



TÜRKİYE YÜZYILI

ARTICLES

The 'Century of Türkiye': A New Foreign Policy Vision for Building the Türkiye Axis

MUHİTTİN ATAMAN

The 'Century of Türkiye' as a Strategic Discourse

HASAN YÜKSELEN

From Geopolitical Anxiety to Assertive Stance: The Historical Construction and Transformation of Turkish Naval Strategy

SERKAN BALKAN and MURAT YEŞİLTAŞ

A Century of Türkiye-Europe Relations: Europe's Diminishing Role

KEMAL İNAT and FİLİZ CİCİOĞLU

Right-Wing Populist Discourse in the European Parliament on Turkish Foreign Policy

HASAN ULUSOY and OĞUZ GÜNGÖRMEZ

Iran-Russia-Türkiye Triangle: A Challenge for the U.S. Position in the Middle East

EWA CZARKOWSKA and MAGDALENA KUMELSKA-KONIECKO

A Founding Role in Türkiye's Africa Policy: The Action Plan for Opening to Africa

MEHMET ÖZTÜRK and MELİH DUMAN

The Cyprus Conflict: A Case for 'Joint Decision Trap'

KIVANÇ ULUSOY and PINAR ATAKARA

The 'Century of Türkiye': A New Foreign Policy Vision for Building the Türkiye Axis

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ABSTRACT *On the centenary of the Turkish Republic, President Erdoğan, who has been ruling Türkiye for the last two decades, has announced a new perspective on foreign policy for Türkiye's second century. He has named the long-term foreign policy vision as the 'Century of Türkiye' and declared his determination for building a 'Türkiye Axis.' After a fierce struggle against both domestic and international tutelage, President Erdoğan has succeeded to attain autonomy in Turkish foreign policy. Ankara has built a powerful economy and increased its military capacity at the national level. Also, it has improved its relations with both Turkic and Muslim countries and begun to take initiatives and to play a leadership role at the regional level. Furthermore, Türkiye has diversified its relations with other actor and elevated its status at the global level. Within this perspective, it has begun to contribute to resolving global challenges and to play an influential role in international organizations. This article will provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolving foreign policy of Türkiye in recent years. It will delve deep into the shifts and transformations that have taken place and explore the underlying principles and objectives that define Türkiye's new foreign policy vision, the Century of Türkiye.*

Keywords: Century of Türkiye, Türkiye Axis, Turkish Foreign Policy, Regional Leadership, Global Actorness

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Introduction: A Fresh Perspective on Foreign Policy*

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been ruling Türkiye for the last two decades, made a very important statement at the unveiling ceremony of the Century of Türkiye program in Ankara on October 28, 2022.¹ Although some observers viewed that document as part of his campaign strategy, the truth is that the Century of Türkiye vision identifies the Turkish Republic's long-term objectives and charts the future course of Turkish foreign policy.² Meanwhile, other commentators argued that Erdoğan's address represented a "call to finish building a great and mighty Türkiye together."³

A skillful politician vis-à-vis the development of new projects, President Erdoğan set a number of targets for the 21st century, which he described as the Century of Türkiye. Having previously set ambitious targets for 2023, 2053, and 2071, he most recently identified Türkiye's objectives and expectations within the context of its efforts to become a global power. It is important to note that 2053 will mark the 600th anniversary of the conquest of İstanbul, which destroyed the Byzantine Empire and transformed the Ottomans into a truly powerful state, whereas 2071 will be the 1000th anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert which Muslim Turks won to be able to call Anatolia their homeland.

It is possible to summarize President Erdoğan's address, which he delivered on the eve of the end of the Turkish Republic's first century (1923-2023), in three parts. The first part of his speech dealt with the AK Party's past efforts to address the Turkish political system's deadlocks and shortcomings. Specifically, Erdoğan recalled that Türkiye had encountered various domestic and foreign threats in the 20th century, which his governments successfully neutralized. The Turkish President devoted the second part of his address to Türkiye's achievements under the AK Party governments and provided a detailed account of reforms enacted in various fields. At the same time, he described the previous two decades as a period when the Republic addressed its shortcomings and completed its preparations for its second century.

The third part, in turn, was about President Erdoğan outlining Türkiye's vision for the 21st century and identifying its future goals. Noting that "We added character to our foreign policy to make our state more powerful, our flag more glorious and our nation more respected," he made the case that Türkiye had become a country that others follow, as opposed to a country following others.⁴ Furthermore, Erdoğan reiterated his commitment to making Türkiye one of the world's top ten nations in politics, economy, technology, military, and diplomacy. He also shared his views on the global system to argue that the Century of Türkiye represents a revolutionary change that would bring democracy, development, peace, and welfare to the entire planet. Accordingly, the Turkish leader stated that his administration would prioritize international principles

and take into account multilateral considerations as opposed to just Türkiye's interests: "We share with humanity the news that the Century of Türkiye represents a revolution that shall bring democracy, development, peace, and welfare to all parts of the world –starting with our country and our region."⁵ That sentence was an expression of the plan to build the Türkiye Axis.

