

# DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN 2008 WAR: REPRESENTATION OF THE TURKISH PERSPECTIVE\*

## 2008 Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı'nın Farklı Özellikleri: Türk Perspektifinden Bir İnceleme

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### Abstract

*This article's aim is to represent the impact of the Russian-Georgian war from the Russian, Georgian, and Turkish point of views. The main focus of the study is to understand how Turkey's state structure represented itself during the August war in 2008 and how it affected the world public opinion. Although the war excessively damaged the Turkish foreign policy, Turkish government supported Georgia's sovereignty and territorial unity. Thus, assuming the role of a mediator between Turkey's two major allies, the West and Russia, Turkey has managed to become one of the important regional players in this war.*

**Keywords:** August War, Turkey, Foreign Policy, Discourse Analysis, Power Legitimation.

### Öz

*Bu makalenin amacı 2008 Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı'nın etkisini Gürcü, Rus ve Türk perspektifinden görmektir. Çalışmanın temel odak noktası, Türkiye devlet yapısının bu savaş sırasında kendini nasıl temsil ettiğini, dünya kamuoyunda bu etkinin ne şekilde olduğunu anlamaktır. Türk dış politikası bu savaşta olumsuz etkilense de Türk Hükümeti Gürcistan'ın egemenliği ve toprak bütünlüğünü savaş sırasında desteklemiştir. Böylece Türkiye, iki büyük müttefiki olan Batı ve Rusya arasında arabulucu olma rolünü üstlenerek mevzu bahis savaşta önemli bölgesel oyuncularından biri olmayı başarmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ağustos Savaşı, Türkiye, Dış Politika, Söylem Analizi, Güç Meşruiyeti.

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## **Introduction**

The conflict, which is known as the 2008 August war or Russian-Georgian war, exploded in Turkey's neighboring country-Georgia with which Turkey is interconnected for political and geographic reasons. The main cause of the war, was the presence of Europe and the USA in Georgia. A reason for which Russia was dissatisfied, and expressed this discontent by sending troops to the neighbor country. Turkey, which is a strategic partner of Russia as well as Georgia, put itself in unfavorable situation. That made the ruling power's policy questionable.

The article reviews the beginning roots of the August war and pays attention to the Georgian and Russian perceptions as long as there are various polemics about the Georgian-Russian issue. Second part of the article concentrates on Georgia's geostrategic partner and neighbor country-Turkey, that played a crucial role in the conflict situation. Therefore, neighbor country's conflict became a predicament for Turkey, major focus will be on Turkish perspective of the Five Days war. In this article, the way that the language power of leaders could legitimate their own policy, will be put under spotlight. In other words, we will try to understand how the AK Party represented the Russian-Georgian war in their favor, and the way they legitimized their power by the language used to define the South Ossetia's conflict from a Turkish perspective.

## **Aim**

The main goal of this article is to review the origins of the conflict and analyze Georgian, Russian and Turkish perspective. Moreover, focus and explain Turkey's perception of the 2008 August war as it is an ally for both countries. As, Turkey turned out to be between its strategic partner countries, the aim of the article is to argue how Turkey perceived the war from its point of view. Scrutinizing concepts of the Turkish discourses made it possible to see power of the language used by the Turkish government. According to the post-structural theory, which recognizes power of the discourse, verbal or written by the governmental legislative representatives,

gave us the opportunity to offer the following hypotheses of the Turkish representation of the conflict issue according to *Sabah* and *Hürriyet* newspapers: First, Georgia is a country of a zero-problem policy with neighbors; Second, Georgia as battlefield for war between the West and Russia; and last, Georgia as a tool for Turkey's regional security.

The methodology of this article is based on discourse analysis, that studies different narratives, written and spoken by state leaders in order to legitimate their power. Discourse is more than a data collection, where verbal speeches and written language of the narratives, have a meaning. The concept of discourse sets up a constitutive relationship between meaning and power in social practice. Every move comes from a position of power and structure within the practice. As a methodology, it is complex and needs a balance between the data and the analyses. It involves a focus upon the sociocultural and political context in which text and talk occur. The discourse analysis is concerned with a critical analysis of the use of language which can be identified in textual and verbal communications. It also encompasses the linguistic understanding of the relationship between the language and ideology, exploring the way in which theories of reality and relations of power are used in texts. This makes the best tool in order to analyze the meaning of the verbal/written discourses.

