

How is the AK party shaping Turkey's relations with Syria and the Middle East?

A critical geographical perspective on the AK party's
foreign policy discourse



Tom Heinen

Bachelorthesis Geografie, Planologie en Milieu (GPM)

Radboud University Nijmegen Faculty of Management, August 2012

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Supervisor: Dr. Olivier Kramsch

Foreword

Dear reader,

Before you lies my bachelor thesis, the completion of the bachelor phase of my Human Geography studies. It is an inquiry into the ways in which political discourses influence the relations between countries. This thesis is about how Turkey's neighborhood with Syria and the rest of the Middle East is discursively constructed.

After three years of studying Human Geography I have become more and more interested in the area where geography meets politics. I think that in this thesis I have finally been able to study that which interests me the most. Although it has taken me a bit longer than anticipated, partly because of changes in theory and methodology, I think this has resulted in a more interesting and satisfying end product.

I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Olivier Kramsch for guiding me through the process of writing and rewriting my research question, as well as helping me choose the right theory and methodology to answer this question. In addition, I want to thank Anton de Hoogh for reading my thesis and providing me with constructive criticism and feedback. I also want to thank Barbara Slavin for providing the recordings of her interview with Yasar Yakis.

Finally, I want to wish you a pleasant time reading this thesis.

Tom Heinen

Nijmegen, August 2012

Summary

In recent years Turkey has become a regional power in the Middle East. Ankara's soft power has greatly increased due to Turkey's successful combination of economic growth, democracy and Islam. Turkey has been proposed as an example for the Middle East, especially since the start of the Arab Spring. Ankara's growing soft power has changed the way in which Turkey is perceived in its neighborhood. At the same time, the government of the Justice and Development party (hereafter AKP or AK party) has changed the way Turkey approaches its neighborhood.

This thesis studies the ways in which the government of AK party has shaped Turkey's relations with the Middle East and in particular Syria. The AK party has been in power since 2002 and has been the dominant political factor in society since then. With the rise to power of the AKP a new conception of Turkish foreign policy was established, with a renewed interest in the Middle East. This renewed interest means that Turkey is influencing its region in new and unprecedented ways. It is argued that the AKP discourse has played an important part in this new orientation. The most prominent example of how Turkey's relations with the Middle East have changed is probably Syria. Moreover, the Syrian uprising is the most pressing issue in the Middle East right now. Because of these reasons this thesis pays specific attention to the AKP's influence on Turkey's relations with Syria. Therefore, the research question in this thesis is as follows:

'How is the AK party shaping Turkey's relations with Syria and the Middle East?'

The goal of this thesis is to create an understanding about how Turkey is shaping its neighborhood, by analyzing the discourse of the most dominant political force in the country, the AK party. The focus is on Turkey's relations with Syria, albeit within the wider context of the Middle East.

To answer the central research question a critical geographic perspective is adopted, using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to uncover the power relations and geographical assumptions hidden in the AKP's discourse. This is combined with an analysis into the background of Turkish-Syrian relations. For Fairclough it is not enough to just analyze a text, it is also necessary to identify the links between a text and the wider social practice in which that text is produced and consumed. The AK party discourse is both constitutive and constituted by this social practice.

Discourse analysis is applied to a selection of texts by a selection of key personalities in the AKP establishment. The texts are analyzed on three levels: the level of text, the level of discursive practice and the level of social practice. These are the three dimensions that constitute a

communicative event. They respectively cover the formal features of a text, the processes of production and consumption of texts, and the relations of the text with other social practices.

Adopting a critical geopolitical perspective and using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis has resulted in a deeper understanding of how Turkey's relations with Syria are discursively constituted.

As the single party in government, the AK party has played an important role in shaping Turkey's neighborhood. The decline of military power in Turkey's society and bureaucracy enabled the AKP to proclaim its own foreign policy. Its foreign policy has made Turkey an active player in the region, shaping the dynamics of many conflicts in the Middle East and changing the balance of power in the region. Under the leadership of the AKP, Turkey has improved ties with Syria while relations with Israel worsened, a development that has left Israel without regional allies. At the same time Turkey's close relations with Syria gave Assad a way out of its isolation from the West. Generally, the AKP government has shown that it supports democracy and human rights in the Middle East, even though there is room for improvement in Turkey as well.

However, the discourse analysis has uncovered that the geographic assumptions within the AKP discourse are at times simplistic and utopian. Furthermore, the analysis in this thesis has shown that the relationship between Turkey and Syria is also shaped by other factors outside the AKP discourse. There are non-discursive factors that have shaped and restrained the possibilities of Turkey in the Middle East. Such factors are for example the end of the Cold War, the Arab Spring and the US led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Turkish society has become more democratic and it has become easier for advocacy groups to influence foreign policy. Business associations, for example, have been an important force in promoting economic ties with Syria. This indicates that there are also other discursive forces that, although they are not as dominant as the AKP, have an influence on Turkey's policy towards the Middle East.

Thus it can be concluded that there are also limits to the AKP government's ability to shape Turkey's neighborhood. In the case of Syria there were hopes that, by using its soft power, Turkey could persuade Assad to take constructive steps towards a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict. The situation looked promising. First of all, there were good relations between the two nation's leaders, Bashar al-Assad and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. There was no significant conflict between the two countries, due to Turkey's policy of zero problems. Secondly, economic ties between the two countries had grown rapidly during the AKP's tenure. Thirdly, Turkey had been a mediator between Syria and other countries and it kept ties with Syria when it was being isolated by the West. Because of these conditions, it would seem that Turkey has a reasonable chance of

shaping the direction Assad is taking in Syria. However, as of yet, the AKP leaders have not been able to convince Assad of stopping the violent suppression of protests in his country. Relations between Ankara and Damascus have gradually worsened, ending in allegations back and forth between Assad and Erdoğan.

The AKP politicians know that Turkey alone cannot end the conflict in Syria. Generally, the conflict is considered as a complex and important issue. The discourse analysis indicates that there are some differences as to what the main causes of the conflict are, leading to different solutions for the Syrian issue. Part of the AKP establishment thinks that the person of Assad is the main problem. Consequently, they think that the process of democratization can be carried out once Assad is gone. Others think that the problem of Syria is to be found more in the structure of Syrian society, particularly the dominance of the Baath party. In their opinion, getting rid of Assad while maintaining the Baath structure will not solve the problem in Syria. According to this line of thought, Assad could stay in place provided that he makes reforms.

Whatever direction the AKP government will take in the future, it is clear that it cannot bring about change in Syria on its own. It needs support from other countries, in particular Iran and Russia, since they are the most important supporters of the Assad regime. Furthermore, the AKP needs supports from the Turkish society for its foreign policy. It might also be wise to keep talking with the Syrian regime, as is argued by some AKP politicians. Simultaneously it needs to work with the Syrian opposition as well, in order to sketch the outlines of the new Syria. This is by no means an easy task for the AKP government. However, as Turkey is becoming a 'wise-country'¹, a country that takes up its responsibilities in the international arena, these are the objectives the AKP should pursue.

¹ The concept of 'Wise country' is coined by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in his text: *'Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring'* (Davutoglu, 2012). It means something like being a responsible member of the international community, contributing to the resolution of regional and global issues.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In recent years Turkey has become a regional power in the Middle East. Particularly after the Arab Spring Turkey has become an example for the Middle East. Its successful combination of economic growth, democracy and Islam is unique and is by many commentators considered as a model for other countries. Ankara's growing soft power has also changed the way in which Turkey is perceived in its neighborhood.

While the uprisings in the Middle East continue, people of different political movements often agree that Turkey could serve as role model for the Arab countries (Ülgen, 2011) . Since 1998 Turkey has adopted a different stance in its policy towards her Arab neighbors. Turkey's attitude is one of mediation and reducing tensions with neighbors, the so-called 'zero problems with neighbors' strategy. Ankara regards itself as one of the regional centers of power and because of the rapid changes in the region it is Turkey's duty to assume responsibility in the region. In Turkey's foreign policy outline (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011) it is said that Turkey has a certain amount of economic and democratic development that Arab countries have not. Turkey has taken it upon himself to lead the region into an era of peace and prosperity.

One of the most important success stories in the past years has been the improvement in relations between Ankara and Damascus. The relationship between Turkey and Syria has changed dramatically in course of just 15 years. After 1998, a period of undeclared war was followed by a time of growing economic and diplomatic cooperation between 2000 and 2010. However, with the arrival of the Arab Spring in Syria, Turkish-Syrian relations have taken a turn for the worse.

1.2 Societal and scientific relevance

With the escalation of violence in Syria Turkey has taken a more and more critical stance towards the regime in Damascus and denounced the violent crackdowns on opposition groups. It has also supported Syrian opposition groups by giving them a place to assemble on Turkish territory. In addition, they have proposed the establishment of humanitarian aid corridors, to enable medical care, drugs and food supplies to reach the victims of the victims of conflict in Syria (van den Dool, 2011). Turkey's attitude towards the Arab Spring is an important factor in the Middle East because of the economic, cultural and political influence it has in the region. Over the last few years the Turkish government has drastically changed its policy towards the Middle East and it likely that this has an effect on the region.

Due to the outbreak of the Arab Spring, relations with Syria have changed more dramatically than those with any other country in Turkey's neighborhood. Therefore this case-study will provide the most insight into the way in which Turkey shapes its neighborhood and the way in which this has changed over the years. In addition, it might give some clues about what the future holds in store for Turkey and its neighborhood. This is important because the fate of Turkey is becoming more and more important for the Middle East and the rest of the world.

This thesis will contribute to the growing debate about Turkey's role as a model for other countries in the region. There have already been studies into the degree in which Turkey can or cannot be a model for different countries (Al-Azm, 2011). Other studies have focused on the different pillars of the Turkish model (Kirişci, 2011) and how the Turkish model can be operationalized (Ülgen, 2011). However, there have not yet been any studies into the position of the Justice and Development party (hereafter AKP or AK party) in this debate. As the dominant political force in Turkey for the last decade the AKP has been able to formulate Turkey's foreign policy. They have a stake in how Turkey is perceived in the region and they can take advantage of the fact that Turkey is seen as a model. The contribution from this thesis is that it analyses the power relations behind the AKP discourse and the way in which this has enabled them to influence their neighborhood.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The goal of this thesis is to create an understanding about the way in which Turkey is shaping its neighborhood. To reach a thorough understanding of Turkish foreign policy it is important to analyze the discourse of the most dominant political factor in Turkey, the Justice and Development party (AK party). The AK party has been in power since 2002; in 2011 it was reelected for a third term. With the rise to power of the AK party a new conception of Turkish foreign policy was established. This new orientation is sometimes, by critics, perceived as an axis shift from West to East (Cornell, 2012). Others think of it as a natural re-orientation of Turkey and reconciliation with its cultural and historical ties in the region. This is the explanation by the proponents of Turkey's new foreign policy (Davutoglu, 2012). Politics aside, it is clear that Turkey's new foreign policy has a profound effect on its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. The goal of this thesis is to gain a further understanding on the workings of this process. Therefore, the central research question of this thesis is as follows:

How is the AK party shaping Turkey's relations with Syria and the Middle East?

Because of the limited scale of this thesis the focus will be on the way in which Turkey is shaping

it's neighborhood with Syria. This does not mean that other relevant matters will be neglected. Rather, they play a less dominant role in the empirical parts of this study. Hopefully, the assessment of the AK party's approach towards Syria will offer an understanding of the general approach of the AK party towards the rest of the Middle East. The reasons of choosing Syria as the focal point of this inquiry are self-evident. The current unrest in Syria is probably the most pressing foreign policy issue for the Turkish government today. In addition, Turkey and Syria share a long border as well as long-standing cultural and economic ties, dating back to the times of the Ottoman Empire. It is arguably one of the most important neighbors of Turkey, if not the most important.

1.4 Structure

The research question will be answered from a critical geopolitical perspective. Critical geopolitics seeks to uncover the power relations behind taken for granted geopolitical representations of the world. The AK party's foreign policy agenda is not pre-given or a natural result of Turkey's geography, it is an ideological construction. A critical geographical perspective aims to reveal how these ideas are constructed and how they influence Turkey's neighborhood. Critical discourse analysis is the instrument that will be used to uncover these ideological constructions. By analyzing texts by a number of key personalities in the AKP establishment it will become clear how the AK party's foreign policy is shaping Turkey's relations with Syria. The theory and methodology of critical geography and critical discourse analysis will be discussed further in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 will give an overview of the development of Turkish-Syrian relations since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. There will be specific attention for the developments since the Arab Spring, Turkey's official foreign policy and the domestic situation in Turkey. These are all important factors in the social practice in which texts are produced. This will lay the foundation for Chapter 4, in which critical discourse analysis will be applied to a selection of texts by key members of the AK party. These texts are a combination of interviews and articles related to the case of Turkey and Syria. The conclusion contains a selection of the most important findings in the thesis and answers the research question of how the AK party is shaping Turkey's relations with Syria and the Middle East. In addition there will be room for a discussion of the possible strategies for improvement of Turkey's foreign policy. This will be followed by a reflection on the research and writing process which resulted in this thesis.

Chapter 2: Theory and Methodology

2.1 Critical Geopolitics

Critical geopolitics is a stream of thought which emerged twenty years ago as a critique on the traditional geopolitical reasoning of the Cold War (Dalby, 2010). It showed how Cold War politics was based on binary geographical assumptions about East and West, development and underdevelopment (Kuus, n.d.). The objective of critical geopolitics can be described as *“disrupting the hegemonic practices of statecraft, challenging the taken for granted specifications of the world in various mappings by elites and by academics”* (Dalby, 2010, p. 281). It is a turn away from classical geopolitics, which is a statist, Eurocentric, balance of power conception of world politics (Kuus, n.d.). Classical geopolitics conceptualizes politics as a natural struggle for power and resources between nations and states. As a result classical geopolitics has for a long time justified conflict between states (Kuus, n.d.). Ó Tuathail calls critical geopolitics the starting point of a new geopolitics, which is to be less burdened by nationalism and more committed to cosmopolitan justice (in Jones & Sage, 2009).

Critical geopolitics is not a coherent and streamlined theory, but rather a loose collection of critiques on the taken-for-grantedness of geographical representations in geopolitics. Inspiration has come from feminism, popular culture and affect and emotional geographies among other poststructuralist theories (Dalby, 2010; Kuus, n.d.). It investigates the geographical assumptions behind the making of world politics and studies the practices by which political actors spatialize international politics (Kuus, n.d.). There is however no agreement on what the term ‘critical geopolitics’ actually means and how it should be put into practice. According to some it has an identity problem and is it unclear what the key subjects, theoretical contributions and core methodology in critical geopolitics are. Furthermore, the ‘critical’ in geopolitics has too often been restricted to deconstructing discourses, doing nothing to change the world into a better place (Dalby, 2010; Jones & Sage, 2009).

According to one of the pioneers of critical geopolitics, Gearoid Ó Tuathail, critical geopolitics is *“no more than a general gathering place for various critiques of the multiple geopolitical discourses and practices that characterize modernity”* (in Jones & Sage, 2009, p. 316). This corresponds with Hyndman and Mamadouh’s assessment that critical geopolitics is not so much a theory of how space and politics intersect, but rather a mode of interrogating aimed at exposing the foundations of knowledge production, geopolitical discourses and the power relations that constitute them. The influence of philosophers like Foucault and Derrida is evident here (in Jones & Sage, 2009). These philosophical influences will be described in more detail below.

Initially the objectives of critical geopolitics were to recover the subjectivity in practices that are represented as objective. Relations of power, gender and culture are part of geopolitics. Furthermore, it sought to recover the 'messy practices' in international politics and to do away with state-centric readings of world politics (in Jones & Sage, 2009).

Critical geopolitics gained momentum after the Cold War. It started primarily as a challenge to American military power and the use of it in the Cold War. After the fall of the Iron Curtain the world was no longer divided into two static blocks, geopolitical divides became fluid. The binary logic of East versus West no longer seemed relevant (Dalby, 2010). Even though the global geopolitical environment had changed significantly, in many instances the dominant discourse was not adapted to this new geopolitical reality. Geopolitical actors like former US president G.W. Bush have continued to use binary logics of reasoning when characterizing conflict. According to Hyndman (in Jones & Sage, 2009), Bush's logic classifies people as being either with the US or against the US. Hyndman argues that current modes of conduct in the international system are still based on the post-Westphalian rules that were devised for inter-state warfare. This system no longer corresponds with the current geopolitical context, which consists of more complex geographical connections within and across the boundaries of nation states (in Jones & Sage, 2009).

