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**ABSTRACT**  
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on the topic

**THE MIDDLE-EAST POLICY OF TURKEY (2002-2011)**

**Author:**

Mariyan Dimitrov Karagyozov

**Academic advisor:**

Prof. Alexandre Kostov, Dr. Sci.,  
corresponding member of the BAS

**SOFIA**

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Mariyan Karagyozov's dissertation on Turkey's Middle East Policy (2002-2011) contains an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and a list of references in Bulgarian, English, Russian and Turkish with a total length of 243 pages.

**The introductory part** of the dissertation explains the importance of the Middle East for Turkish foreign policy historically and in the present day due to its geographical proximity and geopolitical significance as the Middle East is located at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, with its commercial and other ties with Turkey. The region is also important for it due to its rich oil and gas reserves, while Turkey is not rich in energy resources. As a neighbouring region, the stability of the Middle East has direct implications for Turkish national security, particularly in relation to transnational threats such as Kurdish separatism and international terrorism, especially since 2001.

The next paragraph provides motivation why the Turkish foreign policy towards selected Middle Eastern countries is scrutinized. The author had choose to focus on the so-called first-tier neighbours and second-tier neighbours, as well as the Gulf states. In the first group are the immediate neighbours of Turkey Syria and Iraq; the second copries of their neighbours Lebanon and Jordan – the neighbours of the neighbours with which Turkey does not share a common border. Thus included are the countries with which Turkey has the most intense political, diplomatic and other relations, such as Syria and Iraq, which are two of the traditional centres of power in the Arab world, as well as two other states, which stability could have implications for Turkey. In regard to the Gulf states, they are important trading partners, sources of investment and tourism revenues for Turkey. These factors justify the choice of the geographical scope of the study.

This section contains the rationale for why this particular period was chosen as the object of study as well. The reason lies is the fact that since the Justice and Development Party (AKP in Turkish) came to power in Turkey in November 2002, there has been a significant intensification of Turkish foreign policy in general and towards the Middle East in particular. This is due to a combination of factors such as the stabilisation of the economy and domestic politics (the coalition governments of the previous decade have been replaced by AKP single-party governments) and the ideological preferences of the AKP. The dissertation argues that two clearly distinguishable sub-periods can be identified in Turkish foreign policy with regard to the Middle East from the beginning of this century until 2011. The end date of the study was chosen for several reasons. First, it covers two full terms of AKP governments. Second, this is a relatively homogeneous period

that begins with democratization of the Turkish political life, while non-democratic tendencies, although present to some extent earlier, gain momentum after 2011. Thirdly, regionally and internationally, 2011 was a watershed year, linked to the outbreak of the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Fourth, ending the study with 2011 provides sufficient historical distance to make sense of events.

It can be pointed out that the choice of geographical and chronological scope of the text is due to a rare feature of Turkish foreign policy in this period. In the literature on international relations on foreign policy change, which builds on the writing of Charles Herman, it is noted that a fundamental change in the foreign policy orientation of a country is rare, and even more rarely this phenomenon occurs under the rule of the same party.

A separate paragraph is devoted to the state of research on the issue abroad and in Bulgaria. It is examined how the existing literature treats the issue of the change in Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East in this period. Most of the authors agree that there has been a change in Turkey's foreign policy, but there is no agreement about the reasons for it. Therefore, some of the most widespread approaches that attempt to explain it are examined. Firstly, there is the paradigm of neorealism in international relations, which focuses on structural changes in the international system regionally and globally. The text notes the ideas of authors who link changes in Turkish foreign policy to globalization and Europeanization. Representatives of the view that there is interconnectedness and interdependence between the country's domestic and foreign policies are pointed out, as well as authors who emphasize the change of foreign policy instruments. Other widely used optics to explain Turkish foreign policy are those of constructivism and the thesis that there is an ideology called neo-Ottomanism. The strengths and weaknesses of each of these theoretical approaches are outlined, and in conclusion it is argued for the need to use primarily historical analysis and to carefully trace the sequence of events in their interrelationship, applying the strengths of each of the other theoretical strands mentioned above.

**The first chapter** provides a historical overview of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East from the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 until the AKP government came to power in 2002.

