

THE MAIN STRUCTURAL FACTORS THAT MAKE THE BALKANS IMPORTANT FOR TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract: *The Balkans, due to its geographical proximity and historical, social and cultural ties, represents one of the regions where Turkey has shown special interest. Throughout history, Turkey has played a decisive role in the Balkans for nearly 550 years, and its policies and actions have been instrumental both in shaping the region and at the same time in determining the course of history. The Balkans – which geographically constitute Turkey’s opening gate to the European continent – is also of importance for its special status in the historical process in which the Turkish nation took shape and for its potential for the future in terms of regional integration and security. As a result, the Balkans have been and remain Turkey’s main strategic objective regarding the balance of power in this area and European security. Although relations between Turkey and the Balkan neighbours were severely affected during the Cold War, their historical links have continued, in various ways, to this day. From the ethnic and cultural perspective of Turkey, the Turks living in this region belong to both Turkey and the Balkans, such that their dual belonging is considered as being particularly important. In this respect, the emerging / potential emergence of crises in the region has a major significance for Turkey in terms of the sustainability and stability of peace. The Balkans is therefore much more than a neighbouring region for Turkey as a state that has always advocated stability in the Balkans and supported the state integrity. In this study, the main structural factors (historical ties, Balkan Muslims and Turkish minority, geopolitics, security) that make the Balkans important for Turkey’s Foreign Policy will be addressed.*

Keywords: *Balkans, The Ottoman Empire, Turkish Foreign Policy, Balkan Muslims minorities, Balkan Turkish minorities.*

Rezumat: *Principali factori structurali care acordă importanță Balcanilor în politica externă a Turciei. Datorită apropierii geografice și legăturilor istorice, sociale și culturale, Balcanii reprezintă una dintre regiunile față de care Turcia a manifestat un interes special. De fapt, Turcia a jucat un rol decisiv în Balcani timp de aproape 550 de ani, iar politicile și acțiunile sale au contribuit atât la definirea regiunii, cât și la determinarea*

cursului istoriei. De asemenea, Balcanii, care constituie, geografic, poarta de deschidere a Turciei către continentul european, au importanță datorită statutului special dobândit în procesul istoric în care s-a format națiunea turcă, precum și potențialului în ceea ce privește integrarea și securitatea regională. Drept urmare, Balcanii au fost și rămân principalul obiectiv strategic al Turciei în termenii echilibrului de putere în această zonă și ai securității europene. Deși relațiile dintre Turcia și vecinii din Balcani au fost puternic afectate în timpul Războiului Rece, legăturile lor istorice continuă, în diverse moduri, până în zilele noastre. Din perspectiva etnică și culturală a Turciei, turcii care trăiesc în această regiune aparțin deopotrivă Turciei și Balcanilor, astfel că dubla lor apartenență este considerată deosebit de importantă. În acest sens, apariția / potențiala declanșare a crizelor în regiune are o semnificație majoră pentru Turcia în ceea ce privește durabilitatea și stabilitatea păcii. Prin urmare, Balcanii sunt mult mai mult decât o regiune vecină pentru Turcia, ca stat care a susținut întotdeauna stabilitatea în Balcani și a sprijinit integritatea statală. În acest studiu vor fi abordați principalii factori structurali (legăturile istorice, musulmanii din Balcani și minoritatea turcă, geopolitica, securitatea) care fac ca Balcanii să fie importanți pentru politica externă a Turciei.

Résumé : Les principaux facteurs structuraux qui accordent de l'importance aux Balkans dans la politique extérieure de la Turquie. Grâce au voisinage géographique et aux liaisons historiques, sociales et culturelles, les Balkans représentent une des régions envers lesquels la Turquie manifesta un intérêt tout à fait spécial. D'ailleurs, la Turquie joua un rôle décisif dans les Balkans pendant presque 550 années, tandis que ses politiques et ses actions contribuèrent à la définition de la région, ainsi qu'à la détermination du cours historique. De plus, les Balkans, qui constituent, géographiquement, la porte d'ouverture de la Turquie vers le continent européen, présente de l'importance grâce au statut spécial acquis le long du processus historique pendant lequel se forma la nation turque, ainsi qu'au potentiel en ce qui concerne l'intégration et la sécurité régionale. Par conséquent, les Balkans ont été et restent le principal objectif stratégique de la Turquie dans les termes de l'équilibre de pouvoir dans la région et de la sécurité européenne. Quoique les relations entre la Turquie et ses voisins des Balkans furent puissamment affectées pendant la Guerre Froide, leurs liaisons historiques continuent, en diverses manières, jusqu'à nos jours. De la perspective ethnique et culturelle de la Turquie, les Turcs qui vivent dans cette région appartiennent à la Turquie, mais aussi aux Balkans, de manière qu'on considère leur double appartenance extrêmement importante. À cet égard, l'apparition / le potentiel déclenchement des crises dans la région a une signification majeure pour la Turquie en ce qui concerne la durabilité et la stabilité de la paix. En conclusion, les Balkans représentent beaucoup plus qu'une région voisine pour la Turquie, en tant qu'État qui soutint tout le temps la stabilité dans les Balkans et appuya l'intégrité étatique. L'étude ci-jointe, on abordera les principaux facteurs structuraux (liaisons historiques, les musulmans des Balkans et la minorité turque, la géopolitique, la sécurité) qui fassent que les Balkans soient importants pour la politique extérieure de la Turquie.

