

# Being Entrapped Between Change and Return to the Kemalist Political Culture: Two Stories of the Ak Party Foreign Policy in the Context of Arab Spring

## Değişim ile Kemalist Siyasal Kültüre Geri Dönüş Arasında Sıkışmışlık: Arap Baharı Bağlamında Ak Parti Dış Politikasının İki Hikayesi

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### Abstract

*This study is about foreign policy implementations that applied to design Turkish politics before and after the Arab Spring periods by Ak Party, which entered the political scene with the wind of “change” and “reform”. In this context, the current study suggests that the AK Party, prior to the Arab Spring, reinterpreted the basic paradigms of the Kemalist political culture and shaped its foreign policy on these dynamics, but with the Arab Spring, experienced a shift towards the traditional line. In order to embody this argument, the relationship between political culture and foreign policy in the AK Party period is examined in detail.*

**Key Words:** AK Party, Turkish Foreign Policy, Arab Spring, Kemalist Political Culture, Change.

### Öz

*Bu çalışma, ‘değişim’ ve ‘yenilik’ rüzgârıyla siyaset sahnesine çıkan AK Parti’nin, Arap Baharı öncesinde ve sonrasında Türkiye siyasetini dizayn etmesiyle ve uyguladığı dış politikayla ilgilidir. Bu bağlamda mevcut çalışma AK Parti’nin Arap Baharı öncesinde Kemalist siyasal kültürün temel paradigmlarını yeniden yorumladığı ve dış politikasını bu dinamikler üzerine şekillendirdiği, ancak Arap Baharıyla birlikte geleneksel çizgiye doğru bir kayma yaşadığını ileri sürmektedir. Söz konusu argümanı somutlaştırmak adına AK Parti dönemi siyasal kültür-dış politika ilişkisi detaylı bir şekilde irdelenecektir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** AK Parti, Türk Dış Politikası, Arap Baharı, Kemalist Siyasal Kültür, Değişim.

### Introduction

Pursuit of the EU membership, proactive attitude in the Annan Plan, initiating the Kurdish opening, and opening diplomatic relations with Armenia are series of reforms in domestic politics that AK Party implemented to find a solution to the chronic problems in the first years of governance. Furthermore, in 2009, AK Party organized joint cabinet meetings with Syria and Iraq, intensified

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its diplomatic contacts in order to find a peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear program, conducted mediation activities (Syria-Iraq, Syria-Israel, Hamas-Al Fatah) to eliminate disagreements/conflicts in its close geography, and pursued an economy-based foreign policy rather than security oriented one.

Lowering of the Turkish F-4 reconnaissance aircraft by the Syrian army in June 22, 2012 shifted Turkey's foreign policy from soft power towards the military force use. In this context, Turkey has changed the rules of engagement. In September 16, 2013 and May 16, 2015 two Syrian military helicopters and in March 23, 2014 one Syrian fighter jet taken down by Turkish army. Moreover, Turkey declared that it will not tolerate a terrorist state under the umbrella of PYD (Partiya Yekiti Democratic-Democratic Union Party) in Northern Syria and commenced the Euphrates Shield in August 2016 and the Olive Branch Operations in January 2018. Furthermore, it has also started to take control of the area and went down to a depth of 20-30 km in the operations carried out in Northern Iraq.

In the light of above examples, it became clear that Turkey, under the ruling of AK Party, evaluated the surrounding geography with a liberal approach in the first years of 21<sup>st</sup> century, but after 2011 it has been re-orientated towards security-centric approach. The main question here is that why Turkey applied such a change in the foreign policy. This change was explored by following authors; Svante E. Cornell, the paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy and the challenge posed by the Arab Spring<sup>1</sup>; Joerg Baudner, Turkey's role play in before and after Arab Spring period according to the AK Party<sup>2</sup>; Burak Cop and Libby Zihnioğlu, AK Party's reaction to realized developments in external environment<sup>3</sup>; Karşıyaka and Karşıyaka, the transition from proactive foreign policy to uncertainty on the basis of the Arab Spring<sup>4</sup>; and Ozdamar, Halistoprak and Sula, based on "role theory", assuming that context of the Arab Spring forced Turkey to change its Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

This article discusses foreign policy change based on the *political culture and foreign policy* relationship for the two periods of time (2002-2010 and 2010-2018) and discusses the main problem from a perspective that is not signifi-

- 1 Svante E. Cornell, "Changes in Turkey, What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?", *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter, 2012, p. 13-24.
- 2 Joerg Baudner, "The Evolution of Turkey's Foreign Policy Under the AK Party Government", *Insight Turkey*, 16(3), 2014, p. 79-100.
- 3 Burak Cop - Özge Zihnioğlu, "Turkish Foreign Policy under AKP Rule: Making Sense of the Turbulence", *Political Studies Review*, 15(1), 2017, p. 28-38.
- 4 Birce Altıok Karşıyaka - Sinan Karşıyaka, "Recalibrating Turkish Foreign Policy After the Arab Uprisings: From Pro-activism to Uncertainty by Easing off Ideational and Liberal Goals", *Contemporary Turkey at a Glance II*, 2017, p. 145-161.
- 5 Özgür Özdamar - B. Toygar Halistoprak and İ. Erkam SULA (2014), "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Summer, 11(42), 2014, p.93-113.

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cantly studied. Even though AK Party was founded by the people who stand out with their criticisms against the Kemalist political culture and the security based political order, and adopted a liberal approach in ruling, comparing AK Party's before and after the Arab Spring foreign policy with the Kemalist political culture provides an important analysis for the relationship between political culture and foreign policy. Because, while the same party was in power between the years of 2002 and 2018, there were significant changes in the language used by leaders and foreign policy actions.