The interwar period was characterized by the autonomy of Turkish foreign policy, including with regard to its actions in the Middle East. This was due to a combination of factors. Domestically, the population was predominantly rural and illiterate, lacking a financial, commercial or industrial elite with distinct interests that it can impose on the political elite and/or

bureaucracy. This gave the founders of the Republic a free hand. Internationally, there was no distinct hegemon (After World War I, the British Empire went into decline), i.e. there was no Pax..., and the world was multipolar. This gave Turkey opportunities to exploit the contradictions between the major powers and to balance between them.

The key issues facing the Turkish Republic in the Middle East in that period were the questions of the fate of Mosul and the Hatay/Alexandretta governorates. The importance of Mosul was due to three main factors - its oil reserves; the fact that it falls within the Turkish National Pact (Misak-ı Milli) and the presence there of a significant Turkmen minority. However, as it had just emerged from a series of bloody wars (the Tripolitanian War with Italy (1911), the First and Second Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the First World War (1915-1918) and the War of Independence (1920-1923), attempting to embark on large-scale reform and modernization at home, and facing the threat of uprisings and instability on its borders, the newly founded Turkish Republic was unable to challenge Britain on its own on this issue.

The Hatay/Alexandretta Sanjak issue has attracted the attention of several generations of scholars because it can be examined on several levels. The first is the highly traumatic reconfiguration of borders and ethnic and religious identities associated with the collapse of multinational empires and their transformation into nation-states after the end of World War I.

Secondly, it is linked to the mandate system and the influence of European states in the Middle East, which was encountering resistance from local actors, as well as being an interesting example of a diplomatic success of a weak state against a great power at a particular historical moment. To achieve this success, Turkey has taken advantage of the economic and political instability in France and its need to balance the threat in Europe from revisionist states such as Germany and Italy. This leads French politicians to focus on more important issues, and in addition, London and Paris' desire to bring Turkey on board as an ally in the emerging confrontation with the Pro-Nazi Axis leads them to make concessions.

Third, this issue is key to understanding not only Turkish Middle Eastern, but also its foreign policy in general, and in this context its importance is not limited to the interwar period. This is due to the fact that Turkey's annexation of Hatay contradicts the Kemalist motto "Peace in the country, peace in the world" and the widespread view in the literature that traditional Kemalist foreign policy is oriented towards preserving the status quo, the territorial parameters achieved after the War of Independence and avoiding irredentist and expansionist foreign policy. The case

of Hatay shows that, when Turkey is not bound by allied commitments and when the military balance of power is in its favour, Ankara would not hesitate to implement interventionist policies and to intervene militarily beyond its borders.

Turkish foreign policy in the period of World War II is often referred to as active neutrality. Ankara closely monitored developments in Europe, with the Middle East being of more peripheral importance at this time. Turkey avoided involvement in the war until February 1945, when it was already absolutely clear who the victor would be.

The sense of vulnerability to the Soviet Union in the immediate aftermath of World War II was the main foreign policy factor that pushed Ankara into the Western orbit. In the 1950s, Turkey faced the difficult task of bringing Arab countries into the strategic alliances Western countries were building in the region, even though it recognized Israel and that anti-colonial sentiment was strong among the majority of people in the Middle East.

Gradually, as the Cyprus issue intensified, the need to find allies among Islamic and Arab countries pushed Ankara to improve relations with Middle Eastern states in the 1960s and 1970s. The Arab countries became important economic partners for Turkey after the sharp rise in oil prices in 1973. The economic problems of the 1970s and the liberalisation and opening of the Turkish economy to the world in the 1980s made the Arab states desirable markets for Turkish goods and services, mainly construction, which is labour-intensive, thus helping to solve the problem of internal Turkish unemployment.

In general, the Cold War period can be divided into two major sub-periods - that of a more intense bloc confrontation in the first two decades (the 1950s and 1960s), in which Turkey's room for manoeuvre was narrower, and the relative thaw in the East-West relations in the 1970s, in which Ankara had more room for balancing and made attempts at moderate opening towards the Soviet Union and the non-aligned or pro-socialist countries in the Middle East. With the Islamic Revolution in Iran the United States lost an important regional ally, the war in Afghanistan, which heightened Turkish security concerns, and the Iran-Iraq war, necessitated Turkey's active engagement in the Middle East.

