people, and most importantly to the opposition, to help them instil a new government and ensure a peaceful transition from the Assad regime, all the while guaranteeing respect for human rights.

Disappointed at Assad's inaction and opposition to adopt any relieving measure, as a retaliatory move, Turkey decided to provide support to opposition groups, open its borders and offer refuge to thousands of Syrians.

In June 2012, a Turkish military jet was shot down by Syria on international airspace, without any prior warnings. This caused heightened tensions between Ankara and Damascus. Western powers, and especially the US, condemned this act as clear evidence of the continuous infringements and disregard for international norms (Tüysüz, 2012).

In an official interview with Deutsche Welle, Davutoğlu (2013) reiterated that dialogue between international actors and Syria had been thwarted because the Assad led government did not recognize the opposition, and without it, dialogue would be meaningless (Davutoğlu, 2013). He further stressed that dialogue should not be mistakenly seen as the government holding talks with rebels. Instead, the ultimate aim would be to establish an interim government chosen by the Syrian people.

#### **4.2. Refugee Crisis**

The use of soft power and diplomatic efforts failed to resolve the crisis. The world has since witnessed the largest flow of refugees from the Syrian conflict. The occurrences in Syria saw the departure of thousands of Syrians from their country, in the pursuit of a safer and better future. The civil war has increased human suffrage and left people homeless, risking their lives. Turkey has assumed the largest amount of refugees. The responsibility, however, lies not only with Ankara. The international community overall has the duty to respond to the humanitarian crisis and there should

be joint efforts from multiple stakeholders from international organizations, states or NGOs (International Crisis Group, 2013).

The initial belief for open frontiers was that the tumultuous situation in Syria would be over swiftly and the displaced people would return home shortly. Yet this was not the case. The number of irregular migrants increased drastically with the prolongation of the crisis. Hence, more concerted international action was required. The issue of the refugees has sparked no little debate within Turkey. Initially, politics around it was framed and tackled in the light of a temporary matter that would go back to normal once peace would be re-established in Syria (Memisoglu & Ilgit, 2016; Erdogan, 2016). Turkey pursued a successful policy in relieving the human suffering in Syria with the belief that Assad would be ousted quickly (Ataman & Özdemir, 2018).

The continuous huge masses of refugees sparked dissatisfaction and raised widespread concerns among the Turkish population. The locals perceived the refugees only as a ‘temporary issue’ that would wither away quickly. They believed that their presence had a negative impact on the Turkish economy (Erdogan, 2014; Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, 2015).

In March 2016, the EU managed to strike a deal with Turkey that envisaged providing financial assistance, in order to control the overflow and organise the movement of irregular migrants (Rygiel, Baban & Ilcan, 2016). However, the EU was slow and divided in its efforts of dealing with refugees. Certain member states shut borders and refused entrance into their territories. The policies of the EU have further upset relations with Turkey, mostly because Turkey was being used as a ‘control point’ for the refugees (Erdogan, 2016). One of the largest Turkish media outlets, TRT explained that the EU did not comply with its part of the agreement, alongside others (TRT, 2020). This reduced role for Turkey was not particularly welcomed, especially when taking in consideration the country’s aspirations.

### **4.3. US Factor**

President Barack Obama has addressed on multiple occasions, in front of the American public, the conflict in Syria. In his initial speeches he acknowledged the US work with its allies to provide for humanitarian assistance, support the moderate opposition and negotiate a political settlement on how to peacefully oust Assad. However, he had made it clear that unilateral military intervention was not a feasible

option because the US could not assume the responsibility to resolve the ongoing civil war forcefully and on its own.

Matters slightly changed when there were allegations that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons against its own citizens, including here children. In this address, he laid out the basis for a potential military intervention because in case of non-action war effects could spill over the borders to its allies. Interestingly, he explained that any actions in Syria would be to hinder and deplore the further usage of chemical weapons by Assad in the eyes of the world (Caldwell, 2013).