Starting out as a critique of traditional geopolitics and advocate of change, critical geopolitics has, according to Dalby (2010), almost become a synonym for contemporary geopolitics. According to Dalby the focus on critique and deconstruction has been "*diluted and stretched*" (p.281) because the label of critical geography has been applied to too wide an array of subjects. Therefore, the focus on critique of the geographic discourses used in legitimizing foreign policy, war and violence is often lost.

2.1.1 Theoretical influences.

One of the important influences on critical geopolitics has been the work of Edward Said. His influence can be seen in the critique of critical geographers on traditional Anglo-American geopolitical writing. This writing has been based on a discourse that sees the West as under constant threat by the East (Dodds & Sidaway, 1994). Even though the geopolitical landscape has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, orientalist traditions in depicting the 'other' have persevered, especially concerning the Middle East (Dalby, 2010). Critical geopolitics aims to destabilize those simplistic geographic binaries like 'us versus them' and 'inside versus outside' (Kuus, n.d.).

Other important sources of inspiration are the works of Jacques Derrida and, more explicitly,

Michel Foucault (Hyndman, in Jones & Sage, 2009), on which Said has build his theory of orientalism (Dodds & Sidaway, 1994). Dodds & Sidaway call Foucault “*the single most important influence on the existing literature of critical geopolitics*” (p. 516). Critical geopolitics has been influenced by Foucauldian genealogy in that it approaches power “*not only as coercive and disabling but also as productive and enabling*” (Kuus, n.d., p. 3). The explicitly Foucauldian underpinnings of critical geopolitics are what differentiates this line of thought from other traditions in critical scholarship. Power relations are not just imposed on political subjects; political subjects come into being through and within power relations (Kuus, n.d.). Foucault’s influence has led to a focus on the role of geography in political discourse. Geographical knowledge is both the input and the result of power relations. This way geography lost its pretence of neutrality, it was no longer an objective and given fact, it became part discourse and power (Kuus, n.d.). The importance of discourse in geopolitics can be characterized by the following quote by Tuathail and Agnew (1992):

*“Geopolitics, some will argue, is, first and foremost, about **practice** [emphasis in original] and not discourse [...]. Such practice is certainly geopolitical but it is only through discourse that the building up of a navy or the decision to invade a foreign country is made meaningful and justified. It is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign-policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically-infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful”.* (p. 191)

Thus, geopolitics cannot exist without discourse. Only through discourse can geopolitical practices be justified or made meaningful. It is the task of critical geographers to uncover the reasoning behind such practices, for example through critical discourse analysis. This will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

2.1.2 Different themes in critical geography.

A number of scholars have studied the continued presence of Cold War logic in geopolitics and the binary understandings of power. This is also notable in the discourse of the ‘war on terror’, as noted earlier. Critical geopolitics argues that state power is not limited to the territory of the state; it is also exercised in different space-spanning networks. The focus is not on the material (re)sources of state power but on how state power is discursively produced (Kuus, n.d.).

Critical geography is also interested in identity politics and the processes by which political subjects and identities are formed through the geographical demarcation of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Geographical claims about (cultural) borders and homelands are central to the constitution of

national identities. International borders are not lines representing already existing political entities; they are instead the result 'bordering practices'. It is at the borders that practices of othering take place, thus nations are made at the borders, not the other way around (Kuus, n.d.).

Kuus (n.d.) also underscores the need to look at how politically charged topics are problematized and used differently by different political actors. Security, identity and foreign policy are such controversial topics. This has to do not only with the substance of these matters but also with the power relations between the different actors, such as the relation between the centre and the periphery (Kuus, n.d.). It is the task of critical geography to look at the different players on the political stage and unveil the power relationships between them.

2.1.3 Intellectuals of statecraft

According to Kuus (n.d.), foreign policy has remained the domain of a concentrated realm of specialized elites. Because of this, a large part of empirical critical geopolitics has focused on the so-called intellectuals of statecraft, those who comment upon, influence and conduct geopolitical activities. They are not only the elected or appointed government officials, but also include academics, journalists and analysts (Kuus, n.d.; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). These people can be located within the government apparatus as well as in universities or think tanks. The intellectuals of statecraft explain foreign politics to domestic audiences (Kuus, n.d.). Intellectuals of statecraft are not a unified group, there can be disagreements and power struggles between government institutions, academics and journalists. It is therefore also important to consider the different contexts in which these actors have come to their specific opinions (Kuus, n.d.). Within larger states, such as Turkey, there are different types of intellectuals of statecraft regarding their institutional setting and style of reasoning (Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Considering Turkey, there are for example clear distinctions between the military elite and the conservative Muslim elite concerning their position towards Turkey's foreign policy.

In order to analyze the formulation of discourse by intellectuals of statecraft in more detail their geopolitical reasoning has been loosely divided in three groups: formal, practical and popular geopolitics (Kuus, n.d.). Formal geopolitics indicates the analysis of international affairs by strategic thinkers and public intellectuals. This type of reasoning works with highly formalized rules of debate and terminology. Practical geopolitics is the reasoning by politicians, academics and analysts, which is more common sense. Popular geopolitics is concerned with the spatialization of politics in the media. Practical politics is the domain of the intellectuals of statecraft and this is also where most of the geopolitical reasoning by the AK party takes place (Kuus, n.d.; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992).

Kuus (n.d.) gives the following reasons as to why critical geopolitical study should include intellectuals of statecraft:

- The influence of intellectuals of statecraft.

Intellectuals of statecraft have the most power to enforce their geopolitical vision on society, they have the most cultural and institutional resources to do so. This does not mean that their vision is adopted by society altogether, it can be shaped and altered by other groups in society. However, their discourses remain the most influential in directing the mainstream conception of international affairs. There are other discourse-shaping powers beyond the state and beyond the intellectuals of statecraft, but they are, in turn, to a large degree influenced by intellectuals of statecraft (Kuus, n.d.).

- The diversity of intellectuals of statecraft.

The category of intellectuals of statecraft is a very broad one which ranges from high-placed foreign policy officials to also specialists in international trade, development aid, international institutions and environmental policy. There are thus multiple forces of authority and legitimacy operating on a geopolitical level at a variety of different sites (Kuus, n.d.; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992).

Another thesis put forward by Ó Tuathail and Agnew is that intellectuals of core states have a disproportionate influence upon the representation of international political space (Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Following this it can be the case that peripheral and semi-peripheral countries adopt the geopolitical reasoning of the hegemon (Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Since Turkey can be said to be a regional hegemon, less powerful countries in the region might be adopting Turkey geopolitical discourse.

2.2 Critical discourse analysis

A discourse is a particular way of understanding and representing the world. According to Popke (as cited in Smith, 2002) it is also a "*play of power*" (p.650) which enforces the particular discourse through the construction of knowledge. Discourses restrain certain possible actions, while they enable other actions. They determine the rules of interpretation and the specialized knowledge and institutions that come with a particular discourse (Smith, 2002). Jorgensen & Philips (2010) identify the following main points which are shared by all discourse analytical approaches:

1. Language is used to create representations of reality and it is through discourse that certain phenomena gain meaning. Representations of reality contribute to the

construction of reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

2. Language consists of multiple systems of discourses. There is not one general system of meaning and meanings can change between discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).
3. It is through discursive practice that discourses can be maintained or transformed (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).
4. This process should be explored by analyzing the specific context of language acts (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

The works of Michel Foucault have been central to the development of discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). As mentioned before he has also been an important source of inspiration for critical geopolitics. Foucault's conception of discourse as relatively rule-bound groups of statements that impose limits on what gives meaning is common in most approaches of discourse analysis. Different regimes of knowledge determine what is true or false, as a result there are only a limited number of statements that could be considered meaningful within a certain discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

However, most contemporary approaches to discourse analysis agree that there can be several different discourses operating in a given time period. In this sense they differ from Foucault who had the tendency to only define one discourse or 'knowledge regime' in a given period (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). Within the context of this thesis this means that although the AKP's ideas about foreign policy might be the dominant discourse in Turkey today, this does not mean that there are no other discourses operating in Turkey or that the AKP's dominance is permanent.

Important for discourse analysis is Foucault's focus on power and knowledge instead of agents and structures. Like discourse, power cannot be ascribed to a single individual or actor but is spread across different social practices. Power is not only oppressive but also productive in that it constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). Power is always connected with knowledge; they can't exist without each other. Therefore power is also tied to discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

2.2.1 Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.

There are different approaches that can be characterized as critical discourse analysis (CDA). They all share the following characteristics (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010):

- The discursive practices in which texts are produced and consumed contribute to the constitution of the social world. However, there are also societal phenomena that are not

of a linguistic-discursive character (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

- There is a dialectical relationship between discourse and other social practices. This means that discourse is not only constitutive of the social world but also constituted by other social practices (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). According to Fairclough there are social structures who were originally part of discourse but have become sedimented, institutionalized and non-discursive (an example is the family).
- Critical discourse analysis studies language use empirically, in its social context (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).
- Discursive practices (re)create unequal power relations (so-called *ideological* effects). The aim of critical discourse analysis is to reveal these unequal power relations and to change society by the way of more equal power relations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

Thus, with regards to the analysis of the texts it is important to analyze both the discursive practice in which unequal power relations are (re)created, and the non-discursive context in which the text is produced. In chapter 3 the setting in which these texts have been produced will be analyzed in more detail.

In this thesis we will use critical discourse analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough. According to Jørgensen & Phillips (2010) Fairclough's is the most developed CDA theory and method for social research.

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is not limited to language, but can also include other forms of semiosis. Semiosis can be described as: "*meaning-making through language, body language, visual images, or any other way of signifying*" (Fairclough,

2001, p. 229). According to Fairclough there are certain structures beyond discourse, such as economic structures. In this sense Fairclough has a more limited conception of discourse than other theorists, such as Laclou & Mouffe, who conceive everything as discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

For Fairclough, discourse has three functions: it contributes to the construction of social identity,

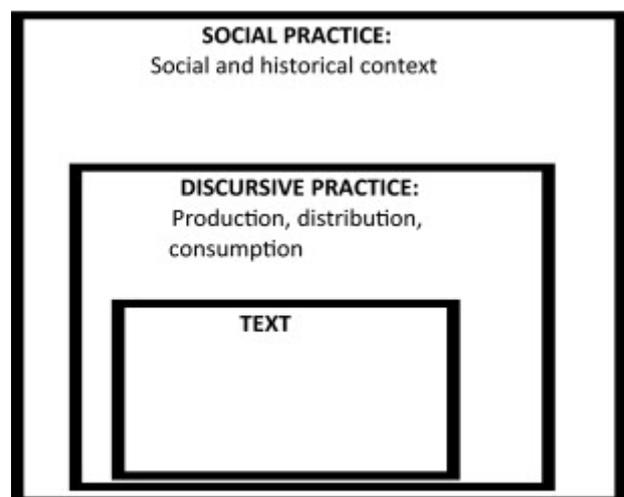


Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis (adapted from Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

the construction of social relations and it has an 'ideational' function which contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and meaning (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

Whenever language is used there is a communicative event which consists of three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice (see figure 1). All these dimensions should be covered when using discourse analysis on a communicative event (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). Each of the dimensions is covered in more detail below.

2.2.2 The level of the text.

Fairclough's model distinguishes between three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice. The analysis of text focuses on the linguistic features of a text. By studying a text it is possible to uncover the ways in which events or social relations are treated in that text and how these construct particular discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). Fairclough (1992) proposes a number of tools to analyze the linguistic characteristics of a text. In this thesis we will use the following selection by Jørgensen & Phillips (2010).

- *Interactional control* is concerned with the relationships between speakers. It asks questions about the selection of topics and the opening and closing of interactions (Fairclough, 1992), in effect the question of who sets the conversational agenda (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). The interactional control settings in a genre represent specific claims about power relations between speakers (Fairclough, 1992).
- *Ethos* deals with the ways in which identities are constructed through language as well as other parts of the body, such as facial expressions or body posture (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). According to Fairclough (1992), ethos functions intertextually. It asks what influences from other genres or discourses are used to create the subjectivity or social identity of those who participate in interactions (Fairclough, 1992).
- *Metaphors* are important in structuring the way we think and act (Fairclough, 1992). By choosing a particular metaphor we also choose a particular way of constructing our reality. Therefore, the selection of metaphors to represent certain phenomena is often part of the struggle over discourse (Fairclough, 1992). It can also be the case that metaphors have become natural to such a degree that people become unaware of them and find it difficult to escape them (Fairclough, 1992).
- *Wording* is the choice of words to convey meaning. Producers have to make choices about the words they choose to convey meaning and consumers have to decide how to

interpret those words (Fairclough, 1992). The meaning of words and the wording of meanings are not fixed, they are socially contested. Different perspectives on the same experience lead to different ways of wording. A change in wording changes the meaning. There can be cases of 'rewording' and 'overwording' (Fairclough, 1992).

- *Grammar*. Transitivity and modality are two important grammatical elements (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). With transitivity the focus is on how events and processes are connected or not with subjects and objects. Modality focuses on the speaker's degree of affinity or affiliation to his or hers statement. The degree of modality has influence on the discursive construction of social relations. Different indicators of modality are truth, permission, intonation and hedging (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010)

2.2.3 The level of the discursive practice.

The way in which texts shape and are shaped by social practice is mediated by the discursive practice. Discursive practice makes up the context in which people produce, consume and interpret texts (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). At the same time, the text and its formal linguistic features influence both the production and the consumption process. It is important for discourse analysis to find out how discursive practices and broader social, economic or cultural developments can be interrelated. A discursive practice can be both a reflection of, and contributing to, societal change (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). An analysis of a discursive practice looks into the way in which a text is produced and consumed. In his own analyses of discursive practices Fairclough focuses on the relations with discourses (interdiscursivity) and other texts (intertextuality) (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

Interdiscursivity is the degree in which a text draws upon different genres, discourses and styles and how these work together in a text (Fairclough, 2003). When the level of interdiscursivity is high this is associated with discursive and thus social change; a low amount of interdiscursivity often corresponds with stagnation (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). Interdiscursivity can also occur in the mixing of genres. Genres are described by Fairclough as the "*specifically discursal aspect of ways of acting and interacting*" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 67). People behave differently in different genres, such as a talk show interview or a newspaper column. However, as Fairclough points out, a communicative event often involves multiple genres, instead of using just one genre (Fairclough, 2003).

Interdiscursivity is a form of *intertextuality*, the way in which texts draw on texts. This will always happen to some degree, but in the case of manifest intertextuality this is done explicitly, for example by citing another text (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). Intertextuality can occur in different

forms, like dialogue, rejection, irony and it can be direct or indirect (Fairclough, 2003).

2.2.4 The level of the social practice.

An analysis of a text as part of a broader social practice consists of two parts. First there is the relationship between the discursive practice and its order of discourse. The order of discourse is the total of genres and discourses used in a social domain. The order of discourse is both shaping and is being shaped with every instance of language use. It is possible for language users to change the order of discourse by using it in new ways or by using parts from other discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010).

Secondly, one of the main purposes of this analysis is to show the links between discursive practices and other, non-discursive, structures that constitute the context of the discursive practice. These conditions cannot be analyzed using discourse analysis, other theories can be necessary here (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010). According to Jørgensen & Phillips it is in the analysis of the connections between discursive practice and social practice that a study arrives at its most important conclusions.

2.2.5 The use of critical discourse analysis in critical geography.

The works of Norman Fairclough and other theorists in critical discourse analysis have been used in a number of different research areas in geography.