The first (1991) and second (2003) U.S.-led wars against Iraq, as well as Syrian support for the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) until 1998, were other factors that attracted and kept the attention of the Turkish state leadership on the situation in the Middle East for a long time.

The first chapter includes a brief introduction and critical discussion of the ideas of the ideologue of the AKP's foreign policy in the period under review, Prof. Ahmet Davutoğlu as well.

**The second chapter** is divided into three parts and deals with Turkey's relations with Syria and Iraq, and in the case of Iraq the relations with both the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Autonomous Region and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) are examined. Ever since coming to power, one of the key issues facing the AKP government has been about the impending US war against Iraq. On the one hand, in a vote on March 1, 2003, the Turkish parliament refused to authorize the United States to use Turkish territory to attack Iraq. At the same time, however, Turkey was trying not to let this negatively affect its partnership with Washington. The war against Iraq has aroused fears in Ankara that it will not only lead to instability and a political vacuum, but that it is also likely to stimulate centrifugal processes in the Arab country, particularly with regard to the semi-independent Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq.

Since the invasion and occupation of Iraq, Turkey has worked to stabilise the situation in the country through bilateral and multilateral initiatives. Ankara has been methodically building relations with the new authorities in Baghdad, while also trying to advocate for the rights of the Turkomans (in Northern Iraq) and to support Sunni political formations in a Shia-dominated country. Iraq remains an important trading and economic partner, and the country is constantly among Turkey's top ten foreign trade partners.

Relations with the Kurdish autonomous region underwent a surprising evolution in the period under review. Until around 2008. Ankara practically refused to develop ties with the authorities in Erbil - an exception against the background of positively developing relations with the Middle East as a whole. Between December 2007 and February 2008, Turkey carried out a large-scale military operation against the PKK in the Kurdish region in Iraq, after which Turkish strategy towards the region was completely rethought. Erbil evaluated that Ankara could be its ally against Iran, Syria and the central government in Baghdad and supported Turkey against the PKK. For its part, Turkey realizes that cooperation with the KRG is paramount to containing the PKK. Second, the region could export its significant energy resources to Turkey. Third, the rising influence of Iranian-backed Shiite parties in Iraq was forcing Turkey to look for new allies in addition to its traditional partners - the Sunni Arab parties. Fourth, Turkey finds that other regional powers such as Iran and Israel are actively present in the region, leading it to try to balance their influence.

Relations with Syria are one of the key parameters of Turkish Middle East policy. Historically, they have been strained over the fate of Hatay/Alexandretta province, and during the Cold War Turkey was part of the Western camp, while Syria espoused Arab nationalism and the anti-colonial cause, as well as being in chronic conflict with Israel. The Syrian leadership was alarmed by Turkey's plans to create a chain of dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and, as a counter-move, has begun to support the PKK, further exacerbating relations between them. In response, Turkey and Israel concluded a military agreement in 1996.

In this sense, the rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus that began at the beginning of the 21st century has even been described as a historical anomaly. The main reason of the thaw in bilateral ties is due to common fears of regional instability linked to the war in Iraq. Turkey, for its part, is worried about the formation of a possible "Shiite crescent", formed around Iran and including pro-Iranian state or non-state actors in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and elsewhere. The rapprochement with Syria is a guarantee for Turkey that such an axis would not form or, if it did, would not be directed against Turkey. Also, for Ankara, improving relations with its southern neighbour is part of a policy of opening up to the Arab world and the concept of 'zero problems' with neighbours. Economically, Syria can be a new market for Turkish goods, especially those produced by smaller and medium-sized enterprises in Anatolia, whose religiously and politically more conservative owners and workers electorally support the AKP. Syria is also the most direct land transport corridor to the south, i.e. a large percentage of Turkey's land trade with Arab countries passes through it.

Syria was worried about the presence of US occupation forces in Iraq and being sandwiched between them and Israel on its southern border. At the point, when the rapprochement began, Damascus was also internationally isolated, and increasing American pressure against its ally Iran was leading the Syrian leadership to fear that after the attack on Iraq, American attacks on Iran and Syria will follow. Moreover, for Damascus, rapprochement with Turkey reduces its dependence on Iran alone.

A free trade agreement has been signed between the two countries, the visa regime has been eased, and Ankara was mediating negotiations between Israel and Syria. The results have been increased trade, economic, cultural and tourist contacts. The evidence of the reached level of political relations was the formation of a high-level Strategic Cooperation Council, which includes joint meetings of the two governments.