Both Turkey and the US were on common grounds with regards to ousting Assad, however, they differed on their approaches to achieve their goal. Turkey desired for a more proactive role of the US in Syria. On his official visit to Washington, Erdoğan pushed for more decisive actions and the establishment of a no-fly zone over Syria, a persistent request on the Turkish side. Obama was cautious in this regard, stipulating that there needs to be more contending evidence to undertake action (Schliesst, 2013). Even after, the evidence that chemical weapons had been used surfaced, it still was not considered past ‘the red line’ from the Obama administration.

Instead, John Kerry, US Secretary of State, proposed to seize and dismantle Syrian chemical weapons. This initiative was brought to the UN from Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, suggesting that the UN, in cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, carry out the elimination of Syrian stockpile (US Office of the Spokesperson, 2013). The proposal did not face opposition, even from the Assad regime, which was a stratagem to avoid any external military involvement. The task was carried out, but developments in the upcoming years proved that it was not a hundred percent successful and Assad still retained hidden amounts of chemical weapons (Shane, 2017).

#### **4.4. Kurdish factor and ISIS**

A part of the militants of Al-Qaeda in Iraq broke off from the mother organization and established what came to be known as the Islamic State in 2004. This new militant group was substantially active until the increased presence of US military troops in Iraq (Glenn, Rowan & Nada, 2016). Their activities were halted for a period of time, however, the power and security vacuum in Iraq and Syria in 2013 were seen as a great opportunity for the re-emergence of ISIS. The instability of these

countries enabled the right conditions for fundamentalist jihadists to announce efforts for the establishment of the Islamic caliphate. They became known for their brutal online videos, showing beheadings or different kinds of executions of infidels. ISIS increased prominence was due to its visibility on online platforms. They are different because of the strategies they employ, with cruelty directed to the locals, focusing on and appealing only to the Sunni community (Shamieh & Szenes, 2015). Amongst the people fleeing from Syria to Turkey, either regular people or part of the opposition groups, there have been jihadists and terrorists (UNHCR, 2015). The liberal access granted from Turkey enabled them with a free pass to cross borders and recruit people.

The northeastern part of the Syrian territory had partially fallen under the control of ISIS and was partially under the control of the People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*), which is a militia group in Syria composed mainly of Kurds. The presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Kurdish community are yet another important factor for the dynamics and interests in the region.

The US has provided assistance and aided military support to the YPG, which has caused further problems to US-Turkish relations. The PKK has close relations with the YPG, although they are not the same organization, and the PYD, which represents the former in politics. Ankara has on multiple occasions called on Washington to cut all "financial and military support to the YPG" (Gürçay, n.d.). On the other hand, Turkey has provided support for the SNC and the Free Syrian Army. Open borders to the refugees and support for the opposition were carried out on the belief that members of the Muslim Brotherhood would lead the upcoming government (Işıksal, 2018). The SNC saw a majority of its members from the Sunni Muslim community. In this regard, Turkey would be able to influence the new government, due to shared religious beliefs and at the same time this would halt any Kurdish aspirations or attempts for seizing control or any further actions for establishing an independent Kurdistan (Balçı, 2012). Officially, the US has not designated YPG as a terrorist organization, unlike Turkey. The US supported the YPG because it had been the only ground force to be able and fight ISIS and succeed in doing so. This is why Washington has provided arms to the Kurdish fighters, which raised worrisome concerns for Ankara.

In 2014, ISIS started to seize more and more territories. It gained control of multiple important cities, such as: Raqqa, Mosul and Tikrit. The city of Kobane, Syria, just a few kilometres away from the Turkish border, fell under the control of ISIS. Ankara reinforced its border, but it was firm on its stance of not undertaking any further actions, without greater US support to the opposition fighters (Landler, Barnard & Schmitt, 2014). Ankara thought that as long as ISIS fought against Kurds then it did not have to intervene. Turkey's inaction in countering ISIS advancements, further upset the US and damaged the country's image in the eyes of the world. For the international community, Turkey was aligning with terrorists. However, Ankara declined such allegations. During an interview, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu refuted Turkey had provided any logistical support to ISIS and clarified that there was a difference between the organization's affiliates and Islamic ideology, the latter being at threat. He reiterated that Turkey was a success story of how democracy and Islam can cohabitate (Davutoğlu, 2014).

