



**JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
AND POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDIES**

ULUSLARARASI İLİSKİLER VE SİYASET BİLİMİ ÇALIŞMALARI DERGİSİ

e-ISSN: 2792-0984

**WESTERN BALKANS, TÜRKİYE AND THE CONCEPT OF *NATURAL POSITION***

**Mevludin IBISH\* & Sezer FERHAD\*\***

\* Assoc. Prof. at International Balkan University

**E-mail:** [m.ibis@ibu.edu.mk](mailto:m.ibis@ibu.edu.mk) **ORCID:** [0000-0003-2654-7584](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2654-7584)

\*\* Research Assistant at International Balkan University

**E-mail:** [ferhad.sezer@ibu.edu.mk](mailto:ferhad.sezer@ibu.edu.mk) **ORCID:** [0009-0005-7676-1329](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7676-1329)

**Submitted:** 28 August 2023 & **Accepted:** 24 December 2023

**Citation:** Ibish, M. & Sezer, F. (2023). Western Balkans, Türkiye and the Concept of Natural Position. *Journal of International Relations and Political Science Studies*, (9), 1-15.

Uluslararası İlişkiler Çalışmaları Derneği | International Relations Studies Association  
Journal of International Relations and Political Science Studies - JIRPSS  
E-mail: [dergi@tuicakademi.org](mailto:dergi@tuicakademi.org)

**WESTERN BALKANS, TÜRKİYE AND THE CONCEPT OF *NATURAL POSITION***

**Mevludin IBISH\* & Sezer FERHAD\*\***

\* Assoc. Prof. at International Balkan University

**E-mail:** [m.ibis@ibu.edu.mk](mailto:m.ibis@ibu.edu.mk) **ORCID:** [0000-0003-2654-7584](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2654-7584)

\*\* Research Assistant at International Balkan University

**E-mail:** [ferhad.sezer@ibu.edu.mk](mailto:ferhad.sezer@ibu.edu.mk) **ORCID:** [0009-0005-7676-1329](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7676-1329)

**Submitted:** 28 August 2023 & **Accepted:** 24 December 2023

**Abstract**

There is no doubt that Türkiye is a very influential state in the Western Balkans region and has developed into an undoubtable regional actor within recent years. In this paper, the aim is to analyze the position of Türkiye as a regional actor in the Western Balkans, to rethink the approach of Türkiye towards the Western Balkans and to introduce *Natural Position* as a new concept related to regional policies and foreign relations. This paper will provide an analysis of the history and development of relations between Türkiye and the Western Balkans, the significance and role of Türkiye in the region and the justification of Turkish involvement within the framework of the concept of *Natural Position*. As well as rethinking the role and approach of Türkiye in the Western Balkans and providing analytical reasoning for a more assertive Turkish role in the Western Balkans.

**Keywords:** Policy, Natural Position, Investment, Regional Power, Integration, Heritage

## Introduction

The Western Balkans is one of the most geo-politically critical regions across the world, especially in Europe. The Western Balkans have been a key area of diplomatic and foreign relations in Europe for centuries, even acting as the fuse which enflamed the global conflict known as the “Great War” from 1914-1918 via the preceding Balkan Wars. The establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918) and then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945), its consequential dissolution and a devastating humanitarian crisis with international repercussions, following a period of democratization and Euro-Atlantic integration (Jano, 2008), the Western Balkans has been the center stage of geo-political developments in Europe for decades. Therefore, the significance of the Western Balkans region in International Relations is undisputed, even more so for a rising regional power such as the Republic of Türkiye.