From this point of view, authors used discourse analysis to examine the foreign policy involving victory speeches of decision-making political elites of the AK Party and the statements they made regarding the foreign policy in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) or on different platforms between the years of 2002 and 2018. This is because the planned and revised speeches provide more objective data as it reflects the official views of the parties and offers clues about the elite political culture. According to arguments outlined above, this study is based on the fact that political elites may have more political and bureaucratic influence/power in developing countries with social inequalities, then they have in developed countries. The main hypothesis of the present study is that; *the elite political culture in Turkey, a developing country, shapes the political virtue when internal and external conditions are appropriate, and the redesigned institutions are effective in determining both political culture and foreign policy.*

This paper is organized as follows. First, the theoretical approach section discusses works on (elite) political culture and foreign policy relationship. Second, AK Party's criticisms of the fundamental principles of Kemalist political culture and how they are reflected in the foreign policy are explained. In the third part, it is analyzed whether the foreign policy implemented after the Arab Spring and *the background* that is effective in shaping this policy are different from the Kemalist understanding. In the last part, the findings and conclusions are presented.

### **Theoretical Approach: Political Culture and Foreign Policy Relationship**

When the paradigms mentioned in the title are taken independently, it can be stated that there is a wide literature on this subject: *AK Party, political culture, foreign policy and Turkish foreign policy.* When these elements are evaluated together, some difficulties arise. Foreign policy analysis tries to explain how and why foreign policy decisions are taken and why countries have their own foreign policy behaviors.<sup>6</sup> According to Hudson, foreign policy analysis sub-discipline attempts to open the black box of decision making in international relations.<sup>7</sup>

6 Marijke Breuning, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, p. 16.

7 Valerie M. Hudson, "Culture and foreign policy: Developing a research agenda", in *Culture and*

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The impact of political culture on foreign policy is one of the least studied and researched areas of foreign policy analysis.<sup>8</sup> According to Ebel, political culture is a well-known but largely overlooked as a recognized variable in foreign policy studies.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of political culture in simple terms contains the principles, norms and values that guide the political system. According to Sodaro, political culture is the attitude towards shared values, moral norms, beliefs, expectations and politics and its social context.<sup>10</sup> As said by Breuning<sup>11</sup>, political culture, which may have a guiding or restrictive effect on decision-makers, encourages the decision-maker to continue its current policies or hinder any decision and implementation. Consequently, it may also be effective in defining national interests. In order to categorize the studies on political culture, it is possible to reference two types of political culture. First view which is also supported by many scholars including Almond and Verba,<sup>12</sup> Putnam<sup>13</sup> and Eckstein<sup>14</sup>, considers political culture as a *functional and instrumental*. According to this perspective, political culture functions as a determinant of political behavior and shapes democracy. As Almond and Verba pointed out, political culture can play a direct and decisive role in the continuation or failure of democracy.<sup>15</sup>

The second view is the institutionalist approach where political culture is structural. According to Arond Lijpart<sup>16</sup>, Rustow<sup>17</sup> and Welzel and Inglehart<sup>18</sup>, who adopted this approach, people learn democratic values by living under the roof of democratic institutions for years. This view sees political culture as part of the political phenomenon of values, norms, belonging and beliefs in society.

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*Foreign Policy*, Valerie M. Hudson (ed.), Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1997, p.5-6.

8 Hudson, a.g.m.p.1-6.

9 Roland H. Ebel vd., *Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Latin America: Case Studies from the Circum-Caribbean*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991, p.3,27.

10 Michael J. Sodaro, *Comparative Politics: A Global Introduction*, 2nd edition, McGraw-Hill, Boston, 2004, p. 256.

11 Breuning, a.g.e. p. 17-18.

12 Gabriel Almond - Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton Univ. Press. 1963.

13 Robert D. Putnam, "Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of Ideology", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LXV, September 1971.

14 Harry Eckstein, "A Culturalist Theory of Political Change", *American Political Science Review*, 82(3),1988, 789-804.

15 Almond - Verba, a.g.e.

16 Arend Lijpart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*. New haven: Yale University Press.1999.

17 , Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model", *Comparative Politics*, (3), 1970, p.337-63.

18 Christian Welzel - Ronald Inglehart, "Political Culture, Mass Beliefs, and Value Change", in *Democratization*, Christian Haerpfer et. al.(eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press", 2009.

Furthermore, studies on elite political culture are very limited. Most of the studies on political culture are about *mass political culture*. Overall, the studies on elites focus on the impact of elites on the formation of political structures or institutions through case studies. Lucion W. Pye, who put forward one of the first studies in this area, states that studying the elite political culture is through interpreting the ideologies of the elites. Pye also states that in less developed or developing countries such as Mexico, it is necessary to look at the elite political culture rather than the mass political culture. The basic idea behind this view is that the elites are more likely to influence the entire political system in such countries than the masses.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Putnam, the most important theoretical work in this field and directly dealing with the elite political culture, defined the elite political culture as the leaders' beliefs, values and habits in his article.<sup>20</sup> Muller and Seligson also focused on political elite behavior rather than the general public and stated that political elites could have a special impact on political culture when they had more opportunities and power to influence the regime in the country.<sup>21</sup> Higley and Burton gave a stronger support to this view and argued that the only determinant of the stability of democratic regimes was the harmony between the elites and their support for democratic values and institutions.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, İltur Turan dealing with elite political culture in Turkey, argue that constitutional limitations in Turkey shapes the elite political culture and the behaviors and beliefs of the political elites shape the mass political culture.<sup>23</sup> Ali Yaşar Sarıbay likewise emphasizes that Turkish politics is shaped by the elite political culture, and this is based on two related issues. These are *we* and *they* or *friend* and *enemy*.<sup>24</sup>

According to Şerif Mardin, the political culture in Turkey is handled via binary distinction as *center-periphery*. Mardin argues that the *center* is managers and the *surrounding* is seen as managed. Hence it is suggested that according to this view, if the political elites (center) have the competence to establish or redesign the mass political culture, it would be useful to focus on elite political culture to understand the political cultures in the country.<sup>25</sup> In this

19 Lucion W. Pye, "Introduction: Political Culture and Political Development, in *Political Culture and Political Development*, Lucion Pye ve Sigmond Verba (ed.), New Jersey, Princeton University Press. Pye, "Introduction: Political Culture", 1965.