In Turkey, PKK activities had been more or less dormant, with a couple of unilateral ceasefires that had been negotiated with jailed leader Öcalan. However, in 2015, PKK actions became more violent. What seemed for a period of time, since 2012, as the beginning of peace talks, came to an end (Butler, 2015). The increased tensions and attacks in Turkey led to operation in Iraq, but Ankara threatened to carry out operation even in Syria, if PKK terrorists would shelter there (Kanat & Ustun, 2015).

ISIS has posed multiple threats and concerns for Turkey, including here: the presence in its proximity of a rival proto-state, the increased number of refugees flows, increased instability in Iraq, the presence in its territory of potential ISIS radicalized sympathizers and the increased Kurdish dissatisfaction for the advancement ISIS has achieved in Kurdish Syrian territories (Aras, n.d.). But, when weighing the degree of threats ISIS and Kurds pose to Turkey, the latter turns out to be a much more pressing issue (Totten, 2018).

In the beginning of 2015, after months of coordinated efforts Kurdish and US fighters seized back control of Kobane. ISIS undertook its first offensive assault on Turkish territory with the suicide bombing in the city of Suruc, during a Kurdish gathering that was planning efforts to rebuild the city of Kobane. The terrorist attack stimulated the government to implement a series of counterterrorism strategies, against ISIS and the PKK. Alongside, Ankara allowed the positioning of US aircrafts

in Incirlik and Diyarbakir Airbases, to carry out airstrikes against the Islamic State (Dolan, 2015). However, since casualties were Kurds efforts were limited.

In May 2016, an unexpected event happened. Prime Minister Davutoğlu resigned from his post and renounced from the leadership of the AKP. His departure came as a pre-emptive move after removal rumours (Financial Times, 2016).

In the meantime, terrorist attacks carried out from the Islamic state have spread around the world. Despite efforts, ISIS activities could not be halted. They carried out multiple terrorist attacks in Istanbul, in key spots, at the heart of the city. Later in the year, there were suicide bombings and shootings at Mustafa Kemal Atatürk Airport in Istanbul, Ankara and Gaziantep. The government stated that perpetrators were affiliates of the Islamic State. These terrorist attacks aggravated the situation because ISIS had targeted random civilians on Turkish territory.

In August 2016, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield, as an offense against ISIS. In the operation were involved TAF and FSA. This operation is a key event, as it marks the clear departure from the previous foreign policy approach. As presented above in this work, there had been frictions and certain minor confrontations at the borders, but this was a military operation and intervention carried out directly on Syrian territory.

The initiation of the operation is justified on the grounds of a series of national security threats. The series of terrorist attacks carried out on Turkish big cities and the control of a part of the border by ISIS forces raised concerns for Ankara. As Yeşiltaş, Seren and Özçelik (2017) argue, on the Turkish side there are two important points that need to be taken in consideration for the changes in employed strategies. First, the resuming of the conflictual situation with the PKK constituted heightened pressure for Ankara. In this regard, they argue, the PKK's aim was to drain Turkey's energy internally and increase their own political and military power in Syria, in order to become a functional and influential actor in the region (Yeşiltaş, Seren & Özçelik, 2017). Second, by exploiting the vacuum and the war fought in its proximity would confine Turkey's foreign policies' influence within its national borders. The PKK undertook all of these actions, as Yeşiltaş, Seren and Özçelik (2017) argue, with the ultimate aim of depleting Turkish forces and advancing their own interests.

Ayata (2015) claims that Turkish actions in the region come as an attempt to present itself as an autonomous actor of global affairs and limitations for achieving its goal have been twofold. First, foreign policy worked as a system guided by values

and defined by identity, which did not encompass an extra action plan for crises. Second, Turkey's varying behaviour towards democratic principles. It is true that at the core of Turkish foreign policy lie attempts to achieve a greater role regionally and internationally. Additionally, he argues that the leadership perceived occurrences in its proximity as a great chance to portray itself as the leading player for changes in the region, with the ultimate aim of asserting its position and influencing future politics in Arab countries and beyond (Khan, 2015).