Before going into the details of the relations between Türkiye and the Western Balkans, it is important to realize how impactful Turkish involvement has been for the Western Balkans region. This paper aims to depict how impactful Turkish foreign policy towards the Western Balkans and how it can be further developed. Firstly, a general understanding must be set in the context of Western Balkans-Türkiye relations, which will be the focus point of the first part of this paper. The second part will introduce the concept of *Natural Position* and its implications for Türkiye and the Western Balkans. In order to properly analyze and rethink international policy, one must recognize the complexity of certain geo-political structures; this will be realized in the third part which will help to properly transition to the fourth. The fourth part of this paper will introduce a revised approach for Turkish-Western Balkans relations and discuss how to enable the development of an improved regional cooperation. The Western Balkans have always been a heated region for dominance between the superpowers of the world. Global actors have attempted to influence the region for decades with financial and political aid/control and yet the Western Balkans states<sup>1</sup> remain significantly underdeveloped and in need of assistance and the Turkish state can assume a key role in this regard.

### I. Türkiye and The Western Balkans

Türkiye is a successor state of the “Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye” (Ottoman State) which considered the Western Balkans region as the “mainland” of the Empire for over 500 years (Ortaylı, 2016). Having in mind the cultural and historical common heritage of the Western Balkans and Türkiye, it is logical to view Türkiye as a dominant actor within the region, however the assumed influence of the Turkish state is not as dominant as one might

expect, as Türkiye is struggling against competition in the region (Vulović, 2023).

The initial engagements of Türkiye in the Western Balkans were in the form of defensive pacts and mutual recognition agreements, tied to the Kemalist doctrine of “Peace at home, Peace in the world”. This approach to foreign policy led to Treaties of Friendship being signed with Albania (1923), Yugoslavia (1925), and treaties of reconciliation and population exchange with Greece (1929) and Bulgaria (1930) (Eyicil, 2004). These bilateral treaties and the increasingly volatile situation in Europe during the 1930s led to the formation of the Balkan Entente which was a defensive military alliance between Türkiye and several Western Balkan states. When observing these foreign policy initiatives, it can be seen that the Turkish intention was to establish ties with its new neighbors on the grounds of mutual cooperation, instead of a regional power role.

The Western Balkans are in need of Turkish aid in many aspects such as economic, political and institutional experience and development as well as Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) (Ibish, 2016), among others. For Türkiye, the region is critical in developing a sphere of influence since not only is it an immediate neighbor but also an attractive venture due to the historical background of the case.

Although Türkiye has increased its soft-power capabilities in the Western Balkans in recent years, utilizing cultural and historical assets as well as economic ties with Western Balkan states, in a series of policies coined by some as “neo-ottomanism” doctrine, however the term has been avoided by Turkish officials (Bechev, 2012). The Turkish approach to the Western Balkans prior to the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government has been one of caution and neutrality besides the period of the Özal government in the 1980s which is seen as the first government to seriously use the common heritage in order to exert influence over the region (Ortaylı & Küçükkaya, 2017).

The influence of Türkiye over the Western Balkans intensified even further during the 1990s and the subsequent dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Bosnian War (1992-1995) and The Kosovo War (1997-1999) were prominent cases in which Türkiye played an active role and assumed its position as a regional power and stabilizing factor, engaging in United Nations (UN) peace missions in the region (Ibish, 2016).

Since the beginning of the AK Party government in Türkiye in 2002, Turkish foreign policy towards the Western Balkans has emerged into a policy of soft-power and proactive involvement. The establishment of soft-power instruments such as TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), Yunus Emre Enstitute and “Yurt Dışı Türkler ve Akraba Toplulukları” (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities) have been core sources

of soft-power for Türkiye in the Western Balkans and have significantly boosted the Turkish image and influence in the region (Ibish, 2016). Although the general Turkish approach to foreign policy has changed significantly during the latest years of the AK Party, moving from liberalism to a (defensive) realist perspective, the position with regards to the Western Balkans has been relatively stable and continuous. During the first decade of the AK Party rule, Türkiye adopted a liberal foreign policy, promoting democratic values and engaging in pro-EU and pro-US stances, specifically in the Middle East. However, the emergence of the Syrian Civil War and increased terrorist activity during the 2010s, along with the “leading from behind” policy of the Obama administration (Krauthammer, 2011), had left Türkiye in a vulnerable position in the region. This vulnerability and increased security concerns turned Turkish policy towards a more defensive and preemptive attitude which can be based on principles of neorealism or defensive realism in international relations (Yılmaz, 2021).