INTRODUCTION

The Balkans is one of the few regions in the world where diversity is politically, culturally and geographically rare. This diversity is an advantage when strong states dominate the Balkan geography, while it becomes a disadvantage in times of the efforts of many weak states to exist. The British political leader, Winston Churchill, characterises the Balkans as saying, "*The Balkans produce more history than they can consume.*"¹ Indeed, when we look at the historical background of the Balkans, not only has no region of Europe witnessed more attacks, invasions and occupation movements than the Balkans, but the region of which the dominance has often changed hands has been one of the most chaotic and unsettled regions on earth. As Eric J. Hobsbawm rightly refers to the past 20th century as the "*Age of Extremes*"² or the "*Age of Catastrophe*", the fact that one of the two bloodiest and most chaotic regions in the world has been the Middle East, and the other one, the Balkans, makes this reality clear. Because in both regions, there have been experienced great wars, civil wars, occupations, ethnic cleansing, exiles, and refugee situations, and there have never been lacking in blood and tears in the lives of the people in these regions. When we look at the history of the Balkans, appear as dynamic and multi-layered geography where the four great civilisations (Ancient Greece, Rome, Byzantine and Ottoman empires) intersect, a wide variety of cultures interact with each other, but never dominated by a single culture. Therefore, if that is true, the Balkans have a destiny that seems immutable. Just in terms of not only races and religions but also it is difficult to find a homogeneous state, even a homogeneous province in this region. So to say; conflict, partition, and ethnic cleansing have been the "ill fate" of the Balkans throughout history.³

¹ Alex N. Grigor'ev, Adrian Severin, *Debalkanizing the Balkans: A Strategy for a Sustainable Peace in Kosovo*, in "Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft" [International Politics and Society], 2007, No. 1, pp. 123-124.

² Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Kısa 20. Yüzyıl (1914-1991): Aşırıliklar Çağı* [Age of Extremes: Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991], Yavuz Alogan (çev.), İstanbul, Everest Yayınları, 2003.

³ This negative image of the Balkans has led politicians and researchers to frequently refer to the concept of "Balkanization" when describing similar regions of the world. The concept is used as a negation term in order to refer to some regions that possess or have the potential to contain features such as conflict, division and instability in international relations.

As a result of all these facts and processes, the Balkans, which consisted of six countries (Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Yugoslavia) in the past; simultaneously with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, together with the countries that emerged after the collapse of Yugoslavia, it has become a region with 12 countries. Besides this, the Balkans, surrounded by globalisation and popular culture, is an area where Orthodox, Catholic, Slavic, and Islamic cultures interact and collide. In this respect, the emerging / potential emergence of crises in the region has a critical importance for Turkey in terms of the sustainability of peace and stability. The Balkans is therefore much more than a neighbouring region for Turkey, which has always advocated stability in the Balkans and supported the establishment of countries' territorial integrities.

In this study, an analysis will be made within the framework of the main structural factors (historical ties, Balkan Muslims and Turkish minorities, geopolitics, security) that make the Balkans important for Turkish foreign policy.

GEOPOLITICS OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA

The Balkan Peninsula is the easternmost of the three peninsulas in the south of the European continent. The geopolitical importance of the Balkans is remarkable as it is a transition point between East and West. This region, as well as being a transit area to other parts of Europe, is noteworthy because of its proximity to Asia and its location extending from Central Europe to the Mediterranean and even to Central Asia.⁴ As a result of its geopolitical situation, the Balkan Peninsula, which has shown a long history and cultural unity for centuries, is bordered to the Mediterranean Sea as a historical region in the south. Here, the Aegean Sea, with its hundreds of islands, is positioned in the Balkans; it is bordered to the Adriatic Sea in the West while stretching from there to Crete and the Mediterranean Sea. As for the northern border of the Balkans, since Roman times the Danube River has been designated as the northern border of the peninsula. The Danube River forms a water barrier that is challenging to overcome, such as The Straits in the south. However, since the Danube River is the main trade route to the Black Sea, and because of the strong trade ties between the two coasts, it has never been an insurmountable obstacle. The empires that dominated this side of the Balkans have always tried to keep the territories beyond the Danube under their control. Not only is this not direct sovereignty, but

⁴ Kenan Arıbaş, *Küresel Çağda Siyasi Coğrafya* [Political Geography in the Global Age], Konya, Çizgi Kitabevi, 2007, p. 429.

also the north and south of the Danube have shown significant differences in terms of culture and social structure. The Danube has remained as the northern border of the Balkans, especially in military terms. Towards the west of the Balkans, Vidin, and in particular, Belgrade, played a crucial role, and after Belgrade, the Sava River has formed a border separating the Western Balkans from Syrmia and Hungary.⁵ Within this natural and historical border formed by rivers, 0.2% of Italy, 27% of Slovenia, and 9% of Romania from the west remain within the Balkan geography. The west of the Balkans borders the Adriatic Sea and the east borders the Black Sea. Its southern border constitutes Greece with the remaining part of Turkey in Western Thrace, which constitutes 27% of the total surface area, and gives the Balkans a feature that provides an exit to the Mediterranean via the Aegean and Ionian seas in the South.⁶

TURKISH AND MUSLIM PRESENCE IN THE BALKANS

The Turkish presence in the Balkans dates back to very ancient times. Even the word “Balkan” is an Old Turkish word that was meaning “mountain range / mountainous”.⁷ The Balkan Peninsula, starting from the 6th century, became a

⁵ Halil İnalçık, *Türkler ve Balkanlar* [Turks and the Balkans], in “BAL-TAM Türklük Bilgisi Dergisi” [BAL-TAM Journal of Turkishness], 2005, Year: II, No. 3, Prizren, Balkan Türkoloji Araştırmaları Merkezi, pp. 23-24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷ According to Mark Mazover, the name “Balkan” itself is a name given afterward to the peninsula. According to him, this naming is the name of a mountain, and today’s Balkans was known as “Rumeli” or “European Balkans” between the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. When the Ottomans called the region “Rumeli”, it was based on the fact that the region was previously the territory of the Roman Empire. In this context, Anatolian lands were called “Diyar-ı Rum” and Anatolian Seljuks were called “Greek Seljuks”. Rumi was the title of the inhabitants of this region. Even in the classical period of the Ottomans, the concept of Rumi had a social content. In general, to distinguish Ottoman Turks from other Asian Turks and in particular it was used to describe an urban, educated and cultured class of the Empire. To Mazover, the widespread use of this name with negative connotations was during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). Therefore, the Balkans began to mean much more than a geographical term over time. Unlike its past uses, the term has strong connotations of violence, desert, and primitivism that are hard to find elsewhere. Hugh Poulton, *Balkanlar: Çatışan Azınlıklar, Çatışan Devletler* [Balkans: Conflicting Minorities, Conflicting States], Yavuz Alogan (çev.), İstanbul, Sarmal Yayınevi, 1993, p. 104.