One example is the work by Adrian Smith on the different geo-economic discourses in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 (Smith, 2002). He shows how new geo-economic imaginations have been discursively constructed and how they focus on market liberalization as a roadmap to peace. This is generally seen as a natural process, which was 'interrupted' by communism (Smith, 2002). Smith aims to denaturalize these trajectories by drawing upon the work of Fairclough by seeing discourse as "the imbrication of speaking and writing in the exercise, reproduction and negotiation of power relations, and in ideological processes and ideological struggle" (Fairclough, as cited in Smith, 2002, p. 651). In Smith's understanding, critical discourse analysis is the "denaturalization of powerful discursive forces shaping the realm of possibilities" (p. 651).

A line of thought similar to that of Fairclough has also been used in urban geographical studies (Lees, 2004). Its methodology is one of "close semantic scrutiny of rhetoric and turns of phrase" (p. 102) to discover particular discourses and how they shape the possible practices.

Browning & Joenniemi (2007) adopt a poststructuralist and critical geopolitical approach in their article 'Contending Discourses of Marginality: The Case of Kaliningrad'. They see the concept of

'margin' as a discursive concept and its meaning as constantly open to challenge and change. It does not have an essential meaning. Instead, its meaning is derived from its use in discourse (Browning & Joenniemi, 2007). Browning & Joenniemi challenge the negative modernistic notion of margins as lacking power and influence. Another similarity with Fairclough is their understanding that discourses are embedded in a broader context of social, cultural and economic developments (Browning & Joenniemi, 2007).

Amer (2012) analyses the construction of a Palestinian national identity through both secularist and Islamist discourses by using a critical approach. He sees the Palestinian national identity as constructed by national identity discourses, which are also shaped by its historical and political context (Amer, 2012).

Seth (2011) analyses the changes in how newspapers have constructed the role of Russian citizen in Soviet times and the time of Putin. He notes the dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure. Discourse is both shaped by and shaping social structure. Like Fairclough, Seth points to the importance of the discursive formation of social identities of those who participate in discourse (Seth, 2011).

Chapter 3: Background of Turkish-Syrian relations

3.1 Historical relations between Turkey and Syria

Historically the relationship between Turkey and Syria has been a difficult one. The sometimes hostile relationship between Turkey and Syria is characterized by a number of recurring issues. First there is the dispute about the region of Alexandretta, also known as Hatay. Alexandretta was a French mandate until its citizens chose to join Turkey in 1939. Since then Syria has contested these decisions and claimed sovereignty over the area until 2005. Turkish control over the water flow of the Euphrates River is another cause of conflict between the two countries. Syria's water supply depends on the amount of water Turkey passes on. The two countries argue about who has the right to use the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris. While the water supply is Ankara's leverage over Syria, Syrian support of PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) rebels can be considered as Damascus' leverage over Turkey (James & Ödzamar, 2009; Zafar, 2012).

After World War I Alexandretta became part of the French mandate of Syria. In 1937 the League of Nations decided that it would become a semi-autonomous part of Syria, which would only have authority in external affairs. In 1938 the newly elected parliament of Hatay declared independence from the French mandate of Syria and in 1939 its citizens chose to join Turkey. Syria has never recognized the separation of Hatay, and still includes the region in official maps (Zafar, 2012).

Turkey and Syria share a history of over 400 years. However, this history has not led to good relations between the two countries. Arab nationalists in Syria blame Turkey for denying them their own national and economic development (Güneylioğlu, 2011). The Turkish republican elite on the other hand, were suspicious of the Arabs and associated them with betrayal during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The new Republic of Turkey did not want anything to do with the Arab world. Instead, it aligned with the Western world and Israel and chose to join NATO. Syria, like other Arab states sought support from the Soviet Union in their struggles with Israel (Güneylioğlu, 2011). The two countries thus became part of the two opposite blocs during the Cold War. Turkey sought to promote NATO influence in the region, Syria offered a safe haven for Kurdish, Armenian and radical left activist groups operating in Turkey (Güneylioğlu, 2011).

Throughout most of the 1990's Turkey has been using coercive diplomacy in order to make Syria decrease and in the end terminate its support of the PKK. Coercive diplomacy can be defined as *"the attempt to get a target – a state, a group (or groups) within a state, or a non-state actor – to change its objectionable behavior through either the threat to use force or the actual use of*

limited force” (Art, as cited in Aras, 2011, p. 591). The logic behind this strategy was that as a rational actor Syria would be sensitive to the possible costs of continuing PKK support (military intervention by Turkey) and the gains of ending their support (increasing trade between Turkey and Syria) (Aras D. , 2011).

Ankara used this strategy most recently in 1998 when, according to the former Turkish Chief of Staff General Kivrikoglu, the two countries were in a state of undeclared war (Aras D. , 2011). Turkey had tried coercive diplomacy towards Syria before, with many Syrian commitments, but with little actual results. This time, Aras argues, the situation was different. The health of Syria’s president Hafiz al-Assad’s was deteriorating and his primary concern was to make sure his son Bashar could continue the Assad dynasty. Furthermore Syria had severe economic problems due to a drop in oil prices. The country faced international isolation, had disputes with Jordan and Iraq and lost most of its foreign support from the Soviet-Union and Arab states (Aras D. , 2011).

The crisis ended with the signing of the Adana agreement which ended Syrian support for the PKK. Since then relations have improved considerably. Ankara and Damascus have agreed to liberalize visa policies, there has been increasing strategic cooperation and trade between the two countries prospered (Cornell, 2012; James & Ödzamar, 2009). The amount of trade between the two countries has grown from \$0.72 billion in 2000 to \$1.8 billion in 2008 (Güneylioğlu, 2011). Other examples of increased economic cooperation between the two countries are the establishment of a Turkish-Syrian Business Council. The ‘High Level Strategic Cooperation Council’ was established as a platform for, among others, the Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Energy, and Trade to improve cooperation and create common action plans (Güneylioğlu, 2011). Therefore, Turkey’s strategic interests in Syria have grown considerably in the last ten years. Not only do the PKK and the refugees from Syria pose a problem for Turkey, a large part of Turkey’s trade with the Middle East is also linked with Syria (Cebeci & Üstün, 2012).

3.2 The ‘Zero Problems’ and ‘Strategic Depth’ Strategy

Under the influence of Ahmet Davutoğlu Turkish foreign policy has pursued a policy of ‘zero problems with neighbors’. The goal is to minimize conflicts with Turkey’s neighbors and also to mediate between other countries using proactive diplomacy (Aras B. , 2009). This policy is different from the past because Turkish interventions in the region used to be based on a balance of power logic. Based on this logic, Turkish policy makers opted for either the Arab/Soviet side or, mostly, the Israeli/American side (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010). Turkey uses its growing status as a soft power to exercise the role of mediator. This soft power is based on Turkey’s democratization process and norm-based foreign policy. It is Turkey’s objective to take place at

the centre of international relations as a bridge between different regions and to attain optimal independence and influence (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010).

Davutoğlu's policy of 'zero problems' as well as his book 'Strategic Depth' are considered to be highly influential in the AKP government's foreign policy. He has been critical of the traditional alliance politics by Ankara and has sought to break with this tradition. His aim has been to overcome tensions between Turkey and other countries by increasing their economic, cultural and social ties. By doing this he creates new relations between businessmen, activists and students who have a stake in the peaceful resolution of conflict. He effectively creates a bypass around the difficult relations between bureaucrats and politicians (Güneylioğlu, 2011). The way to do this should be peaceful and assertive instead of aggressive and confrontational (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010). Syria had become one of the success stories of Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors' policy (James & Ödzamar, 2009).

The concept of 'Strategic Depth' is based on the idea that Turkey has a unique geostrategic location which enables it to play an important role in the world. Therefore, Turkish policy makers should look farther than the borders of their own country. Turkey has a strategic location between Europe, Asia, Russia and the Middle East. It also has control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, allowing Turkey to control the access between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea (Larrabee, 2010). Another aspect of Davutoğlu's 'Strategic Depth' is its emphasis on the legacy of Turkey's Ottoman past and the historical and cultural ties it has left between Turkey and its former colonies, such as Syria (Güneylioğlu, 2011).

Davutoğlu and other high ranking AKP officials can be considered as intellectuals of statecraft. As intellectuals of statecraft they have the power to enforce their geopolitical vision on society (Kuus, n.d.). Although it can be shaped and altered by other groups in society, their discourses are the most influential in directing the mainstream conception of international affairs. Other discourses are in turn shaped by the discourse(s) of the intellectuals of statecraft (Kuus, n.d.).

The 'zero problems' strategy has led to a major change in the relationship between Turkey and Syria. Since the creation of Syria, at the end of the Ottoman Empire, the relations have generally been hostile and centered on conflicts regarding territory, water-rights and the Kurdish issue. The Kurdish issue has been particularly problematic, because Turkey has long accused Syria of being the main backer of the PKK. During the 2000's the relations gradually improved under the AKP government, with the signing of a free trade agreement and mutual concerns over the war in Iraq (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010). In these years Turkey has mediated between Syria and other neighboring countries on several occasions. For example, in 2009 Turkey mediated between Syria

and Iraq and between Syria and Saudi-Arabia. This would have been unimaginable in the 1990's. Turkey and Syria even participated in joint military exercises (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010).

The change in Turkey's attitude toward the Middle East and Syria has been caused most of all by Turkey's democratization process in its domestic politics and the concurrent rise of the AKP (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010). Influence on the direction of foreign policy has shifted from the military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs towards the Ministries of Energy, Trade and Transportation as well as a number of civil society organizations. Generally, economic interests and public opinion have become more important in shaping Turkish foreign policy (Kirişci, Tocci, & Walker, 2010).

3.2.1 Turkey's geopolitical orientation.

In short, the AK party's foreign policy has turned Turkey into a more independent and assertive country, it has resolved a number of issues with its neighbors and has become more active in mediation (Kutlay, 2011). This seems to be a positive development. However, Turkey's new foreign policy has also led to accusations of breaking away from the West (Cornell, 2012). Turkey has sought to improve relations with Syria and Iran, countries that were isolated from the West and part of the so called 'axis of evil'. Yet, Turkey thinks the good relations with these countries can also benefit its Western allies (Cornell, 2012). An additional cause for concern could be the deterioration of Turkey's relationship with Israel, a long time ally in the Middle East, after a series of serious incidents. In the Israeli conflict Turkey is more and more choosing the side of the Palestinians. Because of this Israel is losing its only ally in the region. In addition, Turkey has been unhappy with the American invasion of Iraq, which has increased instability in the region (Cornell, 2012). The combination of strained relations with the US and Israel and a slow EU-accession process raises suspicions about Turkey turning away from the West (Kutlay, 2011).

Although saying that Turkey is turning away from the West is perhaps a simplification, it is true that 'the West' has become less important in Turkey's foreign policy. Whereas Turkey used to focus and often rely on Europe and North America, it has now become more active in its neighborhood (Kanat, 2010). However, while doing this Turkey has stayed attached to the West. It has continued to be a member of NATO, the OECD and it is still an EU candidate country. Furthermore, it is not strange for a country to seek good relations with its neighboring countries and to adapt itself to a changing, multi-polar, world (Kutlay, 2011).

What is perhaps a bit strange is that it took so long for Turkey to adapt to this new, post-Cold War, reality. As Larrabee (2010) argues, the end of the Cold War decreased Turkey's dependence on the US for its security. It also removed the Soviet Union as the main threat to Turkey. In the

post-Cold War era the main security challenges for Turkey lie to the south: Kurdish separatism, an unstable Iraq and the possibility of a nuclear Iran (Larrabee, 2010). Another consequence of the end of the Cold War is that the international system has changed from bipolar to unipolar and might turn multipolar in the future. According to Altunsik & Martin (2011) this change has increased the room for Turkey to maneuver, which is an idea that resonates with the official AKP party program. According to the party program:

“[T]he dynamic circumstances brought about by the post cold war period have created a suitable environment for developing a foreign policy with several alternatives. The particularity of military alliances and blocks to become the determinant elements of international relations has been greatly reduced, and cooperation projects have become a common tool of relations between States. In this new environment Turkey must also rearrange and create its relations with centers of power with alternatives, flexibly and with many axes.” (Justice and Development Party, n.d.)

In 2002, the AK party won its first elections with 34 percent of the vote which gave them a majority in the Turkish parliament of almost two-thirds of the seats. The AKP was able to form a single-party government after the elections, which raised secularist’s concerns that the AKP’s Islamic roots would dominate Turkey’s foreign policy (Kutlay, 2011). However, the founders of the AKP were part of the reformist movement within Turkish Islamism and when they founded the AKP they dissociated themselves from political Islam. The AKP has branded itself as conservative democratic while adopting economic liberalism (Atasoy, 2011). In addition, Erdoğan, as the newly elected Prime Minister, has emphasized the importance of the EU accession process and showed that he was willing to negotiate a settlement with Cyprus and Greece. This was a change from traditional Islamist policy in Turkey (Kutlay, 2011). Thus, although the AKP has Islamist roots and has increased Turkey’s activity in the Middle East, this does not mean that it has abandoned Ankara’s ties with the West.

An important moment in Turkey’s foreign policy was the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In Turkey there was a strong pressure from the parliament, intellectuals, the media and the Turkish electorate against this war. The Turkish parliament decided not to allow the US to deploy their troops from Turkish soil into Iraq (Kutlay, 2011). In doing so, the parliament prevented the government from directly supporting the US-led war in Iraq. The US had to accept this setback because it was a democratic decision (Atasoy, 2011). According to Kutlay (2011) this decision was an important step in the development of Turkey’s new foreign policy. It is an example of how Turkey’s foreign policy has become more democratic. Turkey’s foreign policy is no longer

determined by the military and it has become easier for Turkey's civil society to influence foreign policy. This can be seen in the resistance against the war in Iraq, but also by the AKP's more critical stance against Israel, which is partly inspired by pressure from society (Kutlay, 2011).

The new AKP government was not the first in Turkey that tried to improve relation with the Middle East. However, efforts in the 1980's and 1990s's were hampered by the Kurdish issue and Turkey's close relations with Israel. The relations Turkey had with the region were mostly confined to Syria, Iraq, Iran and Israel and limited to the Kurdish question or other security issues (Altunışık & Martin, 2011). Only after the settlement of the crisis with Syria in 1998 did relations with the Middle-East began to normalize (Kutlay, 2011). The AKP government intensified this process of normalization and re-establishing ties with the Middle East through its policies of 'zero problems' and 'strategic depth'. Under the AKP Turkey's foreign policy has become more diverse and is no longer limited to a few countries or the area of security considerations (Altunışık & Martin, 2011).

As a result of this intensification Turkey has become more active in regional institutions such as the Arab League, which accepted Turkey as an observer country, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Kutlay, 2011). Furthermore, Turkey started to mend fences with its neighbors, especially Syria, and developed its economic and political ties with most of the Middle East. This has been characterized by the visits of high level officials and Turkey efforts at mediation between countries. Turkey has also taken some surprising steps by inviting the controversial leaders of Hamas and the Shia opposition in Iraq (Kutlay, 2011). It was also the only NATO country that kept supporting Syria when it was being isolated by the West. All in all, it is clear that the AKP government's increased activism in the Middle East has had a profound impact on the region.

Turkey's influence in the region has increased further after the Arab Spring. Not only because Turkey can be seen as an example of economic and democratic development, but also because the Arab Spring has weakened the traditional centre of the region (Ayoob, 2011). Countries like Syria and Egypt have to recover from the economic and political damage of the Arab Spring and they will have to re-organize their political system and society. Therefore, the centre of gravity continues to shift towards the non-Arab states in the region, namely Turkey and Iran (Ayoob, 2011). Other events that have contributed to this process are the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which left a power vacuum for Turkey and Iran to fill up (Ayoob, 2011).

3.3 The Arab Spring in Syria

In practically all of the countries in the Middle East Turkey enjoys a widespread popularity across different social and religious groups in society (Kirişçi, 2011). An extensive survey conducted in a

number of Middle Eastern countries has found that 78 percent of respondents have a favorable opinion on Turkey. In addition, 61 percent of the respondents see in Turkey a model for democratic and economic development in the region (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2012). However the same survey also found that only 44 percent of the Syrians have a favorable opinion of Turkey. In comparison, the second lowest perception of Turkey is in Iran with 71 percent (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2012).