This relationship has not stood the test of time since the outbreak of protests in Syria in 2011, which have escalated into armed clashes between security forces and the opposition. Although after a hesitation that lasted from March to August 2011, Turkey broke ties with the authorities in Damascus, openly supported their overthrow and began to actively support the opposition.

**The third chapter** deals with Turkey's foreign policy towards Lebanon and Jordan. With regard to Lebanon, Ankara is involved in the UN peace-keeping mission in the Land of Cedars. Due to its confessional system, Lebanon often falls into political crises, and in the crises of the period under review Turkey offered political mediation. A joint political declaration was signed between Lebanon and Turkey to establish a high-level Strategic Cooperation Council, but it has not worked effectively. In terms of the political instruments used vis-à-vis Lebanon, Turkey copied its own and, at the time, very successful experience from similar bilateral mechanisms already established with Syria. An interesting detail that was not present in Turkish policy towards Lebanon until the AKP came to power is the more special attention Ankara pays to the Turkomans living in Lebanon, who are considered a community related to the Turks.

A key driver of the rapprochement between Jordan and Turkey at the beginning of the period under review was the desire of both countries to limit the negative consequences of the Iraq war. The two countries also coordinated some of their positions on Israeli attacks on Gaza. Trade and economic relations also developed well.

In spite of all these positive developments, many differences have accumulated in bilateral political relations since 2011. The interests of the two countries diverge most notably with regard to the Syrian crisis, with Turkey investing enormous political, diplomatic, financial and logistical resources in ousting President Bashar al-Assad from power, while Jordan has no strategic interest in seeing the complete collapse of the government in neighbouring Syria. Also, Turkish support for Muslim Brotherhood-linked organisations is not well received by Amman, which sees them as the main opposition movement. Jordan has close relations with Egypt, so it does not accept Turkish criticism of President Abdel Fattah Sisi. On the Palestinian issue, there is an implicit competition between Turkey and Jordan for influence in Jerusalem, and the two countries also have different attitudes towards the Palestinian organisation Hamas.

All in all, Lebanon and Jordan occupy a rather secondary place in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East. Despite their intensification, relations with them have not reached the



intensity of those with other Middle Eastern countries. In the period under review, Turkey's relations with these two countries lacked any significant contentious or unresolved issues.

**The fourth chapter** is devoted to Turkish foreign policy towards the countries located on the Arabian Peninsula, which share a number of common characteristics.

Bahrain's small size, demographic potential and low weight in the pan-Arab context predetermine the fact that relations with Turkey remain focused mainly in the commercial and economic sphere. Bilateral relations are good, but fall short of those between Turkey and other Arab countries.

Qatar is of greater regional importance than Bahrain because of its large natural gas reserves, the revenues from which allow it to maintain powerful instruments of soft power, including the pan-Arab TV-channel Al-Jazeera. In the period under review, trade, economic and energy cooperation between Ankara and Doha came to the fore. Since the beginning of the so-called 'Arab Spring', relations have developed to the point where Turkey and Qatar are identified as one of the axes of Middle East politics.

The issue of the war in Iraq dominated the relations of Turkey with Kuwait in the early years of the period under review. Kuwait was involved in the so-called 'Istanbul Initiative' of 2004 for a partnership between NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the stabilization of the region, but while Turkey favours preserving Iraq's territorial integrity and greater centralisation of the country, Kuwait fears that this could rekindle the potentially expansionist intentions of its more powerful neighbour. The Kurds in northern Iraq see Kuwait as a suitable ally through which to balance the country's Shi'a and Sunni groups, but the strengthening of the KRG worries Turkey. Cooperation between Ankara and Kuwait in trade and tourism is excellent, but at the same time Kuwaiti and Turkish interests on some regional issues, including Iran's nuclear programme and Turkish-Syrian rapprochement, diverge.

The United Arab Emirates is Turkey's leading trading partner in the Gulf region. However, this did not save relations from straining when, after the start of the so-called Arab Spring, the political interests of the two countries began to diverge sharply, leading to their stagnation for a period of about five years between 2015 and 2020, when relations were restored.

The main focus of Turkey's relations with Oman is on trade and the economy. Because of Muscat's moderate and balanced stance on Middle Eastern issues since 2011, crises have been avoided in relations with Turkey, which continue to evolve upwards.

