The Transformation of the Republic's Status in the International System

NATIONAL AND STATE IDENTITY IN TURKEY

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Preface

This book is an account of Turkey's transformed national and state identity. The book is theoretical in the sense that it underscores the importance of utilizing the concept of "identity" analytically in order to explain an empirical phenomenon, Turkey's changed foreign policy, and the concomitant change of Turkey's position in the international system. The analysis is based on the idea that a state identity is composed of two parts—namely, national identity and the position enabled by the international states system. In this sense, the concept of state identity is here understood as a heuristic concept linking together two levels of explanation: the domestic and the systemic. The argument that Turkey's state identity has been transformed thus requires demonstrating how this transformation is the result of changes in constitutive parts, national identity, and the international system.

Many books have been written during the last decade about the changes brought by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP) government in Turkey during its long rule. These previous studies have brought to light many important issues. However, there are two aspects that have, in my view, been neglected, ignored, or misrepresented, both having significant consequences. First, in the dominant account of a change brought by the AKP, the question of "what was there before" has not been answered adequately. Second, even though the previous studies do point out that changes in the international system after the Cold War have stimulated changes in Turkey, the link between the changes in Turkey's national identity brought by the AKP regime and the structural changes in the international system has remained inadequately addressed. This study tries to improve our understanding of that linkage. It does so by analyzing the changes in Turkey's national identity with the concepts and tools provided by a constructivist International Relations theory.

Thiss book observes that the recurrent reading of Turkey's republican history, one that emphasizes the struggle between an allegedly omnipotent Kemalist state and the weak society comprising mainly conservative Muslims, does not correspond to reality. The result of that problematic interpretation of history has been the inability to comprehend why and how the AKP's Islamic identity politics fails to create a pluralist society in Turkey. Of equal importance, this book demonstrates how the dominant Islamic-conservative national identity and the ability to engage in a more

proactive and independent foreign policy enabled by the current international system have together produced a transformed state identity that emphasizes Turkey's role as the leading country of the Islamic world.

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ONE
Introduction

To start with, think about our world that is allegedly increasingly global, interdependent, and unequal. Then think about the current international "order" composed of one superpower and several, declining or emerging, regional semipowers. After this, you might end up reflecting on the merits and faults of various theories of the academic discipline called International Relations (IR), from the allegedly dominant realist-liberal synthesis to constructivism and globalization studies. Within the overall "grand canvas" that is provided by these several descriptions of the contemporary world, you can point your finger on a certain spot on the map in front of you and start to wonder how this particular state entity at the same time constitutes, and is itself constituted by, the overall canvas. However, the imagined canvas depicting the world is best defined as a cubistic painting, because the theories and concepts we use are actually depicting the same object from various angles at the same time. Nevertheless, the map indicating the borders of different states is a useful starting point, after which you can start to compose different models and schemas of how these state entities relate to each other. In this study, the finger points to the Republic of Turkey. This way of putting it is, of course, already a choice, preferring a state-centric approach instead of alternative perspectives (of these, see, for example, Clark 1999; Robinson 1998).

Our starting point is thus at least an initial assumption according to which it is still meaningful to embark on an analysis that concentrates on one particular actor or component in the overall picture—which is, of course, more of a never-ending movie than a still photo. But let us leave open by now the question of whether it is, in a strong sense, adequate to speak about the state entity as an actor of world politics. One option would be to follow Alexander Wendt (1999), who asserts that we can

compare human society with an international system, and assume that there can only be a "states system" if there are states in the same sense that there can only be a human society if there are people, and, further, that in this sense states can be conceptualized as purposive actors similar to humans. This could say something about the present study in terms of its relationship to the structural type (emphasizing systemic level instead of unit/agent level) of analysis, but I want to leave that open as well. Suffice it to say at this point that Turkey is in this study conceived as an actor in international relations, but the question of how this "actorness" is constituted needs to be seen as part of the research problem.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE DISCOURSE OF A "NEW TURKEY"