homeland where Turkish tribes came and settled and the mounted nomadic Turkish tribes who came after each other from the east, through Asia and the northern Black Sea steppe region, either mingled with the Native people from Dacian, Thracian and Slavic origin, then disappeared (such as the Pechenegs and Uz from Oghuz origin in the 11th century), or founded powerful states in the north-eastern Balkans as a military ruling class.⁸

This presence continued with the Bulgarian, Oghuz, Pecheneg and Kuman migrations in later periods and reached its climax during the Ottoman Empire. Within the Balkan Peninsula, several strategic massive mountainous regions, straits, and passageways marked the stages of the Empire's founding. This geopolitical factor is of fundamental importance for understanding the stages of Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. After the Ottomans settled on the European coast of the Dardanelles, the Evros River from Edirne to Enez became the first frontier of conquest and spread.⁹ Therefore, first of all, the Ottoman Empire was born and developed as a Balkan empire in the 14th and 15th centuries.¹⁰ In terms of power balance, the Balkans constituted the dynamic for the establishment and rise of the Empire's power and influence to spread to Europe and to become one of the great powers of Europe.¹¹ With the annexation of Edirne to the Ottoman territories in 1361, the Turkish population in the Balkans began to increase, and these lands which were called "Rumeli" became one of the two main politically and culturally dominated areas of the Ottoman State, along with Anatolia. Until the Balkan war in 1912, it was possible to go from Istanbul, almost as far as to the Adriatic Sea, within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. All Western Thrace, Macedonia, Albania and even today's Kosovo and Sancak were under Ottoman rule. Salonika was the second-largest city in the Empire, and the majority of the populations living on the aforementioned "Rumeli" lands were either Turkish or Muslim.¹² In Western Thrace

⁸ Halil İnalçık, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰ İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı Barışı* [Ottoman Peace], İstanbul, Ufuk Kitap, 2006, p. 46.

¹¹ Marija Mitrovic, *Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: The Influence of Traditional Determinants on Davutoğlu's Conception of Turkey-Balkan Relations*, Berlin, GeT MA Working Paper Series, No. 10, 2014, p. 27.

¹² The history and duration of Ottoman sovereignty as a region or country in the Balkans are as follows: Macedonia (1371-1913) 542 years, Serbia (1389-1829) 440 years, Bulgaria (1396-1878) 483 years, Greece (1456-1830) 374 years, Bosnia (1463-1878) 396 years, Albania (1468-1912) 444 yıl, Wallachia [Eflak] (1476-1829) 353 years, Crimea (1478-1774) 296 years, Herzegovina (1482-1878) 396 years, Moldova (1504-

and Macedonia, a Muslim-Turkish population consisting of Turks, Muslim Pomaks and even Muslim Slavs who had migrated from Anatolia at the time was the majority. Albanians living in Albania, Kosovo, and Western Macedonia made up a significant part of this population because they were Muslims. Especially, Islamization and migration from Anatolia to the region, it has contributed to the high level of the Turkish-Islamic population in the Balkans. Therefore, the most powerful and long-term influence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans is the massification and institutionalisation of “Islamization” in the region.¹³ The Balkans are also important in terms of being the starting point for the decline and collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. The late 19th century witnessed rising Greek nationalism and the modern Greek state in 1830 was the first nation-state in the Balkans to come out of clashes between nationalism and the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴ So to say, the fall and collapse of the Empire spreading and rising in the Balkans began tragically from the Balkans. The tragedy of the Empire in the Balkans, especially the Balkan Wars, ended the search for Ottomanism, which aimed to keep the empire together, regardless of religion or race, and turned the Committee of Union and Progress to Turkish nationalism. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish and Muslim peoples living in the Balkan countries did not cut their ties with the motherland and managed to maintain their identity despite all kinds of oppression. Following the assimilation policies implemented during the Cold War, ethnic cleansings against the Turkish and Muslim presence in the Balkans emerged in the just after the Cold War. Although the region seems to have reached tranquillity today, in reality, the political and ethnic conflicts that have been the bleeding wound of the region have not been fully resolved.

BALKANS AND TURKEY: INDEFEASIBLE LEGACY

Moving from the historical reality above, it should be firstly mentioned that

1829) 325 years, Croatia (1526-1699) 173 years, Hungary (1526-1699) 173 years. See L. Carl Brown, *İmparatorluk Mirası: Balkanlarda ve Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Damgası* [Imperial Legacy: Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East], 4th ed., Gül Çağalı Güven (çev.), İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2000, pp. 9-10.

¹³ The majority of the Muslim population in the Balkans, is not the Turks brought from Anatolia and settled in the region within the framework of the settlement policy, was composed of the “Islamized Balkans” under the influence of the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁴ Mustafa Aydın, *Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Historical Framework and Traditional Inputs*, in “Middle Eastern Studies”, 1999, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 164.

the Republic of Turkey bears the heritage of the Ottoman Empire¹⁵, which dominated the Balkans for about 550 years, and since its foundation, it has turned its face to the West and brought its European and Balkan identity to forefront, rather than its Asian one. Therefore, Turkey is a Balkan country not only geographically but also politically, historically and culturally.