Although some observers viewed that document as part of his campaign strategy, the truth is that the Century of Türkiye vision identifies the Turkish Republic's long-term objectives and charts the future course of Turkish foreign policy

Nonetheless, Erdoğan acknowledged the various obstacles before Türkiye's goals and objectives to stress that the country found itself at a critical junction. Accordingly, he argued that the nation would either join the group of top nations or face the risk of lagging behind once again –depending on its future steps.⁶ Consequently, President Erdoğan emphasized the necessity of addressing numerous challenges to achieve these objectives.

The vision document titled the Century of Türkiye, which President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan unveiled on the AK Party's behalf, features concepts directly expressing or reflecting the nation's new foreign policy vision and related issues. Having overseen the transformation of Türkiye's domestic politics and foreign policy since their rise to power, President Erdoğan and the AK Party thus established how they could take additional steps, and toward which goals.

This study analyzes how the AK Party government's foreign policy reflects the vision document's various elements and the objectives identified therein. It will also discuss the role that the party's track record over two decades and future projections played (or will play) in attempts to build the Türkiye Axis. Since that concept has not been in circulation for a long time and therefore has not been a subject of comprehensive debate in the academic literature, this article will rely on President Erdoğan's address at the vision's unveiling ceremony.

An Independent Türkiye Capable of Autonomous Action

Over the last decade, the common denominator of the national, regional, and global contexts of Turkish foreign policy has been the pursuit of independence.⁷ In the Century of Türkiye, the country seeks to refine its Ankara-centric foreign policy approach, which prioritizes its own interests. At the same time, it is committed to upholding the humanitarian aspect of Turkish foreign policy, signaling that 'a fairer world is possible' while still prioritizing Turkish interests. Having been shaped by comprehensive normalization, change, and

As part of the Turkic state's restructuring, a groundbreaking transformation occurred, delineating the realms and actors of domestic security from those of foreign policy

consolidation in domestic politics, that new approach helped the country develop a new vision called the Century of Türkiye.

One of the primary prerequisites for implementing the concept of independence was freeing Türkiye from both domestic and foreign tutelage. Since coming to power in 2002, the AK Party was compelled to channel a significant part of its energy into eliminating the tutelage in domestic politics. The bureaucratic-military guardianship regime

had stood in the way of Turkish politics for many years. The AK Party and President Erdoğan oversaw major changes in domestic politics to end tutelage. According to Erdoğan, the guardianship regime had victimized many groups: “Muslims excluded due to their beliefs,” “Kurds facing discrimination due to their language,” “Alevi encountering pressure due to their denomination,” and “Christians and Jews –the sons and daughters of this land– who have been treated unfairly.”⁸ In other words, tutelage did not just target politicians; all social groups experienced it in their own way.

Stressing that the fight against domestic and global tutelage represented the most important step toward enabling Türkiye to pursue an independent policy, the Turkish leader stated that the country had largely eliminated the bureaucratic guardianship regime at home and made significant progress toward terminating the global tutelage. He outlined his views on this issue by announcing that “Even our decision to reinstate the Hagia Sophia as a mosque, in line with Mehmed the Conqueror’s testament, was a great challenge against global guardianship.”⁹

One of the essential prerequisites for any state to take significant steps toward independence is to reduce its dependency on foreign defense industry. Over the last two decades, Türkiye took revolutionary steps in this field to strengthen its capacity, capabilities, and deterrence. According to recent statements by senior officials of Türkiye, the country has already made significant progress toward making its defense industry self-sufficient and currently meets more than 80 percent of its demand for weapons and ammunition with its own resources.¹⁰

Secondly, ensuring long-term stability in domestic politics is vitally important, which in turn, requires any country to fight terrorism with its own resources. Türkiye currently possesses the capability to achieve this goal. In addition to carrying out a ‘silent revolution’¹¹ in domestic politics, the AK Party and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have governed Türkiye for two decades to generate political stability and, by extension, facilitate bold steps in foreign policy.

Enhancing the Diversity of Actors in Turkish Foreign Policy

Türkiye's transition to the 'presidency' system of government entailed major shifts in the functions of foreign policy actors. Türkiye, which moved to diversify its foreign policy actors as a requirement of being a great state, various other agencies and institutions began to make significant contributions to the planning and implementation of foreign policy. This diversification of foreign policy actors was not only a response to the demands of a great state but also harmonized with the nation's holistic approach to foreign affairs. Specifically, in addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has traditionally been responsible for foreign policy, the Ministry of National Defense and the National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) emerged as the main actors of foreign policy.

