

# TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE BOSNIAN WAR (1992-1995): A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS

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## Özet

Bu çalışmada Türkiye'deki karar alıcıların Bosna Savaşı'na yönelik izledikleri dış politika analiz edilmektedir. Araştırma sorusu Türkiye'nin o dönemdeki mevcut iç ve dış sorunlarına karşın nasıl olup da aktif bir politika izleyebildiğidir. Bu çalışma yeni bir devlet kimliği arayışı sürecinin bu politikada etkili olduğunu savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Bosna, Balkanlar, dış politika, devlet kimliği

## Abstract

The main aim of this essay is to examine the policy adopted by Turkish decision makers toward the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995. The puzzling question is that why Turkey attempted to play an active role during the war in Bosnia in spite of its internal and external problems at the time. This study argues that the search for a new state identity in the post-Cold War era provided the key to understand Turkish foreign policy towards the Bosnian conflict. It is argued that by developing an active attitude toward the conflict, Ankara was in fact trying to reformulate its former identity, which had been constructed during the Cold War. Turkey was trying to prove that it was still important for Western security in the new era. The study shows that the wars of Yugoslav dissolution witnessed many speeches of Turkish leaders declaring the greatness of the country. This dominant discourse was accompanied by an active foreign policy by the Turkish leaders. At the time Ankara started many diplomatic initiatives to bring the Bosnian issue to the attention of the international community. This study argues that the discourse and foreign policy during the Bosnian War were caused by Turkish leaders' desire to show Turkey's still lasting geopolitical significance to the world.

**Keywords:** Turkey,, Bosnia, Balkans, foreign policy, state identity.

## INTRODUCTION

This article examines the policy adopted by Turkish decision makers toward the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995. The puzzling question is why Turkey attempted to play an active role during the war in Bosnia in spite of its internal and external problems? This study argues that the search for a new state identity by the policy makers provides the key to

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understanding Turkish foreign policy toward the problems in former Yugoslavia. It is argued that by developing an active attitude toward the conflict, Ankara was in fact trying to reformulate its former identity, which had been constructed during the Cold War. Turkey was trying to prove that it was still important for Western security in the new era. It was trying to project its new identity as a regional power, but it wanted to maintain its Western-oriented foreign policy as well. Its active policy in the Balkans can be attributed to its search for a reformulation of its former identity in accordance with new international circumstances.

The article will, first, look at the position of Turkey in the new conditions of international politics in the post-Cold War era. Second it will examine the theoretical approach that is believed to be useful to understand its foreign policy toward the Bosnian case. Third it will consider Ankara's approach toward the outbreak of the violence in Yugoslav territories, mainly in Slovenia and Croatia. Fourth its attitude during the Bosnian War that was the longest lasting and the bloodiest conflict in Europe after the Second World War will be analysed. Fifth and last the main findings of the research will be summarized.

#### **TURKEY IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

The collapse of the Cold War led to a new perception of Turkey in the West; Turkey, which had considered herself an inseparable part of the West during the Cold War, found itself in the position of an "awkward partner".<sup>1</sup> The basic question was what kind of role Turkey would play in the new conditions of global politics. Would Turkey continue to be a part of the Western alliance or turn its face to the newly independent Turkic republics? However the Gulf crisis which erupted in 1990 and resulted in US-led war against Iraq changed the US perception of Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Due to the irredentist policy of Saddam Hussein Washington realized that Turkey's regional role was still important for US national interests in the Middle East. The book entitled *Turkey's New Geopolitics from the Balkans to Western China*<sup>3</sup> published by the RAND Corporation, one of the most influential think tanks in the US, emphasized increasing role of Turkey. It was argued that Turkey

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Cornell, *Turkey in the 21st Century, Opportunities, Challenges, Threats* (Britain: Curzon, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the effect of the Gulf War on the US perception of Turkey please see Faruk Sönmezoğlu, 'Dünya ve Türkiye', in F. Sönmezoğlu (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi* (İstanbul: Der, 2004), p. 997.

<sup>3</sup> Graham E. Fuller et. al., *Turkey's New Geopolitics from the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

become a regional power and the changes ensuing from the dissolution of the Soviet Union made Turkey a critical power.<sup>4</sup>

Philip Robins, meanwhile, maintained that Turkey's strategic role in the new era decreased and increased at the same time. Though it lost the role that it had played during the Cold War, it became a regional player in the 1990s by pursuing an active foreign policy in its neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> Robins argued that the US recognized the increasing importance of Turkey whereas Europe did not. It was also becoming clear that Turkey did not share the euphoria of Western countries about the Soviet dissolution. Turkey had difficulty adapting itself to the new norms on issues like human rights increasingly emphasized by the West.