The present book is definitely not the first one ever written on Turkey's recent transformation. As a matter of fact, during the last ten years, a wide array of studies has given vivid and highly valuable interpretations about the country's new determinants, whether economic, political, or social, as well as how these all have affected each other (Çağaptay 2014; Buğra and Savaşkan 2014; Keyman and Gumuscu 2014; White 2013; Hale and Özbudun 2010; Atasoy 2009; Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009; Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2006; Morris 2005). The overall common aspect of this otherwise heterogeneous group of previous study has been the idea of an emergence of a "New Turkey," and thus the assertion that, in both its domestic and its foreign policies, Turkey has, since the incumbent Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) came to power in 2002, almost reinvented itself. Further, within the overall observation of a "New Turkey," the most central aspect connecting most, if not all, of these previous studies is alleged democratization, usually understood as the result of mainly three interrelated issues: the annihilation of the army's political role, the empowerment of devout Muslims, and the related issue of renegotiation of Turkey's national identity. Indeed, the rise of Islamic identity politics ever since the 1980s, as well as the economic restructuring producing the material basis for the empowerment of the Anatolian middle classes, rightly observed as the main contributor to the increasing salience of this identity politics, has already been very eloquently analyzed.

But I firmly believe there are some important aspects that these previous studies do not reflect upon. The first thing is that if we agree that Turkey has changed a lot during the last decade or so, the question of "what was there before" becomes immediately crucial. In this study, I claim that the interpretation of Turkey's political history that seems to justify the idea of a significant change in many previous studies needs to be problematized. So this study argues that the dictum, found behind many previous studies, of an "omnipotent Kemalist state repressing the

weak society" does not work, and that because of this, the democratization process many analysts have attached to the AKP regime needs to be reconsidered as well. That is to say, it is not enough to just observe the recent authoritarian tendencies in Turkey and claim that the AKP suddenly changed from democratic to more authoritarian, and that its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has become too power hungry. This sort of argumentation implies that once Erdoğan's era at some point comes to an end, Turkey's democratization will continue from where it had allegedly arrived around 2005. This study aims to demonstrate that the whole democratization discourse, at least in its current, dominant form, is built on shallow grounds.

The second, equally important, reason to write yet another book on Turkey's recent transformation relates to theories and perspectives. That is, even though many of the previous studies acknowledge that changes in the international system have stimulated changes in Turkey, this is not analyzed in any detail. Here the purpose is to do precisely that. The book tries to investigate transformations within Turkey so that the emphasis is still on major domestic developments, but these domestic developments are here analyzed with the tools and concepts provided by the International Relations theory. I believe this double strategy, to reevaluate some of the paradigmatic assumptions concerning Turkey's political history and the simultaneous discussion of Turkey's transformation through the tools and conceptualizations of (mainly constructivist) IR theory, can deepen our understanding about how much has changed, and in what sense, within Turkey and, most of all, in its relationship to the external world during the last ten years. This book is theoretical in the sense that it underscores the importance of analyzing Turkey's transformation by problematizing certain concepts, such as the "state," "actorness," and "identity" within, at least as how I understand it, a broadly constructivist IR approach.

This study is about how the interests, goals, intentions, and policies of Turkey come about, what sort of process defines these goals and intentions, and about what they are. In order to investigate this, this study analyzes the domestic (unit-level) and international (systemic-level) factors, emphasis being, however, on the former. This emphasis, on the other hand, stems from the underlying assumption that a state should not be seen as an independently existing entity, but rather a coalition of forces (human actors) that hold the relevant resources to monopolize legitimate coercive apparatuses at any given moment. One important, though not the only, reason for making this assumption is that it enables me to take a critical stance toward the above-mentioned dominant feature in the scholarship on Turkey—namely, the idea of an "omnipotent Kemalist state" repressing the weak society. This is why this study concentrates more on domestic politics in explaining Turkey's foreign policy behavior. However, as I try to demonstrate, this does not mean we can

simply abandon the systemic level—the international states system—because domestic factors (culture, political system, interest groups, and competing ideologies) are constituted at least partly by the systemic level.

