Constructivist Analysis of Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy

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Abstract
This article analyses Turkey's foreign policy from 2009 to mid 2016, which had changed immensely toward its neighbours. The author argues that Turkey's foreign policy is considered to be mostly driven by ideological perspective than the logic of nation-state. For this purpose, the author attempts to apply a constructivist approach in International Relations theories for explanation, emphasising normative structures at domestic level. This approach which is based on ideas, norms and identity can provide an answer to the question why Turkey's foreign policy has changed. Hence, this article highlights the determinant factors.

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Introduction

From 2009 until mid of 2016, Turkey's Foreign Policy behaviour had new and distinct elements that contrast sharply with the earlier approach of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s foreign policy. In the post-2002, AKP's foreign policy strategy was designed by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutloglu who believed that the top priority of TFP was to serve state's economic interests. He designed a foreign policy approach based on principle of 'Zero-Problems with neighbours' (Israyleyan 2015). The emphasis was principally on cooperation rather than a confrontation. It was more based on the logic of the nation state. This policy helped its diplomatic and economic relation with regional neighbours including Iran, Syria, Egypt, Israel and Russia until 2009 (Ibid).

From what is called 'Arab Spring' in 2011 until mid 2016, Turkey's Foreign Policy behaviour had immensely changed towards its regional neighbours including Israel, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Syria and Russia. For most of these countries, Turkey's changing diplomatic relations was a surprise particularly in the case of Russia. For instance, Turkey shot downed Russian fighter jets at the Syrian-Turkey border in November 2015 as claimed the Russian military jets have violated the country's airs-pace. Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, stated 'I have been stabbed in the back' by Turkey (Russian Today 2015).

Now, Turkey's Foreign Policy behaviour is at the centre of international politics. This is due to the fact that Turkey is a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), with strategic and geopolitical importance. Turkey is a Sunni-majority Muslim country with a kind of 'democratic' model. Thus, the Islamic characteristic of Turkey differentiates the country

political system from other Muslim majority countries. Hence, Turkey's Foreign Policy due to its membership of NATO and its normative and ideological dimensions is a complicated subject to understand. Yet, the Islamic ideology is considered to be more an important factor in shaping the country's current foreign policy behaviour. Turkey's Foreign Policy had been more consistent with ideological interest than national ones. Ideological policy had imposed many economic and political costs on the country's national interests and has increased its regional and international challenges since 2009 (Akmehmet 2015). Hence, to understand the Turkish foreign policy from 2009 until mid of 2016, it is necessary to look at the ideological and normative characteristics of the country's foreign policy. For this reason, I apply societal constructivism as the most applicable approach.

Constructivism

Constructivism is understood widely as an approach than a theory in the discipline of International Relations. However, whether it is an approach or theory, it has significant contributions to the theoretical debate in International Relations. Constructivism offers a considerable potential applied framework for understanding foreign policy.

The main assumptions of constructivism are:

- International system "is a set of ideas, a body of thought, a system of norms, which has been arranged by certain people at a particular time and place" (Jackson and Sorensen 2010, 160)." In other words, international system is socially constructed and changeable.
- States are not independent but depend on the social environment they reside in (Wendt 1999). This means that systems of shared ideas, beliefs and values have

structural characteristics which define who we are and shape our identity (Reus-Smit 2009).

- Constructivists hold that normative or ideational structures are just as important as material structures in defining the meaning and identities of an individual or a state (Ruggie 1998). It is believed that "material resources only acquire meaning through the structure of shared knowledge" in which they are embedded (Wendt 1994, 389). In short, constructivists stress on the importance of identity in international relations, and emphasize inter-subjective beliefs such as ideas and concepts. Constructivists contend that 'what states do in international relations; the interests they hold, and the structures within which they operate, are defined by social norms and ideas, rather than by objective or material conditions" (Jackson 2004, 337).

- States' identities and interests are constituted by norms and shared beliefs (Finnemore 1996) e.g. liberal values or Islamic philosophy, i.e. the way people conceive themselves in their relations with others. The identity of a state constitutes its interests (Wendt 1992, 398). This means understanding how states' identities conditioned by non-material structures are very important. Because identities first make interests then make policy of state towards others. In short, constructivists argue that state identity, which is the product of historical, cultural, political and social backgrounds, constitutes its interests. This view gives an adequate explanation of why different states behave differently under the same systemic constraint.

The key concepts of the constructivism approach can be summarized as identity, ideas and norms. Constructivists accentuate the role of ideas, identity and norms which, as they argue, play an important role in foreign policy (Flockhart 2012, 82).