Another argument with regard to Turkey's position in the new international system was concerned with whether Turkey was a security producing country or security consuming country.<sup>6</sup> Especially the member states of the European Union were of the opinion that Turkey was mostly a security consuming country leading to the commonly held belief that it did not deserve to be taken into the Union.

In sum, while some observers maintained that Turkey became an important regional power in the new era by allying itself with the US, the sole superpower in the post-Cold War period, others suggested that Turkey's global position was harmed by the end of the perceived Soviet threat. A main hypothesis of this study is that the new status of Turkey in world politics is rather different from its former role. Because Turkey was no longer a neighbor to one of the superpowers, the geostrategic importance of Turkey changed. This could best be observed in the changing Turkish perception of the European Union that concentrated all its energy in enlarging toward the Central and East European countries but excluding Turkey.

Further, the transformation of external global dynamics was coupled with internal crises in Turkey as two important problems emerged which challenged the state identity of Turkey: Kurdish nationalism and religious fundamentalism. The PKK began its violent attacks in southeastern Turkey in 1984. Following the Gulf War, it also benefited from the authority vacuum in northern Iraq. After 1990, it increased its attacks against Turkish security officials, as well as Kurdish civilians who were accused of being "on the side of the Turkish state". The first half of the 1990s saw the peak of PKK activities. During the same period the state identity of Turkey was

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<sup>4</sup> For another evaluation of Turkey's regional power role please see I. O. Lesser, 'Turkey's Strategic Options', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 34 (1999), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms, Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, 'Avrupa Güvenlik ve Savunma Kimliği Açısından Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri', *Doğu Batı*, Vol. 4 (2001), p. 161.

challenged by another trend as well: religious fundamentalism characterized especially by an increasing number of votes for the Welfare Party under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. Political Islam has been one of the main concerns of the Turkish political elite since the foundation of the Republic in 1923. The fact that the Welfare Party increased its share of votes at every election since 1984 local elections led to increasing apprehension<sup>7</sup> and the issue of political Islam (*irtica*) became more acute. In that context, it was not surprising that in the National Political Document of 1992 increasing political Islam was evaluated as “a serious danger” since it was seen as a threat to the secular system of the country<sup>8</sup> In brief, it was not only external challenges that Turkey had to face, but also serious internal problems, like Kurdish nationalism and political Islam.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As states interact with each other they gain an identity for themselves and also attach an identity to the others. Certainly the international aspect of state identity is only one part of the whole picture: there are also domestic factors defining what kind of entity a state would become. When one compares the relative weight of domestic and international factors for determination of state identity, for Wendt, state identity is to a great extent established by the international system.<sup>9</sup> But the important thing at this point is the significance of the concept of “state identity” for international politics. First a definition of the concept is needed: state identity consists of “a set of beliefs about nature and purpose of state expressed in public articulations of state actions and ideals”.<sup>10</sup> It is basically about the definition of a state’s rights, obligations and responsibilities and also of the meaning attributed to other actors. In a way it is about setting boundaries between oneself and others:<sup>11</sup> Who are you relative to others? And who are they relative to yourself and themselves?

States have in fact two kinds of identities: internal and external. While internal identity refers to the set of understandings within the boundaries

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<sup>7</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey, The Challenge to Europe and the United States* (Washington, D. C.: Brookings, 2000), p. 55; İhsan D. Dağı, ‘Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and the Westernization’, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6 (2005), p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Gencer Özcan, ‘Doksanlarda Türkiye’nin Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politikasında Askeri Yapının Artan Etkisi’, in G. Özcan and Ş. Kut (eds.), *En Uzun On Yıl, Türkiye’nin Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Gündeminde Doksanlı Yıllar* (İstanbul: Buke, 2000), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Lynch, ‘Abandoning Iraq: Jordan’s Alliances and the Politics of State Identity’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 8 (Winter 1998-1999, Spring 1999), p. 349.

<sup>11</sup> Glenn Chafetz, Michael Spirtas, and Benjamin Frankel, ‘Introduction: Tracing the Influence of Identity on Foreign Policy’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 8 (Winter 1998-1999, Spring 1999), p. VIII.

of that state among its constituent parts, external identity stands for a state's place among others in international politics.<sup>12</sup> The former can also be labelled as national identity. It is the latter concept that will basically be used in this study. Therefore, whenever state identity is mentioned, what is in fact meant is the external identity. There is an important relationship between state identity and foreign policy:<sup>13</sup> one of the significant ways for states to acquire a new identity or protect the previous one is through foreign policy. Their interactions with other states are a way of getting themselves accepted as part of a certain international community and being respected. Especially during the process of identity formulation or reformulation, foreign policy is a key instrument for decision makers to realize their goals. The constructivist approach is therefore expected to have more explaining power during the periods of new identity creation.<sup>14</sup>