## **Beginning of the August War**

Domestic tensions in Georgia started in 1920s, when South Ossetia attempted to declare its independence. However, it gained name of the autonomous region in Soviet Georgia conquered by the Red Army. Later, in 1989, South Ossetia lobbied to be reunited with the North Ossetia in Russia or to be an independent. However, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, president of Georgia, did not allow it and triggered the conflict. Since 1991, conflict has started between Georgian and South Ossetia, Russia arranged the agreement between the conflict sides; and Georgian, Ossetian and Russian peacekeepers were located around Tskhinvali.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Nicol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, Congressional Research Service 2009, p. 2-3.

During the time, amount of Russian peacekeepers were increasing. Moreover, main source of both conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, have been supported by Russia. It's influences in these regions transformed the separatist conflicts into Russian-Georgian war. Inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were granted with Russian passports, that give the opportunity to Russia to "defend" its citizens from the "threat"- Georgia.

There are still a lot of debates about Russia's intervention in Georgia and different perceptions about the reasons of the war. For example, for Ossetians, the war was a genocidal campaign against the Ossetians conducted by Georgia. For Georgians, it was an intervention of Russia into the Georgian territory and furthermore, invasion of the West. For Russia, that war was a defensive response to protect Russian passport holders.<sup>2</sup> For the international community, it was a break of the international norms from the Russian side, which were strongly condemned and addressed both sides for ceasefire and negotiations.<sup>3</sup> A lot of different academical works such as Gerard Ó Tuathail "Near Abroad" (2017), shows the roads to intervention, underlining territorial conflicts and geopolitical struggles of the August war, and also analyzing the war with three conceptual foundations (geopolitical field, geopolitical culture, geopolitical condition) of the critical geopolitical analysis. Also, Asmus (2010) analyzes the "little war" on a big geopolitical picture as a strategical message to the United States and states that this August war, "shook the world", that "it had no winners, but multiple losers." He considers Russian foreign policy as a "killing of two birds with one stone": punishing their antagonist Saakashvili, and at the same time, sending message to the US and other leaders of former Soviet republics about predictable threat in case they turn to the West and enter to western institutions, specifically NATO.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol-Şafak Oğuz, "Hybrid Warfare Studies and Russia's Example in Crimea", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 9(17), Winter 2015, p. 271.

3 Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, The West, and The Contest Over Ukraine and The Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017, p. 127-128.

4 Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia and the Future of the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010, p. 9.

As for, Georgian perception, it accuses Russia of military aggression and occupation of the Georgian territories. Georgian point of view, about starting the main tensions, considers Bucharest Summit, where Georgia and Ukraine, post-Soviet countries, were announced as potential members of the North Atlantic Alliance, which became a red-line for the Russian security. However, inconvenience between Georgia and Russia had started, when Mikheil Saakashvili came to power. Western educated Saakashvili, with very progressive ideas and with a motto of restoring Georgian territorial unity, turned out to be disliked from the northern neighbor. During his presidency, Georgian foreign policy totally focused on the West, that was offering the main values such as democracy, freedom, and transparency. The West was progressive for Georgians, therefore, Saakashvili with the support of the citizens followed that path.