Dal (2017) argues intervention from a different perspective. He maintains that intervention on the Turkish side was not triggered by the aim of heightening the country's image either domestically or regionally instead it was Syria's own actions that have led to the transnationalization of the conflict. Assad's employed policies were pursued in order to produce instability in the region, with the aim of consolidating his influence internally and internationally (Dal, 2017).

The transformation of Turkey from a neutral country, promoting friendly relations among nations and wider, into the major contributor in war efforts in Syria, I believe substantiates for a dramatic shift. The employment of hard power in the region unfortunately does not help promoting the image of the country. The authoritarian character of Middle Eastern countries especially, does not welcome or positively perceive meddling in their domestic affairs. Ankara's actions can be perceived as an increasing threat.

## 5. Analysis

The beginning of this work provided the deep reforms Mustafa Kemal undertook after the establishment of the modern Republic. The total reformation of the country touched upon almost all areas of life. Atatürk provided a clear departure from the practices of the Ottoman Empire and completely cleared the scenery from what had remained of it. He built on his own legacy that guided Turkish domestic and foreign policy approach until recent years.

The figure of Erdoğan was not unfamiliar in Turkey and Istanbul specifically. The upcoming leader took on a sweeping opportunity and opening in internal politics where he provided clear alternatives and solutions to the almost dramatic situation the country was in.

If we compare Erdoğan and Atatürk we would notice that both had a common ultimate goal: restoring the great power status of Turkey. However, the approaches they chose differed. Erdoğan's plans are a reversion of the Kemalist system. As Atatürk wanted to start from zero, he introduced a new era of Turkish overall politics; Erdoğan has aimed for the same. This shows in various forms. For example, Atatürk banned the wearing of hijab and fez, while Erdoğan considered that people should be free in choosing the way they want to dress and if they want to use a veil, then they should enjoy the same rights as everyone else, as such shaping the matter on grounds of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Furthermore, he has portrayed Islamic topics not in the religious domain, but rather casted them as human rights issues. Initially, he was not fond of being described as a political Islamist. Erdoğan was very cautious and wanted to be perceived as a moderate leader, since he had already witnessed the rigidity of the system and especially the consequences of exhibiting deep religious affinities.

If we dive into a deeper investigation of Erdoğan's character, it is possible to find explanations for his actions. As it has been described above, Erdoğan was brought up feeling alienated by his own society and country. He did not feel like pertained, always having to hide and go unnoticed because of his religion, part of his belief system. As such, later on, when he came to power we can notice initial steps towards gaining visibility and undertaking actions outside the box, trying to advance his cause and change the society he lived in. Erdoğan has been shut down many times.

The way he has been brought up has shaped his perceptions and thoughts, reflected in his actions.

The confidence of the Kemalists stemmed from the presence of TAF. One of the most important duties of the military was to oversee and protect the secularist government. This is how incumbents were held accountable. It had powers to oust any incumbent governments who did not abide by this and especially, when secularism was seen at risk. There have been several cases in Turkish history where governments were ousted by coups undertaken by the TAF, as witnessed throughout this thesis.

The general public opinion, when the AKP came to power and delivered results, was that this party will and should stay in power as long as the economy is doing well. One of the fundamental bedrocks where Erdoğan's power stems from is economic advancement. This is the reason he came to power in the first place and the boost he gave the country through his policies was a mutually satisfactory situation for Erdoğan and the Turkish people.

Turkey has long experienced the threat posed from its neighbours. It has always feared possible attacks, constantly suffering from the security dilemma. The prospects of conflict escalation have always been present since the establishment of the Republic, especially due to the geographical position of the country, an already unstable region, where skirmishes between neighbours have been ever-present.