20 Putnam, a.g.m., p. 651.

21 Edward Muller - Mitchell Seligson, "Civil Culture and Democracy: The Question of Causal Relationships", *American Political Science Review*, (88), 1994, 635-652.

22 John Higley - Michael Burton, "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns", *American Sociological Review*, (54), 1989, p.17-32.

23 İltur Turan, "Türkiye'de Siyasal Kültürün Oluşumu", Ersin Kalaycıoğlu ve Ali Yaşar Sarıbay (Ed.), *Türkiye'de Siyasal Değişim ve Modernleşme*, İstanbul: Alfa Akademi Basım, 2007.

24 Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, *Siyasal Sosyoloji*, (3. Baskı), Bursa, Ceylan Matbaacılık, 1996.

25 Şerif Mardin, "Türkiye'de Muhalefet ve Kontrol", in *Türk Modernleşmesi*, Şerif Mardin (Ed.), (175-

context, it is argued that the Democratic Party's (DP) winning elections in the 1950s fueled the debate between the center and the surrounding, and that the discourses of the DP, including Islamic elements, had significant effects on the surrounding's political culture.

Binnaz Toprak also stated that the establishment of the National Salvation Party (NSP) meant the emergence of new elites who challenged the Kemalist political elites and the fact that the NSP being a power partner contributed to the more visible Islamic discourses and practices in Turkish politics.<sup>26</sup> Nilüfer Göle supports the view that Islamic movements created new elites who criticize the secular modernist elites.<sup>27</sup>

Hakan Yavuz argues that the new political elites in Turkey are those who opposed the military coup in February 28, 1997 and those who took huge losses in the 2001 economic crisis. Author support his argument with the examples of the elevated discourses put into circulation after 2001; *democracy, civil society, human rights and freedom of the press*.<sup>28</sup> In his study of political elites for the period of 1996 and 2004, Murat Somer supports the argument that political Islamist elites accept democratic values because they think that liberal democratic values serve their own interests.<sup>29</sup> Gökhan Murat Üstündağ's article (*Elite Political Culture*), which deals with the AK Party period, makes an important contribution to the discussions of elite political culture by analyzing the speeches made by the representatives in the ruling party during the budget negotiations in the TGNA.<sup>30</sup>

However, these studies, which are carried out in order to eliminate the shortages in the literature related to (elite) political culture, overlook the foreign policy behaviors of the political elites in question because they usually make a reading through the political system and domestic politics. This study aims to contribute to the area that has not yet been extensively studied by addressing the impact of the elite political culture in the AK Party on Turkish foreign policy. As Matlaso emphasizes, elite political culture has a great influence on the political system and foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> This situation is seen in the Turkish political life as in the period of Atatürk and İnönü and also in the AK Party. Nevertheless, the

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- 191), İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 1991.
- 26 Binnaz Toprak, "Türkiye'de Dinin Denetim İşlevi", Ersin Kalaycıoğlu ve Ali Yaşar Sarıbay (Ed.), *Türk Siyasal Hayatının Gelişimi*, İstanbul, Beta Basım Yayım Dağıtım AŞ, 1986.
- 27 Nilüfer Göle, Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites, *The Middle East Journal*, 1997, p.46.
- 28 Hakan Yavuz, *AK Parti: Toplumsal Değişimin Yeni Aktörleri*, İstanbul, Kitap Yayınevi, 2010.
- 29 Murat Somer, "Does it Take Democrats to Democratize?", *Comparative Political Studies*, 2011, p.511-545.
- 30 Gökhan Murat Üstündağ, *Elite Political Culture in Turkey, The Case of Justice and Development Party*, Ankara, Nobel Yayınevi, 2018.
- 31 İbrahim Baba, "Political Culture and Democratic Transition in West Africa: The Nigerian Experience," *University Journal of Management* 3(3), 2015, p.115-121.

political elites' approach to foreign policy is linked with their values accessing to state power. In this context, the behavior of political elites is not only directed by personal elements, but also by internal and external factors.

### **AK Party's Reinterpretation of Kemalist Political Culture (2002-2010)**

The AK Party, which was established in 2001 under the leadership of the politicians who came from the National Vision Movement and adopted democratic conservatism, was initially seen as a party that brought the people to the forefront instead of the State. Islamic thoughts and practices of the founders, warm approach to the Middle East and the Islamic world, showing commitment to the Republic of Turkey's fundamental values, being reconciled with democracy and the global dynamics, adapting to the institutions and processes, and perhaps most importantly supporting EU membership contributed to positive perception of Turkey in the Middle East and the Islamic world.<sup>32</sup> However, in order to exclude himself from the "political Islamist" category,<sup>33</sup> AK Party emphasized that it was not following the Welfare Party (WP) and the Virtue Party (VP) The AK Party, unlike the WP<sup>34</sup>, has adopted a discourse that is consistent with the goal of creating a Western and modern state, which has been the main goal since the foundation of the Republic, and stated that there is no party against the secular-democratic structure of the State. As a matter of fact, it was emphasized that the membership of the EU, which was submitted to the Assembly in November 2002 under the leadership of Abdullah Gül, was one of the objectives of the government.<sup>35</sup> At this basis, the AK Party sharply separated from the WP and Erdogan expressed his positive look towards the EU membership in his speech on May 29, 2003 as follows:

...Which values represented by the EU contain elements that Turkey cannot accept? Democracy, the rule of law, freedom of conscience and attempt, or economic prosperity? We see the membership of the EU not as an end, but as a means to bring the Turkish people to the level of modern civilization they deserve ...<sup>36</sup>

32 Ramazan Gözen, "Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu Politikası temelinde AK Parti ve Suriye", in *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, (Der.) Adem Çaylak ve Seyit Ali Avcu, Ankara: Savaş Yayınevi", 2018, p.434.