Each issue, all together, had been collected, only, there was a time for an action. And Russia chose perfect time for it. Before the direct invasion, there were some provocations ahead, where Georgia strongly tried not to be involved. However, war was an inevitable. It had been planned well: when the whole world paid attention to Olympic games in Beijing, China; When the most of the governmental workers, politicians were on holiday. Consequently, August 7, South Ossetia accused Georgia of launching artillery barrage in Tskhinvali, while Georgia was reporting shelling of the Georgian villages in the conflict zone. Saakashvili was calling for ceasefire and peaceful negotiations. However, South Ossetia separatists did not stop bombing the villages. Georgia was forced to send its forces into South Ossetia. Russian president, Medvedev, addressed emergency and sent its military forces into Georgian territory. Russian justification of this action was that “women, children and the elderly are now dying in South Ossetia, and most of them are citizens of the Russian. We shall not allow our compatriots to be killed with impunity. Those who are responsible for that will be duly punished.”<sup>5</sup> He represented Russia as a “guarantor” of security for the Caucasian people.

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5 CEDR, Doc. No. CEP-95032 August 8, 2008.uss.

This war challenged the whole world, and the neighboring countries particularly. Turkey, which is the biggest trade partner of Georgia, faced some problems during the war placing it in a difficult diplomatic situation, between the United States which is NATO ally, and Russia, the country holding a major share of trade that has an influence on the Turkish economy.

## **Russian Perception: “Coercion to Peace” in Georgia**

Since the beginning of hostilities in the conflict zone, an information about confrontation has spread in the media. Comments about the causes of the war were different. The confrontation was covered on the one hand by Russian, Ossetian and Abkhazian media, and on the other hand, Georgian and Western media. The Russians actively covered the actions of their “peacekeepers”, while emphasizing the “atrocities” of the Georgian troops that “shoot women and children” and “did not provide assistance to the victims and wounded people”, and Tskhinvali “infested corpses of civilians.”<sup>6</sup>

Russian media demonstrated that homes in Tskhinvali were destroyed because of “the shelling by the Georgian troops.” According to them, the formal reason for the entry of troops into the Georgian territory was the “protection of the peaceful South-Ossetian population”,<sup>7</sup> attempts to prevent and protect “wounded Russian peacekeepers.”<sup>8</sup> At the end of the war, analyzing information from the different sources, became known that Russia used to lie and spread propaganda to achieve its geopolitical goals. Imperial policy of the Russian Federation was interested in the weakening the neighboring state’s sovereignty.<sup>9</sup>

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6 “Peacekeepers Came under Fire”, *NTV News*, <https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/137926/>, (Date of Accession: 26.07.2018).

7 “A Month Ago, the Shelling of Tskhinvali Began”, *Vesti News*, <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=207364>, (Date of Accession: 31.12.2018).

8 Alexey Zakvasin, “What Led to the Conflict of Georgia and South Ossetia in August 2008”, *RT*, <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/543411-voina-avgust-2008-gruziya-yuzhnaya-osetiya>, (Date of Accession: 01.12.2018).

9 Kadir Ertaç Çelik-Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “Aralık 2017 Ulusal Güvenlik Strateji Belgesi Bağlamında ABD’nin Karadeniz Politikası ve Türkiye”, *KARAM*, 15(60), 2018, p. 115.

Russia, which pursues a policy of imperialism, will always try to do everything to promote ethnic conflicts in neighboring countries that are pursuing their geopolitical goals. The weakening of neighboring countries will always give a greater opportunity for imperial politics to influence the state's domestic and foreign policy. As it seems, there are no limits for Russia, and there is no crime that it cannot carry out in order to preserve the power in its sphere of influence.

Russian media used different methods of propaganda, the so-called "dosage information". Using this method, the Russian media focused only on coverage of Georgia as an "aggressor" country, but the facts were highlighted that Russian air force bombed Georgian towns and wounded the Georgian people. All the efforts were aimed at creating a positive image of the Russian leadership and at the same time, covering Georgia on the negative side. Russia represented itself as a "peacemaker" that has a moral and legitimate right to "coercion to peace." The propaganda of the Russian Federation used the possibilities to influence on the rest of the world, when Russian troops were engaged not only killing and looting in the territory of another sovereign state, but also deliberately destroy the infrastructure.