The Turkish state played the primary role in the articulation of its interests and formulation of foreign policy during the Balkan wars of the 1990s. In order to understand what kind of goals it pursued, we first have to look at its state identity, i.e. how the political leadership perceived rights, obligations and responsibilities of its own country and other countries in world politics? In the case of Turkey, political leaders since Atatürk have seen Turkey's place as in the Western world. Atatürk's radical reforms were all based on the Western model. The foreign policy of modern Turkey can be understood as a process of developing ever increasing and closer relations with the West and as an attempt to be recognized as part of them. Turkey was also a member of the Western bloc during the bipolar era and contributed to the defence of the West against the perceived threat from the Soviet Union.

Since the wars in the former Yugoslav territories occurred at the very time when Turkish state identity was questioned, constructivism can be used as a theoretical framework in order to understand whether it would provide us with a better tool to make sense of Turkish foreign policy. During this formative or reformatory period, Turkey was expected to use its foreign policy to perpetuate the external identities that it had acquired during the bipolar world order.

How can one analyse whether the identity of Turkey played an important role in its foreign policy? As constructivist theory argues, this can be best demonstrated during the formative or reformatory period of that particular identity. Since the 1990s brought intense identity challenges to

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<sup>12</sup> Paul A. Kowert, 'National Identity: Inside and Out', *Security Studies*, Vol. 8 (Winter 1998-1999, Spring 1999), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> J. T. Checkel, 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics*, Vol. 50 (1998), p. 346.

Ankara, our case study provides us with an important test for constructivist theory. In order to decide whether state identity was effective in formulating foreign policy, we should examine the following questions: Was there any particular kind of identity that policy makers repeatedly stressed upon in explaining their country's place in the world? Was the foreign policy behavior in accordance with the discourse that was emphasized? Did the attitude comply with the state identity? Did any behaviour or discourse in opposition to the claimed state identity lead to criticism within state?<sup>15</sup> If it can be observed that there has been a dominant discourse on a certain state identity, that Turkey acted in compliance with it, and that any in-compliance was faced with criticism, then we can argue for the validity of constructivist thought in our case study.

### **TURKEY AND THE WAR IN BOSNIA**

In fact the emerging conflict in Bosnia did not seem to have a direct impact upon Turkish security considerations in the short or medium term. Geographically, Bosnia was not in the close neighborhood of Turkey and despite all speculations that war in the Balkans would lead to a Turkish-Greek war, in a realistic perspective, it did not seem probable that the conflict would spread to Turkey in the foreseeable future. Philip Robins argues that in fact it was because of identity and "soft politics" that Turkey became interested in Bosnia<sup>16</sup> In that context, it can be stated that Turkish decision makers did not want the conflict in Bosnia to be perceived as a war between Islam and Christianity. They were also concerned that if the conflict last too long, Turkish public opinions' view about Europe can increasingly be negative. Moreover, the possibility of a new migration flow to Turkey created apprehension on the part of the policy makers. In other words, Turkey was interested in the Bosnian conflict not necessarily because of "hard security" issues, but mostly because of "soft security" issues including identity and migration.

One of the international platforms that Turkey considered as important to bring the suffering of the Bosnians to the agenda was the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). A common approach among the countries whose populations consist mostly of Muslims toward the Bosnian problem would attract the attention of international organizations like the UN and get them to take more assertive actions. When the Bosnian war started, Turkey was the term president of the OIC. Thus, it used this opportunity to call an extraordinary meeting of foreign ministers in

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Banchoff, 'German Identity and European Integration', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 5 (1999), p. 277.

<sup>16</sup> Robins, *Suits and Uniforms*, pp. 344-345.

İstanbul. The meeting of foreign ministers from 15 OIC member countries was held in İstanbul on 17-18 June 1992 in which the UN was called on to take all necessary measures, including military, against Serbs. That was in fact the position Turkey was already supporting. The Turkish initiative of convening an extraordinary meeting of the OIC was important because it transmitted to the world how the countries with Muslim populations perceived the Bosnian war. Via that meeting, the OIC gained an important function and could, hence, revitalize its role after a long period.<sup>17</sup>

Turkey launched another initiative on Bosnia in August 1992 that included both diplomatic and military measures. Turkey presented the "Action Plan" to the permanent representatives of the UNSC and asked them to implement the measures. The diplomatic part of the plan consisted of the following proposals: a) Serbian militants should give up their weapons and hand over their heavy weaponry to the UN personnel within 48 hours. b) UN officials should be given the right to enter Serbian prisons and take control over them. c) The UNSC should request Serbia to stop giving aid to Serbian militias. d) Serbian militias guilty of committing massacres should be tried in international courts.