Regardless of the principles behind the policy, Türkiye has been playing an increasingly active role in the Western Balkans, cementing its position as a regional power and prominent interlocutor with regards to issues concerning the Western Balkans. Türkiye’s active role has included playing mediator between the entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, between Serbia and Kosovo and in fact throughout the Western Balkans, taking its place as a mediating and stabilizing factor (Daily Sabah & Reuters, 2021; Kütük, 2022; Szpala, 2022). Although the developments have been positive for Turkish influence in the region, it would be also fair to say that it has not lived up to its full potential. In order to further understand the possible development and potential of Türkiye within the Western Balkans, the paper will now observe the issue within the concept of *Natural Position*.

## **II. *Natural Position* of Türkiye in The Western Balkans**

There are several theories which are specifically designed to observe and analyze the actions and role of an actor over a certain region in international relations which may have some relevancy over the case of Türkiye and the Western Balkans. One of them is the theory of regionalism which puts attention to the development of institutions and common policies of states which share a geopolitical commonality in the regional context, a widely used example of this theory in practice is the development of the European Community (Bloor, 2022). However, theory of regionalism by itself is not sufficient enough to accurately depict the position and role of Türkiye in the Western Balkans, as the Turkish context is far deeper than just geographical commonality. Another important theory is Neo-colonialism, which is usually defined as social, political, economic control of a state or region by a dominant actor,

widely used for the situation of African states and their subjugation by the French (Nkrumah, 1965). Neo-colonialism is mainly used to observe the problematic case of Western powers exiting the African continent while making sure to sustain their dominance and control over their former colonies, establishing mechanisms and institutions which will subjugate the newly-independent African states and make sure the inferiority and dependence on the Western powers is continued (Haag, 2011). Considering the context, the application of neo-colonialism in the context of Türkiye is not possible, as the Turkish position in the Western Balkans has not been established under the backdrop of a colonial existence nor under the aim of a continuation or establishment of a dependence to Türkiye. In truth, to understand the position of Türkiye and its engagements in the Western Balkans, there is need of a new concept, to incorporate and properly understand the complex position of Türkiye in the region.

Some have utilized theory of colonialism and the term “Neo-Ottomanism” to define the position and behavior of Türkiye (Targański, 2017; Yavuz, 2020; Maziad & Sotiriadis, 2020), however the position of this paper largely differs. In the widely used Neo-Ottomanism branding of Türkiye’s approach to foreign policy in the Western Balkans, one would assume that Türkiye is acting with the intention of subordination and dominance of the region and hopes of “neo-colonization” under the pretext of the Ottoman historical background, cultivating the political and financial benefits of that particular region. However, what this paper observes in the proactive role of Türkiye in the Western Balkans is quite different, it is not a behavior of domination or neo-colonization but rather, a developing, complex interdependency between Türkiye and the Western Balkans, which brings mutual benefit, constructed within the background of shared historical, social, political and economic values, which this paper will aim to properly describe utilizing the concept of *Natural Position*.

Observing the undeniable common heritage between the Western Balkans and Türkiye with regards to cultural, historical, political, economic and societal values gives Türkiye a “*natural position*” for involvement in the region. The term *Natural Position* is a new concept that is being proposed in this paper as a key element in the effectiveness and legitimacy of the diplomatic involvement of a state towards a certain geo-political region. The concept of *Natural Position* encompasses the shared heritage and/or values between a regional actor and a certain region and acknowledges this commonality as an important source of legitimacy for involvement, this commonality can be seen from a historical, social, political and/or economic context.

Although the concept of soft power may also be used to define the role in which Türkiye positions itself in the Western Balkans, that concept does not cover the entire picture. The concept of soft power may be enough to explain the cultural, political, and economic persuasion methods (Ali, 2022), however, the historical heritage and the factors it brings, along with the political, cultural and economic interdependency between Türkiye and the region should not go unnoticed.