Syrians' perception of Turkey used to be a lot more positive. As recently as 2010 93 percent of the Syrian population had a positive opinion towards Turkey. Syria was even the country with the most favorable view towards Turkey (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2012). This was an exceptional development given the border, water and Kurdish disputes that troubled Turkish-Syrian relations for such a long time. Even the Syrian nationalists have come around in recent years as they see Turkey is realizing everything they want for their own country. Traditionally they were the ones who condemned Turkey the most (Al-Azm, 2011)

However, in a few years the situation has changed dramatically. Only 30 percent of the Syrians have been positive about Turkey's response to the events of 2011 (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2012). This is a first indication of the difficulties that the uprisings in Syria present to Turkey.

In 2006 there were already signs that Turkey's foreign policy of 'zero problems' could provide difficulties in the long run (Svet, 2006). The friendly relationship with Iran and, until recently, Syria has been based on economic interests such as Turkey's need for natural resources. In the past few years these economic interests have been prevailing over political disagreements. Over time, it will probably prove to be difficult for Turkey to maintain friendly relations with both Israel and Iran (Svet, 2006). In the case of Syria, Turkey has already chosen political interests over economic interests after Assad chose to crack down on the protesters in his country.

Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors strategy' has become difficult to maintain in the wake of the recent uprisings in the Middle East. During the course of the Arab Spring Turkey's position regarding the calls for more democracy has differed considerably from country to country. In the case of Egypt Turkey was an early supporter of the revolution against Mubarak. In this case Prime Minister Erdoğan was the first world leader who asked the Egyptian president Mubarak to step down (Cornell, 2012). However, in the case of the Iranian 2009 presidential elections, Turkey ignored popular demand for more democracy. Moreover, Erdoğan was among the first to congratulate president Ahmadinejad on his re-election, despite widespread claims of fraud. According to Cornell (2012) this paradoxical position is due to ideological similarities between the ruling Islamist Shiite regime in Iran, the Turkish AKP and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The

events in Libya have proven to be even more complicated. Initially the Turkish government did not take a clear stance and even opposed NATO intervention. Later on, the Turkish government sided with NATO and called for Gaddafi's resignation (Cornell, 2012).

In the course of 16 months the unrest in Syria has escalated from small scale protests towards civil war. During that time the Turkish government has tried to persuade, and later coerce, the Syrian regime into ending the harsh crackdowns on Syrian citizens. At the start of the protests in Syria, Turkey appealed to Assad to implement reforms that would lead to a more democratic Syria. However, Ankara's efforts have failed despite the once cordial personal relations between Erdoğan and Assad. Over time this has led to increasingly critical statements by the Turkish government and eventually they choose the side of the Syrian opposition (Cebeci & Üstün, 2012). Up to now Assad has not shown any sign of implementing serious reforms soon, which is an indication that the 'zero problems' policy is experiencing some difficulties.

According to Cornell (2012) these difficulties are caused by three underlying issues. Firstly, the 'zero problems' policy is based on the unrealistic assumption that the countries surrounding Turkey have no fundamental interests that run counter to those of Turkey. The conflict about water from the Euphrates and the Tigris is such a case of conflicting interests between Turkey and Syria. In addition, the AKP government has, according to Cornell, overestimated its influence in the Middle East. As of yet there is no actual evidence of Turkish influence that can match its rhetoric. Lastly, there is a fundamental gap between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's rhetoric about democracy and human rights and their warm ties with de facto dictators, such as President Assad of Syria and President Ahmadinejad of Iran (Cornell, 2012). In the end, it seems that the policy of zero problems often implies a compromise between values and principles and maintaining a 'problem free' status quo.

3.4 The domestic situation in Turkey

3.4.1 Economy

Turkey's economic success is an important part of its role as a model for other countries in the region. Economic development has changed Turkish society, in particular by enlarging the middle class. This has empowered civil society and made it increasingly difficult to maintain political power in the hand of a small elite (Kirişçi, 2011). Yildiz (2011) points to the correlation between Turkey's socioeconomic development and its democratization. The positive development of factors such as personal income, income distribution, levels of industrialization and the quality of education all play a role in the consolidation of democracy in Turkey (Yildiz, 2011)

In 1980 Turkey adopted a number of liberalization reforms which transformed Turkey's economy from one based on import substitution into a liberal market economy focused on exports. These reforms reduced the activities of the state in the economy, liberalized capital flows and reduced tariffs, protectionism and bureaucracy (Ülgen, 2011). Turkey became more open to international trade and is now the world's 16th largest economy. It has a powerful export sector as well as a domestic market which is becoming more and more affluent (Ülgen, 2011).

The composition of the Turkish economy has also changed significantly. In 1960, agriculture represented 30% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 77% of employment. These numbers have decreased drastically, to 15% of GDP and 30% of employment in 2000 (Kirişci, 2011). This has been compensated with a growth in the services and the manufacturing sectors, which increased the demand for better educated employees (Kirişci, 2011).

Over the years Turkey has increasingly become a 'trading state', a state whose foreign policy is guided by economic considerations, with an important economic role for foreign trade (Kirişci, 2011). The amount of foreign trade has increased from \$20 billion to \$330 billion in 2008 and especially the trade with neighboring countries is becoming more and more important in recent years. Turkish companies are expanding and investing throughout the region (Kirişci, 2011).

According to Kirişci the economic development of Turkey influences the way Turkey is perceived in the region. Turkey is an example of a successful transition from an agricultural and closed economy towards a liberal and competitive economy. Because of this process Turkish interests and values are transferred to other countries by the interactions of business elites. Turkish businesses can demand rule of law and a functioning bureaucracy when they chose to invest in a country (Kirişci, 2011). In addition, Turkish businesses have become more vocal and influential in determining Turkey's economic and foreign policy. They have started a number of organizations that advocate for Turkish business interests in Turkey and the Middle East (Kutlay, 2011).

According to the most recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Turkey has made a remarkable recovery after the economic crisis. The impact of the economic crisis was severe, but Turkey's recovery has been faster than in other OECD countries. Domestic demand has increased by 9.2 percent in 2010 and 8.5 percent in 2011 and employment has continued to grow, even during the crisis (OECD, 2012). The swift recovery was made possible by a combination of policy reforms combined and a reorientation of Turkish businesses towards new sectors and markets (OECD, 2012).

However, the OECD also finds a number of flaws in the Turkish economy, such as high inflation rates and a high account deficit caused by a growing gap between imports and exports. Measures have been taken to decrease these numbers (OECD, 2012). The economy is expected to grow 3 percent in 2012 and 4.5 percent in 2013. Between 2012 and 2030 the economy will grow by an average of 4.4 percent, perhaps even 5.7 percent a year if extra reforms are made (OECD, 2012).

Turkey's economy has grown fast over the last decade. After a crisis in 2001, Turkey's GDP was around \$196 billion. After just ten years, Turkey's GDP was over \$773 billion in 2011, a growth of almost 400% (World Bank, 2012). In the following graph the economic growth of Turkey is compared with the Syria, Egypt, Israel, Algeria, Saudi-Arabia and Russia, some of the most important economies in the region (see figure 2).

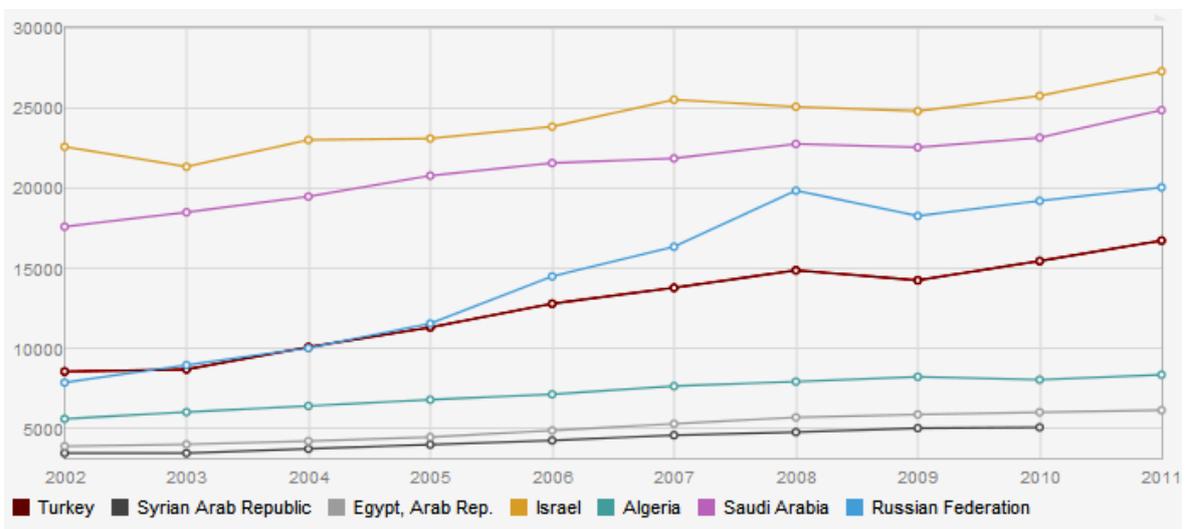


Figure 2. Turkish economic growth compared to key countries in its neighborhood. Gross National Income per capita based on purchasing power parity in international dollars (World Bank, 2012).

The data shows that Turkey has performed a lot better than Syria and Egypt and is moving closer towards Israel, although there is still a large difference between these Turkey and Israel. The wealth-gap between Turkey and most Arab states seems to be growing, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Only Lebanon, not included in the graph, has kept pace with Turkey's economic growth (World Bank, 2012). The Russian Federation has grown even faster than Turkey, but it lacks the democratic, Islamic and cultural credentials that Turkey has towards the Middle East. Turkey's economic growth has outperformed most of the Arab and North-African countries which allows it to more confident in its relations with these countries.

3.4.2 Military – Society relations

Another important change in Turkish society is the decline of the military influence in politics and society in general (Kuru, 2012). Turkey has a long history of military coups which has made the

consolidation of democracy difficult. All democratically elected leaders of Turkey have had to deal with military interference, ranging from forced resignation to the death sentence. The military was able to intervene in politics because it was backed by allies in the judiciary, political and media elite (Kuru, 2012). This elite adopted a combination of secularist, nationalist and anti-communist ideology. This ideology was reinforced through media propaganda and the Turkish education system. The military justified their interventions by referring to the Islamic, Kurdish and communist threats against Turkey (Kuru, 2012).

The Turkish military has played a key role in the establishment of the Turkish Republic and since the 1930's the military has taken it upon itself to be the guardian of the Kemalist regime and its values (Ülgen, 2011). They have used this authority to intervene in Turkish politics through four coups, removing four democratically elected governments. However, after such a coup, they sought to quickly return rule to a civilian government when the perceived threat to Turkey was eliminated. The military preferred to exercise its influence in the background (Ülgen, 2011).

Only recently, after a failed coup in 2007, has the military influence begun to decline. In 2007 the military posted an ultimatum on its website in order to prevent the election of Abdullah Gül, a practicing Muslim, as president. However, the AKP did not back down and Gül was eventually elected as president (Kuru, 2012). Since then over 300 military officers have been prosecuted and detained because of attempts to destabilize the AKP government, known as the Ergenekon affair (Kuru, 2012; Larrabee, 2010). After this affair the military suffered from a remarkable amount of public criticism. In addition, military courts lost considerable power because of legislative changes and the government began to intervene in the appointments of high ranking officers (Kuru, 2012).

As Kuru (2012) argues, the principal reason causing the decline of the military power has been the weakening of the old secularist, nationalist and anti-communist elite. The military could no longer intervene in Turkish politics without the support of the civilian allies. This happened together with the rise of a new Muslim conservative elite in the realms of the economy, politics, media and judiciary (Kuru, 2012). In politics the conservative democratic AK Party is the prominent example of this new elite. It has been the largest party in the Turkish parliament since it first took part in elections in 2002. Because of the demise of military power, it became possible for the new elite to pursue a 'softer' foreign policy. Instead of relying on hard, military, power it is now easier to seek a diplomatic solution in the case of a conflict (Larrabee, 2010), which is clearly reflected in Davutoğlu's 'zero problem' policy.

According to Kuru (2012), there are three main reasons why the new elite was able to consolidate its rule and restrict military influence. These are:

- A new conservative democratic discourse that replaced the old Islamic discourse.
- The choice to apply for candidacy of the EU, implement the necessary reforms and successfully joining the global economy.
- Allying with Turkey's liberal intellectual circles (Kuru, 2012).

Another reason which is put forward by Ülgen (2011) is the fact that during the course of the 1990's it became unjustifiable for the military to maintain its grip on Turkish politics. The Turkish military had to accept democratic reforms if it wanted to keep good relations with the West. After the wave of democratization in Eastern and Central Europe it became clear that Turkey could not join the EU if it did not make reforms. Ironically, it was the Kemalist ideology that limited the military's possibilities (Ülgen, 2011).

The military and the ideas of Kemalism still play an important role in Turkey. However, as Larrabee argues, the process of democratization in Turkey has led to an increasingly diverse public debate. The times in which the military and its allies forced Kemalism on Turkish society and politics are gone (Larrabee, 2010).

3.4.3 Politics

Successive governments in Turkey have carried out important democratic reforms in order to qualify for EU membership. The consolidation of democracy was carried out for a great part under AK party rule. Turkey is probably the most developed democracy with a Muslim majority in the world. This gives Turkey, together with its fast growing economic power, a big say in regional issues. The combination of democracy and Islam is a strong ideological advantage of Turkey in the Middle East (Aras B. , 2009). It enables Middle Eastern countries to draw lessons from Turkey's democratization. However, as Atasoy (2011) illustrates, there are also differences between Turkey and the Middle East. For the Middle East the possibility of EU membership is virtually nonexistent. This changes their prospects for democratization because they do not have the same pressure to make democratic reforms. In the case of Turkey, the Turkish military and the EU both pushed the country towards democratization (Atasoy, 2011).

Efforts to make Turkish politics more democratic and transparent have thus been greatly promoted by Turkey's candidacy for EU membership. Turkey has come a long way but it is not yet there, Turkey's democratization is still 'a work in progress' (Kirişci, 2011). The fact that Turkey is not perfect itself means that there is a smaller gap between Turkey and its neighbors. It is easier for regional activists to work with Turkish colleagues than it is to work with those from well-established democracy. The reason for this is that they are more likely to have similar perceptions of a particular issue (Kirişci, 2011).

A fundamental difference between Turkey and its Arab neighbors is the way in which Turkey is embedded into the West. Because of Turkey's Kemalist legacy, it has sought membership of Western organizations such as NATO, the EU and the Council of Europe (Ülgen, 2011). It is also a member of the European Court of Human Rights. This has given an extra incentive for Ankara to align with European practices and values (Ülgen, 2011). Membership of the European Union has long been an objective for Turkish governments. Although Turkey formally applied in 1987, membership negotiations were only initiated in 2004. However, pursuit of EU membership played an important, if not critical, role in the implementation of political reforms in Turkey.

Even though these reforms may have been successful, there is still a lot of room for improvement. According to Transparency International (Chêne, 2012), Turkey's human rights record remains a cause for concern, especially with regards to the protection of minorities and political freedoms. There are also reports on the violation of press freedom. According to Chêne, all this can have a bad influence on the perception of Turkey in the region and its ability to be a role model.

Another problem is corruption which is spread throughout Turkish society. Reforms have been implemented aimed at reducing corruption, but with little actual improvement. Anti-corruption measures are not centrally controlled or monitored (Chêne, 2012). The most affected sectors of Turkish society are the educational system, the army, public administration, the private sector and political parties. (Chêne, 2012). Corruption is a possible barrier for further economic growth in Turkey. It makes it difficult for Turkish entrepreneurs to do business and it discourages foreign investment in the country (Chêne, 2012). It also complicates Turkey's prospects of membership of the European Union.

Chapter 4: The discourse(s) of the AK party

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the AK party's discourse towards Syria and the Middle East it is necessary to analyze a combination of texts by different AKP politicians. In this chapter, texts from Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, President Abdullah Gül, former Foreign Minister Yasar Yakis and Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz will be analyzed. Each of these politicians has an influential position within the AKP establishment. Three of them have a position within the government and the other, Yakis, is a member of the Grand National Assembly, the Turkish parliament. Unfortunately it was not possible to analyze Prime Minister Erdoğan's discourse in detail, because a suitable text was not available. The texts that could be found were either in Turkish or too short to qualify for a comprehensive discourse analysis. However, when possible some of Erdoğan's statements will be used to compare him with other AKP politicians.