However, constructivism, just like liberalism and realism thoughts, is not a unified concept. There are various strands of constructivism: Systemic (transnational) Constructivism, Unit-level or (Societal) Constructivism and Holistic Constructivism, explaining international relations and state foreign policy making. Despite the differences of opinion among constructivists, they all agree that the world is constructed socially and actions in this social process are driven by ideas and norms (Reus-Smit 2009).

Systemic or Transnational Constructivism

This type of constructivist strand describes a systemic analysis of transformations in international relations (Adler 1997, 342). The two leading scholars of this view are Alexander Wendt (1992) and Martha Finnemore (1996), who focus exclusively on the impact of international norms on state's foreign policy behaviour because it is believed that they affect state identities and interests. This type of constructivist view ignores changes at the domestic political realm. Wendt (1994) states that there are two types of identities in international relations for states: 'societal identities and corporate identities of states' (385). Societal identity refers to a state's self-understanding and others (Ibid). In this context, social identity is the agent that understands itself, its place in the social world and its relations with others. In contrast, corporate identity is rooted in the human, material, ideological and cultural characteristics that make a state what it is (Ibid). Wendt's draw on identity formation and its influence on state foreign policy are important because they fulfill two vital functions. First, identities convey to the self and others who the self is. Secondly, identities express to the self who others are. The former entails that the agent's identity determines a set of preferences about the choice of action. Hence, the identity of state creates its interest. The later function implies that a state perceives other states according to the identities it assigns to them.

Societal (Unit-level) Constructivism

In contrast to Systemic Constructivism, societal constructivism, as illustrated by Peter Katzentein (1996) and Ted Hopf (2002), emphasizes only on domestic socialization processes, such as elections or public opinion and a party manifesto, within society as the most influential factors in shaping state's foreign policy. Because it is believed that internal socialization processes can independently transform the identity and interests of states; without their interaction with others (Katzenstein 1996). The emphasis here is on the role of domestic structure norms such as culture and ideology.

Holistic Constructivism

Holistic Constructivism, as presented by John Ruggie (1983) and Rey Koslowski and Friedrich Kratochwil (1994), is a theory of identity and interest. This type of constructivism aims to integrate the domestically constituted corporate identities of states and their internationally driven social identity into "a unified analytical perspective that treats the domestic and the international structure and process as two faces of a single social and political order" (Price, Rues-Smit, 1998, 269). According to this approach, foreign policy behaviors are consequences of interactions between both a domestic identity and an international identity (Bozdaglioglu 2007). While the author of this article acknowledge the strength of this type of constructivism, the normative approach employed in this research is built upon societal constructivism in order to highlight the causal importance of internal ideas and norms in shaping state's foreign policy.

Societal Constructivism and Identity

Identity is one of the key concepts of constructivism, and that there is yet no clear and agreed-on definition (Finnemore, Sikkink, 2001). However, it is essential to understand what is meant by the concept of identity for the purpose of this article.

In Katzenstein's 1996 edited volume, identity is defined as "a domestic attribute arising from national ideologies of collective distinctiveness and purpose" (Ibid., 399). The emphasis here is on ideology as a determining factor for state behaviour. It is suggested that a "collective identity shapes the content of state interests and the course of state action" (Banchoff 1999, 262), because collective identities are social and rooted within the residents' relations with those outside the boundaries of the community and the territory. This collective ideology is useful in analyzing the new face of Turkey's foreign policy, because Turkey, as a Sunni majority Muslim, has tried to live with its old internal identity, i.e. Muslim identity (Alaranta 2015).

Constructivists argue that a collective identity expresses ideas about the membership within a social group (Jackson, Sorensen 2010, 162). Ideas are held collectively in the form of symbols and knowledge. Intrinsically, they provide a system of orientation for self-reference and action (Rose 2009, 134). As a consequence, "a unified set of ideas that are shared by the members of a society establish a set of shared premises, values, expectations, and action predispositions among the members of the nation that as a whole constitute the national style" (Vertzberger 1990, 267). These norms and values could be interpreted as a national ideology or belief system in state relation with other communities, in the sense that ideas about who I am serve as a guide to political action; the logic of responsibility or appropriateness (Aggestam, 1999). Ideology, in this sense, is a systemic doctrine which describes social needs and aspirations of a group, class, culture and/or state. From this point of view, ideas, understood here as inter-subjective meanings among individuals (Heritage1988, 226) have structural features. In short, national identities are socially constructed and changeable through socialization processes such as public opinion, party programs and election platforms.