Saudi Arabia has always been one of the countries with claims to regional leadership in the Middle East and this makes it an object of special interest for Turkish foreign policy. Ankara has developed active political relations with Riyadh, which is evident from the high-level and top-level visits exchanged during the period under review. Economic cooperation is active, with Saudi Arabia also distinguishing itself as a country where a large number (around 100 000 at certain times) of Turkish workers live and work. The uneventful relations between 2002 and 2011 underwent a transformation after the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring. Initially, the two countries' interests in toppling Syrian President Bashar al-Assad coincided, but around 2013 other issues, such as the situation in Egypt, began to drive them apart.

The general framework of Turkey's foreign policy towards Yemen coincides with that of the other Gulf countries, with one peculiarity in the trade and economic sphere - the complete dominance of the Turkish side, as Yemeni exports to Turkey are insignificant, as it is a poor country lacking natural resources.

In the period under review, political and trade-economic relations between Turkey and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula region developed in parallel. The rapid development of economic cooperation is also largely due to the complementarity between the economies of Turkey and these Arab countries. On the one hand, Turkey exports to them electrical equipment, textiles, food, construction materials, for the production of which these countries do not have the necessary conditions, while Ankara imports mainly products of the petrochemical industry and relies on investments and revenues from tourism. Relations with most countries, with the exception of Qatar, have been strained since the start of the Arab Spring and remain tense until around 2020, when a new thawing phase begins.

**The fifth chapter** of the dissertation is devoted to multilateral cooperation formats between Turkey and the Arab Middle East countries, as well as Turkey's "soft power". Unlike the other chapters, which examine relations with specific countries, this chapter is 'horizontal' and analyses the application of the same instruments in different countries. The logic of separating these two issues - Turkey's multilateral initiatives and soft power - and examining them separately is that the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The first group of Turkey's initiatives are related to overcoming the regional instability after the war against Iraq in 2003. The second strand, where Ankara was very active, was to conclude free trade agreements with regional countries. This pattern is visible in Turkish foreign policy

towards the Balkans, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. The third strand is the abolition or maximum simplification of the visa regime. As a country that attracts millions of tourists with its cultural, historical and natural heritage, facilitating the movement of people is in Turkey's interests. As of 2010, there were even discussions on the gradual establishment of a free trade area through the free movement of people and goods between Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Syria, but the outbreak of the so-called 'Arab Spring' thwarted the project.

The most important factors explaining Turkey's positive image in the Arab world in the period under review are its economic and political model characterised by relatively high growth rates and a more democratic system than in the Arab countries; a foreign policy of zero problems with its neighbours, as well as confrontation with Israel; Turkish 'soft power', including education, tourism, and serials.

This chapter highlights the activities in the Middle East of the Yunus Emre Cultural Centres, which have the task of promoting the Turkish language and Turkish culture, the Turkish Red Crescent, which is active in the humanitarian field, the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet), which disseminates religious literature, and Turkey's use of development aid as a soft power instrument. Two other organisations also play an extremely important role. These are the institutions assisting Turkish people living abroad and 'related communities', which in the Middle East work mainly with Turkoman organisations, and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). In the period 2002-2010, the institution launched more than 6,700 projects, i.e. three times more than in the previous decade (1992-2002). The main areas of activity include the social sector (health, education, training of the administration and of local specialists in various sectors from the recipient countries), the economy (communications, agriculture, energy, industry), infrastructure (water and sewage networks, construction of civil buildings and mosques), restoration of Ottoman monuments, etc. Turkey has also established a special foreign-oriented media which broadcasts in Kurdish and can be viewed in Iraq, Iran and Syria, as well as the Arabic-language Al-Turkiyya TV-channel.

The dissertation also includes a paragraph about multilateral formats between Turkey and the Gulf countries. The realisation of this cooperation between them is facilitated by several factors – this is a relatively homogeneous group of countries in geographical, religious and economic terms, as well as the fact that there is a certain degree of regional integration between them. In 2008, Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries launched a High Level Strategic Cooperation

Council, making Turkey the first country to establish such a mechanism with the GCC and to be granted the status of a non-member partner in the strategic dialogue.