In the course of hostilities, Russia called on other countries to help to contain Georgian aggression and discriminated against the leadership of Georgia. They spread a video, where Saakashvili was frightened and chewing his tie; Russia criticized the desire for Georgia's rapprochement with the West and Georgian intentions to join NATO; Also, Georgia's failure to reduce domestic-ethnic tension within the country was criticized. By using the old KGB methods, Russia pursued a policy of intimidation by spreading the video publicly and in the end of the war they boasted of destroying military equipment and captives.<sup>10</sup>

Despite all the statements of the Russian authorities about the crimes on Georgian territory in August, Russia did not allow representatives of the European countries and organizations

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<sup>10</sup> Shumka A.V., "Information Concern in the View of the Georgian-Russian Conflict (August 8-12, 2008)", *Viys'kovo-Naukovyy Visnyk*, 2009, p. 258.

to investigate. Russia aimed to prove that Georgia committed the genocide of the South Ossetian population.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the leadership of the Russian Federation was aware of that military conflict in the territory of Georgia could not give the possibility to obtain the membership of the North Atlantic Alliance.

In order to confirm the policy of double standards of the Russian Federation and its leaders, it is worthy to demonstrate the point of the Concept of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy of July 15, 2008, which emphasizes: Russia supports efforts to strengthen the central and coordinating role of the UN. This implies: "the strict observance of the goals and principles enshrined in the UN Charter ... that only the UN Security Council is authorized to authorize the use of force in order to enforce peace."<sup>12</sup> That means Russia as a double game player implements actions against of their own proclamations.

The impunity of Russia during the August War in Georgia in 2008, has caused even greater aggression in Syria and Ukraine. Inadequate response from the Western countries, made it clear that there will be no punishment in violation of international law, and there will be no harsh sanctions.

European countries should not stand in the same situation when Russia wants to change Status Quo on the continent, because it can cost the European countries a lot. The situation in the August war of 2008 resembles the Munich Pact of 1938. In 2014, Ukraine has become the next, in order to achieve geopolitical interests the Russian Federation. History has repeatedly argued that the reluctance of joint actions and joint forces to stop the aggressor, leads to tragedies, where millions of people are victims. The Baltic states, Poland, and then Ukrainian President, Viktor Yushchenko, expressed their support for Georgia. State Secretary of the United

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11 Roman Tsimbalyuk, "Russian-Georgian War: An Anniversary of Aggression, Which was Carefully Prepared", *Unian*, <https://www.unian.ua/world/252918-rosiysko-gruzinska-viyana-richnitsya-agresiji-do-yakoji-retelno-gotuvalisya.html>, (Date of Accession: 01.01.2019).

12 "Concept of the Russian Federation Foreign Policy", *Kremlin*, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/785>, (Date of Accession: 01.01.2019).



States, Condoleezza Rice flew to Tbilisi. Also, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has brought a peace plan from the European Union. However, Russia did not suffer any serious political or economic consequences of the invasion.<sup>13</sup>

## **Georgian-Turkish Relations After the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

Relations between Georgia and Turkey were frozen in the Soviet times due to the hostilities between two blocks: The Communist and the Capitalist. However, after the demise of the Soviet Union, intensive Relations between Georgia and Turkey has begun. Turkey was one of the first countries, that recognized the independence of Georgia and started deepening relations with its neighbor state. For newly independent Georgia, Turkey opened the border and became a bridge towards Europe.

During the time, Georgia and Turkey started to switch their good neighboring relations into strategic partnership. Building the oil and gas pipelines, which connects Central Asia and Caucasus to Europe, have increased the geostrategic importance of both countries. These pipelines attracted attention of Europe and the USA, and represented Georgia as a corridor between the Caspian and the Black Sea. Georgia by transiting the resources of the Caspian Sea, to the Turkish and European markets through Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, makes the country as a key regional transporter. During the Soviet period, all transportation were being implemented through Russia. However, after its collapse, there was a need for a new transit routes. For Europe, transporting energy resources through Russia was not convenient. Otherwise, the West would be depended on Russia all the time. Consequently, there was a need for an another option, which was, building a pipeline through Iran from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf, as it was the shortest route, but, the American government opposed the construction of pipeline through Iran. For that time, the Turkish government launched a