Looking at all of the previously mentioned concepts, it is undeniable that the Turkish position needs a new framework, a new concept to detect and analyze its presence in the Western Balkans. This paper aims to fill this gap and provide a reasonable explanation on why Türkiye has, not only the right, but also the most optimum foundations to being an active player in the Western Balkans. In actuality, the concept of *Natural Position* is not only analyzing the approach taken in establishing influence but also the background and the naturally established foundations through which an actor, in this case Türkiye, gains significant convenience and legitimacy for its presence.

The importance of the *Natural Position* should not be understated, as many other global powers are involved because of ideological and geo-strategical premises but might not have the *Natural Position* behind them as defined in this paper.

The deficiency of a *Natural Position* has led to difficulties in justifying their stances in acts of global presence such as their recent involvements in the Middle East, Balkans and Asia. Some entities have parts of the *Natural Position* for involvement however they do not enjoy all elements of the concept, unlike Türkiye.

Türkiye does not have this handicap when engaging in foreign policy in the Western Balkans due to its *Natural Position* to be visible and interact. The Ottoman legacy that is shared with Western Balkans states along with the remnants of a common heritage and the efforts of its successor state established after 1923 (mostly being active 1980s and after 2002) have established the *Natural Position* of Türkiye and have acted as a good launchpad for Turkish foreign policy.

### **A. The Historical Context**

When examining the history and heritage of the Western Balkans, it is inevitable that one would stumble upon the Ottoman State, which was a dominant force and the ruling dynasty over the Western Balkans for over 500 years. The Ottoman State is a Turkish empire which had

a lifespan of more than 600 years and is considered the predecessor to modern-day Türkiye. Some historians argue that the Republic of Türkiye is not a successor state to the Ottomans but rather the reformed version of the same state (Ortaylı & Küçükkaya, 2017). The historical bond between the Ottomans and the modern Turkish state is a very important element in justifying the historical context of Türkiye's *Natural Position* in the region.

Although imperial rule is usually understood as a foreign occupation of certain native lands, that is not the case when the Ottoman presence in the Western Balkans is observed. Peace and stability were prevalent, society was based on religion and religious freedom and economic freedom was mostly secured. The social and economic stability which was established by the Ottomans in the Western Balkans initiated the period of “Pax Ottomanica” (Hayden & Matar, 2012) in which perpetual peace was achieved in the volatile region. The Western Balkans were mostly integrated within Ottoman society and bureaucracy, ethnic groups native to the Western Balkans were utilized in the administrative and military structures and investments towards the region was very high (Comyn-Platt, 1904).

There is no doubt that the Ottomans considered the Western Balkans as an integral part of the empire, this is also very visible with the total devastation in Ottoman intellectual circles after the First Balkan War in which the large portion of the Balkan territories were lost (Boyar, 2007). The Ottoman era in the Western Balkans ended in 1912, however the culture, heritage, architecture and spirit continued to exist and remained as the living evidence of the Ottoman heritage in the region. Thus, even after the Ottomans had left these lands, the relationship between societies continued and the social, historical and cultural ties remained.

Türkiye has not been shy in utilizing this context in order to increase its presence, as Turkish institutions such as TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) have restored more than 80 Ottoman-era structures throughout the Western Balkans (TİKA, 2022), further capitalizing on the historical commonality for influence and relevance in the region.

## **B. The Social Context**

When the social context of *Natural Position* is observed, it is to be understood as a term which encompasses all aspects of the social environment within a region, this would also include the cultural, ethnic and religious compositions. Observing the social construction of the Western Balkans region, the social context for the *Natural Position* of Türkiye is very easily visible with one of the most striking realities being the ethnic ties between Türkiye and the Western Balkans. While the Western Balkans hosts a significant number of ethnic Turks, Türkiye is home to “göçmen” (immigrants) from all over the Western Balkans. These human



ties have served as a base for Türkiye to justify its active policy towards the Western Balkans for decades (Bulut, 2006). As mentioned earlier, Türkiye has not only utilized the existing cultural, ethnic, and religious commonality, it has also begun to build upon it via institutions established in the region such as Yunus Emre Institutes, TİKA and even the Office of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı).