33 Hakan Yavuz, *Modernleşen Müslümanlar : Nurcular, Nakşiler, Milli Görüş ve AK Parti*, 1.Baskı, çev. Ahmet Yıldız, İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005, 336-338.

34 Welfare Party claims that joining the Western world would increase inequality and counterfeiting in Turkey. Furthermore, WP argues that there are major differences between Turkey and Western world, perceived as global Christian union. Oya Tokgöz, "1991 Genel Seçimlerinde Refah Partisi: Siyasal reklamlarda Yer Alan İmgeler ve Söylem Üzerinde Bir Araştırma", *Amme İdare Dergisi*, Mart, 27(1), 1994, p.29-31.

35 "58. Hükümet Programı", <https://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/58inci-hukümet-programi.pdf>, November 3,2002.

36 "Erdogan: AB Kriterleri taviz değil", *Hürriyet*, May 29,2003.

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Moreover, different from the traditional Kemalist understanding<sup>37</sup>, respect for human rights, the rule of law, the reflection of the demands of the people on politics, which is, the State knows the right thing for the people and the application of it (jakoben approach) to be abandoned, the liberalist approach to the economy by giving priority to privatization and the adoption of free market economy proves that AK Party is pro West.<sup>38</sup>

Another measurement of Westernization is the rejection of Ottoman-Islamic culture and the construction of modernity on the basis of the Western nation-state structure. The Kemalist elites were those who thought that development and progress would be possible through Western-based modernization movements and considered themselves to be positivist, secularist-statesmen.<sup>39</sup> The steps taken by the Republican revolutionists in the light of this idea were to blackout the period from the Turks became Muslim till the establishment of the Republic, the distance the historical cultural ties with the Middle East and the Islamic geography, and assume the period passed in the Islamic civilization as an interregnum period.<sup>40</sup>

Ahmet Davutoğlu<sup>41</sup>, who is regarded as influencer of the foreign policy of the AK Party, argues that in the case of the importation of Western modernity, which has been formed for many years with its own internal dynamics, in other words, Western values, it would begin to dominate all areas of society. Furthermore, Davutoğlu argues that Western modernity creates a problematic process in different regions and exposes assimilating feature of Western civilization.<sup>42</sup> According to Davutoğlu, the ancient Ottoman tradition diminished with the appearance of republic and that is why Turkey cannot develop the strategic moves. In this context, Davutoğlu sees the Ottoman hinterland as a strategic and historical power. "Politically, Turkey is obliged to meet in a place with Ottoman history. Stating that *"Even though it doesn't meet, events already*

37 In the Kemalist political order, even though it is said that *"Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the Nation"*, some of the sovereignty is left to the people and the majority of it is in the hands of the state forces Hepar, *Türkiye'de Devlet Geleneği*, 112-113). In order to protect their positions, people and institutions that direct the politics have tried to make the effect of the state absolute by staying away from the public, by not relying on the public, and taking a security-centered approach through internal and external threats (Durdu, *Türkiye'de Küreselleşmenin* 102-103).

38 Yavuz, a.g.e., p. 353.

39 Gözen, a.g.m., p.424-425.

40 Fatih Yıldız - Fikret Çelik, "Türk Batıcılığının Milliyetçi-Muhafazakarlık Üzerinden Tenkidi", *Bilgi*, Yaz, (62), 2012, p.284-285.

41 Davutoğlu served as Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Consultant between 2003 and 2009, between 2009-2014, he served as Foreign Minister and between 2014 and 2016 as Prime Minister.

42 Rasim Özgür Dönmez, "Ahmet Davutoğlu Dış Politika Anlayışının Kökleri", Rasim Özgür Dönmez (Der.) *Türkiye'de Politik Değişim ve Türk Dış Politikası: Neo-Osmanlılığın Sosyo Politikliği*, Bursa: Dora Yayınları", 2014, p.14.

*dictate*”,<sup>43</sup> Davutoğlu reveals the objection of AK Party against the attitudes of the Kemalist elites to discard Ottoman history.

Davutoğlu argues that Kemalist elites in Turkey determined a perspective for it in the system which does not comply with Turkish community realities, the historical background and future expectations and ideals.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, author suggests that instead of being a passive element around the other of civilizations, Turkey needs to rebuild his own identity, psychology and political culture. In the construction of this identity and culture, religious and historical continuity should be remembered again.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the AK party, which advocates the necessity of living in the conscience of religion, is not against the concept of secularism, which guarantees that the state should be equal to all faith groups. Based on this understanding, the AK Party states that, there is no problem for Islam to live together with Secularism and Democracy, on the contrary, it could constitute an example of the culture of reconciliation.<sup>46</sup>

In the AK Party's understanding of nationalism, there are significant points that differ from Kemalist nationalism. The AK Party, which distinguishes between ethnic and religious elements, is trying to create a concept of a nation by adopting Ottoman heritage and Islamic cultural elements. The concept of nation, which is associated with Turkishness, has undergone a transformation in favor of Sunni Islam, which characterizes the Ottoman past. Supporting this approach, major discourses, appropriately presented as national interests, are emphasizing the *new Turkey* aiming to regain power like in the Ottoman period and *grand Turkey*.<sup>47</sup> In addition to this, the AK Party tried to construct a supra identity rather than an ethnically based identity. AK Party supported the idea that regardless of their ethnicity or ideology, people who show loyalty to the State should be considered as Turkish Republic citizen and recognized the diversity as the cultural and social wealth.<sup>48</sup>

When the AK Party's state approach is considered, it is obvious that this approach does not share common grounds if not opposite with the predictions of Kemalism. The AK Party's state understanding point became more obvious when term Prime Minister Erdogan was describing the party's identity in the following statement;

43 Dönmez, a.g.m., p.15.

44 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik, Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, 41. Baskı, İstanbul: Küre Yayınları,2009, p. 91.

45 Davutoğlu, a.g.e., p.93.

46 Ertan Efeğil, “Türk Dış Politikasında Siyasal Kültürün Etkisi: Kemalist Siyasal Kültürün Evrimleşmesi”, *Akademik Bakış*, 5(10),2012, p. 200.