During the beginnings of Erdoğan's rule, the Davutoğlu era in foreign policy, there was a pure liberal approach to international politics, with a strong emphasis on soft power. Davutoğlu believed it was the right way of tackling foreign policy issues, especially if Turkey wanted to heighten its global influence. At the same time, this was the way he believed the country could overcome the security dilemma. In his work, he posited important criteria that were a departure from previous approaches. Most noticeably, putting forward the principles of strategic depth and the zero-problems with neighbours.

The novelty in this approach was that the country would step back from the usage of hard power and rather exercise its influence through soft power and not only. Soft power and multilateralism were thought of as the only viable ways for maximizing and advancing Turkish interest and heightening its image regionally and globally (by becoming a trademark). Ankara would no longer only focus its efforts to the Western world, which overall had not been very welcoming; instead it would take on a much more proactive role, engaging with countries all around the world.

Additionally, the aim was also to level out also previous enmities between Turkey and the Arab world. The assumption was that Turkey possessed all necessary assets and tools to be a regional power and exercise its influence on other countries of the region and beyond.

At the beginning of their rule, the government was faced with an important challenge: the US preparations for the war in Iraq. As new in office, but not politics, Erdoğan and Gül were very cautious with not taking any wrong steps. Engagement and support in a regional conflict would not be welcome from the society, which yearned economic development and war efforts would most certainly not procure desired economic advancements. On the other hand, the request for help was extended from an international partner and refusal would be detrimental for foreign policy advancements. To leave the vote to the Parliament was a strategic choice to justify the refusal of support. Nevertheless, inaction in Iraq was the first application of the ‘zero-problems with neighbours’ principle.

Ankara started extending its activities into different spheres by promoting its culture worldwide. Turkey became well-known for its soap opera productions, increasing visibility through the exports of Turkish movies and TV shows that have gained worldwide appraisal; its national carrier, which ranks amongst the best worldwide aviation service providers, its increased number of representations, which promote and advance the country’s interest, helping bridge relations between most countries and play a key role in the engagement the country has abroad. On another note, the government aimed for an international role for mediating conflicts.

Similarly, Gülen and his movement have provided a substantial help to further this cause. Through their educational institutions, they have for years promoted Turkey, its language and culture all around the world. They have, through soft power, managed to recruit personnel and students into this “virtuous organization”, which to this day is believed to have millions of adherents. And this went on for as long as both Erdoğan’s and Gülen’s interests were in harmony.

Turkish foreign policy employed by Erdoğan and Davutoğlu was working in concert with global and regional geopolitical dynamics. If they had opted for any other course of action, it would have worked against their state’s interests.

The presence of the Kurdish minority in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq has always been of major concern, especially for Ankara. Throughout the history of the modern republic they have suffered a lot of suppression from different governments

and the idea of establishing their own autonomous region or state have been not only remote but completely off the table. However, developments and dynamics in recent decades have opened up opportunities for a higher degree of action.

Turkey has historically seen Syria as a security threat. After Bashar al-Assad came to power, relations between the two countries seemed to have reached a new phase. However, Assad's reconciliation with Ankara was not in good faith, as a genuine effort to put aside past grievances or antagonistic behaviours, and work for providing more peace and stability to the region. Rather, there were hidden intentions, including here gaining more visibility and acceptance in the international community. To this end, it was very appealing to grow close relations with a NATO member state, neighbouring country. Ultimately increased cooperation benefited both countries with stronger commercial ties and mobility, which decreased considerations for engagement in direct confrontations because it would be costly and damaging for both.

The uprising and political unrests in the Middle East were seen as an ideal moment from Erdoğan and Davutoğlu. Resolving and contributing to conflict resolution had been their goal. They believed that they could join on the side of protestors, help establish their political will, in return portraying a country fully committed in the promotion of peace and stability, in doing so, seizing the opportunity of heightening the country's image. The eruption of the civil unrest in Syria and the forceful suppression from the government was perceived as a chance of furthering precisely the abovementioned purposes. Turkey already had a good positioning in the region and a strong economy through which to exercise power, but it wanted more. As Mearsheimer (2001) argued states' longing for more power are never enough. As such, along calls from the international community, Ankara wanted to assume a leading role in diplomatic efforts. As a self-reliant country, able to mediate conflictual situations, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu believed that based on the recently growing close ties between the two countries, Assad would concede their requests and peacefully resign from his post.