Turkish institutions in the region have engaged in the construction of eye-catching cultural and religious structures, activities and publications which have collectively worked upon the existing cultural and religious commonalities between Türkiye and the Western Balkans and increased cultural export to the region tremendously in the last decade (Bechev, 2012). These social engagements and investments are bound to turn public opinion in favor of Türkiye which adds to the social context of its *Natural Position*. According to a recent poll by the International Republican Institute (IRI), realized in North Macedonia, 87% of citizens would like the state to have closer relations with Türkiye (International Republican Institute, 2022). This high enthusiasm for closer relations does not stem from personal preference but rather the effects of Turkish engagements in the region from contemporary and historical context.

### **C. The Economic Context**

The economic context of the concept of *Natural Position* entails the existence of ties between a regional actor and a certain region in terms of economic and financial sectors. The economic ties that are part of the *Natural Position* justifications can be in the areas of international trade, natural resources, foreign investments among other aspects of international political economy. For the Turkish state, the Western Balkans have always been a convenient region for financial and capital investments. The closer relations pursued by the state have opened the doors to the Western Balkans for Turkish investors which have utilized these ties for easier access to the markets (Bechev, 2012).

In the last decades, Türkiye has pushed for increased trade agreements and foreign direct investments towards the Western Balkans, utilizing the TÜSİAD (Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen Association) and MÜSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association) along with chambers of commerce in the Western Balkans and the Turkish Exporters Union (TIM) in the path to realizing agreements and investments in the region. These efforts have not been in vain, according to TIM reports, Turkish exports in the market share of the Western Balkans have been on a steady rise for years, showing an astonishing rise of over 20% during the years before and after the pandemic period (Fırat Büyük, 2018; TRT Haber, 2022). Türkiye has free trade agreements with all Western Balkans states and Turkish

investments in the Western Balkans have increased four-fold since 2007, including a significant presence in the banking sector (Szpala, 2022). Although the most successful entry of Turkish products into the Western Balkans markets have been mostly through North Macedonia and Albania (Jusufi & Ukaj, 2021), the rise in exports throughout the rest of the Western Balkans states cannot be ignored. The Turkish presence within the markets of the Western Balkans continues to grow in significant rates and this presence has established the economic context for the *Natural Position* of Türkiye in the region. This increased presence is consistently supported by the Turkish government, therefore these investments and trade engagements by Turkish businessmen are not solely about profit but also endorsed by the government (Jusufi & Ukaj, 2021). The reasons for such endorsements are not only to increase regional authority but also to develop regional interdependency and cooperation, avoiding the potential for antagonization.

### **III. The Complex Role of Türkiye in The Western Balkans**

To understand the position of Türkiye and the difficulties with regards to the balance of relations with Western Balkans states, it is important to remember that the Balkan peninsula, even with the common legacy which binds nations, can be seen as a non-integrated and raw region (Ibish, 2016). The geo-political, ethnic and religious disputes have yet to be resolved and tensions between nation-states are still very visible.

In order to be able to effectively exert influence and attain cordial relations, Türkiye has to balance between the historical and cultural tensions of North Macedonia and Bulgaria, the ethnic tensions of Albanians and Serbs in Serbia and Kosovo as well as the ongoing instabilities within Bosnia and Herzegovina, between the entities of Republika Srpska and the federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These complicated cases make it necessary to employ a delicate balance which means that Türkiye must act cautiously as well as flexible in its approach to the region, a position which has also been supported by Serbian leader in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik (Büyük, 2021). The initial approach in recent years towards the Western Balkans was based on the doctrines of “Zero problems with neighbors” and “Strategic Depth” that were formulated by one of the chief foreign policymakers in Türkiye, Ahmet Davutoğlu (Vračić, 2016). Davutoğlu argued that the previous approach to the Western Balkans was too passive, and Türkiye had to utilize the Ottoman heritage and take a more active role in the Western Balkans (Davutoğlu, 2008), not only due to viewing the region as a “neighborhood” but also for strategic and inherent interest.