47 Cenk Saraçoğlu, , “AKP, Milliyetçilik ve Dış Politika: Bir Milliyetçilik Doktrini Olarak Stratejik Derinlik”, *Alternatif Politika*, Nisan, 5(1), 2013,p.55.

48 Efeğil, a.g.m., p. 200-201.

Conservatism represents a more democratic perspective than a solid and frozen ideology. Democracy, by gaining the acceptance of the national will, is the legitimacy of the political power which is taken from the general acceptance of the nation. Politics is a field of compromise. An effective state does not define, shape, or impose preferences on its citizens; it is the state that is defined, supervised and shaped by the citizen.<sup>49</sup>

While it is strongly supported here that the state should be a structure that responds to the demands of people, it is also emphasized the mistake in the fact that the *state knows the most accurate for the people* especially in the Single Party period. Similarly, in the section of the State and Constitution of the document announcing the 2023 vision, the AK Party stated that the Constitution consists of two basic parts, *fundamental rights and freedoms and the structure and functioning of the state*. AK Party stated that basic rights and freedoms are not a favor to the people by the Constitution or the State but rather those have the legitimacy beyond the constitution and the state. On the contrary AK Party supported that there could not be the *nation of the state* and was against the conception of the nation of the state in the present constitution, but there would be the *state of the nation*.<sup>50</sup> In this context, the AK Party, which seeks to construct participatory and pluralist democracy, appears to be a supporter of a new Republic based on universal values such as the rule of law and respect for human rights.

### Reflection of Kemalist Political Culture on Foreign Policy Prior to Arab Spring

In the early years of his ruling, it is possible to understand the main philosophy of the AK Party's foreign policy by the criticism that Davutoğlu brought to Kemalism. Davutoglu argued that the Kemalist political culture, that caused the abandoning Ottoman heritage and alienated Turkey with its near abroad, revealed a *security based foreign policy* along the borders of the country.<sup>51</sup> Based on this argument, Davutoglu advocated the need to restore relations which were shaped out of security concerns before, with its neighbors based on inter-community relations featuring economic and cultural dimensions.<sup>52</sup> To achieve this, a new balance between the internal political culture approach and foreign policy making was needed first.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the political elite will not see near abroad as a source incorporating major problems and will play an active role due to feeling themselves responsible for establishing peace in the

49 "59. Hükümet Programı", Resmi Gazete.

50 "AK Parti 2013 Siyasi Vizyonu, Siyaset, Toplum, Dünya", [www.akparti.org.tr/site/akparti/2023-siyasi-vizyon](http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/akparti/2023-siyasi-vizyon), 2012, 19-20.

51 Davutoğlu, *a.g.e.*, p.73.

52 Davutoğlu, *a.g.e.*, p.144.

53 Davutoğlu, *a.g.e.*, p.317.

region. This situation is not only from the geopolitical position of Turkey, but also from the history of the country and moral obligation fed by the cultural and religious ties.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Turkey's priorities, according to decision-makers from AK Party, is to prevent the instability arising in this area by increasing the economic development and people's welfare.

In this circumstance, the impact of the military elites in the decision-making process of Turkish foreign policy<sup>55</sup> was restricted by reforms in the name of membership to the EU between 2002-2007. Here, the ruling party used the EU membership process and the political reforms it required as a means to liquidate, at least limit, the military's influence in the political sphere. As stated by Balcı,<sup>56</sup> the AK Party, especially in the first five years of its rule, has played the Kemalist bloc, whom advocating membership to the EU by a legal rhetoric, by passing regulations requested by EU.

Perhaps the most important building block of the AK Party's foreign policy is the implementation of a zero-problem with neighbors policy (which is being analyzed in dozens of articles, books, reports, etc.). Zero-problem policy, which is defined as amending the judgment of being surrounded by enemies and aiming at solving the problems with surrounding countries,<sup>57</sup> is largely considered as successful implementation between 2003-2010. In 2009, Turkey held the Joint Cabinet Meetings with Iraq, where it had problems due to Northern Iraqi Regional Government (NIRG) and Syria where it almost had war in 1998. Also, diplomatic initiatives were taken to improve relations with Armenia and policies towards solution were implemented by going beyond the traditional security line on Cyprus.

On the other hand, Davutoğlu argued that Atatürk's *Peace at Home, Peace in the World* principle, couldn't be realized by taking reactive positions based on policies of the world powers, as it was done by the previous rulings. Instead, it could be achieved by active foreign policy, *removing passive nature and taking forceful role*. Furthermore, Davutoğlu suggested that the way to implement this policy was to take an active role in preventing and resolving crises and to highlight diplomatic efforts. Turkey assumed the role of mediator between Syria-Israel, Iraq-Syria, Afghanistan-Pakistan and the Hamas-Al-Fatah,<sup>58</sup> and started

54 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye-Ürdün Dostluğu ve Ortadoğu...", www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-al-dustour-gazetesinde-urdun\_-10\_09\_2009-tarihinde-yayimlanan-makalesi.tr.mfa., (8 Mart 2016)

55 Joost Lagendik, "Türkiye'de Asker Sivil İlişkileri: AB'nin Etkisi ve Talepleri", in *Türkiye Siyasetinde Ordunun Rolü, Asker-Sivil İlişkileri, Güvenlik Sektörü ve Sivil Denetim*, Henrich Böll Stiftung Derneği Türkiye Temsilciliği, İstanbul, 2010, p.87-91.