After centuries of the Ottoman Empire's sovereignty, the Balkans became one of the most depressed regions during the collapse of the Empire. Both the effects of the French Revolution and the struggles of the great powers on the Balkans as determinants of the independence movements in the region have led to a radical change in the political, human and geographical structure of the region. Following the declaration of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Turkey's relations with the Balkan countries have shown progress on a peaceful basis. In the interwar period, Turkey's prominent status quo approach in international relations was also reflected in the Balkan policy. During the Cold War period, however, Turkey's Balkan policies were much more limited and it did not find much room for action in the area squeezed by the eastern and Western blocs. The main change in Turkey's Balkan policy was triggered by the end of the Cold War and entering of Yugoslavia into a break-up process in a regional sense, and thus, Turkey gained a wider room for manoeuvre in the Balkans just as it did in the Caucasus and the Middle East.

The Balkans region has become significant for Turkish foreign policy due to four main factors in the period from past to present. These four main factors make the Balkans region significant for Turkey and that furthermore affect its relations with the countries and peoples of the region at all times closely. The factors in question are as follows:

- 1) Historical ties with the region
- 2) The population of Balkan-origin living in Turkey
- 3) Muslim and Turkish-origin communities living in the Balkans
- 4) The geopolitical position of the region and security

Looking at the *historical ties with the region*, one must first state that the Ottoman Empire was born in the town of Söğüt as a beylik, but it was established

¹⁵ The Ottoman Empire's dominance over the Balkans is divided into three periods: 1) The period of progression and supremacy in the Balkans (1354-1683), 2) The period of weakening and decline of supremacy (1683-1821), 3) The period of breaking down of supremacy and withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkan territories (1821-1913). For more information, see Caner Sancaktar, *Balkanlar'da Osmanlı Hâkimiyeti ve Siyasal Mirası* [Ottoman Dominance and Political Heritage in the Balkans], in "Ege Stratejik Araştırmalar Dergisi" [Ege Strategic Research Journal], 2011, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 27-47.

and flourished in the Balkans as a world state. In this context, with the conquest of Edirne (1362), we see that the Balkans were historically the main expansion area of the Ottoman Empire. In the course of the in the process of expansion of the Empire, its orientation to the West much more than the East, in fact, ensured that the empire is regarded as a Balkan empire rather than an Asian or Eastern Empire. Because a significant portion of the Ottoman human resources and economic income were also provided from the Balkans. Furthermore, the Balkans is a region that has closely influenced Ottoman-Turkish political life. It is a fact that the political ideas and movements that developed in Western Europe entered the political life of the Ottoman Empire through the Balkan lands and strengthened. Therefore, it is an undeniable fact that nationalist ideas, organisations and movements in the Balkans affected Ottoman-Turk intellectuals and political leaders in the development of the understanding of motherland and nation in the modern sense. Indeed, the fact that two of the most prominent centres of the Committee of Union and Progress, the pioneer of the 1908 Revolution (re-declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy [II. Meşrutiyet]), were located in Salonica and Manastir is meaningful in this regard.

The Balkans, in the Ottoman Empire, was the region where the Devshirmeh [Devşirme] system was applied most intensively.¹⁶ In this context, this region provided the Empire with a great number of soldiers (Janissary [Yeniçeri]) and senior executives. Considering that from the 215 grand viziers of the Empire, this figure reaches 292 with the reassignments¹⁷, and 62 of them are of Balkan origin, and the military and civilian cadres performing war of independence are mainly of Balkan origin; the importance of the Balkans in Turkish political life and Turkish foreign policy can probably be better understood. For example, considered one of the most important grand viziers of the Ottoman Empire, Sokullu Mehmet Pasha, who served as Grand Vizier for more than 14 years during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murat III, marked the period of the Ottoman Empire with his statecraft, projects, and personality as a devshirmeh Ottoman statesman of Serbian origin.¹⁸ Similarly, Mustafa Kemal

¹⁶ Colin Imber, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu (1300-1650)* [The Ottoman Empire (1300-1650)], Şiar Yalçın (çev.), İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2006, p. 178.

¹⁷ T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü [Republic of Turkey, the Prime Ministry General Directorate of State Archives], *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi* [Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Guide], 2nd ed., İstanbul, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, No. 42, 2000, pp. 487-500.

¹⁸ The provinces in the Balkans were mostly ruled by the pashas of Balkan-origin. Many of

Atatürk, Republic of Turkey's founder, was born in Salonika as a member of the last generations of a Turkmen Yoruk family who migrated from Anatolia to the Balkans in the 14th or 15th century.¹⁹

It is to some degree true that the Ottoman conquests caused a sudden interruption in the natural development of Balkan history. It is also true that Balkan nations have lost their national dynasties and ruling classes. With the disappearance of the Balkan states, the development of the "high culture" symbolised by their elite also halted. Nonetheless, folk culture and literature and arts connected to the church sustained its vitality and development during the Ottoman period. On the other hand, Ottoman culture had a strong influence on language, arts and daily life. It can be argued that the culture of the indigenous people thus prospered by coming into contact with Islamic culture. The most apparent document of this cultural influence is the Balkan languages. The number of cultural words taken from Turkish, even in today's Balkan languages, varies between 2000 and 5000 words depending on the region. Also, the Ottoman heritage is visible even today in clothes, folk music, eating and drinking traditions,

these people were successful managers who grew up through the Devshirmeh system. There were also numerous devshirmehs among the Ottoman viziers and other Council (Divan) members. Therefore, an important element of the political institutionalization of the Ottoman Empire was the practice of devshirmeh. The practice of devshirmeh took place between the 14th and 18th centuries. This practice declined in the 17th century and then ended in the 18th century. At the time period determined by the central government, the desired number of Christian boys was gathered from the designated regions. The gathering of the children was carried out by officials authorized by the central government and the Janissary Agha. As a rule, one boy was subjected to being devshirmeh for every forty families. Children were chosen by different criteria (body structure, height, intelligence, morals, character, beauty, etc.). According to these criteria, the best children were collected. Only the single-male child family, clergies and prominent families of the region were exempted from the practice of devshirmeh. The collected children were taken to Istanbul and delivered to Janissary Agha. The best ones were taken to the palace, employed in various jobs and trained at Enderun. The most successful ones in the training process were assigned to different positions under the Sultan's command at the palace. Others were sent as rulers to different parts of the Empire. Devshirmehs, who achieved the highest success in the training and post-training posts, were rising up to senior positions in the state administration. See Caner Sancaktar, *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁹ For more information, see Ali Güler, *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün Soyuy* [Lineage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk], in "Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi" [Journal of Atatürk Research Center], 1999, Vol. XV (Kasım), No. 45, pp. 969-1009.