As part of the Turkic state's restructuring, a groundbreaking transformation occurred, delineating the realms and actors of domestic security from those of foreign policy. Accordingly, the Ministry of National Defense (*Milli Savunma Bakanlığı*, MSB), starting with the Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, TSK) as its most important institution, was overhauled under the new political system and transformed into an agency exclusively responsible for external security. At the same time, the Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard began to report to the Ministry of Interior, which assumed complete responsibility for domestic security.

After these changes, currently Türkiye's main actors that are concerned with Türkiye's external threats and security are the MSB, the TSK, the MİT, and the Defense Industry Agency (*Savunma Sanayii Başkanlığı*, SSB). Having assumed the responsibility for defending the country against external, as opposed to internal, threats, MSB, TSK, and MİT made game-changing moves within the framework of Türkiye's involvement in regional crises like Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Following the institutional and ideological transformation of TSK and MİT, the government notably bolstered the capacity of these two institutions. Accordingly, they became capable of operating rather freely as true foreign policy actors.¹² As its cyber capabilities and human capacity strengthened, the MİT began to play a more active role in defending Turkish interests abroad and neutralizing threats against the country to help develop an effective foreign policy.¹³

At the same time, Türkiye boosted the capacity of SSB, which was established to develop and build indigenous defense products to become an important player in the global marketplace.¹⁴ The country also appointed defense industry attachés to nine nations for the purpose of strengthening the bond between foreign policy and the defense industry. SSB thus joined a select group of Turkish institutions with representatives abroad. The various security institutions, which worked together to defend Turkish interests abroad, have showcased

In a grand celebration, the Victory Day Special Concert and the 100th Anniversary Anthem Promotion Program were held at the Presidential Complex on August 30, 2023.

DIRECTORATE OF
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their readiness to usher in the Century of Türkiye as actors of a holistic foreign policy.¹⁵

Expanding its state capacity and taking an interest in new foreign policy areas, Türkiye sought to take advantage of various agencies and institutions, in addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its relevant security institutions, as a global power. It is important to note that the use of hard power alongside the soft power significantly contributes to the ability of nations to defend their global interests. Accordingly, Türkiye attached importance to humanitarian and cultural diplomacy, which enabled it to attract interest regionally and worldwide, in addition to exercising military might as a deterrent.

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Başkanlığı*, TİKA) remains Türkiye's most influential actor in enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy.¹⁶ Established in the early 1990s, the agency dramatically expanded its capacity to transform itself from a regional organization to a global player over the last two decades. For example, the number of TİKA's program coordination offices increased from 12 to 63 between 2002 and 2023. Likewise, the number of countries where the agency operates climbed from 20 to 170 during the same period. TİKA has annually launched more than 1000 new projects since its establishment.¹⁷

Another important actor is the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, YTB), which

was established in 2010 to address the emerging needs of the state as part of the scope of Turkish foreign policy. Having become a well-known institution shortly after its inception, YTB emerged as a global player in international education and cultural activities despite primarily dealing with Turks living in other countries. One of the agency's most important projects, Türkiye Scholarships, has made very significant contributions to the internationalization of higher education in Türkiye by attracting international students from across the world. The number of foreign students, which was 18,000 in 2000, has increased by 16.6 times as of 2022-2023, reaching a total of 301,549.¹⁸ In line with its growing role within Turkish foreign policy, Türkiye plans to open YTB representative offices in various countries in the near future. That decision alone may be seen as confirmation of YTB's growing influence in the field of foreign policy. Today, YTB is one of the most effective institutions bolstering Türkiye's public diplomacy efforts and soft power.¹⁹

Seeking to build the Türkiye Axis in the Century of Türkiye, the country notably expanded its diplomatic network in recent years to elevate its global standing

At this point, it is necessary to underline that there are some other actors emerging as actors in foreign policy. Together with YTB, the Council of Higher Education (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu*, YÖK), and the higher education institutions of Türkiye, efforts were made to enhance the internationalization of higher education by increasing visibility in the global market. Thanks to Türkiye's principled stance in the international arena, it has become an appealing destination for youth from around the world. So, this population increase of over 300,000²⁰ is not solely attributed to the success of YTB, but also represents a collaborative achievement involving YÖK, universities, and notably, the visionary leadership of President Erdoğan.