However, these doctrines have proven to function only in times of perpetual peace, since this approach was abandoned, once it became apparent that such doctrines would be dysfunctional in times of instability, the evidence of which can be seen after the recent instabilities in the Middle East and the subsequent Turkish reaction (Reuters, 2022). Instead, Türkiye has recently move to more defensive approach to protect its national interests. In such a volatile environment, Türkiye has worked to sustain good relations with all Western Balkan states, utilizing a balanced approach which can be traced to *realpolitik* principles. Even though Türkiye has recognized the independence of Kosovo, the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and pushes for closer relations with Albania, this has not impaired them from seeking trade deals with Serbia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2023). The ability to engage in close relations with two separate sides of a clash can only be possible with a *Natural Position* for involvement in the region, as mentioned previously, Türkiye is a benefactor of that *Natural Position* in the Western Balkans. It is very critical for Türkiye to utilize its position, because only through cordial relations with Serbia can the instability within Bosnia's entities be resolved. The same intricate context can be seen throughout the Western Balkans, these cases need a regional actor which has the capacity and legitimate position to appeal to both sides, for the Western Balkans, Türkiye can take on that role.

#### **IV. Rethinking the Approach and Position of Türkiye**

Having in mind this significant regional advantage, it is undeniably evident that Türkiye has the potential to have an even stronger position in the Western Balkans, however certain steps must be taken in this regard. The Turkish actors in the region cannot stay on the sidelines and assume the role of a neutral referee in the domestic developments of Western Balkans states.

In order to sustain its position as a regional power and a part of the discussion, Türkiye has to take clear positions with regards to policy decisions and political agendas of Western Balkans states in order to establish its own vision for the future of the region. Turkish policymakers must not shy away from criticizing the actions and rhetoric of political groups and governments in the Western Balkans when necessary and Turkish assets, especially think-tanks should be utilized in order to push for a Turkish position.

Türkiye must also re-examine its position with regards to the European Union (EU) membership proceedings of Western Balkan states. The recently developing understanding that Türkiye is in competition with the EU for influence in the Western Balkans (Atalay, 2021)

should be openly rejected and altered. In fact, this paper argues that Türkiye should support EU integration in the Western Balkans for several reasons. Firstly, the development of democratic values and efficient market economies in the Western Balkans would lead to a more stable playing field for Turkish diplomats and businessmen in the region. Secondly, with the possible membership and integration of Western Balkans states to the EU, Türkiye would have a new source of influence, authority, and leverage with regards to the EU. Turkish influence cannot be easily removed from Western Balkans states, for reasons that are clearly visible in this paper and the membership of these states to the EU would only give Türkiye an opportunity to have influence over the EU itself. Therefore, the argument which this paper holds is that Türkiye should approach the EU integration of Western Balkans states with enthusiasm as it opens the doors for Turkish influence to be exerted over potential EU decision-makers and thus the EU agenda. Türkiye must also engage in further effort to advance the process of EU integration in its own state. When Türkiye would once again convince the international community of its determination for EU integration, the position of Türkiye would further intensify in both Western Balkans and European Politics in general.

Utilizing these benefits and getting back on track to EU integration will make Türkiye seem like a proper regional factor that speaks for the benefits of the entire Western Balkans region and not only itself. In the development of democracy, reducing corruption and EU integration, Türkiye will assume the role of a leader in the region which will make the international stage further acknowledge the *Natural Position* of Türkiye in the Western Balkans.