and behaviours.²⁰ On the other hand, long centuries of living together with the Turks in cities and villages, the influence of the laws and infrastructure institutions of the Ottoman Empire and finally the imitation of the Ottoman high culture as a prestige-culture constituted the main ways of acculturation among the Balkan native population. F. William Hasluck, a British historian and archaeologist, has shown how members of both communities share widely Christian and Islamic folk beliefs and customs.²¹ The eclecticism of folk religious sects such as Bektashism played an important role in this. On the other hand, the Rumelian Turks took many cultural elements from the Balkan native population in agriculture, daily life, and the arts, so that in time, a cultural difference between Rumelians and Anatolian people emerged.²²

Nationalism has been the fundamental dynamics of development, change, integration, and disintegration in the Balkans since the 19th century. Both the dominance of the Ottoman Empire over the Balkan peoples and that the Balkan peoples embarked on national struggle for independence against the Empire from the early 19th century and the subsequent efforts to build their own “nation-state”, inevitably initiated and developed a process that gave rise to the “Ottoman / Turkish / Muslim” antagonism in the Balkans. Therefore, it is worth noting that both behind the happenings experienced during the Ottoman withdrawal from the Balkans and the ethnic and religious conflicts experienced in the Balkans in 1990s, the process of being purified from the Ottoman past/heritage at both political, cultural and ethnic levels, in other words, “*De-Ottomanization*” process/efforts, lies. On the other hand, in the first stage of the post-Cold War era, domestic and foreign developments encouraged Neo-Ottomanist ideas and discourses in Turkish foreign policy. The rise of Neo-Ottomanist discourse in Turkish political life in the early 1990s arises from both the actualisation of changes in Turkish foreign policy that promoted the emergence of critical ideas and alternative discourses and a series of developments (the collapse of the bipolar international system, new independent Turkic republics in Central Asia, Bosnia-Herzegovina

²⁰ Halil İnalçık, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

²¹ See F. William Hasluck, *Sultanlar Döneminde Anadolu'da Hıristiyanlık ve İslam* [Christianity and Islam in Anatolia During the Sultans], Vol. 1, Timuçin Binder (çev.), İstanbul, Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2012; F. William Hasluck, *Sultanlar Döneminde Anadolu'da Hıristiyanlık ve İslam* [Christianity and Islam in Anatolia During the Sultans], Vol. 2, Timuçin Binder (çev.), İstanbul, Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2013.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 33. For more information, see F. William Hasluck, *Bektaşilik İncelemeleri* [Bektashism Reviews], Ragıp Hulusi Özden (çev.), İstanbul, Say Yayınları, 2012.

War, the rise of Kurdish ethnic nationalism in Turkey). Neo-Ottomanism emerged as a result of the political developments in the Balkans, the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie in Turkey, the widespread religious education especially following the September 12, 1980, military coup, and the economic liberalisation efforts initiated by the Motherland Party, led by Turgut Özal. He sought a geopolitical redefinition of Turkey-West relations (in particular Turkish-American relations) in the cultural geography of a potential Turkish sphere of influence over vast geography, expanding from the Balkans to the China Sea so that the “next century would be a century of Turks.”²³ In this context, in the 1990s, Turkey has “entered into more rapprochement with the Ottoman past” in this process, undoubtedly, the attacks against the Turkish and Muslim communities in the Balkans, taking into account the action and reaction principle, have historically led to the development of prejudice in the public opinion and the administrative circles of Turkey as well as against the non-Muslim nations and states of the Balkans. Therefore, in the memories of Turkish foreign policy, the Balkans have often taken their place with negative images. Because, during the interwar period, in terms of spreading area of fascism, and communism after World War II (1939-1945), the Balkans were perceived as a threat to Turkey and a region where minority problems were endless.

Considering the second factor, the “*population of Balkan origin living in Turkey*”, that makes the Balkans important for Turkey, together with the process of the Ottoman withdrawal from the Balkans, the waves of migration from the Balkans to Anatolia during the period of the Republic continued for various reasons (oppression and war), creating a population of Balkan origin (Bosnians, Muslim Albanians, Torbesler, Pomaks, and Bulgarian Turks) which has a population of approximately 3 million among Turkey’s population²⁴, and even a significant number of the relatives of these people still live in the Balkans. Facing massive immigration from the Balkans to Turkey also affect Turkey’s ethnic composition, it has also contributed to the construction of the Turkish nation. Although while migration between the Balkans and Turkey based on ethnic rather than religious-based (for example, in the Turkish-Greek population exchange

²³ Hasan Kösebalan, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 12.

²⁴ For more information, see Seyfi Yıldırım, *Balkan Savaşları ve Sonrasındaki Göçlerin Türkiye Nüfusuna Etkileri* [Effects of Immigration in Turkey’s Population after the Balkan Wars and Aftermath], in “Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi” [The Journal of Modern Turkish History], 2012, Vol. 8, No. 16 (Güz), pp. 75-92.