The discourse analysis will be carried out by using a combination of the tools that have been proposed by Fairclough, as described in chapter 2. The texts will be analyzed on three levels, the level of text, the level of discursive practice and the level of social practice. The most important findings will be discussed in the last paragraph. The quotes used in the discourse analysis are from the main source cited at the start of each paragraph, unless indicated otherwise.

4.1 The discourse of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

Main source: Davutoğlu, A. (2012). *'Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring'*. (Turkish Policy Brief Series No. 3) Retrieved June 5, 2012, from:
<http://policyleadershipinstitute.org/documents/Turkeypolicybrief3DavutogluEN.pdf>

Davutoğlu has been one of the central figures in Turkey's foreign policy over the last 10 years. With a background in political science, Professor Davutoğlu became chief advisor to the Prime Minister in 2003 and Foreign Minister in 2009. In his influential book 'Strategic Depth' he proposed a new foreign policy for Turkey which was later adopted by President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan when he became chief advisor to Erdoğan (Aras B. , 2009).

4.1.1 The level of text

In his article it quickly becomes clear that Davutoğlu considers the recent changes in Turkey's neighborhood as a serious event. The metaphors and the wording he uses throughout the text convey the significance he attaches to the Arab Spring. Some of the metaphors he uses for the Arab Spring are: *"tectonic transformation"* (p. 1), *"equally significant as the international economic crisis"* (p. 1) and *"political earthquake"* (p. 6). In his wording he uses adjectives like

historic and epic describe the Arab Spring, in phrases like *“this great historic transformation process”* (p.4) and *“this epic democratic struggle”* (p.6). The choice to use these words means that Davutoğlu attaches great importance to the Arab Spring. It indicates that he thinks of the Arab Spring as a unique and legitimate development that has had a great impact on the Middle East.

Another important point made by Davutoğlu is that the political transformation in the region is a natural and inevitable process. This is a recurring theme throughout the text and is an important part of Davutoğlu’s discourse. It implies that Turkey should not try to hold back the process, because that would simply impossible. Rather, Turkey should find out how to adept itself to the new reality in the Middle East. The following quote is a characteristic example of this attitude:

“Though challenging, we believe that these transformations are natural and inevitable processes. As it is unwise to confront these processes, the best course of action is to develop a sound understanding of the causes of this transformation and develop suitable strategies to cope with the change” (p. 1)

It is important to note the intransitivity of this claim, which refers to the connection of the process with subjects and objects. By describing it as a natural phenomenon Davutoğlu leaves out the agents that cause the process. It also implicitly puts Turkey in a position above those countries that are yet to go through this process, with Turkey leading them the way. Whether political transformation in the region is inevitable is something that only time can tell. Davutoğlu, however, describes it as a given, irreversible fact. This is also related to the modality of his statement. He seems absolutely certain that the transformation process will succeed. However, after more than a year of civic unrest, there has not yet been a lot of improvement in Syria. In countries like Saudi-Arabia and Bahrain political transformation seems even further away. Davutoğlu might overestimate the power of Syria’s opposition forces and their capability of overthrowing Assad. Yet, he describes the uprisings in Syria and the rest of the Middle East as an objective and natural process. For a critical geopolitical perspective it is important to retrieve the subjectivity and political considerations behind such representations. Davutoğlu, and the AKP government as a whole, has chosen to back the Syrian opposition. With this in mind it, he wants to keep the pressure on Assad. This would become a lot more difficult if he were to voice his doubts about the Syrian opposition.

A different part of Davutoğlu’s discourse is his rejection of a renewal of Cold War-like structures and polarization in the Middle East. He sees it as a task for Turkey to resist such a Cold War logic,

saying:

“I stated on many occasions that we do not want to see Cold Warlike structures emerging in the region [...] In particular, it was incumbent upon us to work towards preventing divisions across sectarian lines, i.e. Shiite versus Sunni or political regimes, i.e. defenders of the old regimes, versus new democratic regime.” (p. 3)

This critical attitude toward Cold War logic corresponds with the original objective of critical geopolitics to offer a critique of the binary geographical assumptions of the Cold War. However, the use of the ‘Cold War’ metaphor is also a bit surprising. Rejecting the Cold War also means a, more or less, implicit rejection of NATO and American interference in the Middle East. Nonetheless, Turkey is still a member of NATO and retains close ties with the United States.

In a break from Turkey’s traditional foreign policy, Davutoğlu wants to reconnect with the people in Turkey’s neighborhood. He even goes as far as saying *“the people in our region with whom we shared a common history and are poised to have a common destiny”* (p. 2). The objective of reconnecting with these people is a guiding concept in Turkey’s foreign policy. The way in which Davutoğlu describes the ties with the region is almost affectionate in its wording: *“we will not take steps that will alienate us from the hearts and minds of our region’s people”* (p.2). He creates a sense of a shared identity with the people of the Middle East by using wordings such as *“common history and destiny”* and *“our regions people”*. However, he also underscores Turkey’s uniqueness and sovereignty. He stresses the importance of Turkey’s national priorities, saying: *“we determine our vision, set our objectives, and execute our foreign policy in line with our national priorities”* (p. 4).

There are different ways in which to interpret Davutoğlu’s quest to reconnect with its neighborhood. On one hand it is a good thing that Davutoğlu stresses similarities instead of differences and that he wants to promote better ties with other people in the region. On the other hand it is too easy to say that Turkey has a common history with its neighboring countries. Their history has been far from common, given that Turkey used to dominate the region for centuries in the days of the Ottoman Empire. The centre-periphery relations between what is now Turkey and, for example, Syria or Egypt were characterized by conflict and a notion of Ottoman superiority. As the heir of the Ottoman legacy, Turkey is certainly not a natural best friend of the Arab people (Makdisi, 2002). Concerning Turkey’s foreign policy there is a clear difference in the ethos of Davutoğlu’s discourse and the earlier Ottoman or Kemalist discourses. Davutoğlu constructs the identity of the Arab people as similar to the Turkish identity, sharing a common history, culture and future. In a Kemalist or Ottoman discourse the Arab identity was constructed

as backwards or underdeveloped compared to the superior Turks (Makdisi, 2002).

Furthermore, saying that Turkey shares a common history with its neighbors is naïve because there are important differences between the different people of the Middle East in terms of ethnicity, religion, language and culture (Schwedler, 2008). By considering all people as *“eternal brothers”* (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 5) he easily neglects these differences. It becomes clear in Davutoğlu’s text that Turkey is not just looking to the West anymore. For example, while still defending universal values, he wants to ‘enmesh’ them with local values, although it is not clear what these are. In this, Turkey is the template for other countries in the region, as they *“deserve to have the same rights and privileges enjoyed by our own people”* (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 3).

According to Davutoğlu President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has failed to implement the reforms he has promised on the roadmap that Turkey and Syria had agreed upon. Efforts to resolve the issue diplomatically have *“fallen on deaf ears”* (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 8). Instead the Syrian regime is said to *“deny and suppress such legitimate demands through coercion”* (p. 8). Davutoğlu chooses to side with the opposition, describing them as *“civilian protestors”* (p. 3) in a *“democratic struggle”* (p.8) who are victims of *“indiscriminate force”* (p.3) and *“crimes against humanity”* (p. 8).

Davutoğlu’s wording of the situation in Syria gives a slightly one-sided image and fails to take into account that atrocities have been committed by both sides. It is also questionable whether the opposition as a whole can be characterized as civilian protestors. According to the International Crisis Group (2012), fragmentation among the opposition makes it difficult to speak of a united front. In addition the label of ‘civilian’ is arguable given that there are also a number of armed militias involved in the conflict. There have been reports of atrocities committed by both Assad loyalists and opposition forces. Atrocities by one side often provoke retaliation by the other (International Crisis Group, 2012).

4.1.2 The level of discursive practice

The article by Ahmet Davutoğlu is part of the Turkey Policy Brief Series, an initiative by the International Policy and Leadership Institute (IPLI), which is part of the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV). TEPAV is a non-profit think tank that has no affiliations with political parties. The Turkish Policy Brief Series includes submissions from ‘highly recognized Turkish and international policy experts, analysts and practitioners’. It is striking that the same article has also been published in SAM Vision Papers, which is dedicated to articulating the views of the Turkish Foreign Ministry and Davutoğlu. Therefore it is likely that the viewpoints in the text have not been subject to scrutiny by TEPAV’s editor.

It is not common for an active Foreign Minister to publish articles and set out foreign policy in the

way Ahmet Davutoğlu does. He has written three articles for the SAM Vision Papers series and articles for Foreign Policy magazine, Turkish Policy Quarterly, and Insight Turkey.

The 'academic' ethos of the publications, Davutoğlu's academic credentials and Davutoğlu's position as Foreign Minister make for an interesting mix between the political and scientific genres. Davutoğlu also comes with a new concept for the new role that Turkey has to take upon itself in the international system. Turkey has to become a "*wise country*" (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 3), which means something like being a well respected and responsible member of the international community. Both the mixing of genres as well as the creation of new discursive elements point to a high degree of interdiscursivity.

According to Davutoğlu, Turkey is in a unique position which sets it apart from other nations. He argues that Turkey "*possesses several advantages, which make it uniquely positioned to respond to the myriad of challenges related to political transition*" (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 1). The notion of Turkey as a central and unique state is certainly not a new one. As Bilgin (2007) shows, the notion of Turkey as a central state was originally part of the discourse of the military elite, who ironically used in completely the other way as Davutoğlu does today. The military used it to legitimize their rule domestically and to argue for caution and restraint in regional politics. Davutoğlu, however, uses it to call for activism in regional politics in order to fulfill Turkey's potential as a central state (Bilgin, 2007). There is thus a form of intertextuality in this text by Davutoğlu. He uses the same concepts as others before him in other texts, but he attaches to them a different meaning and purpose. But however advantageous and unique Turkey position may be it still needs other countries in order to take a unified stand against Assad. The question is whether Turkey has the ability to persuade countries like Russia and China to take up their responsibility to act as wise countries.

Davutoğlu's text also builds on the gradually developing activism in the region by former president Turgut Özal and the steps that have been taken towards EU membership by governments before the AK party (Aras B. , 2009). There is thus a high amount of interdiscursivity in Davutoğlu's text. He builds on notions of Turkey as a 'central state', borrowing from a military discourse, but he also uses notions of liberalization, democracy and human rights, borrowing from a pro-EU discourse.

As to how Turkey is to take on this new role on the international stage Davutoğlu makes two somewhat contradictory statements. First of all he says that "*we realize it comes with many expectations and require new instruments which might be missing in Turkey's traditional foreign policy toolkit.*" (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 4) However, on the other hand he also says that "*we will*

benefit greatly from the rich history, experience and resources of our nation which is the basis of our foreign policy" (p. 4). Thus it can be said that Davutoğlu seeks both *discursive change* and stability at the same time. By using such words as "*instrument*" or "*toolkit*" Davutoğlu represents foreign policy as a set of technical problems which can be solved when one has the right equipment. He does not pay attention to the messy nature of international politics in which some problems simply do not have an easy solution.

These aspects of interdiscursivity are also noted by others who analyze Ahmet Davutoğlu's influence on Turkish politics. As Aras (2009) noted, Davutoğlu aims to change the way in which Middle Eastern countries are represented in Turkey. Hence it was possible for a new geographic imagination to develop. Davutoğlu has argued for 'Strategic Depth' in Turkish foreign policy. 'Strategic Depth' amounts to the expansion of policymakers' mental maps to include neighboring regions beyond the homeland of Turkey. This is also helped by a new awareness of Turkey's historical and cultural roots in the region (Aras B. , 2009).

Regarding the degree of intertextuality, the only explicit reference Davutoğlu makes to other texts are his own. He does this sometimes when he talks about subjects which have been elaborated on before. Other references to texts are more indirect and implicit. When discussing concepts like liberalism, capitalism, universal values/ human rights and democracy Davutoğlu is implicitly drawing on philosophers and theorists before him, such as Voltaire, Locke and Aristotle, without explicitly mentioning them.

4.1.3 The level of social practice

In the context of the Arab uprisings Davutoğlu describes the actions of the AKP government as "*humble*" (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 6) and "*on the right side of the history*" (p. 6). The decision to back the Arab people in their demands for reform was "*courageous but risky*" (p. 6) and a "*prudent and just action*" (p. 6). The fact that there is little opposition in popular media towards this representation of AKP government is indicative of how the interactional agenda is constructed. It corresponds with Kuus's (n.d.) assessment that intellectuals of statecraft are very influential in determining mainstream opinion. It is government officials like Davutoğlu and Erdoğan who dominate public debate. The interactional agenda is influenced by power relations in society. The dominance of the AK party, both in governance and in public opinion, is visible in the appropriation of Davutoğlu's discourse at the level of the foreign policy elite (Aras B. , 2009).

However, Davutoğlu's description of the behavior of Turkish officials tends to overlook the initial hesitation to back the protesters at the beginning of the Arab spring in Tunisia and Libya (Cornell, 2012). Moreover, when protest broke out after the controversial re-election of Iranian President

Ahmadinejad Prime Minister in 2009, Erdoğan was among the first to congratulate him. Davutoğlu tends to forget that, in recent years, Turkey has not always been on the right side of history.

A key concept in Davutoğlu's text is that of becoming a "*wise country*" (p. 3). A wise country is a metaphor for a responsible member of the international community (Davutoglu, 2012). Turkey is ready to take on the responsibilities that come with such a title, delivering "*essential functions*" (p.3) such as conflict prevention, mediation and resolution or development assistance. The fact that Turkey is now ready to assume her responsibilities implicates that previously Turkey either was not ready or not willing to do this. However, in the case of Syria, Turkey could not prevent the escalation of the conflict. On the contrary, it befriended a dictatorial regime which, even before the uprisings, acted against all the values that Turkey has long claimed to protect. Perhaps after these mistakes the time has now come for Turkey to really become a wise country.

In the background of all the statements made by Davutoğlu, or any other text on Turkey's foreign policy, are the economic and political stability in the country. Turkey has implemented important reforms domestically in order to qualify for EU membership. Together with its fast growing economic power this gives Turkey a growing influence in regional issues (Aras B. , 2009).

Davutoğlu is aware of the influence of the social context on Turkey's foreign policy discourse. He notes for example how history shapes Ankara's policies: "*we formulate our policies through a solid and rational judgment of the long-term historical trends and an understanding of where we are situated in the greater trajectory of world history.*" (Davutoglu, 2012, p. 2)

However, Davutoğlu makes it look like he is simply doing what the environment determines, as if any rational person would do the same. This way he strips Turkey's foreign policy of all subjectivity. What he tries to cover up are the power relations that determine the direction of Turkey foreign policy. Bilgin (2007) has shown how political actors with divergent foreign policy discourses all assume that Turkey's geographic position is deterministic for its foreign policy. Nevertheless they all come to very different conclusions. By doing this Davutoğlu effectively depoliticizes Turkey's foreign policy and makes it seem that he does not have a choice. The *modality* he chooses approaches that of a scientific truth. While he recognizes that there are certain contextual factors influencing his discourse, he uses it to justify every political choice he makes. By adopting such a position of environmental determinism Davutoğlu makes his discourse seem infallible. Certain policy decisions become inevitable while other, possibly better alternatives, become out of the question (Bilgin, 2007).

4.2 The discourse of Defense Minister Yilmaz

Main source: NATO Review. (2012). *Turkey: interview with Defence Minister Yilmaz*. Retrieved July 2, 2012, from: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/Turkey-Greece/Turkey-Defence-Yilmaz/EN/index.htm>

The material used here is an interview with Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz by a reporter of NATO Review, an online magazine which discusses security issues relevant for the NATO organization. The interview is part of an issue on the 60 year anniversary of Turkish and Greek membership of NATO.