Pure diplomatic measures failed to bring about the desired results. Turkey's strategy shifted. At this point, they opened frontiers and granted opposition fighters free entry-exit into Turkish territory to carry out their preparations against Assad. Part of the opposition was also the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom Ankara maintained good relations. Their goal now became to let the opposition groups engage in

confrontations. Turkey believed and hoped the Muslim Brotherhood would be successful, and in the end, come to power, through which Turkey believed could exert its influence and direct Syria's policies. However, the Syrian opposition proved to be fragmented and did not posit a united front against the regime.

When this did not happen, they tried to pursue another strategy. Ankara resorted to the buck-passing strategy, proposed by Mearsheimer. They tried to get the US involved in the region (passing on the buck), and let them assume the main responsibility in sorting out the situation in Syria (the hostile state), while they took a more passive role, but still reap off the benefits at the end. As in game theory, through a rational calculation, Turkey wanted to achieve its goal bearing the least costs. The US was very reluctant in getting engaged in the Middle East, from the memories of the long and painful war efforts in Iraq.

At the same time, another threat had emerged: the emergence of ISIS. The fundamentalist jihadi group that occupied territories in northern Syria and Iraq, exploiting the security vacuum, militarily equipped and yearning for advancing their goals, started to further threaten the peace and security of the region. Especially in Syria, the group was making territorial gains in Kurdish-inhabited areas. This is why Kurds started to respond, fighting for their territories and actually being successful. Since they were the most successful force in the war against ISIS, the US provided support to the YPG/PYD, by supplying arms and equipment to counter the terrorist organization.

Increasing tensions at the borders, a much more powerful Kurdish community in its proximity, right across the border, exploiting the unstable situation in Syria by using its territory as a safe haven all culminated in offensive behaviour.

Bingöl (2019) argues that when conditions in internal and global affairs change, with a special focus on leadership, approaches employed by decision-makers might change. The new incumbents might form new partnerships and there might be an overall re-orientation of domestic and foreign policies.

Based on this, we can say that before Turkish foreign policy was based on Davutoğlu's vision, however, later on Erdoğan assumes a more proactive and leading role of foreign politics. Despite not a drastic change in leadership, but rather a shift of ultimate decision-maker attributes for the shift in Turkish foreign policy

I believe there are three key interrelated developments in Turkish domestic politics presented in a chronological order.

The first, the failed military coup. Erdoğan gained popularity in the eyes of his followers after the coup. He was depicted as a strong leader, who with the support of his people managed to retract the overthrow of his regime and end brutality. At the same time, he managed to further damage Gülen's figure and the movement's activities locally. Worth-mentioning here is the change in the role played by the military. During Atatürk the military's powers were extensive. One of its crucial roles was to safeguard the secularist nature of the country. This has dramatically changed during Erdoğan, where the military is a tool of the government to project power. The diminished role of the military initially began with reforms for compliance to EU norms, however later it became even more evident that the purpose was to decrease military officials' influence in the society and meddling with politics.

The second, Davutoglu's resignation as leader of the AKP and the post of Prime Minister. Together with his renunciation came concerns about the course Turkish foreign policy would follow. The chief promoter of friendly relations and zero-problems policy with neighbours left the political scene on a very crucial moment.

And here we come to the third, the military intervention in Syria, where Turkey assumed an assertive role in the region, which was the product of insecurity.

The intervention in Syria does spark resemblance of what happened during Inonu's presidency. Both İnönü and Erdoğan saw a window of opportunity and decided to take action and gain global prestige as a result. However, there is a difference. In the case of İnönü we have a successful allocation in the global sphere, which is not the case for Syria. When Turkey joined in the Second World War, it was not the principal fighting countries in the conflict, rather it joined later and reinforced great powers' strength and ended on the victorious side. In the case of Erdoğan, he mistakenly read in between the lines and misleadingly believed that they could rely on US capabilities to act in concert, assuming their intentions were aligned.