## **Conclusion**

The Turkish role in the Western Balkans is as crucial as it is complicated, Türkiye has made admirable efforts in increasing its position as a regional power and the positive results are evident. However, there is vast room for further improvement of relations. Türkiye has the opportunity to utilize its established base and the international power vacuum in the Western Balkans in order to make its presence permanent. Türkiye has the advantage of its *Natural Position*, which can make Türkiye, an undisputable regional power in the Western Balkans, if utilized efficiently.

The concept of *Natural Position* should play an important part in the way we understand and observe international relations, specifically the justification of interventions by regional and international powers in the world stage. When analyzing the position of

foreign actors within regions, one must consider not only external and international factors but also the national and internal contexts. In such cases, the utilization of the principles of *Natural Position* provides us with the capability to efficiently pinpoint internal and external factors within regions and understand the role of international and regional actors.

The Western Balkans has been under Turkish influence for a long period of time, however the intensity of the presence of Türkiye has yet to reach its potential. The approach which has been taken by Türkiye towards the Western Balkans has been steadily evolving and assuming its shape, however, amid the inherent chaotic nature of the region, it is important to take a step back and re- evaluate certain positions. Türkiye should rethink its attitude towards other players within the region, considering the possibility of a beneficial outcome for Türkiye.

### References

- Ali, M. (2022). Turkey's soft power policy towards the Balkans: Challenges and perspectives. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 255-265.
- Atalay, O. (2021, October 25). *Balkanlarda AB, Soros, Türkiye*. Retrieved from Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü: <https://www.sde.org.tr/analiz/balkanlarda-ab-soros-turkiye-analizi-24362>
- Aydıntaşbaş, A. (2019, March 13). *From myth to reality: How to understand Turkey's role in the Western Balkans*. Retrieved from European Council on Foreign Relations: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/from\\_myth\\_to\\_reality\\_how\\_to\\_understand\\_turkeys\\_role\\_in\\_the\\_western\\_balkans/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/from_myth_to_reality_how_to_understand_turkeys_role_in_the_western_balkans/)
- Bechev, D. (2012). Turkey in the Balkans: Taking a Broader View. *Insight Turkey*, 131-146.
- Bloor, K. (2022). Regionalism and the European Union. In K. Bloor, *Understanding Global Politics*. E-International Relations.
- Boyar, E. (2007). *Ottomans, Turks and the Balkans: Empire Lost, Relations Altered*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bulut, E. (2006). *'Friends, Balkans, Statesmen Lend Us Your Ears': The Trans-State and State links between Turkey and the Balkans*. London: Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics.
- Buyuk, H. F. (2021). *Feuding Bosnians Look to Turkey's Erdogan to Mediate Crisis*. Retrieved from Balkan Insight Website: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/10/feuding-bosnians-look-to-turkeys-erdogan-to-mediate-crisis/>
- Comyn-Platt, T. (1904). *The Turk in the Balkans*. Forgotten Books.