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<sup>13</sup> Olga Koshelenko, "The Kremlin's Propaganda", *TCH*, <https://tsn.ua/svit/gruzinskiy-diplomat-poyasniv-chomu-08-08-08-ye-fikciyeyu-a-napad-rf-pripav-na-inshu-datu-1198599.html>, (Date of Accession: 09.08.2018).

campaign to construct a pipeline through Turkey, as the safest and the most economical route for oil export. In 1992, the Prime Minister of Turkey Süleyman Demirel, offered a construction of a pipeline to Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Turkey agreed on the construction of a pipeline. Nevertheless, it was a necessary to select the route for exporting, either through Georgia or Armenia. A route through Armenia was politically inconvenient, due to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. That gave the opportunity to Georgia to be involved in this important project.<sup>14</sup> BTC and BTE pipelines deepened Turkish-Georgian relations indeed and reduced the dependence of Georgia on Russia. The pipelines strengthen the security, economy and independence of the Georgian state.

Georgian presidents' foreign policy to retain good relations with neighbor countries, has been a prerogative. The same policy has been implemented in the Turkish foreign policy, that was also focusing on maintaining peaceful relations with neighbors. Zero problem policy was working successfully in Turkey's neighboring countries unless the August war started in Georgia. Turkey's foreign policy principles turned out to be under the question. However, how Turkey justified itself that is the most important research question of the article.

### ***The Zero-problem policy with neighbors over the case of Georgia***

AK Party, which came to ruling in 2002, had as an aim to improve the relations with the neighbor countries. Zero problem policy, which is a creation of the former prime minister, Ahmet Davutođlu, allows Turkey to take the role of a regional actor<sup>15</sup> by eliminating the all kinds of problems between the neighbor countries or, at least, minimizing them as much as possible.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Mithat Çelikpala, "From a Failed State to a Weak One? Georgia and Turkish-Georgian Relations", *The Turkish Yearbook*, 2005, p. 183-185.

15 Özlem Demirtaş-Bagdonas, "Reading Turkey's Foreign Policy on Syria: The AKP's Construction of a Great Power Identity and the Politics of Grandeur", *Turkish Studies Journal*, 15(1), Spring 2014, p. 141.

16 *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbors", <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa>, (Date of Accession: 09.08.2018).

The case of Georgia brought the Turkish zero problem policy with neighbors to face a serious challenge. Thus, Turkey's major step into retaining peace in the region started collapsing with the August war 2008. Nevertheless, the AK Party emphasized with its speeches that Turkey, as a regional player, would continue to sort out the problems in the region. In an attempt to gain prestige of its zero-problem policy with neighbors. The Georgian conflict with Russia did not reduce its success, in contrast, it made of Turkey an important regional actor. The AK Party by making a response on the case, represented its own power over Russian-Georgian conflict. For example, the Turkish President at that time, Abdullah Gül, in Sabah newspaper, stated that Turkey was worried about the occurrences in the Caucasus region, and mentioned that "Turkey has always played the role of a keeper of peace, stability and prosperity and it will always continue to play it in the region. Turkey has shown its support for peaceful purposes, wherever people were having trouble, or in need for help. These are shown in the Caucasus, in Georgia. I hope that this will be an example for everyone."<sup>17</sup>

Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, due to the recent situations, spoke with the president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili and mentioned "Turkey's concerns over the conflicts that led to a large number of casualties, in Turkey's friend and neighbor country, and this current situation should be peacefully resolved."<sup>18</sup> Later, Erdoğan visited the capital of Georgia and met, Mikhail Saakashvili. The prime minister said that he came to Tbilisi in order to share the pain and express the concern over the conflict. He emphasized that Turkey was following the developments and expresses its anxiety toward the conflict. Erdoğan said "We, Turkey, support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. The peace and prosperity of Georgia is closely related to Turkey and we are determined to support the Georgians who are affected by the conflict."<sup>19</sup>

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17 "Gül'den Kafkasya Değerlendirmesi", *Sabah*, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/08/12/index.html>, (Date of Accession: 12.09.2018).