The second part of the plan comprised military precautions in which Turkey proposed to the UNSC members that if the diplomatic measures were not accepted by the Serbian side or if the measures failed to achieve the planned aims, then selected Serbian military targets should be bombed from the air. Foreign Minister Çetin emphasized that the most important part of the Action Plan was its military part: If other measures did not stop the Serbian aggression, then a military intervention would be conducted. Turkey's Action Plan was one of the most important proposals for putting an end to the violence in Bosnia in the early phase of the war.<sup>18</sup>

From the end of May 1992 onward, Turkey adopted a new attitude concerning any military intervention in Bosnia. Since there was no sign of ending the war or reducing its extent, and since the international community did not show a definite will to deter the aggressor either, Turkey decided to back an international military operation against Serbian targets. The intervention should take place within the framework of an international organization, most probably the UNSC. However, the government in Ankara emphasized its opposition to any unilateral move that would not solve the problem. In this way the government distanced itself clearly from Özal's attitude.

In the meantime, Turkey was supporting the diplomatic initiatives of the EC to provide a peaceful solution to the Bosnian conflict. Turkey was

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<sup>17</sup> Concerning İstanbul meeting of the OIC see Soysal and Kut, *Dağılan Yugoslavya*, p. 23

<sup>18</sup> Şule Kut, 'Yugoslavya Bunalımı ve Türkiye'nin Bosna-Hersek ve Makedonya Politikası: 1990-1993', in Sönmezoğlu (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, p. 330.

invited to the London Conference that was held on 26-27 August 1992. Although Turkey was neither one of the parties to the conflict nor a member of the EC, it was asked to take part in the conference. In Turkey the invitation was considered as an important indication of its increasing importance in the region, its active foreign policy, and its increasing economic and political weight. It was also a result of the role Turkey played in the framework of the OIC. In other words, as long as Turkey launched its own initiatives and developed an assertive policy, it was gaining importance in the European framework. Its improving status in Balkan affairs and impact upon the regional actors and Islamic countries made Europe understand how important and powerful Turkey was. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that at the time when Turkey was trying to deal with this heavy foreign policy agenda, it had to continue its struggle against the PKK as well. Turkey, which tried to keep its security against increasing PKK attacks and resurfacing Kurdish nationalism in its internal politics, had to keep its attention on the violent conflict in the Balkans. In spite of that, from the very beginning of the Bosnian War it tried to follow an active foreign policy. One of the important reasons behind this assertive foreign policy was the country's aim to maintain its Western state identity. Turkish decisionmakers firmly believed that Ankara was still important for European security and it could prove its importance to the international community through its policies during the Bosnian War. As Turkey took new initiatives and supported heavy-handed measures, the West seemed to understand that Ankara's role was inevitable in the solution of the conflict on the European continent. In other words, Turkey's Western-oriented state identity influenced its formulation of national interest and foreign policy attitudes. Despite all its internal problems Turkey tried to propose new initiatives for the solution of the conflict in order to maintain its former identity.

Another important initiative of Turkey on the Bosnian issue was the convening of a Balkan Conference in İstanbul on 25 November 1992. As the violence was going on in Bosnia without any sign of reaching a ceasefire or an agreement among the parties, there was the growing fear that the conflict would spread to other regions in the Balkans, especially to Kosovo and Macedonia. Çetin pointed out that there was a serious danger of the outbreak of a Balkan war soon and that this was the greatest problem the world was faced with. Turkey had two fundamental aims in gathering a regional conference: a) to emphasize once again the necessity of military intervention, b) to attract attention to the possibility of the war spreading. The Turkish Foreign Minister emphasized that Turkey decided to take



initiative without waiting for the world to find a solution.<sup>19</sup> Regional countries and some neighboring states took part in the conference: Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Romania. The Balkan Conference could be considered as an important diplomatic initiative of Turkey which aimed to get the international community to act more assertively to stop the violent incidents in the Balkans and prevent the beginning of a Balkan war. Turkey was both using its contacts within the OIC and trying to play a regional leadership role in order to assert more influence in the international arena.