It would have been flawed to consider Turkish foreign policy choices by applying only a state-centred approach. This is where a human-agency approach proves useful. Erdogan's desire and projection for the future of the country resonate the realist tradition, in which the countries' seek to seize power. His actions are congruent with his aspirations, where his ultimate goal has been to re-establish the Turkish image in the world as a great power and a re-call from the past to restore the once glorious prestige of the Ottoman Empire.

The realist (rational) and psychological models have delineated the structure of the debate surrounding foreign policy shift in Turkey. The combination of these models produces a clearer picture of the overall situation. It is almost impossible to argue against the fact that Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have for sure carried out an analysis of the conditions present at the time before taking decisions. It is another issue if they were right or wrong in their calculations. Erdoğan's choices might have seemed irrational and difficult to swallow for the Western community. However, in reality, domestic and international developments are merely just an expression of underlying perceptions within. What differs now with the beginning is that previous policies were compliant and in line with EU interests and Erdoğan was careful in his actions. For sure, overall changes point to a revisionist leader.

The research question aimed to discover the reasons mounting to Turkish foreign policy change in 2016. The history for the evolution of foreign policy, alongside internal dynamics and tools employed in the international system, with a specific focus on the military intervention in Syria have provided a thorough analysis of the issue. Based on this work, we can regard that Turkish foreign policy shift has been the result of the growing Kurdish concern (a domestic problem that spills across borders) and the desire for the acquisition of higher power.

The research hypothesis was that domestic developments in Turkey and the personal aspirations of centralized leadership would lead to foreign policy changes. In order to test this hypothesis, key domestic developments as well as a detailed inquiry of Erdoğan's profile were put under examination. The results have shown that domestic developments, especially the persistent Kurdish question, and the increasingly personalized style of governance are the key elements that have brought about a different foreign policy approach. The departure of Davutoğlu was a development that cleared the decision-making domain from ideological opponents, where Erdoğan makes the calls and who through reforms has gained higher mobility for action. There have also been enabling factors, such as economic advancement, the rising threat of ISIS and attacks on Turkish soil, as well as disassociation and marginalization from the EU.

With the situation in Syria, Turkey's approach to foreign policy has shifted, however, main objectives remain the same. The change lies in the way goals are to be achieved.

## 6. Conclusion

After the detailed assessment of Turkish foreign policy, it has been proved that domestic concerns, in specific the Kurdish issue, have provoked engagement in offensive behaviour. For Ankara, the areas of its territory inhabited by the Kurds are an integral part of the country and any aspirations for secession or autonomy are inconceivable. The involvement in the Syrian crisis disrupted the status quo and state of affairs of the region.

As it has been examined throughout this research, the great aspiration has been to grow into a great power that encompasses and exerts its influence over all Muslims, not only the Middle East but also former Ottoman Empire territories in Asia, the Balkans and elsewhere. Additionally, aspirations have not only been to return the country's once upon a time great power status, but as well as revive its regional and global influence in many dimensions, including here: political, economic, cultural and even military. All undertaken efforts have been in this regard.

In sharp contrast, from Atatürk's rule, we see a Turkey nowadays, which seems to be drawing back from the West, democratic principles and processes, religion is present in most areas of everyday life and the military enjoys a significantly reduced role. Engagement in hostile behaviour towards a neighbouring state per se hinders the process of attaining specific goals and the role Turkey should play in regional and global affairs.

The research question was presented to answer the reasoning behind the change in approach of Turkish foreign policy. The examination of multiple dimensions of foreign policy provided a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Based on the research, we can determine that foreign policy actions are affected from domestic developments and leading figures.

The research hypothesis was the following: domestic developments and personal aspirations of centralized leadership, amount to foreign policy changes. In order to test the hypothesis we have taken in consideration a series of key events in the internal domain, mainly Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases, the failed military coup in 2016 and the Kurdish question. The first two exemplify the increasing concentrated power in the hands of Erdoğan. The Kurdish factor is one of the most important elements in setting the national and regional security agenda. The intervention in Syria proves the case.