Thirdly, the Yunus Emre Institute (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*, YEE) was established during the AK Party government and has been active in the field of foreign policy. Tasked with promoting Turkish language and culture worldwide, the institution has already opened 80 Yunus Emre Cultural Centers in 60 countries ranging from East Asia and the U.S. to Central Asia and Africa.²¹ YEE makes significant contributions to Turkish foreign policy thanks to its activities in the field of cultural diplomacy. Indeed, Turkish has become one of the five most learned foreign languages globally thanks to the Institute's efforts.²²

The Turkish Maarif Foundation (*Türkiye Maarif Vakfı*, TMV) has recently joined the group of organizations operating in the domain of foreign policy.²³ Established in the immediate aftermath of the FETÖ coup attempt in 2016,

Having significantly increased its state capacity, Türkiye aims to end its hierarchical relationship with the Western nations, which remained intact throughout the 20th century, and resume its relations on the basis of equal partnership

the Foundation's main purpose is to provide formal and non-formal education abroad –including to Turkish citizens. TMV's inception resulted in the suspension of FETÖ-affiliated schools in 45 countries. In 21 countries, FETÖ-affiliated schools have been taken over by the Foundation. Currently operating in approximately 70 countries, the Turkish Maarif Foundation provides formal and non-formal education on Türki-

ye's behalf in 49 different countries. It is important to note that the Foundation educates more than 50,000 students at 428 institutions to boost Türkiye's soft power and expand its sphere of influence.²⁴

Furthermore, Türkiye's economic growth enables various economic and financial actors to start operating globally and developing large-scale industrial and infrastructure projects. Accordingly, Turkish companies and brands have come to exert indirect influence over global politics. For example, Turkish Airlines increased its number of destinations from 78 in 2002 to 344 by 2023,²⁵ making it the world's leading aviation company in terms of destinations.

Finally, it is important to note that Turkish non-governmental organizations consolidate Türkiye's soft power by providing humanitarian and development aid to people worldwide. Especially in recent years, such organizations witnessed an increase in their budget and an expansion of their areas of activity, which resulted in Türkiye's emergence as an active global player.²⁶ Non-governmental organizations established in Türkiye continue to work hard to deliver all forms of assistance to disadvantaged people around the world –starting with those regions with which the country shares historical and cultural bonds. Specifically, Türkiye's post-2011 humanitarian mobilization for Somalia, the second-largest recipient of aid from Turkish civil society organizations, showcased its ability to operate effectively.²⁷

Building a Powerful Economy

The economy plays a vital role for any country's efforts to become fully independent and to pursue an effective foreign policy. Unveiling the Century of Türkiye vision, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stressed that one of his administration's key objectives was to transform the country into a global hub for trade, industry, and energy. Over the years, Ankara successfully completed mega infrastructure projects like Marmaray, the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, the Çanakkale Bridge, and the new İstanbul Airport to meet that target. The Turkish economy recorded robust growth over the course of two de-

acades to increase its exports from \$36 billion to \$250 billion. Today, Turkish companies deliver their products to 228 different countries and territories worldwide.²⁸

Over the coming months and years, the development of appropriate economic and energy policies will undoubtedly remain a critical concern. Türkiye, whose economic actors have become more competitive globally, overhauled its healthcare industry, manufactured its next-generation automobile, and developed satellite and aviation technologies with its own resources to establish itself as a global player. Furthermore, Türkiye possesses “vast potential due to its state tradition, historical experiences, past bonds, and dynamic population”²⁹ and has climbed from 67th place to 37th place in the Global Innovation Index between 2010 and 2022.³⁰ A driving force behind that development has been the significant increase in R&D spending from \$2.67 billion in 2008 to \$20.25 billion in 2021.³¹

Commanding an advanced defense industry remains among the main preconditions for building a large and powerful economy. Having concluded that it had to take the lead in defense to meet its foreign policy targets and act independently, Türkiye took revolutionary steps toward producing original defense products in recent years.³² Investing heavily and making progress in new fields like autonomous and unmanned systems, the country has earned the world’s respect, especially thanks to its armed unmanned aerial and naval vehicles.³³ With many states attempting to add Turkish-made armed unmanned aerial vehicles to their military inventory, Türkiye emerged as an influential player in the global defense market. The nation currently exports defense products worth \$4,4 billion to more than 170 countries and has seven defense companies in the list of the top 100 defense manufacturers.³⁴

Experts have traditionally viewed the defense industry as a key component of Türkiye’s increasing level of activity in foreign policy. Especially thanks to its globally praised and highly effective armed unmanned aerial vehicles, the country emerged as a game-changer in many regional conflicts.³⁵ Indeed, the Turkish defense industry’s progress played an important role in Türkiye’s recent foreign policy endeavors. Specifically, Turkish-made defense products and weapon systems not only reinforced Türkiye’s defenses but also contributed to the safety of its friends and allies. Likewise, Türkiye has become a more important player within NATO.