When it became evident that the international actors did not intend to conduct a military operation against Serbs in the short-term for a variety of reasons, Turkish leaders decided to start a new initiative to stop the arms embargo against Bosniaks. They argued that an embargo against the whole Yugoslavia was in fact harming the Bosniak side since Serbia already had enough stocks of weaponry and ammunition and was in a position to send them to the Bosnian Serbs. Serbia could also break the embargo and get new weapons from other countries. Turkey concentrated its efforts on the US administration, Islamic countries, and international organizations to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims. Foreign Minister Çetin argued that the arms embargo led to a situation in which it became impossible for the Bosniaks to defend themselves; thus the lifting of the embargo was a moral necessity for the world. At the OIC Summit held in Karachi in April 1993, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, and Malaysia put forward a joint proposal for lifting the embargo against Bosnia-Herzegovina. The proposal was accepted unanimously at the Summit, in which the OIC member countries called upon the UNSC to take all necessary measures, including military ones, as soon as possible.

An important question in this regard is whether Turkey sent any weapons to Bosnia violating the embargo. According to Turkish press reports when Turkish journalists asked Foreign Minister Çetin whether there would be any weapons transfer from Turkey, the Minister remained silent. However, the former Turkish Chief of Staff Doğan Güreş made public in late 1994 that during his term there were secret weapons deliveries to Bosnia. However 90 % of these weapons were seized by Croatia.<sup>20</sup> Remembering that Turkey traditionally tries to maintain its cautious attitude toward any regional conflict, one should state that sending weapons to the Bosniak side was a good example of how Turkey deviated from its traditional foreign policy.

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<sup>19</sup> The original text of Hikmet Çetin's statement is the following: "Türkiye dünyadan medet ummadan inisiyatif almaya karar vermiştir." Quoted in Selin Çağlayan, 'Ankara'nın kâbusu: Balkan Savaşı...', *Hürriyet*, 23 November 1992.

<sup>20</sup> 'Bosna'ya silah gönderdik', *Hürriyet*, 4 December 1994.

As the violence between Bosniaks and Croats started in 1993, Turkey proved itself to be one of the few countries in which both warring sides had trust. Turkish mediation between the two sides was welcomed,<sup>21</sup> and even both Bosniak and Croatian leadership asked for it. In their press meeting Bosniaks and Croats pointed out that whenever their negotiations were stuck, they applied to the mediation of Foreign Minister Çetin, and only with his initiatives could the bilateral talks go on. Both sides expressed their appreciation of Turkey's role. Çetin also visited Sarajevo twice in order to attend the Bosniak-Croat negotiations. By maintaining contact and friendly relations with the Croat side as well, Turkey might also have attempted to distance itself from the image of protectors of only the Muslims.

Turkey's relations with the Bosnian Croat side and the Croatian leadership were also one of the highlights of the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller and her Pakistani counterpart, Benazir Butto, to Sarajevo and Zagreb in February 1994. The two leaders' visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina was important in several respects. It was the first high level visit after that of French President Francois Mitterrand. Moreover, as Western-oriented female leaders, their visit attracted the attention of the world media, thus increasing the international public awareness of the suffering in the region. Çiller and Butto made public the Declaration of Sarajevo, in which they stated the aim of their visit as "humanitarian", urged the whole world to help stop the destruction of Bosnia, and requested the UNSC to implement all its resolutions. They also pointed out that the "unfair" weapons embargo should be ended. In Zagreb, Çiller met Croatian leader Tudjman, who asked her to host a summit between Croats and Bosniaks and convince Izetbegovic to attend. This was also a sign of how Croatia perceived Turkey as a bridge to get into contact with the Bosniak leadership.

As a result of its mediating role between Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks Turkey's contribution to the agreement on a ceasefire in February 1994 and creation of a federation between them the following month could not be rejected. Turkey proved itself one of the peace brokers together with the Washington administration which also appreciated Turkey's role by inviting it to the ceremony of the signing of the federation agreement. Invitation of Turkey could be considered as an indication of its weight in the region and how its role acquired importance during the Bosnian conflict. It also showed that the Western world was aware of Turkey's position regarding the developments and the international community saw Turkey within "the Balkan equation".

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<sup>21</sup> İlhan Uzgel, 'Doksanlarda Türkiye İçin Bir İşbirliği ve Rekabet Alanı Olarak Balkanlar', in Gencer Özcan & Şule Kut, eds., *En Uzun On Yıl* (İstanbul: Boyut, 1998), p. 410-411.

Moreover, it was not just the regional actors, but also the international actors that were seeking Turkish support in their attempt to find a peaceful solution. Lord Owen, a UN representative, and Thorwald Stoltenberg, who replaced Vance in May 1993 as EC mediator, paid an official visit to Turkey and asked Turkey to use its influence over the Bosniaks. Owen stated that the demands of Bosniaks for an outlet to the sea and more territory were right in essence, however for a stable peace the parties should come to an agreement. Turkish Foreign Minister Çetin stated that Turkey did not play a concrete mediation role; however, he would contact Izetbegovic as soon as possible to provide peace. He also added that Turkey would support Izetbegovic's policy to the end.