Based on the findings, this research has achieved its objectives. Chapter 1 has successfully laid the foundations for the examination of Turkish foreign policy. It helped trace distinguishing features and patterns that determine the course of foreign policy.

As it has been explored, longings for what used to be the image of the Ottoman Empire in the world are still vastly present among the Turkish society and Erdoğan. It has been witnessed that domestic developments have been affecting foreign relations. During the rule of Atatürk, moving forward from backwardness (associated with Islamic practice) and safeguarding reforms determined actions with the international community. Actions, since the establishment of the modern Republic, have been carried out precisely to this end: restore the great power status and be an influential actor in the world.

Chapter 2 successfully analysed the tools employed in foreign policy and the stance Turkey has taken since the beginnings of the rule of the AKP.

We can conclude that Erdoğan's strategies of governance are a mixture of traditions of political Islam, combining religion and politics. Due to the undertaken reforms, now Turkey is mostly perceived worldwide as a revisionist state, which the international community is not particularly fond of. This is because revisionist states, as posited in the offensive realist theory, have a high chance of engaging in hostile behaviour; this in return hinders peace and stability.

Chapter 3 carefully examined the relations between Syria and Turkey. In the early stages of Erdoğan's rule, it appeared that his aspirations had come to fruition. Ankara had assumed a much more proactive role in the region, following a liberal approach. Davutoğlu's method seemed to work. However, events that started in the wake of the Arab Spring demonstrations, in the case of Syria, turned more into what has been referred to as the "Arab winter" (Gourevitch, 2011), shaking the status quo of the region.

As it has been determined in Chapter 4, The Kurdish minority retains the potential of changing and shaping regional geopolitics, especially the Turkish outlook. On this note, we can conclude that intervention was a rash decision, provoked by uncertainty. Rational calculations of domestic threats and personal perceptions of the leading figures are the key elements for the transformation of the course of foreign policy.

The war has been dragging on for years now and its repercussions of are insurmountable. Assad, still to this day, has not been ousted from power. The conflict is persistent and worrisome concerns regard how long it will continue. Turkey in return became one of the leading actors in the conflict, a role that exceeded expectations. Further questions, based on the evidence that has been shown in this thesis are whether Turkey will be able to recover its regional and global image. Future policies that will unwrap in this regard, depend on how long will the conflict in Syria persist and what will the outcomes of this very long war be. On the Turkish side, under the current leadership, as long as territorial integrity is at risk, with regards to the Kurdish threat, considerations of offensive behaviour are vastly present.

## Summary

This dissertation aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving nature of Turkish foreign policy, specifically the relations with the Middle East, by exploring in details actions in the Syrian crisis. The Turkish quest for influence in the region and wider became evident through the investigation of historical facts. As a country with such ambitious aspirations, in order to attain its goals, Ankara employed two different approaches in foreign policy. In this regard, the different employed modes of action are examined: initially, friendly and cooperative behaviour, luring desired outcomes, and later on, engagement in hostile behaviour. This approach helps pinpoint the changes that have occurred.

The analysis of the internal political situation in Turkey, especially concerns regarding threats to undermine the government, national security matters and undertaken reforms of the system provided a thorough understanding of issues that shape foreign policy. The role of the country in the international community, the successor of the once glorious Ottoman Empire, could not be reduced to a mere actor on the sidelines. This has been the goal of all incumbent governments and leaders since the establishment of the modern republic; the only difference is in the approach that has been used.

The exploration in detail of the Syrian case provided indispensable information to comprehend the evolution of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East. Direct military involvement was not the intended course of action. However, the perception of an imminent Kurdish threat, which could have graver repercussions for the country, superseded the costs of engagement in military efforts. An increasingly centralized style of leadership provided another right condition for stauncher action to firmly overcome insecurity. Unfolding events in the region proved that Turkey is not the sole or principal actor in the Syrian crisis. Turkish interventions in Syria have disrupted the balance of power that had been achieved in the region, on the way alienating international stakeholders, and at the same time raising questions and concerns for other countries in the region.

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