18 "Erdoğan Saakaşvili ile Görüştü", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-saakasvili-ile-gorustu-9617668>, (Date of Accession: 29.11.2018).

19 "Erdoğan: Acılarını Paylaşmaya Geldik", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/erdogan-acilarini-paylasmaya-geldik-9666239>, (Date of Accession: 15.10.2018).

The AK Party was trying to settle down the situation with its zero-problem policy, which emphasized the important role of Turkey in the region. In these speeches of the Turkish president and prime minister, we see that the power of the state was ready to reestablish peace in the Caucasus region.

The Caucasus region has always been a vital link between the West and the East. For centuries, the strategic location of this region attracted the strong neighbors' attention with the aim of including the region to their borders. After the First World War, the independence of the South Caucasus states, put the region into one of the world's biggest games: Gaining power and having an influence, which resulted from the Sovietization of all southern Caucasus independent countries. After 70 years, the collapse of the Soviet Union which took place between 1990 and 1991, brought global transformations to the world. The disintegration of USSR created problems between some of the newly independent countries, as well as opportunities for others, giving them the freedom to start working on their own in the new world order.

Furthermore, the Turkish foreign policy, which is mainly based on a zero-problem with neighbor principle, was questioned since the conflict was taking a place on Turkey's doors. Consequently, the Turkish government had no alternative but to get involved and started defining the August war from its perspective. This article has the aim of analyzing the definition of the August 2008 war, from a Turkish perspective. It targets understanding how the power of language, legitimates the leaders' actions.

### ***Georgia as a battlefield between the West (USA) and Russia***

The explosion of the five-days war demonstrated that the attempt to balance the situation in the Caucasus, and at the same time, maintaining a partnership with Moscow, was not easy. As previously mentioned, Georgia, being a battleground, put Turkey in an unfavorable position. However, the AK Party's foreign policy, made Turkey play a mediator role, presenting itself as a bridge between Russia and the USA.

To legitimize their power, representatives of the AK Party contacted both conflict sides and visited each opponent country calling them for peace. President Abdullah Gül, made a phone call with both Georgian and Russian Presidents and by expressing his concerns about losses and civilian casualties, Gül called upon both sides to settle for peace and stability.<sup>20</sup>

Abdullah Gül, also emphasized the role of Turkey as a maintainer of peace and prosperity in the region. In his speech, Gül stated: “I would also like to say that, as everybody has seen, important events in the world appeared around Turkey. In the past years, events in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and now in the Caucasus region. All of these events showed that Turkey must always be strong, stable, having strong economy and military forces. As I see, all of us, everyone, care about it. And I believe that we should do much more for our country.”<sup>21</sup>

The government of Turkey, by representing its willingness to keep a balance in the Caucasus crisis, legitimated the AK Party’s power, as a main mediator player between the East and West. Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Babacan held a telephone conversation with his fellows, the Georgian Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili, and the Russian, Sergei Lavrov. He expressed his regrets about the casualties, and confirmed providing the country with humanitarian aid. He also emphasized that “the situation on the ground poses a serious threat to the peace and stability in the South Caucasus.”<sup>22</sup> Minister Babacan has agreed to remain in close contact with both Ministers.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as a prime minister at that time, mentioned in Hürriyet newspaper that Turkey cannot take one side: “There are those who try to push us toward the U.S. and others toward Russia. Nevertheless, the former is our closest ally, while the latter is a country having a great trade volume with us, particularly in terms of energy. I cannot let Turkey be entirely pushed toward

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20 “Medvedev ve Saakaşvili’ye Mesaj”, *Haber Turk*, <https://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/91176-medvedeve-ve-saakasviliye-ayni-mesaj>, (Date of Accession: 13.11 2018).