Having argued that we should come up with an approach that does not reproduce the idea of an omnipotent Kemalist Turkish state repressing a weak society, I nevertheless think it is fruitful to analyze a phenomenon that can be called "Turkey's transformed state identity" and the resulting vision of Turkey's new, allegedly global role. What is meant by a "transformed state identity," and, more importantly, what is the worth of such a formulation in explaining Turkey's role in the world, can only be addressed by looking at the ideological struggles within Turkey during the last decade, and in this sense coming up with a unit-level analysis. However, the systemic level has constitutive power not only to foreign policy but also to those domestic factors that in my view are crucial in explaining Turkey's new assertive foreign policy.

Ultimately, then, the research problem can be defined by asking how Turkey's new state identity is being constructed, both domestically and internationally. In other words, the research agenda can be formulated by asking: What are the characteristics, traits, and mechanisms of the current international system that induce and enable Turkey to conduct a more expansive, proactive, and self-confident foreign policy? In the more theoretical language of the constructivist approach, this is about asking how the structure within which actors act constitutes the actor's identity, interest, and goals. Thus we see that there really is no stable canvas against which to analyze Turkey's new foreign policy: all seemingly stable entities often seen as the country's relevant external environment—the EU, the Middle East regional system, as well as the international states system as a whole—are in fact in the process of constant "becoming," in a mutually constituting, intertextual form. As those readers familiar with the internal theoretical distinctions of the International Relations discipline can observe from all of this, my approach is more or less inspired by neoclassical realism and constructivism (on how neoclassical realism absorbs constructivist insights, see Sterling-Folker 2009). I do not want to declare myself as a partisan of any theoretical school—it just seems to be the case that what I think is a fruitful perspective in general terms becomes closer to these IR approaches than any of the alternatives. However, if we exclude what I believe is a highly implausible claim that national interests are always pregiven or unproblematic, there is very little said in this study that could be seen as contradictory to basic realist assumptions.

The European Union, and, more generally, Europe's place in the world, more or less inevitably functions as one of the main configurations of that global canvas within which Turkey is also painted. This is so because the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 in order to become a European nation-state. Europe was definitely seen as Turkey's

destiny, even though European great powers of the time, Britain and France, were also perceived as a threat. Recent decades have witnessed an enormous debate concerning the "real" intentions of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, including polemics concerning his attitudes toward the West, Islam, and modernization. In my view his public statements explicitly confirm that he wanted the newly established Republic of Turkey to become similar to the modern European nation-states. In his famous speech from 1927 (the *Nutuk*), two issues are presented as the most important in this respect: securing Turkey's independence and ending the political role of religion. One of the most relevant statements in the great speech in this respect is the following:

> The Ottoman state, the sultan, the caliph, the government, these had all become meaningless concepts. Whose independence was to be saved? In this situation what could be considered as the right decision? Gentlemen, in this situation there was only one possible way to proceed. That was the creation of a totally new, in every aspect independent Turkish state, based on the principle of national sovereignty. . . . Later on, attempting to restore the Ottoman lineage and state would have been a tremendous offence against the Turkish nation. Because, no matter how determinedly the nation had fought for its freedom, its independence would have been under constant threat with the sultanate still in place. . . . And what comes to the caliph, was not this entirely ridiculous figure within a world civilization enlightened by science and technology? (Atatürk 2006, 16–17)

At the time, Western Europe was the brightest example of this new civilization that Atatürk wanted Turkey to become part of, which is why Europe was conceptualized as Turkey's destiny. Subsequently, after the Second World War, the main threat was the Soviet Union, which resulted in Turkey seeking (and, in 1952, finally managing) to secure its place within the Cold War Western security alliance: NATO. However, ever since the founding of the Republic, Turkey's European vocation has been contested. As this study demonstrates, today we have come to a point where that relationship is being thoroughly renegotiated. In a very significant sense, Turkey's transformed state identity is the end result of that renegotiation process.