(1923-1930), which was one of the most recent mass immigration, despite a religious-based exchange), these immigrants are considered as ethnic Turks in Turkey and were also considered Greek in Greece. Because, in the historical process, the fact that the most important determinant of ethnic identities in the Balkans has been primarily the religion, not the race or the language. Turkey and Greece have taken an important step towards forming their national states with the necessary exchange of people. In this context, these immigrants were after the arrival subject of intensive *Turkification*, which resulted in changed family names, inability to use the mother tongue, etc.²⁵ On the other hand, the political, social, economic and psychological losses caused by these migrations for the Muslim and Turkish communities of Balkan origin, as well as the pressures experienced by the Muslim and Turkish communities living in various Balkan countries, have become one of the most sensitive issues Turkish foreign policy in every period. In this context, Turkey's one other reason for the interest in the Balkans, increasing concerns about the new wave of mass immigration. Turkey has received large amounts of immigration from the Balkans since the period of the Ottoman Empire; one of the most important reasons for this is that when a crisis or war broke out in the region, Turkey has always been a popular destination for Balkan Muslims and Turkish minorities. In other words, in both groups, especially in times of crisis, they see Turkey as the biggest guarantee. Since the high economic and social cost of these migrations laid a burden on Turkey, Turkey carries out policies that support human rights and freedoms in the countries where minorities come from and still reside, to eliminate the need to emigrate to Turkey. Also, mass migration leads to a reduction in the number of the Turkish minority in the Balkans, and this situation is not a desirable situation for Turkey. This approach, which may also be considered as Turkey's taking an active role in the Balkans, has been perceived, from an imperialist point of view, as Turkey's return to the former Ottomans and the Balkans. This was also considered to be Turkey's foreign policy status quo as a sign of a major change. It has therefore been claimed that the new, Islamic and Ottomanist tendency foreign policy identity was now operative and on the arena.²⁶

Considering the *"Turkish and Muslim population living in the Balkans"*, as the

²⁵ Eşref Kenan Rašidagić, *A Critical Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans*, in Muhidin Mulalić, Hasan Korkut, Elif Nuroğlu (ed.), *Turkey-Balkan Relations: The Future Prospects of Cultural, Political and Economic Transformations and Relations*, Istanbul, TASAM Publication, 2013, p. 182.

²⁶ Marija Mitrovic, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

third factor that makes the Balkans important for Turkey and Turkish foreign policy, This Muslim and Turkish presence in the Balkans is the result of continuous mass migration from Anatolia in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is known that the Ottoman Empire forcibly moved nomadic groups from Anatolia to Rumelia and settled them in certain areas along strategic routes. One reason for this migration and settlement was to secure the conquered territories and main roads and provide raiding forces at the borderlands. Another reason was the policy of sending animal-breeder nomads to the borderlands of Rumelia, who caused a disturbance in Anatolia and caused harm to the villagers. Whatever the reason is, there is no doubt that the Empire played a leading role in Turkifying Rumelia. Besides that, especially in the 14th century, there seems to have been a spontaneous movement of migration from Anatolia to settle in the rich lands of Rumelia. Those who participated in this migration were mostly Turkmen tribes who came to Western Anatolia under Mongol pressure from Eastern and Central Anatolia. It seems that the occupation of Byzantine lands in Western Anatolia and the emergence of Turkmen beyliks was the result of this Turkmen migration movement. According to the 16th-century archival records, even in the 1520s, the Yoruks in Western Anatolia accounted for one in nine of the entire population. The Turkmen nomads who migrated from East to West Anatolia continuously were causing a population pressure, and the Balkans were an appealing area for the nomads who had to search for new grasslands.²⁷ Today in Balkan geography, more than 1 million Turkish population (approximately 760 thousand in Bulgaria, 120 thousand in Greece, 78 thousand in Macedonia, 40 thousand in Kosovo, and 70 thousand in Romania) and more than 8 million Muslim population (approximately 2.5 million in Albania, 2 million in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.6 million in Kosovo, 900 thousand in Bulgaria, 670 thousand in Macedonia, 150 thousand in Greece, 120 thousand in Montenegro, 235 thousand in Serbia, 70 thousand in Romania) live.²⁸

In this context, Turks and Muslims living in the Balkans today, as they did yesterday, have positive thoughts and opinions towards Turkey and see Turkey as a “protective state” in almost every period (especially during times of oppression, conflict, and crisis). Likewise, Turkey’s public opinion and state are also equally sensitive to these communities in the Balkans because of their historical and

²⁷ Halil İnalçık, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁸ Caner Sancaktar, *Balkanlar Türkiye İçin Neden Önemli?* [Balkans Why is It Important for Turkey?], Türk Asya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (TASAM), 27 Mayıs 2010, in https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/71/balkanlar_turkiye_icin_neden_onemli (Accessed in 08.10.2019).

cultural ties and are interested in their problems. Hence, Turkey, even if other factors are ignored, Turks and the Muslims minority in the Balkans are directly affected by the developments in the region. After the Cold War, Turkey's apparent interest in the Balkans began to experience a change. In the context of Yugoslavia, with the end of ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, since the early 2000s, while soft power has become an effective key throughout the region, Turkey's foreign policy towards the Balkans in the framework of this new approach has emerged.²⁹ In addition to seeking the political and security aspects that Turkey's Balkan policy as well, in the last decade, quests based on soft power elements have also been very important.³⁰ In the period following 2009, when Turkey's foreign policy behaviour towards the Balkans is analysed, it is evident that beyond the major changes in the meaning of discourse, there is indeed an essential continuity in terms of Turkey's shaping of its relations with the region.³¹ During Ahmet Davutoğlu's term as prime minister, Turkey displayed a better-structured vision in the region, endeavoured to be more proactive in the face of developments experienced in the region, and emphasised the approach of being in touch with people in the field through the use of soft power capabilities and, in particular, cultural ties.³² Turkey sought new instruments to expand its sphere of influence, and in this context referred to the common Ottoman history of the Balkans in its discourses. It began to use its cultural and religious ties arising from Ottoman heritage, including kinship relations with the Balkan people, to position itself more strongly in Balkan politics and to balance the influence of the great powers in the region.³³ In this context, the instruments of soft power for the region said that Turkey's heavily granted.