Overall, bilateral relations and regional multilateral formats have a complementary role in Turkish foreign policy strategy in general and towards the Middle East in particular. Regional cooperation without the involvement of external players and some of the major global powers gives an advantage to Turkey, which is vastly superior demographically, economically and militarily to all countries in the Middle East and North Africa, with the sole exception of Iran and Egypt. Moreover, regional integration gives Ankara additional weight and self-confidence in international relations and in developing other vectors of its foreign policy.

**The conclusion argues**, on the basis of the historical review, that in developing relations with the Middle East the AKP is building on a long tradition and experience of Turkish diplomacy. Turkey's right-wing conservative parties are keen to develop closer ties with the Middle East because of shared religious, cultural and historical ties. The difference between the first decade of this century and previous attempts to open up Turkey to the region is that Turkish engagement is now becoming all encompassing, multifaceted and much deeper.

The factors pushing the AKP towards active engagement in the Middle East are several.

"Desecuritization" and the replacement of hostility with good-neighboring relations with Middle Eastern countries has led to a diminishing role for the Turkish military in determining the country's foreign policy, which is important to the AKP for domestic political reasons.

Another important set of reasons is the AKP's perception that religious proximity between Turkey and Arab countries exists in the context of a stronger emphasis on Ottoman and Islamic heritage in Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Turkish pro-Islamic political currents maintained active ties with their Middle Eastern counterparts throughout the Cold War. AKP politicians want to develop political, economical, including trade and investment, as well as touristic and cultural ties with the region. This is also important with regards to developing Turkey's relatively less developed southern and southeastern regions, neighbouring exactly the Middle East. The small and medium Anatolian bourgeoisie and producers who electorally support the AKP are oriented towards the Middle East, rather than Europe for two reasons. Firstly, they are geographically closer to the Middle East and, secondly, they prefer to export their products to these markets, where they are more competitive, rather than to the European ones.

Next, Ankara's desire to become an energy hub between Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia, is impossible without an active Turkish Middle East policy and the implementation of strategic infrastructure projects such as oil and gas pipelines.

As a consequence of all this, the instruments used by Turkish foreign policy are being renewed and broadened, including, in addition to the above-mentioned active trade, investment, economic integration, visa-free travel and increased tourism and contacts, an emphasis on the use of mechanisms such as mediation, soft power instruments such as cultural and educational institutions, etc.

In this part of the dissertation, the periodization of Turkish foreign policy in the period under review is outlined.

The first stage is called a period of increased European integration, but at the same time Turkey maintained active relations with other regions. Domestically, European integration was also given priority, because it was in line with the AKP desire to end the tutelage of non-elected actors such as the military and the civil bureaucracy over the domestic politics. Moreover, Europeanisation in the foreign policy is also visible in the application of the instruments of so-called 'soft power'. Also, Turkish foreign policy in the region of the Middle East mainly coincides with the priorities of Western countries. The synchrony between Turkish foreign policy and that of the leading Western countries in the early years of the twenty-first century was a logical result of the undeniable dominance of Western countries in world politics at that time. In this period, Turkey's main aspiration in the Middle East is to deal with the consequences of the war in Iraq, and the foundations of the new Turkish foreign policy strategy are being laid by gradually developing the legal basis of relations with various countries, activating bilateral dialogue, aspiring to sign agreements on free trade and increasing trade turnover.

The second period in Turkish foreign policy tentatively began after 2008. Its triggers are internal and external factors. Domestically, the AKP stabilized its positions after achieving a second consecutive victory in parliamentary elections, in which it even increased its result compared to 2002, and gradually gained the upper hand in the political battle with the military-civilian bureaucracy. Internationally, this adjustment of Turkish foreign policy coincides with the global financial crisis, which shakes the confidence in the economic and political model offered by Western countries as the only possible one. This period lasts until 2011 and the 'Arab Spring'.

The third stage is the attempt of AKP and Turkey respectively to achieve dominance in the Middle East region after 2011 through primarily militarized means in line with its vision of achieving strategic autonomy, but it failed. The fourth stage begins around 2020 after the foreign policy of the previous period reached its limits. This new phase is characterised by attempts to restore relations with key countries in the region such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel. The third and fourth periods are beyond the chronological framework of the present study and are therefore only marked in its concluding part.

Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East fits the general framework of Turkish foreign policy in other regions, such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, Africa, Latin America and others. Thus, its study provides opportunities to analyze the overall Turkish foreign policy, as its all vectors are interrelated and policy towards the Middle East is only one part of the larger whole. One of the conclusions of the text is that Turkey's main aspiration is to increase its regional influence, which would allow it to play a more active and important global role.

## MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

The following can be mentioned as the main contributions of the present dissertation:

- 1) It represents the first, as far as we know, comprehensive monographic study of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East during the period under review. The work proposes to distinguish chronologically a separate sub-period covering the years between 2002 and 2011 in the relations with the region. The two selected chronological boundaries are motivated by the internal political events in Turkey (general elections) and the developments of the regional and global scene. In this way, the dissertation fills a gap in the scientific literature, offering the professional community a comprehensive study within the specified chronological and geographical boundaries.
- 2) Another aim of the work is, based on the study of historical material, to propose a chronological division of Turkey's Middle East policy into two stages within the macro-period 2002-2011. Delineation of separate sub-stages with their own characteristics on the basis of chronological and problematic-chronological approach would allow a more precise and in-depth insight into the observed processes.
- 3) The advantages and weaknesses of different main theories of international relations, applied to analyse the Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East in the period 2002-2011, are pointed out. Based on the shortcomings of the various schools in international relations theory such as (neo)realism, constructivism, liberalism for a comprehensive analysis of Turkish foreign policy in the specified time and space limits, the need to apply a combined but primarily historical approach and process tracing is defended. This method relies on the application of elements of the theories and schools listed above, but it relies on carefully following the sequence of events in their interrelationship and analyzing the outlined trends as well.
- 4) An original methodology is proposed. The text groups the studied countries in a unique way. The study of two first rank neighboring countries (immediate neighbors), two countries of the second rank (neighbors of neighbors) and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula gives a panoramic view and allows the common features and differences in Turkish foreign policy towards the individual countries to be highlighted.

The regional multilateral political and economic initiatives proposed by Turkey are mentioned and analyzed - the forum of Iraq's neighbouring countries at the beginning of

the period under review; the idea of "Shamgen" - a Middle Eastern zone of visa-free travel and free trade with the participation of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey; the cooperation between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Thus, the dissertation endeavors to examine the overall policy of the Republic of Turkey towards the region, which has a broader character than the sum of bilateral relations with individual Arab countries. Thus, the hypothesis is tested whether the development of Turkey's relations with each country is a function of and whether it fits into the context of the general Turkish foreign policy towards the region and the answer is affirmative. It is concluded that Ankara emphasizes regional cooperation without the involvement of external global powers, as such formats give it an advantage, since Turkey has the most political weight among the participating countries.

- 5) The paper examines changes in Turkish foreign policy at three levels. The first is the individual level, as the biography and ideas of the main ideologist of Turkish foreign policy in this period, Prof. Ahmed Davutoğlu, are outlined. His ideas have been subjected to a critical multidisciplinary analysis, which has been lacking in the Bulgarian language until now.

The second level is that of domestic politics in Turkey. The text highlights which institutions have a leading role in foreign policy making and the changing balances between them; the coalitions of social and economic groups that support the government's policy towards the Middle East, mainly the conservative small and middle enterprises in Anatolia.

The third level of analysis is regional and global scene and taking into account the changes that affect Turkish foreign policy.

- 6) The dissertation offers information and assessments, made by Turkish official institutions, academic authors and journalists, published in Turkish, and that is why they are less known to the Bulgarian and international audience. The main aim is, by using them, a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and motivations of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East to be provided.



## **PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC**

1. Is “Turkish model” possible in Egypt and Tunisia?, in *The Arab Spring: a Hope for Change and a Challenge for the European CFSP*”, Sofia, Center for European and International Studies, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012, pp. 81-94 (in Bulgarian)
2. „Turkey's Middle East policy - an advantage or an obstacle to the European integration of the country?“ in "Restructuring of the political and ideological space in Bulgaria, Europe and the world", University of National and World Economy Publishing House, Sofia, 2015, pp. 273 – 283.
3. The Evolution of Relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, *Geopolitika*, Vol. 5/ 2016, pp. 158-167.
4. Stages in the relations between Turkey and the Gulf countries, *History*, Vol. 24, No. 5/ 2016, pp. 475-489.