Another precondition of having a strong economy is to reduce one’s dependence on foreign energy. Actively participating in major energy infrastructure projects, Türkiye remains on track to become a central player in the global energy trade.³⁶ Specifically, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline has been delivering Caucasian and Central Asian oil to global markets since 2006. Furthermore,

Going forward, one of Türkiye's most important goals will be to elevate its international status and ensure that other countries pay more attention to its actions

the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline has been active since 2007. Along the same route, Türkiye has begun to transport Caucasian natural gas to Europe through the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) since 2018.³⁷ The country also plays an important role in the shipment of Russian natural gas.

Having accumulated significant capacity to search for hydrocarbons with its own resources through seismic research and drilling on land and in the sea, Türkiye has been getting positive results. Specifically, recent petroleum discoveries in the Southeastern part of the country significantly increased Türkiye's ability to produce oil. Furthermore, the extraction of Black Sea natural gas has come to an end and recently the country started to deliver it to the domestic market.

In addition, heavily investing in renewable energy and having emerged as a major trading hub in the energy market, Türkiye aims to significantly reduce its dependence on foreign energy. The country has already increased its installed power from 31,000 MW to 101,000 MW and continues to extract some 710 billion m³ of natural gas from the Black Sea with its own resources.³⁸ With this progress, the country is on its way to achieving energy security and enhancing its capacity for independent foreign policy.

A Türkiye Empowered to Take Initiative in the Region

Türkiye remains committed to developing constructive relations with all states in its neighborhood to build an axis of peace and welfare and, in this context, resuming the process of normalization in its bilateral relations. It is important to note that the country prioritizes the development of multidirectional and multidimensional relations with countries in the region. Seeking to lead economic efforts to rebuild the relevant countries in this part of the world, where state structures suffered heavy damage in recent years, Türkiye promotes the creation of common free trade zones.

Furthermore, the country established itself as a game-changer by countering anti-Turkish projects regarding regional issues that were directly or indirectly linked to its interests. It is important to note, however, that Türkiye does not just react to regional developments but also takes initiatives more and more frequently. For example, Türkiye has established a successful mediatory role between Ukraine and Russia and provided the platform for the conflicting sides to sign the grain deal, which prevented a global food crisis. Ankara has

been trying to prevent the spread of the Ukrainian-Russian war to other countries in the Black Sea Region. Another example of a Turkish regional initiative are the Turkish constructive efforts in the South Caucasus. After the liberalization of the Azerbaijani territories from the Armenian occupation, Türkiye has invited Armenia together with other regional countries to form a regional stability axis in the South Caucasus.

Collaborative Engagements with Neighboring Countries

Seeking to strengthen its cooperation with neighboring countries on the basis of the win-win approach and the principles of international law, Türkiye started to work more closely with its neighbors due to mutual threats. Thanks to the expansion of its military capacity, the country signed security agreements to deploy troops to Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Qatar.

Having adopted the preventive security doctrine and developed a new counter-terror strategy, Türkiye has been countering potential and actual threats from state and non-state actors in the region outside its borders.³⁹ Specifically, the country adopted a new military and national security policy focused on neutralizing all threats at their source and successfully eliminated terrorist threats emanating from Iraq and Northern Syria.⁴⁰

In exchange for offering military and financial support to its neighbors, Türkiye expects the relevant countries not to tolerate any activities that place at risk Turkish national security and interests. In this context, Ankara has been experiencing serious problems with Iraq and Syria for a long time. Since neither country has prevented attacks against Türkiye from their Northern provinces, the Turkish government conducted several cross-border military operations against ISIS and YPG threats by invoking Article 51 of the United Nations Charter pertaining to the right of self-defense.

Nonetheless, Türkiye tries to develop its relations with Iraq and Syria on the basis of preserving their territorial integrity, removing all terrorist organizations from their sovereign territory, promoting political stability, and ensuring economic development.⁴¹ Having provided a safe environment to a large number of Syrians in a sizeable area of Northern Syria that it liberated from terrorism, Türkiye calls for the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict on the basis of territorial integrity. Accordingly, the country launched the Astana Process with Russia and Iran to end the civil war and help restore peace by stopping the fighting. Likewise, the Turkish government has been trying to develop its relations with Iraq –both the Kurdistan Regional Government and the central government in Baghdad– with a special focus on economic relations. The opening of a new border gate in Üzümlü, Hakkari led to a significant increase in cross-border trade and contributed to an increase of the bilateral trade volume to more than \$19 billion in 2021, thus making Iraq the fifth largest trade partner of Türkiye.⁴²



Turkish President and leader of the AK Party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan speaks during the event presenting the Century of Türkiye, AK Party's projects and programs for the country's future, in Ankara, on October 28, 2022.