56 Ali Balcı, *Dış Politikada Hesaplaşmak, AK Parti, Ordu ve Kemalizm*, İstanbul: Etkileşim Yayınları, .2015, p.82.

57 Murat Yeşiltaş – Ali Balcı, "AK Parti Türk Dış Politikası Sözlüğü", *Bilgi*, Kış, (23), 2011, p.17-18.

58 Sami Kohen, "Dış Politikada yeni 'sektör': Arabuluculuk", *Milliyet*, 9 Şubat 2010.

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foreign policy applications based on Davutoglu's principle. With the guidance of this principle, management of the AK Party has carried the ideal of positioning Turkey as a regional, and then the global power/actor. The first step to achieve this, as Ozal defended, was switching foreign policy from *passive foreign policy of the status quo*<sup>59</sup> to *multi-dimensional and pro-active foreign policy*, and making Turkey as a central, and policy maker country in the region (Oğuzlu, 2009: 44-46).<sup>60</sup> At the end of the 1990s, a similar understanding could not be realized due to the opposition of the military during the period of Ismail Cem's Ministry of Foreign Affairs,<sup>61</sup> who also envisaged approaching different subjects with the same principle. In other words, an approach that does not reduce/tie Turkish foreign policy to a single country or problem was aimed to implement a foreign policy that would include the regions of Asia, Europe, Africa, Middle East and America at the same time and to increase interdependence.<sup>62</sup>

AK Party's foreign policy simply explained by Ahmet Davutoglu's quotation "There is no more borderline diplomacy, but there is the surface diplomacy, and the surface is the whole world".<sup>63</sup> Davutoglu stated that Turkey is not only a European country, but also a Black Sea, Caspian, Central Asian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean country, and the countries of the region have great expectations from Turkey, therefore, it is required to keep clear of all communication channels.<sup>64</sup> In this context, instead of a security-centered approach towards the countries in the region, it was envisioned to develop relations with states such as Iran and Syria, which are regionally oriented and have previously supported terrorism.

In this context, under the leadership of the AK Party, Turkey's increasing activism in foreign policy of peace began to take shape around concepts such as, diplomacy, dialogue, justice, cooperation and freedom. To reveal such will of Turkey, Term President Abdullah Gul emphasized the instability in the Middle Eastern geography at Saudi Arabia visit on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009, and stated that now Turkey's priorities are preventing the instability arising in this area and increasing the economic development and people's welfare.<sup>65</sup>

59 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "11 Eylül Sonrası Türk Dış Politikasında Vizyon Arayışları ve Dört Tarz-ı Siyaset", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, Kış, 1(1), 2007, p.37.

60 Tank Oğuzlu, "Türk Dış Politikasında Davutoğlu Dönemi", *Orta Doğu Analiz*, Eylül, 1(9), 2009, 44-46.

61 Saraçoğlu, a.g.m., p.58.

62 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "İş dünyası artık dış politikanın öncülerinden", (Röportaj), *Turkish Time*, Nisan-Mayıs 2004.

63 "Davutoğlu: Hattı Diplomasi Yoktur Sathı Diplomasi Vardır, Sathı ise Tüm Dünyadır", *Radikal*, January 5, 2010.

64 Ramazan Erdağ- Tuncay Kardaş, "Türk Dış Politikası ve Stratejik Kültür" in *Türk Dış Politikası Yılı: 2012*, Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat ve Ufuk Ulutaş (Der.), Ankara: SETA Yayınları, 2013, p.75-76.

65 Mustafa Yetim - Rıdvan Kalaycı, "Türkiye-İran İlişkileri: "Sıfır Sorun mu?", Nükleer Sorun mu?", *Akademik Orta Doğu*, Mart, 5(2), 2011, 88-89.

## Political Culture and Foreign Policy Change after the Arab Spring: Why?

Kaarbo, Lantis and Beasley<sup>66</sup> and Wilkinson<sup>67</sup> state that political culture is not static and can therefore change over time. Richard Fagen<sup>68</sup> also focuses on how the planned political change takes place and how political elites want to transform their citizens' open and mental behavior. Therefore, political culture could evolve due to changing beliefs and understandings of individuals,<sup>69</sup> shifts in internal and external political environment,<sup>70</sup> changes in the regimes of states,<sup>71</sup> the emergence of new political decision-making elites<sup>72</sup> and economic and social reasons.<sup>73</sup> In other words, the political culture of the states can be transformed into a different form as a result of the developments and changes taking place in the international and internal political structure.

Mümtaz Turhan emphasized two points related to the change of political culture; *free/allowed or forced/direct* change.<sup>74</sup> Free cultural change, as the name implies, preferably involves changing the cultural approach from top to bottom or from bottom to top. For example, the top to bottom changes usually take place during the revolution as it was in France or Turkey. In such cultural changes, intellectuals can influence the political preferences or social priorities of the masses. Harry Eckstein mentions two types of change. These are situational change and political transformation. Situational change involves rapid industrialization, war or the emergence of new political elites. Political transformation involves radical changes in social and political structure as a result of revolutions or major events.<sup>75</sup>

Even though the AK Party has been in power since 2002, what are the reasons for the radical changes in the understanding of political culture and foreign policy after the Arab Spring? It is possible to answer this question with the argument of Welzel and Inglehart: *relatively poor or developing societies, highlight more emphasis on materialistic values*.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the societies in question tend to

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- 66 Juliet Kaarbo vd., "The Analysis of Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective", in *Foreign Policy Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences On State Behavior*, Ryan Beasley et. al. (eds.), (1-22), ABD: CQ Press.
- 67 David O. Wilkinson, *Comparative Foreign Relations: Frameworks and Methods*, California: Dickenson Publ. Comp. Inc., 1969.
- 68 Richard Fagen, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969.
- 69 Martin W. III Sampson, "Cultural Influences on Foreign Policy", Charles F. Hermann vd. (Ed.), *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* Boston:Unwin Hyman", 1987, p.384-408.
- 70 Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations*, Hampshire: Macmillan..
- 71 Efeğil, a.g.m. p.189-206.
- 72 M. Lopez, *Elite Theory*, International Sociological Association, 2013.
- 73 Turan, a.g.m..
- 74 Mümtaz Turhan, *Kültür Değişmeleri*, İstanbul, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1969.
- 75 Eckstein, a.g.m., p.789-804.
- 76 Welzel - Inglehart, a.g.m., p.131.