Looking at the "*Geopolitical position of the Balkans and security*", as the fourth factor that makes the Balkans significant for Turkey and Turkish foreign policy, firstly, it can be mentioned that the main influence of Balkan geopolitics on Turkey is cultural and historical and this was because the Muslims of the region

²⁹ Zeynep Elif Koç, Murat Özsoy, *An Evaluation of Turkey's Western Balkans Policy under the AKP and Prospects for the Post-Davutoğlu Era*, in "Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi" [Selçuk University Journal of Studies in Turcology], 2018, Issue: 43 (Bahar), p. 358.

³⁰ Birgül Demirtaş, *Reconsidering Turkey's Balkan Ties: Opportunities and Limitations*, in "Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Global Reach", Pınar Gözen Ercan (ed.), Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 140.

³¹ Marija Mitrovic, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

regarded Turkey as their homeland. The culture that dominated the region for centuries was Ottoman-Turkish culture. At this point, it should also be noted that for the first time in 1808, until the German geographer, August Zeune, uses the term Balkan Peninsula, the region was called “European Turkey” (Turkey d’Europe) in most sources and maps.³⁴ Therefore, the historical background and the Turks in the region are an important geopolitical factor for Turkey. On the other hand, we can say that the geopolitics of this geography, especially in terms of the “stability” and “security” factors, are significant for Turkey and Turkish foreign policy in every period. Indeed, during the period of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans had strategic importance with its “outpost” position protecting Istanbul against Europe. Turkey’s special geographical position between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, makes Turkey a Balkan, Mediterranean, and the Middle Eastern country all at the same time. This geographical position also makes Turkey much more sensitive to the developments and changes in the regional or international political and military balances.³⁵ So, the Balkans region is a very important geographical region connecting Central and Western Europe with Asia, as a peninsula adjacent to the Black Sea, Aegean and Adriatic seas and extending into the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, and with this feature, the geopolitical value of the Balkans is really high both in terms of security and in terms of trade routes, transportation, and stability. In other words, the Balkans has the distinction of being a road corridor to the West for Turkey. The link roads, between Turkey and Europe countries, which have intensive economic and political relations, to pass through this region. Therefore, maintaining security and stability in the Balkans is extremely important that both in terms of Turkey’s security as well as to sustain economic and political relations. The emergence of the possibility of a conflict in this geography as well as the creates risk for regional security, Turkey’s relations with the region and with Europe will also be negatively affected. Secondly, the Balkans region is Turkey’s way of opening up to Europe, so the Balkans’ being in “stability” and “security” is of great importance both for Turkey’s “national security” and for the path to Europe not to be interrupted. Therefore, the Republic of Turkey has been continuously seeking “stability” and “security” in the Balkans region since its establishment and has supported and promoted all kinds of political, military, economic and cultural formations that

³⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position], 22nd ed., İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2007, p. 66.

³⁵ Mustafa Aydın, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

will serve that purpose (For example, the Balkan Entente established in 1934, and the Balkan Pact established in 1954).³⁶ Moreover, the Balkans region, one of the hinterlands of Turkey's foreign policy, is also very important in its event race against Greece in the context of its struggle to become a "regional power" in this geography. Considering Turkey's deep disagreements with Greece. In this context, Turkey's entering into more effective relations in the Balkans from Greece, to be a balance across Greece is of utmost importance. Thirdly, since the early 1990s, in Turkey's relations with the Balkans, it has emerged as a process of redefining the role and discourse. With the end of the bipolar international system, however, Turkey also had a wider arena of manoeuvring in foreign policy, thereby enabling it to develop more effective foreign policy initiatives.³⁷ In this context, throughout the 1990s near Turkey's land basin said that a foreign policy showed increased but controlled activity. The wars that took place in the Balkans in the 1990s brought great security concerns, especially for Turkey, and therefore Turkey played an active role in generating a solution in the crisis areas of the Balkans and especially in the conflicts experienced in Bosnia and Kosovo. Turkey's role in the region during the said crisis has reached its peak. In this context, Turkey approached the issue of Yugoslavia with similar matters, such as political and security concerns, and tried to play an active role in solving the Yugoslavia Crisis. Besides, following the internal conflicts that took place in the Balkans, Turkey has played an important role in the international peacekeeping mission in the region. In this context, to ensure lasting stability in the Balkans and to strengthen the cooperation environment, Turkey continues to play a leading role in regional affairs and organisations.³⁸

³⁶ For more information on the determinants of the emergence of the Balkan Entente and Balkan Pact, see Hasan Kösebalan, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56; Melek Fırat, *Relations with Greece (1923-1939)*, in Baskın Oran (ed.), Mustafa Akşin (trans.), *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006: Facts and Analyses with Documents*, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2010, pp. 210-212; Melek Fırat, *Relations with Greece (1945-1960)*, in Baskın Oran (ed.), Mustafa Akşin (trans.), *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006: Facts and Analyses with Documents*, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2010, pp. 350-353; Dilek Barlas, *Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Opportunities and Limits for Middle-power Activism in the 1930s*, in "Journal of Contemporary History", 2005, Vol. 40, Issue: 3 (July), pp. 441-464.

³⁷ Birgül Demirtaş, *Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans: A Europeanized Foreign Policy in a De-Europeanized National Context?*, in "Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies", 2015, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 129-130.

³⁸ Birgül Demirtaş, *Reconsidering Turkey's Balkan Ties...*, p. 133.