Any changes in the predominant idea of the nation are likely to have significant foreign policy implications because they involve

socialization processes from within the society. National interests are largely a function of ideas that shapes foreign policy. Christian Reus-Smit (2009), in explaining how 'identities are the basis of interests' (Wendt 1992, 398), uses an Islamic Caliphate as an example:

> [The] Islamic Caliphate in the age of absolutism brought with it a range of interests such as controlling religion within its territory, pursuing rights of succession beyond that territory and crushing nationalist movements (Reus-Smit 2009, 221).

This analytical example illustrates that the idea that foreign policy officials hold about the state form the basis of national interest. They draw on social norms, values, and beliefs to mobilize a sense of belonging and solidarity to legitimatize the general thrust of foreign policy (Aggestam 1999). State leaders see themselves as a guardian of these social values. It defines, for instance, who is enemy and who is friend based on these social norms. Thus, internal domestic identities are determinants of the national policy. Constructivist explanation of foreign policy behaviour is important, because it explains where states' preferences come from and why states have different preferences. In sum, non-material structures, such as Islamic ideology or liberal philosophy, condition national and state's identities because identities inform interest and, consequently, actions (Wendt 1992, 398).

Democratization process within society plays an important role in shaping state foreign policy. Weldes (1996) emphasizes the importance of democratic representations in contributing to the construction of a state identity and interests (281). This is because a democratic representation not only allows for a variety of discourses, including those that stress the differences between the self and others, but also settles a vision "through well-defined relations with others" with a clear national interest (Ibid, 282). Hence, a democratic representation defines who and what the state is, and who and what enemies are.

Turkey's national identity and social process

Muslim identity of Turkey is one of the multiple identities it has. Turkey's Muslim identity is domestically driven. It is originated from the Sunni sect of Islam, particularly the interpretations of the Naghshbandi and Sufi brotherhoods (Heper 2013). This Muslim identity has increasingly been raised since the end of the Cold War and particularly after the AKP came to power in 2002 (Dalay, Friedman 2013). As Jenny White (2014) argues, Turkey's national identity has been in a process of redefinition from Islamism to Muslim-hood since 2002 (211). Muslim-hood, according to her, implies a different understanding of personhood and a pluralist vision of an Islamic public sphere that allows people with different languages to have a collective identity (Ibid, 49). In this sense, Kurds, Arabs and Turks have a collective identity but they could still hold a second ethnic identity; that of Turks, Kurds and Arabs. It is a common ideology that depoliticizes radical nationalism or Communism/Marxism. In fact, it views Communism as its biggest enemy (Ibid, 35). The Muslim-hood identity aims for the incorporation of Turkey into the "Islamic community of nations" and presents Turkey as potential leader of the Islamic world, particularly the Sunni communities (Heper 2013).

The AK Party's decade of ruling the country has tried to "enable the country to live its true identity" which is religious and conservative (Alaranta 2015). Mahir Unal, AKP's deputy and Deputy Parliamentary Group Chair, stated that "in our civilization and culture, all books are written in order to explain the Quran" (Ibid). The statement not only explicitly asserting there is a distinct Islamic civilization that Turkey belongs to, but it also claims that the Quran is a guide to the society. The ideological character of the current Turkey's AKP-led government is greatly influenced by the Islamic conservative ideology. The embracement of Sunni-Muslim conservative identity has implications far beyond the country's border.

The AKP's rise to power in 2002 and changes to the deeply seated Kemalist network (Romano 2015) are significant changes not just in the internal political structure, since Kemalist network defined Islamism as threat to the Turkish state, but for the external foreign policy as well (Dalay, Friedman 2013, 125). The country's local election in 2009 was important socialization process that has brought a new activists and politicians into political and institutional practices. The AKP has been dominated by homogenous activists, politicians and Islamists who desire to embrace and practice Islamic thoughts within society and more openly support their fellow Sunni Muslims in the region. The socialization processes such election has changed the dynamic forces within the AKP and consequently its foreign policy towards its regional neighbours. The party itself has gone into political shuffle. It has not only sidelined its sister, Gulen's movement from the AKP, but has also banned them in the country. They Ire able to do that because of the socialization processes took place in 2009 that gave an overall confidence to the AKP's leader.

The prevailing Islamic discourse, such as Muslim-hood, fellow brothers, etc., has influenced the formation of the country's preferences and the construction of the national interests because they have created structural norms (Cornell 2012). Cornell (2012) argues that TFP is largely ideologically driven because the two influential politicians, Ahmet Davutoglu and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have strong Islamic ideological incentives (Ibid, 18-19). His analytical argument is based on speeches, writings and emphases on the Islamic values (Ibid). For instance, they define who is an enemy and who is a friend based on the Sunni branch of Islam. It defines the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad and Kurdish forces in Syria as enemies and terrorists while Saudi Arabia and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as friends because of their Sunni identity match.