While trying to convince the international community to act more forcefully, Turkey also made sure that it was ready to take part in all military operations to provide peace and order in Bosnia. The UNSC accepted Resolution 816 allowing NATO planes to attack Serbian war planes that would try to violate the no-fly zone, and NATO aircraft began to implement the decision on April 12, 1993. As a response, Turkey expressed its readiness to join the NATO action. After NATO's invitation, 18 Turkish F-16 planes were sent to the region to monitor the no-fly zone. NATO's request for Turkey to send its aircraft was considered "a great success of Ankara" and "a great source of prestige" in the Turkish press.

Turkish Foreign Minister Çetin, who played a critical role in the formulation of Turkey's Bosnian policy, resigned in July 1994. During his term he supported an active but multilateral policy toward the Bosnian dispute and did not pay any credit to those who were asking for unilateral military action from Turkey. Before leaving his job he stated the following: "Turkey was suddenly faced with many problems that all needed Turkey's attention. Thanks to Turkey's initiatives in several issues it was understood that Turkey was a great state whose opinions were respected." On Bosnia he stated:

Turkey did everything that was needed. I myself went to Sarajevo four times under fire. We sent a huge amount of humanitarian aid. Before the problem intensified, we launched an action plan in August 1992. If that plan had been implemented, the problem would not have come to the point today. Although everybody stated that it was impossible, Turkey sent peacekeeping soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

Çetin's remarks pointed out that in the post-Cold War era Turkey tried to find policies to the problems in its neighborhood. He also stressed that thanks to its initiatives, the international actors appreciated Turkey and its greatness. The statements of the Turkish Foreign Minister could be

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<sup>22</sup> Barçın Yinanç, 'Hiçbirseyi daha kötü bırakmadım', *Milliyet*, 30 July 1994. (Translated from Turkish by the author)

regarded as a reaction to the claims that Turkey lost its former strategic importance. Therefore, Turkish attempts to provide solutions to the conflicts could be considered as a way of proving Turkey's importance in the new era.

In order to increase its support among both Turkish decision makers and the public, Bosniak leadership tried to emphasize their similarities with Turkey and the Turkish people. When Demirel wanted to visit Sarajevo in July 1994, for his stay Bosniaks prepared the house of an Ottoman Pasha, Topal Recep Pasha, who had served during the reign of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman. By that gesture, the common history between Turks and Bosniaks was emphasized and the Ottoman heritage in Bosnia was remembered. Furthermore, Bosniak leaders were trying to find similarities between their struggle and the Turkish War of Independence, thus attempting to get more support from Turkey. The Bosnian Ambassador to Turkey, Hayrettin Somun, pointed out that they would show the same heroism as the Turks had already shown in their War of Independence and win their independence by fighting.

From the beginning of August 1995 onward the US intensified its efforts to find a solution to the Bosnian crisis. The Washington administration looked for Turkish support, especially in convincing the Bosnian side to agree to a peace deal. Since the US government was aware of the fact that Ankara could exert its influence over the Bosnian leadership, it sought Turkey's help in that regard. The National Security Advisor to the US President, Anthony Lake, visited Ankara and informed the Turkish government about the new initiative of the US to find a solution to the Bosnian debacle.

In September 1995 diplomatic traffic in Turkey concerning Bosnia was intensified by the visits of the US Vice Foreign Minister Richard Holbrooke, the Bosnian President Izetbegovic and Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhammet Sakirbey. In the trilateral talks in Ankara, Holbrooke tried to make use of Turkish mediation to encourage the Bosnian side to be more flexible on the peace deal. Turkey repeated the importance of keeping Bosnia-Herzegovina's territorial integrity, which was also accepted by Holbrooke. The US Vice Foreign Minister also stressed that any peace implementation would need Turkey's participation and Turkey played a critical role in the Bosnian crisis. Lake's and Holbrooke's visits were an important sign of Washington's acknowledgement of Turkey's role in the Bosnian crisis. The US wanted to inform Turkey about a possible peace plan and also to use its influence over the Bosnian leadership.