- Davutoğlu, A. (2008). Turkey's foreign policy vision: An assessment of 2007. *Insight Turkey*, 77-96.
- Daily Sabah & Reuters. (2021). *Turkey ready for mediator role in Bosnia crisis: Defense Min. Akar*. Retrieved from Daily Sabah Website: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-ready-for-mediator-role-in-bosnia-crisis-defense-min-akar>
- European Parliament. (2023, April). *The Western Balkans: Fact sheets on the European Union: European Parliament*. Retrieved from European Parliament website: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans>
- Eyicil, A. (2004). The Balkan policy of Turkey during Atatürk period. *The Journal of Atatürk Research Center*, 335-367.
- Fırat Büyük, H. (2018, June 21). *Turkish Exports to Balkan Countries Rise Rapidly*. Retrieved from BalkanInsight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/21/turkey-s-export-to-balkan-countries-increases-22-per-cent-06-21-2018/#:~:text=Turkish%20exports%20to%20the%20Balkans,Turkish%20products%20cheaper%20to%20buy>.
- Hayden, A. J., & Matar, N. (2012). *Through the eyes of the beholder: The Holy Land, 1517-1713*. BRILL.
- Haag, D. (2011). Mechanisms of neo-colonialism: Current French and British influence in Cameroon and Ghana. International Catalan Institute for Peace.
- Ibish, M. (2016). Western Balkans and Turkey after the coup d'état attempt (15th of July 2016). *Adam Academy Journal of Social Sciences*, 75-94.
- International Republican Institute. (2022, December 19). *IRI North Macedonia poll finds dissatisfaction with country's direction, support for EU membership, increase in positive perceptions of Turkey and China*. Retrieved from International Republican Institute: <https://www.iri.org/news/iri-north-macedonia-poll-finds-dissatisfaction-with-countrys-direction-support-for-eu-membership-increase-in-positive-perceptions-of-turkey-and-china/>
- Jano, D. (2008). From 'Balkanization' to 'Europeanization': The stages of Western Balkans complex transformations. *Europe in Formation - Journal of studies on European construction and federalism*, 55-69.
- Jusufi, G., & Ukaj, F. (2021). Turkey's trade with Western Balkans: Looking beyond the Turkish foreign policy. *Journal for International and European Law, Economics and Market Integrations*.
- Krauthammer, C. (2011, April 28). *The Obama doctrine: Leading from behind*. Retrieved from Washington Post: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-doctrine-leading-from-behind/2011/04/28/AFBCy18E\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-doctrine-leading-from-behind/2011/04/28/AFBCy18E_story.html)

- Kütük, D. (2022). Analysis - Erdogan's Balkan tour: How economic relations stabilize the politics in the Balkans? Retrieved from Anadolu Agency Website: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-erdogan-s-balkan-tour-how-economic-relations-stabilize-the-politics-in-the-balkans/2680940>
- Maziad, M., & Sotiriadis, J. (2020). Turkey's Dangerous New Exports: Pan-Islamist, Neo-Ottoman Visions and Regional Instability. Retrieved from Middle East Institute website: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-dangerous-new-exports-pan-islamist-neo-ottoman-visions-and-regional>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. (2023). Relations between Türkiye and Serbia. Retrieved from Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkiye-and-serbia%20.en.mfa>
- Nkrumah, K. (1965). Neo-Colonialism, the last stage of imperialism. Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd.
- Ortaylı, I., & Küçükkaya, I. (2017). Cumhuriyetin ilk yüzyılı (1923-2023). Timaş Yayınları.
- Ortaylı, I. (2016). İmparatorluğun son nefesi. Timaş Yayınları.
- Reuters. (2022). Turkey's military operations in Iraq and Syria. Retrieved from Reuters Website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-military-operations-iraq-syria-2022-11-21/>
- Szpala, M. (2022). Bromance. Turkey's activity in the Western Balkans. Retrieved from Centre for Eastern Studies Website: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-11-22/bromance-turkeys-activity-western-balkans>
- Targański, T. (2017). Neo-Ottomanism. An empire being rebuilt? *New Eastern Europe*, 78-83.
- TİKA. (2022, 10 17). TİKA works to preserve common cultural heritage in Balkans. Retrieved from TİKA website: [https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/news/tika\\_works\\_to\\_preserve\\_common\\_cultural\\_heritage\\_in\\_balkans-73114](https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/news/tika_works_to_preserve_common_cultural_heritage_in_balkans-73114)
- TRT Haber. (2022, September 14). Balkanlar'a 8 ayda yaklaşık 14 milyar dolar ihracat. Retrieved from TRT Haber: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/ekonomi/balkanlara-8-ayda-yaklasik-14-milyar-dolar-ihracat-708582.html>
- Vračić, A. (2016). Turkey's role in the Western Balkans.
- Vulović, M. (2023). Economic Relations between the Western Balkans and Non-EU Countries. Retrieved from Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik - Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2023C36/>.

Yavuz, M. H. (2020). *Nostalgia for the Empire: The politics of Neo-Ottomanism*. Oxford University Press.

Yılmaz, E. A. (2021). Turkish foreign policy in a neorealist framework: Bilateral relations since 2016. *Middle East Policy*, 144-158.