The question arises why the KRG was not seen as "fellow Muslims" by the AKP leaders before 2009 even though they were

in power since 2002. From the societal-constructivist point of view, this is because Turkey had a certain definition for itself and others. That is, Turkey viewed the Iraqi government through the lens of Sunni Arab participation. TFP makers realized in 2008 that the Iraqi state structure, as a former Sunni ruling state, is fragmented and is no longer ruled by Sunnis since Maliki's Shia-led government steadily approached towards Tehran. As Morelli and Pischedda (2014) argue, Turkey viewed the KRG as a counterbalance to the Iranian influence on the Shia-dominated government of Iraq (Morelli, Pischedda 2014, 5). The KRG was the only stable Sunni region in Iraq that was not just politically and economically capable to be engaged, but it also matched the Turkish internally driven identity, with both being Sunnis. Therefore, the reframing of the KRG's identity from an "implacable threat to the Turkish nation" to "fellow Muslims" happened at a time when the Turkish government acknowledged that the Iraqi central government was no longer a unified national government as Sunnis almost lost their political power in administering the country. In this regard, identity can be seen as an important factor in shaping TFP from 2009 until mid of 2016.

Contemporary Turkish foreign policy and its discourses

The logic of 'responsibility or appropriateness':
The transnational responsibility is a state's objectives that it pursues out of its territorial borders as an ideological responsibility (Nia 2011). However, the term of transnational responsibility can be different from one state to another; secular state and ideological one (Ewing 2015, 286). The new face of TFP is more ideologically, responsibilities and duties mission based than the logic of nation-state. Hence, the current Turkey's foreign policy can be accounted as a mission-oriented state rather than interest-oriented one (Habibi 2016). In line with the logic of responsibility, Turkey-led by AKP fraternal commitment

towards Islamist Sunni movements in the Middle East during what is called 'Arab Spring' (Dalay 2016). The practical reflection of AKP's changed sudden principles in foreign policy behaviour is manifested in AKP's deep rooted and politically based ideology, Islamic conservative nationalism, defending, protecting and showing solidarity to fellow brothers who have a similar ideological belief (Alaranta 2015). Turkey's support to Islamist movements in the last six years, such as Hamas in Gaza, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sunni-rebels (Turkey calls them 'modern' Syrians') in Syria, Turkmens in Syria, Islamists in Libya, Nahza Islamist Movement in Tunisia and Sunni politicians in Iraq, are interpreted within the logic of responsibility or duty. The 'Genocide' against Yazidis by the so-called Islamic State or *Daesh* in 2014 in Iraqi Kurdistan is another example that can be interpreted within the logic of irresponsibility because of ideological and identical differences. In 2014, Daesh attacked Yazidis in Shangal in Iraqi Kurdistan which the United Nations called 'Genocide' (BBC 2015). Turkey's response was a total silence, and no solidarity or even rapid humanitarian assistance was given. The Yazidi case can be interpreted in the logic of un-duty or irresponsibility because they are not Muslims; they have identical and religion differences.

According to the logic of responsibility, Turkey foreign policy behaviour towards its regional neighbours, which is not based on cost-benefit logic, could only be explained within the logic of 'responsibility or appropriateness' which originates from the political Islam. The practice of *'Our Brothers'*policy towards Sunni-Islamist movements in the Middle East since 2009 is one of the main consequences of the logic of responsibility or duty. The following examples illustrate the argument:

- Turkey has provided its aid worth of $200 million to Gaza Strip which is controlled by Hamas- Sunni Islamist armed movement (Çam 2015). And Turkey ended its diplomatic relations with Israel as a response to Israel's killing of

Turkish activists who aimed at breaking the blockage of Gaza (Sherwood 2010).

- Turkey's political support to the Iraqi Sunnis since 2003 has become apparent when senior Iraqi Sunni Muslim politician, Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi who was charged of terrorism activity by an Iraqi court, took 'safe heaven' in Turkey. Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said 'I will host him, as long as he wants' (BBC 2012).

- Turkey ended its diplomatic relations with Egypt when the 'Sunni Brotherhood movement' was overthrown by the Army, in retaliation to their brothers' cause. It was an ideologically-motivated decision.

- Turkey has been intervened Syrian civil unrest since 2011 and declared its stands with Sunni protesters. Since then Turkey has provided a financial, political and military support to what Turkey calls 'modern Syrians or rebels' in Syria since 2011. Because these 'Syrian modern -anti Assad regime' are either Sunnis or Turkmens (Butler 2015). They do not hesitate to bomb the Kurds in Syria because of ideological and identical differences.