After a Serbian attack killed 37 people in a marketplace in Sarajevo, NATO launched its biggest military campaign against the Bosnian Serb forces, which was called Operation Deliberate Force. Although after the last attack of the Bosnian Serb militants Çiller repeated Turkey's willingness to

send troops to Bosnia in case the international community would launch a joint operation, Turkish aircraft did not take part in the military campaign; however, they provided air cover for the planes conducting the bombing. Turkey was pleased that the Western world at last came to the conclusion that the war in Bosnia could not be stopped without a military intervention. That point was consistently repeated by Turkish decision makers since the inception of the war. Turkish leaders declared that they supported the decision to attack Serbian targets. Prime Minister Çiller stated that this was simply “a good beginning” and declared her hope that “...this will establish a good basis for discussing the international community’s peace plan and take it in hand.” In addition, Foreign Minister İnönü pointed out that the military campaign was “a step in the right direction by the international community in fulfilling its undertakings to protect the civilian population.”<sup>23</sup>

The NATO operation was successful on the Serbian side and forced the Serbians to come to the negotiating table. Serbian leader Milosevic, Bosnian leader Izetbegovic and Croat leader Tudjman, as leaders of three groups, started negotiations under the mediation of the US administration in Dayton, Ohio on 1 November 1995. After two weeks they reached an agreement on a peace deal stipulating maintenance of the territorial integrity of Bosnia that would consist of a Bosnian-Croat federation and a Bosnian Serb entity. Turkey did not play a direct role in the negotiations which were, in fact, brokered by the US. After the conclusion of the agreement, President Demirel congratulated all three leaders. Turkish officials stated that the Dayton Peace Agreement was not a perfect one; however, “under the prevailing circumstances this was the best that historical opportunity provided.”<sup>24</sup>

### **THE TURKISH PERCEPTION OF THE WAR AND STATE IDENTITY**

In the Turkish view, what was happening in Bosnia was a reflection of the Serbian leadership’s aim of creating ‘Greater Serbia’. Turkey was of the opinion that Serbia was also trying to take revenge for the conquest of the Ottomans of that region by killing Bosnian Muslims whom they also called “Turks”. In fact, the Serbian leadership seemed to hate Bosniaks since they regarded them as the extension of Ottoman history. The fact that Bosniaks were, in fact, keeping Turkish culture alive increased that image in view of the nationalist Serb groups. During the conflict Serbian and Croatian attacks also damaged some of the buildings and infrastructure that had been constructed during the Ottoman Empire. One of the best known examples

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<sup>23</sup> Semih D. İdiz, ‘Bosnia crisis reaches endgame’, *Turkish Probe*, 1 September 1995, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Semih D. İdiz, ‘Ankara welcomes peace accord for Bosnia’, *Turkish Probe*, 24 November 1995, pp. 7-8.

was the destruction of the bridge in Mostar by the Bosnian Croat forces. In other words, for Turkey, the war also represented the erasing of the Ottoman culture in Europe. This was a war not only against Bosnian Muslims, but also against all Ottoman heritage.<sup>25</sup>

Turkish officials were also affected by the fact that Turkey was the only country that Bosniaks could ask for help. Turkey was the only source of help for them. Regardless of whether or not Turkey wanted it, they considered Turkey as their only would-be guardian that should provide protection for them. There was no other country to which they could turn. The Turkish Foreign Minister stated:

During the Gulf War there were no people who waited for Turkey to come to their help and who saw Turkey as the only hope for their salvation. Events did not turn into a massacre. In Bosnia-Herzegovina people are sacrificing everything in order to migrate to Turkey. That was not the case in Iraq. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Azerbaijan people had hope only from Turkey. They had millions of relatives in Turkey. They were doing their best to migrate to where those people were living.<sup>26</sup>

Turkish foreign policy during the Bosnian War could be called active and assertive, since Turkey launched many initiatives to get other countries and international organizations to act. Turkish attempts were concentrated on two sides: the Islamic world and the Western world.<sup>27</sup> Concerning Islamic countries, Turkey used the platform of the OIC by trying to bring all countries with Muslim populations to adopt the same attitude on the Bosnian conflict. The extraordinary summit of the OIC in İstanbul in June 1992 was an important early initiative that led to the acceptance of a common point on the issue. The convening of the Balkan Conference and the diplomatic initiatives launched at the level of the CSCE, UN and NATO calling upon them to decide in favour of a military intervention were also significant activities of Turkey in its attempt to end the bloodshed. Turkey, in fact, was the only country that from the early phase of the war consistently insisted on the necessity of a military campaign against Serbian targets. Ankara emphasized its opinion that only sanctions and diplomatic measures would not be enough to deter Serbs. The Turkish government also stated that it was ready to join an international intervention with its own troops. Some observers even compared the role of Turkey in the Bosnian crisis to that of the US during the Gulf conflict. In fact the use or threat of force was not a traditional instrument in Turkish foreign policy.

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of the impact of the Ottoman heritage on Turkey's policy toward the Balkans please see Şaban H. Çalış, 2001. *Hayaletbilimi ve Hayali Kimlikler, Neo-Osmanlılık, Özal ve Balkanlar*. Konya: Çizgi.