21 “Gül’den Kafkasya Değerlendirmesi”, *loc. cit.*

22 *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Statement N.144, (Date of Accession: 10.08.2018).

one side. We act according to Turkey's national interests".<sup>23</sup> Therefore, by this, representatives of AK Party demonstrated their enthusiasm for playing the role of a mediator or facilitator in find a solution for the problems in the regions surrounding Turkey. "Turkey attaches importance to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and is highly concerned about the recent developments. Turkey believes that this conflict should be resolved through peaceful means."<sup>24</sup>-stated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In Hürriyet newspaper as well, the Turkish government was calling both sides for negotiation and to stop military intervenes: "Turkey urges dialogue in Georgia-Russia conflict",<sup>25</sup>

According to these statements, the government of the Turkish Republic, was trying to legitimize its power by playing the role of the mediator. Hence, the Georgian-Russian war happened to be an opportunity to represent Turkey as a precarious bridge between Russia and the West (the USA).

The discourse analysis of the Turkish government's foreign policy during the August war showed the strength of language in legitimating the power of a state. In conclusion, three hypotheses were presented: Georgia - a country of a zero-problem policy with neighbors; Georgia as a battleground in 2008 war between the West and Russia; and Georgia as a tool for Turkey's regional security. Despite the fact that the August war put Turkey between its two major allies the West (mainly the USA) and Russia, the Turkish government managed to become one of the important regional players through performing the role of a mediator by supporting the sovereignty and territorial unity of Georgia.

Georgia, one of the former Soviet Union countries, passed a lot of obstacles to achieve the stage of democracy, transparency, justice

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23 "Medvedev ve Saakařvili'ye Mesaj", *Sabah*, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/08/13/haber;E33D825343B4472BA91509F74AB78821.html>, (Date of Accession:13.09.2018).

24 *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Statement N.156, (Date of Accession: 26.08.2018).

25 "Turkey Urges Dialogue in Georgia-Russia Conflict", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turkey-urges-dialogue-in-georgia-russia-conflict-9614123>, (Date of Accession: 08.11.2018).

and the fluidity of relations with its neighbors. Yet, despite the multiple attempts to have a relation with Russia based on trust and cooperation for mutual interests, the young Georgian state failed to achieve its goal due to the strong neo-imperialistic desires of the former, crystallized around its will to gain a sphere of influence in the region again. These desires were expressed aggressively by the invasion of the Georgian territory in the August 2008 war, which was military aggression that made twenty percent of the Georgian territory under occupation.

### *Georgia as a tool for Turkey's regional security*

“Security most often involves mobilization of discursively important sub-security concepts, such as strategic interests and national interests”,<sup>26</sup> The Caucasus represents one of the strategic interests according to the Turkish views. This region, which is a core of natural resources such as gas and oil reserve, makes a reliable energy source of Turkey. Not only, does Turkey get an economic benefit, but also the stability and peace through its cooperation with this region. Nevertheless, the Russian-Georgian clash, shook those benefits. Turkey, which controls the Black sea's straits, allowed the ships of the United States to deliver aids to Georgia. Consequently, Straits question was reopened again, which brought Turkey across a security dilemma:

“While the US and Russia are both happy to find a ‘real’ enemy to legitimize their actions, difficult days lie ahead for countries caught in the middle....In Georgia, where two players are now meeting, Turkey is about to lose its basis for working with the US in the south and Russia in the north”<sup>27</sup>- written in Milli gazete. Thus, it is clear that the article was trying to delegitimize the power of the government by picturing the case of Georgia to put Turkey in a security dilemma. However, the AK Party used Georgia as a tool to legitimate its power, “security as a “political discourse” installs responsibility and legitimizes the exercise power.”<sup>28</sup>

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26 Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse analysis and Bosnian War*, Routledge, London and New York 2006, p. 30.

27 Beril Dedeoğlu, “Boğazlar, Yeniden...”, *Time Turk*, <https://www.timeturk.com/tr/makale/beril-dedeoglu/bogazlar-yeniden.html>, (Date of Accession: 20.10.2018).