Today's Europe is, of course, very different from the one that existed at the time of the founding of the Republic of Turkey. Following the devastating horrors of the Second World War, an integration project unprecedented in modern world history has taken place, resulting in a political union that has challenged all theories of international relations based on the primacy of sovereign nation-states. However, it is also true that in today's world the idea of the European Union's ability to spread its liberal democratic model to its eastern and southern neighborhood has become increasingly hard to maintain. For a long time, the EU has entertained an idea of a "European space," or "polity," where the EU is able to

promote its political and economic model to its eastern and southern neighborhoods (Delanty and Rumford 2005). An entirely new concept, "normative power" was formulated at the beginning of the 2000s to depict how the EU, irrespective of its contested international role or its ambiguous ontological status, nevertheless was able to influence other actors. In this sense, speaking about "normative power Europe" was intended to illustrate that with the EU we had come face to face with not only a specific kind of entity but also one that had a specific aim—namely, the setting of standards. Thus, the EU as a normative power refers to a power that exerts influence through norms themselves (Manners 2002).

But seen from today's perspective, it is rather obvious that Russia is definitely not willing to play the game with the rules established by the EU, and at the same time Turkey has become a country that no longer sees itself as being part of a European sphere of influence but as a civilizational center country that itself shapes the new regional and even global order, sometimes in cooperation with the EU, but just as often against it. During the last ten years, we have seen almost an endless array of commentaries, articles, and full-scale books about Turkey's new international role and its evolving relationship with the Western world. The literature assessing the merits and faults of Turkey's EU membership is a subsection of this literature. Ultimately, whether or not the authors themselves are aware of it, or explicitly refer to it, all this writing stems from the fact that Turkey's revolutionary modernization process starting in 1908, in what was then still the Ottoman Empire, was a crucial event inaugurating world historical transformation in the Middle East and in the Islamic societies' relationship to Western modernity (Halliday 2005). That process is, of course, an ongoing one. Currently so much is at stake, because where Turkey is heading—becoming a liberal democratic Muslim-majority country and even an EU member, or, alternatively, reasserting and reemphasizing its civilizational difference from the Western world and even affirming the West as its counter image—is certainly of great significance to the twenty-first-century international order as a whole.

The last ten years have witnessed new global trends that have induced many analysts and researchers to argue that, pure military power excluded, we are moving from a U.S.-dominated unipolar world, established at the beginning of the 1990s, to an increasingly multipolar international order. As noted in a *BBC News Magazine* article on January 6, 2014, one of the slogans of this discussion has been the "rising" or "emerging" powers, a group of states that because of their new, primarily economic, power have challenged the "old" powers, such as the United States, Japan, and the European countries (on more of this, see Hurrell 2013; Ikenberry and Wright 2008; Cooper and Antkiewicz 2008). States often mentioned within this context have been Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS countries), but recently also Mexico, Indonesia, Ni-

geria, and Turkey (MINT countries). However, all of these countries have in fact very little in common—the only true common factor is that they are "non-Western" and that, Russia and China excluded, they have really good inner demographics—they are all going to see a rise in the number of people eligible to work relative to those not working. But demographics and an economic boom for a decade or so does not make any country a new global power. A much more detailed analysis of any of these countries is thus required, such that investigates the domestic political and cultural preconditions of an alleged emerging power status and analyzes how these factors are constituted in relation to existing global structures.