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accept some restrictions on the issue of democratic freedoms for the realization of national security and other objectives. Political culture in Turkey, as a developing country, rather than being determined in accordance with the values of the masses, it is possible that decision-makers shaped it by the behavior of the political elites.

Therefore, the most important factors of the change in question can be explained by the change and increase in the internal and external threat perceptions and the change of the decision-making elites within the AK Party<sup>77</sup> by the time. Consequently, the behavior of the political elites has been influential in shaping the foreign policy. Similar to Eckstein's political transformation approach, AK Party's political culture has changed based on the Arab Spring and terrorist organizations' (Fethullahist Terrorist Organization-FETO and PKK) actions within the borders of Turkey and actions of terrorist organizations such as PYD, ISIS and the countries supporting the PYD, especially the US, in Syria. The decision-making political elites have repositioned themselves against current developments and they started to discuss domestic and foreign policy from this new perspective.

Starting of anti-regime movements in North Africa in 2010 and effecting many countries in the Middle East such as in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria by 2011, made Turkey as one of the most affected countries by the Arab Spring. Due to the facts that war came close to the borders of Turkey, territorial sovereignty emerged under the control of different terrorist organizations, several terrorist attacks happened in Turkey and limitations happened in foreign policy, particularly narrowed influence in Syria, the political elites of AK Party have changed their handling of internal and external policies. Considering Turkey's relations with people and regimes in the Middle East, the most important challenge posed by the Arab Spring in terms of Turkey has been the sustainability of this foreign policy. In this sense, in case of peaceful transformation in the region, Turkey's foreign policy wouldn't be affected, and the achievements of the past wouldn't be lost. However, since the popular movements in the region did not progress in line with Turkey's forecasts, decision-makers of AK Party showed different responses to the developments in the region.<sup>78</sup> From this point of view, a series of radical changes have been put into effect, including the changes from the parliamentary system to the expansion of the perceptions of threat that have existed since the foundation of the state.

77 Terminating active positions of Abdülatif Şener, Bülent Arınç, Abdullah Gül, Ali Babacan, Hayati Yazıcı and Ahmet Davutoğlu in the AK Party (in the form of resignation, separation or non-nomination).

78 Fahrettin Sümer, "Turkey's Changing Foreign Policy and Arab Spring" *The Public Sector Innovation Journal*, 18(1),1-28,2013, p. 1-28.

## Relationship between Political Culture and Foreign Policy after the Arab Spring: Change towards the Kemalist View

The political culture, which functions as a facilitator and the justification of the current political system to be managed,<sup>79</sup> used as a tool for the consolidation of domestic politics through foreign policy by the AK Party decision makers after the Arab Spring. Therefore, the main paradigms of the Kemalist political culture, which were revised in line with its own understanding within the framework of the EU accession negotiations between 2002-2011, have shifted to a different line in the Arab Spring process. Thus, AK Party decision-makers started frequently using the discourse of the most surrounding elements of Kemalist political culture; *surrounded by enemies*. Conversely, in the first 8-9 years of their power, the AK Party decision-makers who were coming from the conservative-Sunni Islamist line tried to overthrow this understanding and tried to establish the understanding that Turkey is surrounded by *collaborative neighbors*, rather than with the enemies.

Actions such as, conflict in Syria turning into a civil war, military coup carried in the leadership of Sisi and removal of Mohammed Mursi from power in Egypt, domain expansion of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and possibility of establishing a corridor under the control of a terrorist organization (PKK / PYD) in the north of Syria (Turkey's southern border), have changed the way handling Turkey's immediate surroundings. While eroding the internal and external distinction, the AK Party began to impose the understanding that it is fighting against insider and outsider enemies. The most concrete indicator of this is the language used and the steps taken after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. President Erdoğan in his speech elaborated the understanding and execution of this approach; "This event is not an event that is planned and executed only inside... This event has actors inside but its script is written outside..."<sup>80</sup> While terrorist organizations such as PYD and ISIS as well as countries supporting these organizations are presented as external enemies, The PKK and FETO presented as the internal enemies.

The idea of being surrounded by enemies is not expressed by targeting only Middle Eastern countries. Because, in addition to the neighboring countries such as Syria and Iraq, Turkey claims that Western allies provide support to terrorist organizations such as the PKK/PYD and FETO. This idea is expressed in Erdogan's speeches; "...Germany is clearly supporting terrorist organizations..."<sup>81</sup>; "...Belgium permits them (terrorist organizations) to sway

79 Turan, a.g.e..

80 "Erdoğan: İçeride aktörleri olan ama senaryosu dışarıda yazılan bir darbe hareketidir", *Hürriyet*, August 2, 2016.

81 Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 'Almanya çok açık bir şekilde terör örgütlerine destek veriyor', *Time Türk*, March 13, 2017.

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their rags/flags...<sup>82</sup>; and "...Some countries, especially the USA, are trying to open up their own excuses and give public support to the organizations that kill the innocent people in our region....."<sup>83</sup> Erdogan stated that those supports directly target Turkey and added in his speeches; "... Turkey is being attacked from inside and the outside. Our country, just like a lion removed from the claws to be tamed, being forced to pass under the yoke..."<sup>84</sup>; "... The issue is not a matter of the person. The target is Turkey, and the Turkish Nation ..."<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, he expressed his feelings by saying; "... you will fail, and you won't be able to divide our nation, haul down our flag, destroy our homeland, demolish our state, and precipitate this country to its knees..."<sup>86</sup> Then, to clarify the assumed role of Turkey, Erdogan said: "... regardless of the circle of fire around us, we will continue to help all the oppressed ..."<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, the AK Party, before the referendum held on April 16, 2017, focused on the following arguments; Turkey's current parliamentary regime is weakening Turkey's power, and while being in the most troubled region of the world, Turkey's decision-making mechanisms have been sluggish. In other words, the republic's established political system (even it had been interrupted by many coups) reveals a remote management mechanism from producing solutions to the problems around and does not carry Turkey to further. In this context, it has been tried to change the internal political structure and political culture as a necessity through the developments in the external world. As a matter of fact, before the 2015 general elections, this situation is expressed in the AK Party's election declaration with the following statements:

"...on the one hand political instability caused by the severed parliamentary system which is created by guardianship form of organizing and broken apart from its democratic nature, on the other hand, the new Turkey that needs our effective vision effective and dynamic management. Hence, we believe that presidential system is a more appropriate management model..."<sup>88</sup>

Two points need to be considered here. The first is that the AK Party wants to change the Kemalist political order in line with its own perspective. Because, it is claimed that the current structure is away from supporting the

82 "Erdogan'dan Brüksel'deki PKK çadırına sert tepki", Radikal, March 18, 2016

83 "Erdogan'dan ABD'ye: Artık Yutmuyoruz", Time Türk, December 29, 2016.