MUSTAFA KAMACI / AA

One of the most important steps that Türkiye has recently taken within the framework of its holistic foreign policy is related to the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Having started paying due attention to the traditionally neglected seas, the country made major maritime investments –possibly for the first time in its history– to try and become a naval power of the future. Within this context, Türkiye signed a Maritime Boundary Delimitation Agreement⁴³ with Libya in November 2019, which has changed the balance of power in the region. In addition, by building new ships and other types of marine vehicles such as TCG Anadolu amphibious assault ship, the first Turkish aerial vehicle carrier, with its own resources, it aims to deter its adversaries with a strong message displaying its capabilities.

Strengthening Cooperation with the Turkic and Muslim Worlds

Türkiye pursues a non-sectarian and inclusive regional policy that seeks to build axes of peace. At the same time, the country builds on certain concepts like the Turkic world, the Muslim world, and the 'geography of the heart' to work more closely with some states or groups of states on the basis of shared cultural and religious values.

Türkiye further strengthened its relations with other Turkic states as it increased its state capacity and bolsters its economy. Especially since Türkiye

played a key role in the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh after three decades of the Armenian occupation by supporting Azerbaijan, other Turkic states have come to appreciate the advantages of working more closely with Ankara. Furthermore, Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed an alliance treaty in Shusha on June 15, 2021 to set an example to the relevant nations.

Türkiye has played a leading role in the transformation of the pan-Turkic international organization, namely the Organization of the Turkic States (OTS), and in the institutionalization of intra-Turkic relations

Türkiye has played a leading role in the transformation of the pan-Turkic international organization, namely the Organization of the Turkic States (OTS), and in the institutionalization of intra-Turkic relations. Having spearheaded the 2009 establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, the country led the effort to transform that entity into a proper international organization at its 2021 meeting in İstanbul. Thus, OTS, the headquarters of which is based in İstanbul, has become the main platform for the Turkic world. Through OTS, Türkiye has been trying to improve its military, diplomatic, political, and economic relations with the Turkic world.⁴⁴

Similarly, Türkiye has been investing in its relations not only with its neighboring countries but also with Muslim countries further afield, such as those in Africa and South East Asia. Türkiye has played a constructive role in the Libyan crisis. Ankara was/is the only real power that supports the legitimate Government of National Accord based in Tripoli. By providing military, political, and economic support to the legitimate government, Türkiye de-escalated violence in the country and maintained hopes for a lasting solution to the crisis.

Furthermore, Türkiye has contributed to regional stability in the Gulf by preventing regional intervention in Qatari domestic affairs against the blockade of other Gulf countries. It has provided military, political, diplomatic, and economic assistance to the Qatari government. Eventually, Qatar has maintained its autonomous status and its independent perspective of regional politics. Later on, together with Qatar, Türkiye has normalized its relations with other Gulf countries. Thus, Ankara has shown to other regional actors that its main objective in taking regional initiatives is securing regional stability, not to deepen the regional crises.

The effectiveness of Türkiye's alliance with Azerbaijan, the emergence of the Türkiye-Qatar bond as an axis of resistance in the Middle East, and the role that Ankara played in Somalia's state-building project all reflected the growing

influence of Türkiye in international politics. As Türkiye proved more capable in foreign policy, various Turkic and Muslim nations have opted to work more closely with this country in many different fields.⁴⁵

Türkiye's Elevated Global Status

Seeking to build the Türkiye Axis in the Century of Türkiye, the country notably expanded its diplomatic network in recent years to elevate its global standing. With 257 diplomatic missions abroad, it currently has the world's fifth-largest network.⁴⁶ At the same time, the number of foreign diplomatic missions (foreign embassies and consulates) in Türkiye climbed to 326.⁴⁷ Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased its human resources and rendered it more effective as the number of Turkish diplomatic missions abroad soared.

Türkiye also made significant progress regarding the ability of its citizens to travel around the world –an important indicator of any country's global status. For example, Turkish citizens could only travel visa-free to 42 countries in 2002. By 2023, that number had increased to 75.⁴⁸ It is also important to note that Turkish citizens can travel to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Serbia with their identity cards.

This section will focus on three parameters demonstrating the expansion of Türkiye's sphere of influence –diversification of foreign policy, contribution to the solution of global problems, and becoming influential in international organizations. As shown below, Türkiye has recently improved its status in each of these parameters.

Diversifying Foreign Policy

Having significantly increased its state capacity, Türkiye aims to end its hierarchical relationship with the Western nations, which remained intact throughout the 20th century, and resume its relations on the basis of equal partnership. The Western states, however, reacted negatively to Ankara's demand and began to otherize it. In response, the Turkish government was compelled to take stock of its relations with the relevant nations. Diversifying its foreign policy with a multilateral and multidimensional approach, Türkiye thus started engaging with non-Western countries and regions. Accordingly, it sought to attain a global status by increasing its footprint worldwide and trying to strike a healthy East-West and North-South balance.