<sup>26</sup> Nilüfer Yalçın, 'Çetin: 'Derhal uyacağız' ', *Milliyet*, 1 June 1992. (Translated from Turkish by the author)

<sup>27</sup> Hasan Ünal, 'Bosnia II – a Turkish critique', *The World Today*, Vol. 51 (1995), p. 128.

Turkey has always been cautious toward the use of force except in some rare circumstances. Therefore, Turkish foreign policy during the Bosnian problem could be regarded as the most active one since the Cyprus issue in 1974.<sup>28</sup>

At the time of the Bosnian conflict, Turkish policy makers declared many times that Turkey was a great country that would follow a leading and dynamic foreign policy. Since Turkey's position in the new international order of the post-Cold War era was discussed heavily at the time, Turkish leaders were insisting on the country's important role in world politics. In their view, one should remind the world that Turkey was still influential and could not just be put aside. In the region extending from the Adriatic to the Wall of China, it was not possible to wage a war or bring peace without the support of Turkey.<sup>29</sup>

During the Bosnian conflict, thanks to its initiatives Turkey was taken into consideration. Almost all the actors involved in some kind of mediation asked for Turkey's support. Owen-Stoltenberg's visit to Ankara, the invitation of Turkey to the London Conference, and later Richard Holbrooke's contacts in Ankara were important indications that so long as Turkey launched an active diplomacy, its role in international politics was appreciated. In other words, as Turkey's role in regional affairs increased, Turkey's position in international politics improved as well.

Moreover, Turkey's influence in the Balkans was perceived as an important proof of its claim of being European. Only if it had weight in the region, it could prove its importance to Europe. If its Bosnian policy failed, it would mean not just the destruction of an Ottoman heritage, but also the end of Turkey's European dream.

The Kurdish question did not appear to play any substantial role in Turkey's Bosnian policy since Bosnia was an internationally recognized country and the violence against it was directed mainly from another state, Yugoslavia. Although Kurdish nationalism was on the rise in those years and PKK attacks constituted a major internal problem, Turkey presented inter-group relations in the country as a model to the Balkans. However, it was also emphasized that if a multi-cultural and democratic Bosnia was created, this would be an example for the solution of Turkey's own problem. Meanwhile, some observers stated that it was easier in Turkey to go to Bosnia than to criticize Turkey's Kurdish policy.

In sum, arguing that it was a great country interested in its region, Ankara tried to play a leadership role and assume guardianship of the Bosniaks. It launched many diplomatic initiatives, but it was careful not to act alone. It was emphasized by Turkish decision makers many times that

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<sup>28</sup> Diplomats at the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Interview by author, Ankara, January 2004.

<sup>29</sup> A previous Turkish foreign minister, Interview by author, Ankara, 13 January 2004.

Turkey would act multilaterally and did not have any neo-Ottomanist dreams. Turkey considered that as long as it could assert its weight in the Balkan crisis, it would be taken into account by the US, European countries and international organizations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study analyzed Turkey's foreign policy during Bosnian War between 1992-1995. Turkish state identity has been discussed heavily in the wake of the end of the Cold War and alternative identities were proposed instead especially by Kurdish nationalists and Islamists. As the country's strategic role that it acquired during the Cold War was increasingly questioned, there seemed to be ambiguity regarding the path that Turkish foreign policy makers would choose. The war in Bosnia started at the very time in which Turkey was experiencing an identity crisis.

The findings of this study supports the hypothesis that constructivist approach helps us make sense of Turkey's Bosnia policy. Turkey tried to prove that it could still play an important role in its neighborhood, especially in Europe in the new circumstances of the post-bipolar world system. Turkey's Bosnian policy constituted a hallmark because it represented the most active foreign policy attitude of Ankara since the Cyprus intervention of 1974. Turkey found that as it acted rigorously and tried to convince international actors to act more assertively, it was increasingly taken into consideration by the great powers, like the US and EU. The fact that it started bearing the fruits of its active policy encouraged Turkey to maintain the intended course.

During the Bosnian war Turkish policymakers stressed the continuing importance of Turkey for the stability of the neighboring regions. The wars of Yugoslav dissolution witnessed many narratives of Turkish leaders declaring the greatness of the country. This dominant narrative was accompanied by an active foreign policy implemented by the Turkish leaders characterized by Ankara's many diplomatic initiatives to bring the Bosnian issue to the attention of the international community and convince international actors to take more measures in order to stop the conflict. This study argued that this discourse and foreign policy were caused by Turkish leaders' desire to show Turkey's still lasting geopolitical significance to the world. Related to that they also aimed to maintain the state identity that Turkey had acquired during the Cold War as part of the Western world. Turkish policy makers found that as long as they launched initiatives for the solution of the conflict, they were taken more seriously by the US and other international actors.



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