- As a consequence of its ongoing support to Sunni Turkmens and 'Sunni Arab fighters' such as Jabhat al-Nusra Islamist based ideology, Turkey has directly confronted Russia. The shooting down of Russian fighter jets in November 2015 by Turkish air-forces has resulted in diplomatic crisis (Russian Today 2015).

Thus, the new face of Turkey's foreign policy, compared to pre-2009, is greatly influenced by assuming the other regarding interest such Sunni communities in the Middle East as an inseparable part of self-regarding interests'; Turkish national identity. Turkey's approach to the cause of Shia protesters in Bahrain during what is called 'Arab Spring' can also be interpreted in light of the logic of irresponsibility because they do not have the same ideological belief and identity. Turkish

leaders viewed the uprising in Bahrain as an internal matter rather than as a transnational cause (Hurriyet Daily News 2011). In contrast, Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, called upon presidents of Egypt, Syria, Libya and Tunisia to step down and respect the voice of their citizens (Parkinson 2011). Protesters in those countries are mostly Sunnis and led by Sunni-Islamist movements who have similar thought of Islamic conservatism. Thus, the AKP-led Turkish government justified its diplomatic approach to those countries based on its ideological belief.

Counter-Iran's Influence in the Middle East, Balancing power, and Sunni-Alliances

These discourses are rooted in Turkey's historical memory. Ottoman Empire ruled most of the Middle East by Turkish elites for almost five hundred years. It could be argued that the most important feature of Turkey's foreign policy behaviour since the 'Arab Spring' has been its public support to Sunni-Islamists in the Middle East. In this way, Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, views the 'Arab Spring' as an opportunity for Turkey's regional order, motivated by 'Ottoman memory'. In fact, Turkey's anti-Assad policy and its relations with Egypt and its-Alliances with Saudi Arabia – Qatar – Jordan can be understood in the context of these objectives and motivations (Rafi 2016). For practical realization of countering Iran's influence in the region, Turkey is seeking for cooperation, coalitions and alliances among Sunni countries at state and non-state actors including Sunni Islamist movements. To this end, Turkey has extended its efforts to forge alliances with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, and Sunni-Islamist rebels in Syria. Turkish officials believe that its alliances with Sunni countries in the Middle East are capable of establishing powerful block that would counter Iran's influence.

Societal Constructivism approach to Turkey's Foreign Policy

During the last six years, Turkey's Foreign Policy has been subject to the mentioned discourses as main resources for Turkey's definitions of its identities and hence interests. The above discourses construct the identity and consequently interests of Turkey. Social domestic discourses have constructed Turkey's identity and interests. It is a corporate identity that has made Turkey to change, to a great extent, its behaviour toward its regional neighbours. The authors argue that Turkey's current foreign policy behaviour is greatly influenced by corporate identity (the domestic social norms). Turkey's corporate identity has greatly determined who is 'friend' and who is 'enemy'. This new dynamic has brought Turkey into a *'real-politics'* towards the Middle Eastern, European countries and a superpower country like Russia. In this context, Turkey is in the critical moment of its history. Turkey has already faced internal security issues, e.g., in January 2016 asuicide bomber killed more than 40 army officials in Ankara, and on 13th March 2016 a suicide bomber again killed 40 people and injured 100 more (Letsch 2016). Hence, Turkey's internal insecurity can be greatly linked to the current state foreign policy and internal policies towards its own Kurds in the south of the country. For its neighbours like Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey's Foreign Policy and its internal policies are great matters because Kurdistan Regional Government is hugely reliant on Turkey's export product and its geographical importance for exporting oil. Therefore, any undesired consequences of Turkey's Foreign Policy have a great impact on IraqiKurdistan and other neighboring countries. In short, it is a 'corporate identity' and the socialization processes has greatly influenced TFP towards its neighbours, and has implications far beyond its borders.

Conclusion

This research paper has tried to apply societal constructivism in order to explain the causal importance of internal normative

environment in reconstructing contemporary Turkey's Foreign Policy. From 2009 until mid of 2016, Turkey's Foreign Policy has been greatly affected by domestic social identity and ideology. Turkey's domestic social discourses have encouraged or drove the AKP to adopt more ideological policy towards its neighbors and regional countries particularly Syria, Egypt, Israel, Iraq, Tunisia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Jordan, Bahrain and Qatar. In fact, the AKP itself has been dominated by more radical Islamist conservatives since 2009 election.

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