4.2.1 The level of text

Before the interview reaches the subject of the Arab Spring, Minister Yilmaz unintentionally hints on Turkey's changed geopolitical perspective. When talking about the reasons of Turkey joining NATO he first says this is a consequence of Turkey importing Western values. However, he quickly corrects himself and says: *"let's not say Western, [but instead] universal values"*. This form of hedging is notable because of Turkey's increased interest and activism in its own neighborhood in recent years. In earlier times, when Turkey sought to gain acceptance and integration in the West, using the term *"Western values"* would not have been a problem.

According to Yilmaz, *"Middle Eastern and East Mediterranean countries have been the cradle of many conflicts, transitions for many centuries"*. However, the *"transitional process in the Middle East has not finished, even today."* Yilmaz, like Davutoğlu, uses the word *"transition process"* to define the situation in the Middle East as a natural, logical and irreversible chain of events. It is thought of as part of a process that has been going on for centuries. By describing the events in the Arab world as a process he makes it intransitive, he strips the uprisings of the subjects who are rising up.

Yilmaz also points to the privileged state Turkey is in, having tripled its economy in the last ten years. This way he also indicates that Turkey has already come a long way in the transition process. For Yilmaz it is an important factor in the way in which Turkey is perceived in the region. People in the region take Turkey seriously because of Turkey's economic power. Yilmaz is very much aware of this as well as other important characteristics of Turkey, saying:

"Turkey is in a good economic condition, both a Muslim country and a country that has democratic values and democracy, that is respectful to local values in this respect, that adopts democracy and is a EU candidate country. For the countries in North –Africa, the countries where the Arab Spring has been inspired, and for most of the countries in the

Middle East, at least for part of the public, these criteria are a model. “

He notes that the combination of these properties can be a model for other countries, although it is important to analyze the modality of his statement. Yilmaz hedges when he says *“at least for part of the public”*. This indicates a lower amount of affinity with his statement. This lower amount of affinity is shown again in the continuation of his statement when he says: *“They [the Middle Eastern countries] think that Turkey is partially showing that it is possible to develop and to reach a contemporary level of civilization while taking core values as a base.”* In brief, what Minister Yilmaz is saying is that Turkey is partially showing that it can be a model for part of people in the Middle East. He is very careful in how he is projecting Turkey as a role model.

The idea of a *“contemporary level of civilization”* corresponds with Yilmaz’s earlier statement about the Arab Spring as a transition process. Turkey is apparently already a step ahead on the civilizational ladder which ought to give them a certain form of authority over those who are further down. It implies that the Kemalist objective of reaching a level of development and modernity similar to that of the Western countries is finally accomplished.

It is also notable how Minister Yilmaz consequently says that *“they [the Middle Eastern countries] see Turkey as a model”* or *“they see Turkey has reached a level of development”*. His wording almost seems to suggest that Turkey is the victim of its own success. Turkey now has to be a model for the Arab world because they expect Turkey to. In the way that his sentences are grammatically constructed, Yilmaz omits the agency of the Turkish government. He says that the Arab countries see Turkey as model and forgets to say that it is also in the interest of Turkey to be seen as a model. As a role model Turkey could increase its influence in the region. Furthermore, the origination of the role model concept is partly due the changing foreign policy discourse in the Turkish government, with a shift in focus from military influence towards economic and ideological influence in the region. This shift can be connected with the rise of the AK party and the new Turkish elite in Turkish society .Yilmaz is a prominent member of the AK party and the new Turkish elite.

Another factor which puts Turkey in a unique position is, according to Minister Yilmaz, Turkey’s shared history with the Middle East. This corresponds with Davutoğlu’s notion of ‘Strategic Depth’. For Yilmaz, Turkey’s unique position is the reason why the international community, NATO, and the EU, should support Turkey in its efforts to provide peace and stability in the Middle East. Yilmaz’s argumentation goes as follows:

“Turkey knows the region better than outsiders, we have lived together approximately for

400 years, 500 with some countries. Hence the country that can solve their differences or understand them is Turkey. Therefore, as long as Turkey has support, we understand other countries. We are respectful to their values and we want them to have peace without any malicious intentions."

However, the argument that 'living together' for a long period indicates that different people can more easily understand each other is a fallacy. History is full of violent evidence that points to the opposite. It is true that Turkey has lived together with other countries in the Ottoman Empire. Yet, the very notion of 'empire' indicates that this 'living together' was characterized by unequal power relations and domination by the Ottomans (i.e. today's Turks). The Syrians, Egyptians, Serbs, and others only came to live 'together' after they were conquered by the Ottomans. The interviewer does not criticize Minister Yilmaz for making this invalid statement, which indicates that Minister Yilmaz has a high amount of interactional control. The relationship between the speakers with Yilmaz's position of authority prevents the interviewer from making any comments on Yilmaz's statements. This is in turn related to the subject of ethos. Because of the lack of criticism Yilmaz is allowed to, more or less, reconstruct Turkish and Middle Eastern history and culture into a new, shared, identity.

4.2.2 The level of discursive practice

The interview with Defense Minister Yilmaz was conducted during one of his visits to NATO. It appeared on NATO Review, which is an online magazine published by NATO. It is described as: *"the Alliance's flagship magazine on current policy issues, [...] intended to contribute to a constructive discussion of transatlantic security matters"* (NATO Review, n.d.). On the website of NATO Review an image is created of an objective and semi-scientific magazine. During the interview this image is quickly proven to be false. The interviewer is not at all critical of the things Yilmaz says, even though some of his statements can be easily disproved. Furthermore, his questions are highly suggestive and sometimes they seem to be derived directly from the AK party program. The following question is a good example of this: *"Do you feel that following the upheaval in Africa and in the Middle East, starting in 2011 and continuing into 2012, makes [sic] Turkey's position far more important geopolitically?"* This fits right into the policy of 'Strategic Depth' and the AKP's foreign policy in general.

The catchphrase of NATO Review, *"NATO Review, were the experts come to talk"* (NATO Review, n.d.), gives the impression that just about any expert can join in on the discussion. It implies that NATO's policy objectives do not influence the contents of the magazine. Of course this is not true. In the end it is still the NATO who determines who is being interviewed and who is not. It would

be hard to imagine that somebody with a critical stance towards NATO would be allowed to vent his or her critique on this platform. In fact most people interviewed by NATO Review are either employees of NATO or, like Yilmaz, officials from a NATO member state. Furthermore, the people that are chosen to be interviewed might take on a different stance than they would in another setting. In this instance Minister Yilmaz might be more positive on NATO because he is being interviewed by a NATO official, whereas he might be more critical when he is speaking to his own electorate.

Another factor that is complicating this particular interview is the fact that everything Minister Yilmaz says has to be translated from Turkish to English. The difficulty here for the researcher is in determining whether the translation corresponds with that which Yilmaz actually intends to say. According to Marcela Zelnickova, project coordinator at NATO Review, the translation was done in-house by a NATO employee and the voice-over was made so that it would flow smoothly. However, the substance of the interview was said not to have been edited in any way (personal communication, August 2, 2012). There is of course a risk that certain details get lost or explained differently than intended. On the other hand, this risk seems to be small when looking at the interactional control. The interview is possibly scripted to a certain degree. During the interview Minister Yilmaz is holding a paper in his hand which likely contains a list of question and possible answers, although this cannot be confirmed. Even if Minister Yilmaz would have made a curious statement, this could have been edited out afterwards. In an interview like this, neither side wants to alienate himself from the other. Moreover, it is very unlikely that an experienced, high-ranking, diplomat such as Minister Yilmaz would be tricked into making any controversial statements, even if the interviewer would try to do so.

Minister Yilmaz's discourse contains an important part of intertextuality. He refers to the well known Turkish principle of *"peace at home, peace in the world, peace shall remain everywhere"*. This is perhaps the most famous quote from Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the Turkish republic. It has been the guiding principle behind Turkish policy from the days of Ataturk until now. The original discourse of Ataturk is clearly still important in Turkey's foreign policy today. This is shown not only by this quote, but also reflected in the 'zero problems' policy laid out by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. In an elaboration of the 'zero problems' policy on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first paragraph starts with the following:

"Aware that development and progress in real terms can only be achieved in a lasting peace and stability environment, Turkey places this objective at the very center of her foreign policy vision. This approach is a natural reflection of the "Peace at Home, Peace in

the World” policy laid down by Great Leader Ataturk, founder of the Republic of Turkey. Besides, it is a natural consequence of a contemporary responsibility and a humanistic foreign policy vision.” (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011)

Given that the ‘zero problems’ policy is a reflection of the ‘peace at home, peace in the world’ mantra it is clear that there is high degree of intertextuality and interdiscursivity in Yilmaz’s discourse as well as the AK party’s foreign policy discourse in general. Ataturk’s principles are adapted to 21st century politics. However, it seems that most governments in Turkey have drawn upon Ataturk in some way or another when it came to their foreign policy. An earlier study using discourse analysis has shown that the ideology of Kemalism has been used differently by a variety of governments to legitimate sometimes competing interpretations of Kemalism (Bagdonas, 2008). The question that comes to mind is whether Ataturk is really the ultimate inspiration for the AKP’s foreign policy or the ultimate way to legitimize it.

4.2.3 The level of social practice

Minister Yilmaz attaches great importance to the previous policy decisions made in Turkey, especially the choice to join NATO in 1952. These choices are made because of the Turkish support for Western/universal values. He says: *“Through joining NATO in 1952, Turkey determined its direction and its security as the same as the West. This was not a decision Turkey took only in 1952, this was the consequence of Turkey supporting Western values.”* He later corrects himself to say *“universal values”*. Still, it can be said that, according to Minister Yilmaz, the general forces of Westernization in Turkey at the time moved Turkey in the direction of joining NATO.

According to Yilmaz this support for Western values and NATO is still present in Turkey today. When asked how NATO is perceived in Turkey he replies:

“Among the public there is a perception that NATO provides enough security for Turkey. Therefore, the public is pleased. [...] In Turkey there is an agreement, with the big majority in Turkey that believes that NATO is the right organization for Turkey’s defense.”

However, a recent survey by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (Nyiri & Raisher, 2012) has actually found that Turkey, as in past years, is the country with the least support for NATO. Turkey’s support for NATO lagged far behind that of the US and the EU countries, with only 37% of respondents saying that NATO is essential for their country’s security. Both the US and the EU have a support rate of 62%. Even the lowest scoring EU country, Poland, rated far above Turkey (Nyiri & Raisher, 2012). Thus, the results of this survey disprove Minister Yilmaz’s claim that there is a supportive climate towards the NATO in Turkey, on the contrary. The reason for

Yılmaz's misconception could be that he overstates Turkey's support for NATO because he is being interviewed by NATO Review. There is also the possibility that he truly misjudges the feelings of the Turkish citizen towards NATO. The lack of support for NATO is an important part of the social practice in which this text is produced. However, it does not seem to influence Yılmaz's discourse and if it does he is not going to admit in an interview with NATO Review.

This is an observation that needs to be elaborated upon further. As discussed in chapter 3, the focus of Turkish foreign policy has in recent years shifted more towards its own neighborhood. The Turkish government wants to prevent the image of Turkey breaking away from the West. However, at the same time Western interventions in the Middle East, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, have made the West less popular. Relations with Israel have also deteriorated. Meanwhile, the military and the old Turkish elite, the guardians of Kemalism and Westernization, have lost influence in Turkey. It might be wise for the AKP not to attach itself too closely to the West. Not only for ideological reasons, but also given the current feelings in Turkish society.

Minister Yılmaz repeatedly points to the economic and democratic development of Turkey. Turkey is now a more stable country with higher standards of living than before. Because of this Turkey is in a better position to be a role model.

“What people are asking for is peace and living in a better world. Turkey is a good model for that. Compared to the past Turkey is in a better condition. Thereby Turkey can show its example model both in the Middle East and North Africa.”

Thus, the changing social practice in Turkey has made it possible for Turkish policy makers to propose Turkey as a role model for other countries in the region.

In the interview Yılmaz frequently points to the importance of cooperation between Turkey, NATO and the EU. This is not surprising given the setting of the interview. However, there are other important actors in Turkey's region who are necessary for the resolution of pressing conflicts such as the civil war in Syria or issues like the Iranian nuclear program. These problems cannot be resolved by focusing solely on NATO or EU diplomacy. As a start, countries like Russia, China and India could be more involved, possibly bilaterally or through a UN framework. The fact that Yılmaz keeps focusing on the West to solve the regional problems can be seen as part of the Cold War logic that Davutoğlu has warned against. In this sense, Yılmaz is not completely adapted to the new conditions of 2012.

4.3 The discourse of former Foreign Minister Yasar Yakis

Main source: Slavin, B. (2012). *'Former Turkish Official: Assad Fall May Lead to Chaos in Syria'*. Retrieved July 11, 2012, from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/former-turkish-foreign-minister.html>

The text that is being analyzed in this paragraph is an interview with former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Yasar Yakis. As one of the founders of the AKP, he is an influential member of the AK party and currently holds a seat in the Turkish parliament. Barbara Slavin of the al-monitor was kind enough to provide me with the original audio recordings, which provided me with extra material to analyze that will also be included in this discourse analysis.

4.3.1 The level of text

Already in the introduction of the article it becomes clear that Yasar Yakis takes a different stance towards the crisis in Syria than Ahmet Davutoğlu and Ismet Yilmaz who are both officials of the current AKP government. The thesis that Assad's fall might make matters worse in Syria is something that Davutoğlu or Yilmaz did not mention in their interviews. Prime Minister Erdoğan has even called for Assad's resignation on numerous occasions. There is thus immediately an indication that there is a significant difference between the discourses of Yakis and other members of the AKP establishment.

Another indicator of the general setting of the interview is the first quote from Yakis *"The Syrian question is more complex than we all think"*. His wording indicates that he is not targeting a specific person, but rather the general conception of the Syrian conflict. However, by emphasizing the complexity of the situation, Yakis diverges from Davutoğlu and Yilmaz who speak of the Arab uprisings in terms of a natural and objective process towards democracy. Furthermore, whereas Davutoğlu and Erdoğan have called upon Assad to step down, Yakis think every opportunity should be used to maintain communication with Damascus. Using this quote in the introduction to the interview signals that the writer of the article considers this an important part of Yakis's message.

Occasionally, Yakis's opinion on the complexity of the Syrian conflict is also a reason for him to take a critical stance towards the AKP government. He disapproves of Erdoğan's earlier decision to cut off all ties with the Syrian regime, because it has deprived Ankara of leverage over the Syrian regime. Erdoğan's reaction to the recent shoot down of a Turkish plane by Syrian defenses has been more moderated, which can count on more support from Yakis. According to Yakis this is the best way to handle the current crisis, because military interference by Turkey would make it

impossible to cooperate with the Syrian regime. Furthermore, it would also lead to an escalation of the conflict as it would be an open invitation for other actors to intervene. According to Yakis, Turkey took:

“The right decision by siding with the people when the people and the dictator were facing each other. But doing it on the assumption that Bashar al-Assad’s fall was imminent was a too courageous a decision. Whereas people like me, who worked in diplomacy for 40 years, prefer not to put all eggs in one basket.”

After his critique on the Turkish government, Yakis continues with a reference towards his experience as a diplomat, which ought to give him authority to speak on this subject. In doing so he attaches a great degree of modality to his statement. It seems that other people with such experience can only come to the same conclusion as Yakis. The ‘eggs in the basket’ metaphor points to the unpredictable nature of international politics. For Yakis, it is better to have multiple options on the table because you cannot be sure which option you will need.

Although Yakis thinks that Assad will fall some day, he stresses that it is very difficult to predict exactly when this is going to happen. He uses the metaphor of an earthquake to illustrate this: *“Bashar al Assad’s fall sooner or later is going to arrive, but I always thought that it was like predicting an earthquake. I could take place in the next week and it could take place in the next decade.”*

Yakis argues that Syria is fundamentally different than other Arab countries. This is the reason why Assad’s fall alone does not save the problem in Syria:

“The Syrian question is more complex than we all think [...] In Syria, unlike in other Arab countries, the destiny of the army, the political regime, security and intelligence, the four of them which are the main pillars of the state, are tied together very closely and very strongly. And if one falls, the others should also fall [...]. Without creating a substitute for these four elements [...] then the country will fall into chaos.”