One of the most significant steps that Türkiye has taken toward becoming a global power was to elevate its foreign policy to the global scale. Successive AK Party governments truly diversified Turkish foreign policy, in terms of both

counterparts and issues, to ensure that the country engaged with all continents and regions through its official and civilian actors.

In this context, one of the most successful endeavors has been Türkiye's newly developed partnership model with African countries. Built on the win-win principle, these relationships have generated trust and

enabled the cooperation between Türkiye and Africa to flourish in a comprehensive sense.⁴⁹ As a result of intense diplomatic efforts since the early 2000s, the number of Turkish embassies in Africa increased from twelve to 44 over two decades.⁵⁰ During the same period, the trade volume between Türkiye and African nations skyrocketed from \$4.3 billion to \$40 billion annually.⁵¹ Similar developments occurred between Türkiye and Latin America and the Caribbean where the number of Turkish embassies soared from 6 to 19 over two decades and the trade volume climbed from \$1 billion to \$15 billion.⁵²

Furthermore, Türkiye launched the Asia Anew Initiative in 2019 to promote closer cooperation with Southeast and East Asian countries in many different areas. Partly thanks to that effort, Türkiye has improved its economic and trade ties with Asian countries. The country's trade volume with the relevant regions increased by approximately 40 percent within two years of the Asia Anew Initiative's unveiling. Eventually, Asia's share in Türkiye's total trade volume has increased from 22 percent to 32 percent in the last two decades.⁵³

Specifically, the Turkish government attaches importance to developing stronger relations with China, as Asia's greatest rising power. Accordingly, the country aims to take advantage of China's Belt and Road Initiative and develop its own projects to contribute to that plan. In this context, a railroad route was established between China and Türkiye in 2019, which enabled the Chinese Rail Express to reach Ankara via the Caspian Sea. Türkiye also seeks to develop institutionalized relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which continues to increase its influence over the Asian continent, to play a more active role within the relevant regional cooperation mechanisms.

Türkiye's Contribution to Resolving Global Challenges

One of Türkiye's main objectives has been to exert influence over global issues. That is because defining one's interests on a global scale is among the preconditions for any state to become a global power. Accordingly, having decided to try to become a global power, Türkiye, too, must define its interests on a global scale.

By providing military, political, and economic support to the legitimate government, Türkiye de-escalated violence in the country and maintained hopes for a lasting solution to the crisis

Türkiye has been actively formulating policies to address pressing global issues that have garnered significant international attention in recent years

Türkiye gained worldwide respect through its humanitarian diplomacy and active aid initiatives under the AK Party governments. Indeed, the country has made more donations than any other nation in gross national product terms since 2015, despite not being one of the world's most advanced and wealthy countries.⁵⁴ Having delivered more than \$8 billion worth of humanitarian aid in 2020 to

increase that ratio to approximately one percent,⁵⁵ Türkiye offered \$5.5 billion worth of humanitarian assistance to 122 nations in 2021 despite experiencing an economic crisis. Furthermore, Türkiye provided humanitarian aid to 161 countries and twelve international organizations, along with COVID-19 vaccines to nineteen nations.⁵⁶ For instance, 15 million vaccine doses were sent to African countries.⁵⁷ Last but not least, Ankara continued to provide humanitarian aid to the Syrian people and helped international organizations, starting with the United Nations, deliver their humanitarian aid to their intended recipients. According to the UNHCR's *2022 Mid-Year Trends* report, 103 million people were forcibly, internally, and internationally, displaced in 2022. As mentioned in the report, Türkiye currently hosts 3.7 million refugees, internationally displaced people, and asylum seekers.⁵⁸

Going forward, one of Türkiye's most important goals will be to elevate its international status and ensure that other countries pay more attention to its actions. One of the ways in which any country can play a more active role in international politics is to become a mediator between countries and players experiencing problems. Accordingly, Türkiye continues to try and become a sought-after and leading mediator in times of crisis.⁵⁹ Having established high-level cooperation mechanisms with 29 different countries to build an axis of peace and stability in its neighborhood, the Turkish government launched ten multilateral cooperation processes to promote regional dialogue in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Asia.