84 "Türkiye Asırlık Bir Hesaplaşmayla Karşı Karşıyadır", <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/84907/turkiye-asirlik-bir-hesaplaşmayla-karsi-karsiyadir.html>, October 12, 2017.

85 "'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 'Mesele şahıs, parti meselesi değil, hedef Türkiye'dir', Hürriyet, November 19, 2017.

86 "Ülkemize diz çöktüremezsiniz", Milliyet, July 17, 2017

87 "Etrafındaki Ateş Çemberine Rağmen, Türkiye Tüm Mazlumların Umudu Olmaya Devam Ediyor", <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/43890/etrafındaki-ates-cemberine-ragmen-turkiye-tum-mazlumların-umudu-olmaya-devam-ediyor.html>, May 7, 2016..

88 "Davutoğlu'ndan başkanlık sistemi açıklaması", Milliyet, November 11, 2015.

targets that AK Party set for Turkey. The problems in the decision-making mechanism of the parliamentary system are clearly seen in the crises, particularly in the cases of Ahmet Necdet Sezer, when the government and the President came from different parties, and the coalition governments. Hence, structural changes are seen as a necessity. The second and most important thing is that the AK Party has actually shifted/come closer to the fundamental philosophy of the Kemalist political culture. Two of the most striking elements of the Kemalist political culture were the *strong state approach with state's understanding of what is right for the people*, and the design of domestic and foreign politics based on former. Therefore, the AK Party, which has put forward the weakness of the parliamentary system in order to respond to today's conditions by bringing criticisms to the Kemalist order, has indirectly decided on what is right for the nation. In addition, mentioning the statement that we are in the most problematic/conflicting region of the world, to justify the presidential system shows that approach, which was established between 2002 and 2011, that *we are surrounded by the countries we can cooperate* has been abandoned.

Based on above statements, Erdogan identified that Turkey is in the region which is facing a great crossroad, and many have great hopes for Turkey. Indeed, in his victory speech as well as in his statements about the Middle East, he emphasized that he sees the fate of the Middle Eastern countries and Turkey is united.<sup>89</sup> He underlines that if Turkey has a strong military and economy, the Muslims not only in the region, but also all over the world will be even stronger. However, strong Turkey is associated with the AK Party staying in power. In September 2017, Erdogan has shown a strong link established between the ruling of AK Party and the internal and external policies by saying that "...Turkey's fate and the fate of the AK Party are integrated. We have seen that if we (AK party) stumble, Turkey falls in trouble..."<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

This article argues that the AK Party, established by people who critique Kemalist political culture, continued with founders' perspective until the Arab Spring, but with the Arab spring, shifted towards the way similar to the Kemalist understanding, with the different content. The *foreign policy* imposed by the AK Party is not seen only as an *outward-looking action*. This is because the applied foreign policy makers a close connection with domestic political culture. The

89 After the 2011 general elections, Erdogan said the following: "... I salute Damascus, Cairo, Tunis, Sarajevo, Nicosia and other friendly and brotherly countries, who have turned their eyes to Turkey to receive the news with great excitement... Today, on a global scale, the oppressed and sufferers have gained hope. Believe that Sarajevo has won as much as Istanbul today. Beirut has gained as much as Izmir. Damascus has won as much as Ankara. Diyarbakir, Ramallah, Tripoli, West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza has won. Today, Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans, Europe has won as much as Turkey ...".

90 "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan uyardı: Bunun faturası bize kesilir", *Hürriyet*, September6, 2017.

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AK Party government, acting nationally and internationally, tries to reinforce its power by reflecting its role in the international environment to the internal political structure while fighting against other countries in the international arena by using internal resources.

Political culture cannot be regarded as independent from the history of the state and struggles that passed until the present. The AK Party decision-makers implemented foreign policy by taking into account that Turkey is the continued presence of an empire who had many difficult struggles throughout history and spread to the wide geography. However, Turkish foreign policy can be shaped by the actions, decisions, personal interests, values and behaviors of political elites. Therefore, the management holds the concept of political culture to state administration or interpret the political culture in line with their own purposes. In this context, it can be stated that by the transitioning from the Parliamentary System to the Presidential System, the decision-making mechanism will operated by a narrower political elite, and they are effective in determining the functioning of the state and foreign policy.

Each political structure lives in a certain environment and continues to exist in interaction with the human environment around it. In this environment, while the AK Party-based decision-making political elites had perspective of *we or friend* for some regional political actors in the pre-Arab Spring period, now perspective shifted towards defining them as *they or foe* in the post-Arab Spring period.

The rhetoric of *enemy or threat* was instrumentalized in the transformation of the internal political structure and the acceptance of the foreign policy in place by the public. In this context, the idea that the Turkey is under the danger of division by PKK, PYD, FETO, ISIS terrorist organizations and countries supporting them, has often been circulated. The impression that a strong political structure should be built against these threats was presented to the public's approval in a similar way as it was suggested by Inglehart (2005) for "underdeveloped and developing societies". Besides, the rhetoric that after the Arab Spring the fate of AK Party and Turkey is united and if AK Party is weakened then Turkey will be damaged, has been used frequently by political elites.

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