This argument goes against a number of assumptions made by Davutoğlu and others in the AKP government. According to Yakis, the situation is very complex and of a different nature than other popular uprisings in the Middle East. Therefore, the fact that Turkey’s approach has worked in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt does not mean that it will work in Syria. The removal of Assad does not mean that all will be well for Syria, the opposite may be true. There needs to be a plan not just for the removal of Assad but also a plan for the future of Syria. If Yakis’s expectation is true, it might even be the case that Syria is better off with Assad than without him, and under the rule of the

Baath party strongmen.

For Yakis the Baath regime that Assad inherited from his father is the main cause of the problems in Syria. Yakis even says that:

“a British educated ophthalmologist [...] would never do all these things which are happening. It is because the pressure of this team [...] that he inherited from his father Assad that caused all this trouble. So when you move Bashar al Assad and leave the others it may be even worse.”

It is not unreasonable to say that the Baath party is an important cause of the current conflict in Syria. However the assumption that a British educated ophthalmologist, an eye doctor, would not commit the crimes that are committed in Syria is rather naïve. Although it is not clear how much influence Assad still has Syria, as President he is ultimately responsible for the crimes that his subordinates commit. However, it is evident that he has not tried anything to curb the violence in Syria or to enact democratic reforms. He might be under pressure from the Baath establishment, but as president he is the perfect person to do something about it. Yakis, however, is quite convinced of Assad's innocence. With regards to the modality of his statement, both his intonation and wording indicate that he is convinced of his statement.

Unlike Defense Minister Yilmaz, Yakis emphasizes the importance of Russia in the conflict in Syria. Without Russia it is not possible to reach a durable solution to the conflict. It is not only a regional power, as a member of the UN Security Council it has the power to veto any resolution on Syria that it does not like. However, because of Russia's strategic interests in Syria they are not likely to give up on Assad easily. In addition to involving Russia, Yakis argues that a settlement of the Syrian issue must incorporate the Syrian regime as well. *“The regime, with or without Assad, has to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.”* This vision is quite different from that of the AKP government. They seem to think that Assad and the Baath-party elite have to go before any solution is possible. Yakis realizes that his opinion might differ from the official state policy when he says: *“This may not be Turkey's position but as a person who lived there and knows the sensitivities, I think this may be one exit.”* Yakis more or less says that he knows better than the AKP government, his fellow party members, how to handle the crisis in Syria. He attaches a great degree of modality to his statement saying it *“as a person who lived there and knows the sensitivities”*. However, from a former Foreign Minister and expert on the Arab World it might be wise for the current government to take notice of Yakis's opinion on the Syrian issue.

4.3.2 The level of discursive practice

The interview with former Foreign Minister Yakis appeared in an article on Al-Monitor. On their website Al-monitor is described as a news site focused on the Middle East. It offers a combination of original articles and a selection of translated articles from independent newspapers from different countries of the Middle East. Its aims are to offer *“in-depth coverage and fresh perspectives from the Middle East to a global audience”* (Al-Monitor, 2012). Al-monitor does not endorse a particular political party or cause. It aims to offer different perspectives from different sources. In this sense it can be said that al-monitor aims to increase the amount of interdiscursivity. In the case of Turkey, Al-Monitor offers articles from six different newspapers in Turkey, with different political affiliations. Some of the Turkish newspapers included on the site are Haber Turk, Milliyet and Radikal, which are influential and popular newspapers in Turkey. The board of Al-Monitor consists of influential people from the business, academic and political community, both from within and outside the Middle-East. Among them are the head of the Arab League Mission in Paris and the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center.

An example of an original article by Al-Monitor is the interview that is being analyzed here. The interview fits into Al-Monitor’s objective of offering different perspectives. The interviewer sometimes points out how the American perspective differs from Yakis’s or the Turkish perspective. On some occasions, there are notable differences between Yakis’s discourse and that of Yilmaz or Davutoğlu. On the other hand there are also a number of similarities with the discourse of the AKP government. This is not surprising since they are members of the same political party.

Yakis is a member of the Turkish parliament for the Justice and Development Party (AKP). In his career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs he has worked as a counselor at the Turkish embassy in Syria. Later on he became ambassador to Saudi-Arabia, Egypt and the UN. He entered politics in 2001 as a co-founder of the AK party and became Deputy Chairman, in charge of international relations (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2009). In 2002 he was elected to parliament and became Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first AKP government. As a Foreign Minister he was in charge of the negotiations on EU accession and easing tensions with Cyprus. He is currently a member of parliament for the AK party (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2009).

Because of Yakis’s close alignment with the AK party and the current government it is surprising that he takes a critical stance on government policy. However, as a former Foreign Minister and a distinguished diplomat he has a certain authority that is difficult to match for other AKP member of parliament. His experience as a diplomat in the Arab world, particularly in Syria, gives him a

well-informed perspective on the current situation in Syria.

According to Yakis, Turkey is, after Syria, the country that would suffer the most from the chaos that would erupt after a possible fall of Assad. In that case Turkey will have to deal with even larger groups of refugees as well as possible foreign intervention. In addition, Yakis warns for the danger that the Kurds will establish an autonomous government near the border with Turkey when a power vacuum arises in Syria. Yakis's warning about the Kurds goes as follows:

“Secondly, the groups that are the strongest or the best organized in the [Syrian] opposition are the Kurds. [...] Two of their parties are very strong and they are almost sine qua non for any solution in Syria, in the opposition. One of them is in touch with the PKK terrorist organization and is acting together with Bashar Assad [...]; the other is close to [Iraqi Kurdish leader] Barzani and is in the opposition. But we know from the history, from our experience in the north of Iraq that when the Kurdish identity question is raised, the Kurds are capable of putting aside their differences and reunite. [...]. If the country falls into chaos, the Kurds are likely to declare their autonomy [...] so we will have in addition to the difficulty that we are going to have because of the refugees, a Kurdish region on the Turkish border and more difficulties with fighting against PKK terrorism.”

This is not the first time the Kurdish threat has been used by Turkish politicians or generals. Yakis builds on this tradition and uses it to urge for caution in Turkey's handling of Syria. There is thus a degree of interdiscursivity here. In his wording Yakis connects the Kurds in Syria directly with the issue of PKK terrorism, the Kurdish threat. However, it is not unlikely that after the civil war in Syria, the possibly autonomous Kurds of Syria will mainly focus on rebuilding their livelihoods.

With regards to the Syrian opposition Yakis is very much aware of the difficult position they are in, saying: *“as long as they are not coordinated among themselves, they will remain separate”*. He says that there is even a risk of rivalry between opposition groups when they become dominant in different regions. Regional rivalry would create a new problem after a possible fall of Assad. He is also curious about the outcome of a possible democratic election in Syria, since it is not clear whether the opposition has broad based support. Yakis refers to an opinion poll of several months ago which still depicted a majority of 56 percent in support of Bashar al-Assad. The opinion poll is a form of intertextuality and is used by Yakis to illustrate the division in Syria. It serves to underpin his claim that the fall of Assad is not necessarily imminent and that his fall this might lead to more trouble in Syria.

Yakis's concerns over the possible outcome of the Syrian unrest can also be seen in the following

fragment, in which he mentions the aftermath of the protests in Egypt:

“In Egypt, when we talk of the strength of the opposition, if you take into consideration the rhetoric used in the Tahrir Square is not what the elections gave as a result. Prime Minister Erdoğan, since I worked with him very closely at the [...] establishment of the [AKP] party used to say that the voice of democracy can be understood only when the votes in the ballot box are counted. So we do not know what type of outcome will produce an election, a very democratic election in Syria.”

This is another form of transitivity as Yakis cites Prime Minister Erdoğan, a man who Yakis knows personally. It serves as a warning that the fall of Assad will not automatically lead to democracy in Syria.

4.3.3 The level of social practice

Yasar Yakis repeatedly notes his experience as a diplomat in the Middle East. In the following fragment he connects his experience as a diplomat with his discourse:

“I happen to be the longest serving Turkish diplomat in the Middle Eastern countries. I served four years in Syria, four years in Saudi-Arabia and four years in Egypt. [...] So my assessment regarding the situation may vary slightly from the assessment of others.”

Because of his experience, Yakis probably has a more detailed perception of the social practice in countries like Egypt and Syria. Therefore his discourse is somewhat different from others, who do not have this experience. This could be part of the reason why Yakis’s discourse occasionally differs from Davutoğlu, Yılmaz or Gül, who have not served as a diplomat in the Middle East.

As noted earlier, Turkey’s experience with the Kurds has influenced Yakis’s discourse. Turkey has also had some troubles with refugees in the 90’s, which is still remembered in Turkey today. This experience makes Yakis wary of the possible surge of Syrian refugees towards Turkey, saying that *“receiving refugees is a problem which looks differently for a Turk than an American”*.

4.4 The discourse of President Abdullah Gül

Main source: France24. (2011). *France24 The Interview: Abdullah Gül, Turkish President*. Retrieved July 8, 2012, from: <http://www.france24.com/en/20111210-abdullah-gul-turkey-president-syria-crackdown-defectors-army>

Abdullah Gül has been the President of the Republic of Turkey since he was elected in 2007. Before that he was Minister of Foreign Affairs and also briefly Prime Minister. The discourse of President Abdullah Gül regarding Syria will be studied using an interview he gave to a

correspondent of the French TV channel France24.

4.4.1 The level of text

Gül says he is very sorry of the events taking place in Syria, because *“all of the Syrian people are [Turkeys] friends”*. In addition, as the president of a neighboring country he would like to see order and stability in the country. This seems to be primarily in the interest of Turkey, because it is important to maintain stability at Turkey’s borders. Gül explicitly states that he does not want to be misunderstood and that he does not have a hidden agenda towards Syria. He states: *“We only want all of the Syrian people to be happy, to have economic prosperity and freedoms. It is within this framework that I say what I say.”* By saying that all the people of Syria are his friends Gül attempts to neutralize the conflict in Syria. His wording is very careful and he chooses not to take a side in the conflict. This could be a deliberate attempt to keep different options open for Turkey in the future. It could also be a more natural reaction by Gül. After all it part of his job as a president to act as a bridge between conflicting parties. Throughout the interview he makes sure not to blame a specific ethnic or religious group for the violence. An example of this is that although he holds Assad, the Baath establishment and the state security apparatus responsible for their part in the violence, he does not blame the Alawites for their overrepresentation in the Syrian regime.

However, even though Gül says that he only wants the Syrian people to be happy it is clear that the Turkish government has important strategic interests in Syria. As mentioned before, stability at the Turkish-Syrian border is very important. Other issues that he does not mention are the stream of refugees who are heading towards Turkey and the Kurds who are living in the border region of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. A protracted conflict in Syria may encourage Syrian Kurds to establish an autonomous government, which would in turn have consequences for the Kurdish issue in Turkey. President Gül is surely aware of this, but he does not mention it during the interview. Perhaps he does not want to focus too on the Kurds, since it is such a delicate topic in Turkey.

According to Gül, things got out of hand when the Syrian regime chose to suppress the *“legitimate demands”* for democracy and freedom with tanks and soldiers. This got many people killed and the Syrian people in turn reacted to this. From the following segment it becomes clear that Gül blames the Syrian government for the escalation of the conflict.

“What I say is very clear. There are legitimate demands of the people. And instead of listening to the legitimate demands, instead of analyzing those demands very carefully. You have, if you have the tanks, the soldiers to suppress these people in order to maintain

the one-party regime, then you have what you have today. And this is very saddening.”

Gül’s choice of words has an effect on the way the identities of the conflicting parties are constructed. Saying that there are *“legitimate demands of the people”* creates the opposition’s identity as rightfully asking for reforms and broadly supported by society. By saying *“what I say is very clear”* he gives a high modality to his statement. However, because of the variety of factions within the Syrian opposition it is not easy to say that all their demands are legitimate or that they are supported by a majority of the Syrian people. There are also small groups of religious extremists who want to establish an Islamist state. From the perspective of the AKP this can hardly be called legitimate. The identity of the Syrian government, on the other hand, is constructed as being suppressive and violent. Describing it as a one-party regime has a connotation of authoritarianism.

When asked if Bashar al-Assad should leave power as soon as possible, Gül notes that it is not just Assad who is the problem. He says that the actual problem is the structure of the entire Syrian society:

“We should not only look at this on the basis of a person. There is a structure there; there is an ideology there, the Baath regime, the Baath party. And he is the head of this party and he has to see that things cannot go on the way they are. People who love Syria, people who love their own people, what they should do is to meet the desires, demands of this great people for freedoms and democracy.”

It is surprising to see such a statement that recognizes the complexity of the problem in Syria. Abdullah Gül makes a point that is comparable to that of Yasar Yakis, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, there are some subtle differences in the wording of Yakis and Gül. Assad does not really play an important role for Yakis because he is being pressured by the people around him to suppress the uprisings. Those people are from the Baath establishment he inherited from his father, therefore the Baath structure in Syria is the primary problem in Syria. For Gül, both the Baath structure and the person of Assad are part of the problem. He recognizes that the Syrian conflict goes beyond one person because it is rooted in the structure of Syrian society. However, at the top of this Baath structure is President Bashar al-Assad who has the ability to change the structure. For a member of the current AKP government, this is a remarkable observation by Gül. This is something that was not found in the analysis of the discursive practices by Davutoğlu or Yilmaz, who mostly focus on the person of Assad. Moreover, as can be read below, Prime Minister Erdoğan is known for having lashed out at Assad on various occasions.

Thus, Gül's stance towards Syria is certainly different than that of Prime Minister Erdoğan. Erdoğan has called on Assad to step down on numerous occasions and had cut off all ties with Syria before Gül gave this interview ("Erdoğan reminds Assad", 2011; Turkish PM cuts, 2011). Therefore it is all the more surprising that Gül thinks it is not too late for Assad to implement reforms that would lead to more freedoms and democracy. Gül states:

"Although it might now be seen as somewhat late, he should do what is necessary. [...] He should very clearly say that he is moving to a multi-party system, release all political prisoners, and it is important to hold elections with international observers."

These are the words Prime Minister Erdoğan used when he called on Assad to step down in a televised speech. There clearly is a distinct difference in their attitude:

"If you want to see someone who has fought until death against his own people, just look at Nazi Germany, just look at Hitler, at Mussolini, at Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania. If you cannot draw any lessons from these, then look at the Libyan leader who was killed just 32 days ago." (as cited in: "Erdoğan reminds Assad", 2011)

Although the two statements were made in different settings, it is clear that Erdoğan and Gül employ a different rhetoric regarding Syria and Assad. Erdoğan's attitude towards Syria is a lot tougher than that of Gül. This is shown in the metaphors that are used. Erdoğan compares Assad with Hitler and Mussolini. Gül, on the other hand, gives a rather ambiguous answer when the interviewer asks the simple question of whether Bashar al-Assad is a criminal. Gül replies: "I don't want to make any specific characterization but it is the Syrian army who are killing these people". By using this kind of wording, Gül draws the attention away from Assad and towards the Syrian army. However, it is President Assad who is commander in chief of the armed forces of Syria. Therefore, he is ultimately responsible for their actions.

The different attitude of Gül and Erdoğan can also be observed in their body language. Gül appears more calm, composed, thoughtful and charismatic than Erdoğan in public appearances. Body language is an important part of ethos, it contributes to the construction of identity through language and aspects of the body.

According to Gül, Turkey's role in the conflict in Syria is to provide a democratic platform and provide protection for victims of oppression and civilians who fight for democracy and freedom. Gül stresses that these people are not soldiers and that Ankara does not allow armed activity in Turkey. Rather, he would like to provide a platform for the discussion of the future organization of Syrian politics. Because it is a neighboring country refugees often come to Turkey. However,

reports have surfaced that suggest that Turkey is in fact supplying rebels with weapons (Weiss, 2012). In addition there is a lively arms trade at the Turkish side of the border (McDonnell, 2012).