To some degree, this study aims to conduct such an analysis on Turkey. The aim here is not to scrutinize the main reasons for Turkey's recent rising significance based on a decade of economic boom, but rather to turn to politics and ideological struggle in order to investigate what has changed in terms of Turkey's international position. Further, I take the enduring and often complicated relationship between Turkey and Europe as the main focus, as I believe this relationship is crucial in defining Turkey's place in the world. However, I believe the Turkey-Europe relationship needs to be positioned within the global context, so that this relationship is analyzed within the evolving arena of world politics. This immediately reveals that we need to place both Turkey's internal power struggle and its relationship with the international environment into a historical context.

Here we can shortly depict the "material facts" of present-day Turkey in terms of its economy, demography, resources, and military power, after which this study turns to the question of what, actually, is made out of these material facts—how political domestic and international factors increase or decrease Turkey's prospects of becoming a major player in world politics in the foreseeable future and, of even greater importance, what kind of player it is going to be. In traditional realist (or neorealist) IR theory, brute material "capabilities" are all that counts, so that power is ultimately the ability to win wars. The resources most often used as an indicator of national power include the level of military expenditure, gross national product (GNP), the size of the armed forces, size of the territory, and size of the population (Schmidt 2008). So what, as of this writing, are the "critical numbers" in terms of Turkey? Turkey's defense budget in 2014 was around US$18 billion; military strength in terms of its overall firepower capacity, according to Global Firepower Index, was the eighth biggest in the world in 2014 (Global Firepower Index 2015), having, for example, the second largest army within the NATO; Turkey's territory encompasses 780,000 square kilometers, on a strategically highly significant location that unites two continents, Europe and Asia; GNP was around US$820 billion, which makes it the seventeenth biggest in the

world; the population in 2014 was estimated to be around seventy-seven million, making it eighteenth in the world.

So what do these numbers tell us? Not particularly much, one could say, because as has been observed in many occasions, it is difficult if not altogether impossible to decide the criteria for choosing what capabilities are most important and, more importantly, in what circumstances. According to classical realist thinkers, such as E. H. Carr, power is ultimately indivisible, but for the purposes of discussion it could be divided into three categories: (1) military power; (2) economic power; and (3) power over opinion (Schmidt 2008). In any case, the eighth biggest firepower capacity, if we concentrate on realists' favorite marker of power as an ability to win wars, makes Turkey at least a leading regional power—no Middle Eastern state is stronger than Turkey in terms of firepower, and there are only seven more powerful states in the whole world. In addition to military capabilities, power in world politics is closely related to the economic sphere, and the talk about the "emerging powers" has mostly underscored how states such as Brazil and China are increasingly challenging the economic dominance of the Western powers. In this respect, Turkey's power and ability to influence other states has definitely increased. As Soner Çağaptay (2014, 10) puts it, "due to its sheer size, with 75 million citizens and a $1.3 trillion economy, Turkey is better positioned than any other Muslim-majority country to potentially become the twenty-first century's first Muslim world power."

Irrespective of what we think about Turkey's potentiality to become a world power, the assertion that it would be such with the "Muslim" label now sounds completely natural to many of us. This, however, only demonstrates how much has changed in recent decades. For the first generation of republican political elites, as well as for many in much later decades, it would have been astonishing and even insulting to be seen and identified as a specifically Muslim state and nation. There is thus something extraordinary in the common way of speaking that defines a state as specifically Muslim, or lists persons as the "500 most influential Muslims in the world" (see http://themuslim500.com/). Excluding some Catholic theologians and American evangelists, I believe most influential persons in the West would find it extremely odd to be identified as an influential Christian person. Indeed, being seen as a Muslim nation was similarly odd and anachronistic to several generations of Turkish political leaders, because in their eyes a religious identification was something that belonged to a past world and was definitely in contradiction with their wish that Turkey was to be seen as an active member of a modern, universal civilization.

This is just to remind us that what we now have come to perceive as completely natural—Turkey as a Muslim nation—is actually a very recent phenomenon. To this assertion, many commentators would probably ask whether it isn't, in fact, the other way around; wasn't the west-