28 Hansen, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

The AK Party as an initiator and protector for Turkish security made its power lawful by suggesting to establish the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) to both sides. Prime Minister Erdoğan in Sabah newspaper said: “At this moment, we are going to make a step, which creates a working ground for future relations. We want this region to be essential. CSCP will be a creation for peace and security in this region. Turkey can take a role to make a step for Caucasus Alliance and maintain security and peace.”<sup>29</sup>

Erdoğan also stated in Sabah that: “like in Balkans, we can do Caucasus alliance. We, Turkey can take this responsibility. I will call those countries to discuss the idea and be involved in this initiative. If we all step together, we can prepare the ground for peace and security in the Caucasus.”<sup>30</sup>

President Gül also mentioned the “Caucasus Stability” and expressed that Turkey can take that initiative to solve the conflict: “The idea of Caucasus stability is important. There is a need of bringing back the stability and security to the region. Turkey has dealt with similar issues before. We worked on instigating security initiatives in the Middle East, the same way we worked on bringing peace to the Balkan region. The latest has been in development and it is stable nowadays. Likewise, we believe that such initiatives are very important in order to keep the stability in the region and create a long-term security.” The President also stated that: “The most important thing is to create platforms, in which problems can be solved. That is what the Caucasus needs. Problems should be resolved peacefully the same way borders were set by the Helsinki agreement. Such work is needed in problematic areas. I hope that everyone will pay attention to it and undoubtedly, the Turkish diplomacy is ready to dedicate itself to make and maintain peace and security in the regions of conflict.”<sup>31</sup>

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29 “Erdoğan Acil Önlem için Devreye Girdi”, *Sabah*, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/08/12/haber;049E4BFEC323421D8D17C28A983C6911.html>, (Date of Accession: 12.09. 2018).

30 “Erdoğan: Kafkas Birlięi Kuralım”, *Sabah*, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/08/11/haber;7FFE406CDF114D6A844150EBCD91769B.html>, (Date of Accession:11.12.2018).

31 Gül'den Kafkasya Deęerlendirmesi, *loc. cit.*



## Conclusion

The Georgian-Russian 2008 war, not only was a challenge for Georgia and Russia, but also for the rest of the world, especially its neighbor countries. During the war Turkey was one of countries, which played crucial role between conflict sides. Despite the war made the Turkish Republic's foreign policy in an unfavorable situation, the government of Turkey, with its zero-problem foreign policy, tried to implement a foreign strategy "as a political performance". The power of the state, using the case of Georgia, legitimated its power through to the speeches of the government's representatives.

The three suggested hypotheses, explained how the AK Party tried to implement "boundary producing political performance."<sup>32</sup> The zero-problem policy, which was close to fail, was emphasized by the AK Party that pictured Turkey as a main regional player, allowing them to legitimate their power. On the other hand, the AK Party played the role of a facilitator and bridge between two powers, and therefore represented itself as a mediator between Russia and the USA via the 2008 war, which made its power stronger and justifiable.

The AK Party as an initiator of the Turkish security, made its power reliable by suggesting creation of Caucasus alliance. "Security is an ontological necessity for the state, not because the state has to be protected from external threats, but because its identity depends on them."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the identity of those who rely on the state's power as security guarantor legitimates its power. Therefore, by representing the Russian-Georgian war, the AK Party legitimated its own power, as a security protector of the Turkish identity.

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32 Richard K. Ashley, "Foreign Policy as Political Performance", *International Studies Notes*, 13, 1998, p. 51-54.

33 Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and Bosnian War*, Routledge, London and New York 2006, p. 30.

Consequently, the interpretation of cases as a danger or threat, allows the government to justify its actions making their approaches to solve the problematic situation with any means, lawful which grants the government a supreme state of power as “an important site of interpretation is the way in which certain modes of representation crystallize around referents marked as dangers,”<sup>34</sup> In other words, those statements and articles, by repeating the same idea made an effective interpretation to legitimate the state’s power. As seen, the representatives of the AK Party in their statements, used the Russian-Georgian 2008 war, to presented itself as a mediator and protector of peace in the region, moreover a security guarantor of the Turkish identity.

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34 David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States foreign policy and the politics of Identity*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1992, p. 2.

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