When Gül is asked whether he thinks the Syrian regime is behind the attacks on the Turkish embassy in Damascus and on Turkish pilgrims, he replies: *“Nothing in Syria happens by coincidence. [...] It is the visible and invisible elements of the state which organize certain activities”*. Even though the Syrian regime has directly or indirectly attacked Turkish targets, this has not triggered a reaction from Abdullah Gül or the AKP government in general. The recent downing of a Turkish reconnaissance plane was met with more serious disapproval by the Turkish government. This is a sign of Turkey getting more and more discontent with the Syrian regime. However, as of yet there has not been a counter attack or other steps in this direction. The question is how long Turkey will put up with Syrian provocations.

4.4.2 The level of discursive practice

‘The Interview’ is a program on the French TV-channel France24 which features French or international guests from the fields of economics, politics, culture or diplomacy (France24, 2011). France24 is a state-owned company which describes itself as *“a leading 24/7 international news channel”* with the mission to cover international events through a *“French perspective and to convey French values throughout the world”* (France24, n.d.). It is surprising that a news agency is so open about its objectives and possible bias in covering certain events. Obviously a French perspective on the Middle East is rather different than a Middle Eastern perspective on the Middle East. It is important to be aware of the possibility that the interviewer is biased to a certain degree, which in turn might influence the questions he asks.

The interview with Abdullah Gül is conducted in Vienna at the World Policy Conference. The setting of the interview, combined with the international audience of France24, might influence Gül’s discourse. After all, the international community has different concerns and priorities than the Turkish electorate at home. Gül is known to use a discourse that resonates with his audience (Kirişci, 2011). When talking to a Western audience he uses a detailed discourse of democracy, whereas to an Arab audience he would focus on concepts like ‘good governance’ and ‘transparency’. He has repeatedly stated that Turkey itself is not without democratic problems (Kirişci, 2011). This helps to create a relation between Turkey and the Arab countries that is different than those between the EU and the Arab countries. In the latter case it is mostly the Arab countries that have problems and the EU that offers solutions.

During the conversation the interviewer sometimes confronts Gül with very direct questions, formulated in more and more provocative terms. The objective of the interviewer is probably to

get Gül out of his comfort zone, which is not very successful. As mentioned earlier, Gül's opinion is that the problem in Syria is bigger than just Assad. However, the interviewer attempts to lure him into making a statement that would blame Assad for the crisis in Syria. The interviewer begins by asking if Assad is responsible for what is happening in Syria. Gül responds by saying that it is wrong of the state apparatus to suppress the legitimate demands of the people. While he is answering this question, the interviewer interrupts him to ask: "*is Bashar al-Assad a criminal?*". Gül is slightly surprised by this question, but he evades a direct answer and continues with his story. This is all related to the setting of the interactional agenda. The interviewer tries to push Gül into a certain direction by asking these provocative questions. A controversial statement would of course make a great headline. Asking whether Bashar al-Assad is a criminal is a simple yes or no question. Even so, answering such a question can be tricky. It is difficult to say he is not a criminal, because to some degree he is responsible for what is happening in Syria. It is also difficult to say he is a criminal, because this could block possible solutions to the crisis. Gül reacted to these questions quite smoothly and he managed to stick to his own story.

Another factor related to the interactional control is the fact that Gül's answers have to be translated from Turkish to English. The translator has to interpret Gül's statements and translate them to English. Just like the interview with Yilmaz, the difficulty for the researcher is to determine whether the translation corresponds with Gül's intentions. There is of course a risk that certain details get lost or explained differently than intended.

4.4.3 The level of social practice

In this particular interview President Gül does not make many explicit references to Turkey's economic and democratic development in recent years. He did refer to Turkey's economic growth on various other occasions, such as in his address at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, saying: "*despite the economic crisis across Europe, Turkey stands out as the second fastest growing economy in the world right after China.*" (Gül, 2012). What is notable is that Gül, like Davutoğlu, does not explicitly refer to Turkey as a model for Syria or other Arab countries. Defense Minister Yilmaz did call Turkey a model for the Middle East. Instead, in the interview Gül says the Syrian opposition took as example the peoples of Tunisia and Egypt. Thus it seems that within the AKP government there is a difference in opinion with regards to the ability to shape Turkey's neighborhood.

Gül does think that Turkey's economic development can be an important asset for the European Union, because economic activity in Europe is focusing more and more on Turkey's region. Turkey already has established economic ties with this region and is a growing economy. Therefore,

Turkey can make an important economic contribution to the European Union. Gül uses the interesting metaphor of a pie:

“There is a pie, and people think that Turkey will take away some of this pie, this cake. That it is not the case. Turkey will perhaps grow the size of this cake, of this pie, and will take a share in that bigger pie, because Turkey is a growing economy. And we see the economic activity gravitating towards Asia, in Europe and in the world. And I think everybody in Europe will realize there is also a benefit in having relations with Turkey.”

Here Gül notes how Turkey’s economic growth has made it an important player in the region. Turkey can be an important asset for the European Union and in return if Turkey becomes a member of the European Union this will improve its status in the Middle East.

On the other side, Gül also realizes that Turkey needs to keep working towards fulfilling the criteria for membership of the European Union. This means that the democratization process in Turkey should continue. It is important for the social practice in Turkey that its President wants to continue the democratization process in his country.

4.5. Conclusions from the critical discourse analysis.

Since all of the four officials are members of the AK party there are a lot of similarities between their discourses. They all have to abide to the official party policy to some degree. This does not mean that there are no differences between them or that they do not criticize each other.

In general, although their degree of affinity may vary, the discourse analysis showed the following similarities:

- They incorporate the changing power relations on the level of Turkish society, Turkey’s neighborhood and also on a global level. Because of Turkey’s economic development it deserves to play a more important geopolitical role. Especially Davutoğlu and Yılmaz point to the unique strategic geographic position of Turkey.
- They reflect a changed attitude in Turkey’s foreign policy which aims to resolve regional conflict in a peaceful matter instead of the use of force. This is influenced by Ahmet Davutoğlu’s policy of ‘zero problems with neighbors’.
- They want better relations with the people of the Middle East. Especially Davutoğlu and Gül underscore the historical and cultural ties with the people of the region.
- They all stress the importance of human rights, democratic values. They think the claims

that the protesters in the Middle East make for these rights and values are justified.

- They all seem to think that Turkey should not directly interfere in Syria, at least not on its own. Thus it can be concluded that the AKP knows that there are limits to their ability to shape the Middle East.

However, even within a party or government discourse there can be variations, which can be influenced by the different background of a person. Factors like education, career experience, upbringing, culture and religion can play a role in the construction of a discourse. Furthermore, a communicative event can be influenced by the audience that is being addressed. Below are the most important differences that emerged during the discourse analysis:

- An important difference is in the perception of the Arab Spring, which is either seen as a natural, logical and objective process towards democratization (Davutoğlu and Yılmaz), or as a more complex issue of which the outcome is unsure (Yakis and Gül).
- Correspondingly, Davutoğlu and Yılmaz tend to focus on Assad as the one who is guilty for the situation in Syria. Erdogan has also made statements that condemned Assad's response to the protests. Yakis and Gül, on the other hand, point towards the role of the Baath establishment, the security apparatus and the Syrian army. Yakis even goes as far as to say that Assad is not really responsible for the events happening in Syria.
- In the texts that were analyzed, Yakis is the only one who mentions the possible threats to Turkey posed by a further escalation of the conflict in Syria.
- Yakis is also the only AK official who refers to the importance of incorporating Russia and China in a possible solution for Syria.

In addition, there are a number of geographical simplifications in the AKP discourse. These need to be addressed to make Turkey's foreign policy more realistic.

The notion of the Arab Spring as a natural process by Davutoğlu and Yılmaz does not do justice to the complexity of the uprisings. What might have made the Tunisian uprising successful might not work in Syria. Furthermore, by creating a sense of shared identity Davutoğlu and Gül try to underscore the commonalities between Turkey and its neighbors. While this is better than to argue over the many differences, it is important to realize that those differences are still there and could be the basis for conflict in the future. There are many different cultures, political systems, ethnic groups, and economic situations in different parts of the Middle East

Another simplification made by Davutoğlu and Yılmaz is the assumption that Bashar al-Assad is the bad guy while the Syrian opposition can only do well. Civil war is inevitably a lot messier than that. Various reports have shown that human rights violations are perpetrated by both sides in the conflict.

There is also a general tendency to overlook the AK party's own mistakes and its strategic interests in the region. The AKP has long supported dictators in the region as part of its 'zero problem policy'. Initially it has hesitated to fully support the protesters, for example in Libya. Today, in the case of Syria, the AKP government has taken the right side by supporting the Syrian opposition. It is the choice that corresponds with the government rhetoric about human rights and democracy.

It is inevitable for the AKP to have strategic interests in the region. The Middle East is important for Turkish trade and for its energy demands. In addition, the AKP has ideological reasons that make the Middle East an important region. Furthermore, in the case of Syria, the fate of the Kurdish population there is inextricably bound up with that of the Kurds in Turkey. Since it is impossible to deny these interests, it is better to acknowledge them. As a vocal proponent of transparency, it is always a good thing to practice what you preach.

Conclusion

This chapter will sum up the most important findings of this thesis and will address the research question of how the AK party is shaping Turkey's relations with Syria and the Middle East.

The goal of this thesis was to create an understanding about how Turkey is shaping its neighborhood, by analyzing the discourse of the country's most dominant political force, the AKP. The focus was on Turkey's relations with Syria, since the Syrian uprising is the most pressing issue in the Middle East right now.

Adopting a critical geopolitical perspective and using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis has resulted in a deeper understanding of how Turkey's relations with Syria are discursively constructed. The discourse analysis has made clear that while Turkey's rhetoric sounds promising and hopeful, it is also at times simplistic and utopian. On a more positive note, under the wings of the AKP Turkey has improved itself considerably. It has transformed from a country that could be susceptible to a 'Turkish Spring' to a country that actively supports the calls for democracy in the Middle East. Over the last years, the AKP government has shown that it supports democracy and human rights in the Middle East, even though there is room for improvement in Turkey as well.

As the single party in government, the AK party has played an important role in shaping Turkey neighborhood. The decline of military power in Turkey's society and bureaucracy enabled the AKP to proclaim its own foreign policy. Its foreign policy has made Turkey an active player in the region, shaping the dynamics of many conflicts in the Middle East and changing the balance of power in the region. It has improved ties with Syria while relations with Israel worsened, which has left Israel without regional allies. At the same time it empowered Assad when he was being isolated by the West.

However, the AKP is not the sole force that shapes Turkey's foreign policy. The relationship between Turkey and Syria is also influenced by other, non-discursive, factors that are beyond the AKP's control. The end of the Cold War, the Arab Spring and the US led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan are such factors. Meanwhile, Turkish society has become more democratic and it has become easier for advocacy groups to influence foreign policy. Business associations, for example, have been an important force in promoting economic ties with Syria.

During the Arab Spring Turkey has evolved from a passive bystander to an active supporter of democratic change in the Middle East. Turkey is an important supporter of the opposition in Syria, not only vocally but also by offering it a platform to assemble. It has become clear from the discourse analysis that the AKP government does not want to directly interfere on Syrian soil,

even though it is a strong supporter of the opposition. The Turkish government is giving shelter to refugees and the Syrian opposition but it does not support soldiers in any way, at least not openly. It is likely that Turkey alone will not be able to coerce Assad into cooperating. Only when Turkey is able to orchestrate a broad coalition against Assad will it be possible to improve the situation in Syria. As of yet, Turkey has not been able to significantly alter the dynamics of the Syrian conflict, despite the AKP best intentions.

Thus it can be concluded that there are certain limits to the AKP government's ability to shape Turkey's neighborhood. In the case of Syria there were good relations between the two nation's leaders, there was no significant conflict due to the policy of zero problems and economic relations were flourishing. In addition, Turkey has been a mediator between Syria and other countries and it kept ties with Syria when it was being isolated by the West. Therefore it would seem that Turkey has considerable soft power with regards to Syria. Yet, it has not been able to convince Assad of stopping the violent suppression of the protests. Relations between Ankara and Damascus have gradually worsened, ending in allegations back and forth between the former friends Assad and Erdoğan.

The AKP politicians consider the conflict in Syria as an important issue. There are some differences as to what is the main cause of the conflict, which leads to different solutions for the Syrian issue. Davutoğlu, Yılmaz and Erdoğan focus on Assad as the problem. The Arab Spring is a process which cannot be stopped and the removal of Assad seems to be the way to go. Gül and Yavaş, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of the general structure of Syrian society and the role of the Baath party. They think that this is the main problem and that a possible solution could include Assad provided that he makes reforms.

Whatever direction the direction the AKP government will take, it is clear that it cannot effect change in Syria on its own. This is also reflected in parts of the discourse analysis. The AKP needs support from other countries, in particular Iran and Russia, since they are the most important supporters of the Assad regime. Furthermore, it needs supports from the Turkish society for its foreign policy. It might also be wise to keep talking with the Syrian regime, like Yavaş has argued. It also needs to work with Syrian opposition however, in order to sketch the outlines of the new Syria. Even if Turkey succeeds it all these efforts there might not be an easy and quick solutions to the Syrian conflict. Only time will tell how Turkey has exactly influenced the course of events in Syria. When the conflict has ended it will be possible to fully understand Turkish actions and to determine whether the AKP government has done the right thing.

Reflection

In this last section I will give a short reflection on the process that has resulted in this bachelor thesis. Below, the limitations and results of the thesis will be addressed, as well as recommendations for future research.

Determining what my research question and theory were going to be provided me with some challenges. Initially I was planning on using a foreign policy model to determine the way in which Turkey is shaping its neighborhood. The literature on critical geography taught me that this is too much of a simplification of the messy practice of international politics. The underlying logic that when certain variables are put into a model this will create an objective result is based on the false premise that politics can be objectified. In addition, it can be difficult to determine what exactly is 'Turkey'. There are so many different actors in Turkey that it is difficult to speak of a unified discourse or a single power structure that shapes the Middle East. Therefore I have chosen how one actor, the AKP party, has influenced Turkey's neighborhood. During the discourse analysis it turned out that even within the AK party there are slight differences in discourse.

With these things in mind I took a different direction in my research, which inevitably delayed the research process. However, it has also led to a more satisfying result. It led to a new research question and theory based on the idea that politics is subjective and as a consequence all policy research is subjective. This thesis is also colored by my personal experience and therefore inherently has a degree of subjectivity. After all, my assessment of Turkish relations with Syria is just one truth among many others. It is up to the reader to assess how my vision might inform his or hers.

That being said, in my research I have tried to remain as objective as possible and to substantiate my claims as well as I could. I have analyzed a number of different AKP officials, with different functions within the AK party. The persons whose discourses have been analyzed here belong to the most influential people within the AK party. This makes it easier to make general conclusions about how the AKP influences Turkey's neighborhood. If only one policy maker had been studied, his own opinion might have been mistaken for the AKP's. With regards to the discourse analysis there is one important shortcoming in this research. This is the fact that Prime Minister Erdoğan's discourse has not been analyzed in detail. The reason for this is that it was not possible to find a communicative event that was suitable for analysis. The only sources that were available were either too short or in Turkish, such as his addresses to parliament. In the context of this thesis it was thus not possible to fully include Erdoğan's discourse. Therefore, future research into this topic should find new ways to include Erdoğan in order to gain a more inclusive picture of AKP

discourse.

The absence of Erdoğan in this study is part of a larger issue, which is the condition that I was dependent on others for material to analyze. Because of this, I had to take into account their possible bias in the production of the text. Furthermore, some of the questions I had were not asked during the interview. In a perfect world I would have been able to directly ask the AKP officials my questions, but unfortunately this was beyond the scope of this thesis. However, direct interviews with perhaps lower level AKP officials might be a possibility for future research.

Another factor that influenced my research was the rapid course of developments in the region. This had both its upsides and its downsides. What was relevant a year ago might be unimportant today. In a similar vein, the discourse behind a text that was produced only a year ago might have already changed drastically. On the other hand, the continuously changing nature of the relations between Syria and Turkey is also what makes this topic so interesting.

Despite the omissions mentioned above, I think this thesis has given a valuable insight into the way in which discourse and hidden power structures can influence the relations between countries. It has also shown that there are other, non-discursive, elements that play a role. It is the interaction between the two that has made researching this topic an interesting challenge.

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