The new context of global politics and the new outlook of Turkish foreign policy after the Cold War period, in the context of the Middle East and the Balkans, Turkey pulling the focus of regional politics has opened up new possibilities in international relations to Turkey.³⁹ In the post-Cold War era, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) that will make a big change in Turkey's domestic and foreign policies, came to power, it not only continued active diplomatic initiatives that had intensified since the 1990s, but it also had a chance to add new elements to Balkan policy thanks to its increased interactions with the European Union (EU).⁴⁰ In this respect, since the 1990s, Turkey's active and inclusive in the Balkans is possible to say that the foreign policy of a positive impact on Turkey-EU relations. Ahmet Davutoğlu, the determinant of the main lines of Turkish foreign policy under the JDP, has played a significant role in the theoretical and practical framework of Turkey's Balkan policy. He proposed a new framework in terms of post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy and argued that Turkey should shape its policy in the Balkans, especially by making it based on the region's two important Muslim people: Bosnians and Albanians.⁴¹ On the other hand, for Ahmet Davutoğlu, cultural cooperation with the Balkans and the protection of Ottoman and Turkish heritage in this region are particularly important. According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, based on intra-regional balances and inter-regional dependency, strengthening the internal security of these communities, protecting their cultural assets, strengthening their socio-economic infrastructure, and maintaining and increasing communication between communities, Turkey, as well as peace in the region will make a powerful and secure the tension conjuncture.⁴² In the EU, such as Turkey, as well as the maintenance of peace and stability, also sees the Balkans as an area of influence as a test area for its capabilities.⁴³

CONCLUSIONS

Turkey is a multifaceted country for reasons such as its geographical

³⁹ İbrahim Kalın, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Framework, Values, and Mechanisms*, in "International Journal", Charting the New Turkish Foreign Policy, 2011, Vol. 67, No. 1, (Winter), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Birgül Demirtaş, *Reconsidering Turkey's Balkan Ties...*, p. 130.

⁴¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *op. cit.*, pp. 316-318.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁴³ Marinko Bobic, *Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans*, in Aharon Klieman (ed.), *Great Powers and Geopolitics: International Affairs in a Rebalancing World*, Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2015, p. 97.

location, history, culture, and the social, political and economic composition of its nation. In this context, Turkey is both an Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea country, as well as Eurasian, the Near Eastern and the Balkans country.

The Balkans is a very important region not only for Turkey but also for regional and international powers. The Balkans is a region that cannot be reduced to homogeneous patterns in terms of the facts discussed in this article. Therefore, it is necessary to think of the Balkans with many political facts and factors in which the countries in the region whose conflicting histories, contradicts today and becomes uncertain in the future.

Turkey's relations with the Balkans, as well as the countries of the region and Turkey's national conjuncture, has been developed within the facilities and subjects where the international conjuncture makes it possible. The foreign policy understanding of the Republic based on maintaining the status quo, Yugoslavia experience of the Balkan countries, multipolar recognises opportunities to the countries in question of the international system after the end of the Cold War, and finally, from the countries of the region they live in identity crisis, and Turkey's since 2002, foreign policy understanding evolving from status quo to active foreign policy understanding was the determining factor of the relationship. In this context, since the end of the Cold War, mainly of Turks and Muslims in the Balkans in the international arena—even one-spokesman Turkey. Therefore, the position of Turkey in the region is special and unique. No doubt, as well as the advantages of this position, the disadvantages will always exist.

However, relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries should not be understood as purely bilateral relations. In fact, the international organisations to which each party is a member and the responsibilities it imposes have a direct or indirect impact on mutual political and economic relations. Thus, Turkey and Balkan countries, as well as EU enlargement and deepening policies, affect unequal degrees. On the other hand, EU members Bulgaria and Romania have expressed their support for Turkey's EU membership so far. This might work to their benefit with regard to the EU insofar as the EU recognizes a need to enhance its presence in the Black Sea area and insofar as it is officially favourable toward Turkish membership. This support, as long as the EU is aware of the need to increase its presence in the Black Sea region and it is important as long as the positive view of Turkey's membership.⁴⁴ Therefore, the Balkans have great importance with its special position, as well as with its potential for the future, in

⁴⁴ Ronald H. Linden, *Balkan Geometry: Turkish Accession and the International Relations of Southeast Europe*, in "Orbis", 2007, Vol. 51, Issue: 2 (Spring), p. 345.

the context of regional integration and the EU membership goal shared with all the countries of the region. In the post-Cold War period, increasing the effectiveness of Turkey's foreign policy and Turks and Muslims living in the Balkans, language, religion and culture in the sense of partnership of its, offers a wide range of ground relations in the region to Turkey. In this context, Turkey has an important position in the Balkans, which is often in crisis, thanks to its position of being a model country in the region with its image of moderation in foreign policy, responsibility, respect for the international order and, democratic attitude. On the other hand, the developments underwent in the Balkans during the 19th and 20th centuries indicate that the region will continue to be an important area of struggle for the great powers in the 21st century. Because the region is in a strategic location as a geographical position and it is also the geopolitical basin of many historical powers.

Within this framework, its special position in the historical process bears the Balkans far beyond being a geographic place for Turkey. Turkey depending on the current national power capacity and has the potential to be a state of shaping the developments in the Balkans. Turkey, which strives to develop regional cooperation with all countries in the Balkans, increases its effectiveness in the Balkans by creating different platforms and contributing to these formations both economically and culturally through a multi-relationship and dialogue network including non-governmental and professional organisations. It is inevitable for Turkey to know and manage the perceptions that pose risks for the policies it will produce in the Balkans, which are very diverse in terms of ethnicity, in order to be more effective in these efforts. In this regard, it is an inevitable necessity for Turkey, which is based on the principles of "regional ownership" and "comprehensiveness" in its Balkan policy in the 21st century, to claim the Balkans heritage that it inherited from the Ottomans today and in the past, and to play an active role in the region, in terms of both its historical and geo-cultural responsibility and the strategic horizon that Turkish foreign policy holds.