Prioritizing and attaching importance to further developing multilateral relations, Türkiye has also been the only country to co-chair mediation and friendship groups at the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In this sense, it emerged as a respected actor for the peaceful resolution of disputes and mediation. Within the context of mediation, the country contributed to ongoing efforts to find a political solution to problems between the Philippines and Moro as well as Kosovo and Serbia. Likewise, the Turkish government played a constructive role during Venezuela's internal crisis and amid disagreements between various Palestinian factions. Finally, yet importantly, the country prevented a global food crisis by serving as a media-

tor and facilitator between Ukraine and Russia, having hosted talks in İstanbul in 2022. It was also noteworthy that Türkiye brokered a prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine.⁶⁰

Türkiye has been actively formulating policies to address pressing global issues that have garnered significant international attention in recent years. It is important to recall that climate change, declining biodiversity, air and sea pollution, the waste problem, deforestation, natural disasters, global health crises, next-generation technological developments, the insufficiency of natural resources, food security, energy supply crises, supply chains, the future of Antarctica and irregular migration all place at risk the international system. Having become a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2004, Türkiye ratified the Paris Agreement in 2021 to demonstrate its commitment to fighting climate change and began to contribute to international efforts in that field. The country also pledged to become carbon-neutral by 2053 and developed the “zero waste” project in 2017 to raise awareness about environmental issues.⁶¹

Türkiye's Influential Role in International Organizations

Türkiye has taken steps to facilitate an overhaul of international organizations, whose effectiveness and legitimacy have been questioned in recent years, to help them become more active. Attaching great importance to multilateral diplomatic activities, the country remains committed to the United Nations Charter as well as the key norms and principles of international law, including the territorial integrity and sovereign equality of states, the preservation of international peace, and the protection of international security. Türkiye also seeks to play a more active role within international organizations to become more influential worldwide. Yet it does not intend to step out of the international system. Instead, the country adheres to a rules-based and constructive policy in an attempt to help the international system operate in a more effective and seamless manner.⁶²

Above all else, Türkiye wants to play a bigger and more active role in global international organizations like the UN and its bodies. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been delivering agenda-setting speeches at the UN General Assembly in recent years and his government attaches great importance to the UN meetings. The twentieth-largest contributor to the UN budget, the nation has taken major steps toward transforming İstanbul, one of the world's largest and most cosmopolitan cities, into a new hub for the UN. The city currently hosts the offices or representatives of eleven UN agencies and specialized institutions.

In addition to contributing to the UN system, Türkiye aims to help make it more functional and effective, which is why it advocates a reform of the UN Security Council. Specifically, President Erdoğan's globally-celebrated motto,

“The World Is Bigger than Five,” has already evolved into a call for a more just organization.⁶³ Türkiye not only expects the UN to adopt a more active and effective stance on certain global and regional issues, including the Israel-Palestine dispute, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Syrian crisis, and the Libyan question, but also urges global and regional powers to abide by the UN resolutions and the core principles of international law such as the prohibition of annexation, whether it is the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula or Israel’s invasion of the Golan Heights. Furthermore, the Turkish government pleads with the global powers not to take unilateral action against others since such deeds undermine the current international order.

Notwithstanding, Türkiye actively contributes to the UN’s efforts to resolve certain regional issues. For example, the country and its leader Erdoğan successfully hosted and brokered a grain deal between Russia and Ukraine under the UN’s auspices.⁶⁴ This agreement made it possible for millions of tons of grain to cross the Turkish Straits and prevented a global food crisis. Likewise, the Turkish government contributes to the preservation of the status quo in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean (as in Libya and Syria) and the territorial integrity of all countries in the region, which represents a major contribution to putting the UN’s principles to work.⁶⁵

Currently, the European Union (EU) finds itself amidst a series of challenges that have cast a shadow over its stability and influence. The ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict, coupled with the mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly evident in its support for member states such as Italy, has significantly diminished the EU’s standing. Moreover, the aftermath of Brexit,⁶⁶ the protracted Syrian civil war, and the resulting refugee crises, the persistent Euro-debt issues,⁶⁷ the complexities of the Lisbon Treaty,⁶⁸ and the historical rejection of the EU Constitution have all contributed to the EU’s complexities. If the EU aspires to defy Henry Kissinger’s timeless critique,⁶⁹ become a prominent global actor,⁷⁰ and most crucially, ensure its longevity, it becomes imperative to consider Türkiye’s membership or at least cooperation with Türkiye. Türkiye’s strategic importance, both geographically and politically, cannot be understated. As an effective actor in both Europe and Asia,⁷¹ Türkiye has the potential to strengthen the EU’s geopolitical influence, opening doors to enhanced trade, cultural exchange, and collaborative security measures in the region.

Furthermore, Türkiye continues to work closely with Western multilateral organizations like NATO, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe (CE). Highlighting its traditionally strong bonds with the Western world, Ankara lives up to its responsibilities on those platforms and does not intend to sever its ties with the Western nations by any means. Unlike various European countries, including those that famously de-

scribed NATO as brain dead, Türkiye continues to cherish its NATO membership and seeks to further develop its political, military, and economic relations with the West on the basis of the principle of equal partnership.

In response to its alienation by the West, Türkiye strengthened its relations with non-Western international organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and launched an effort to pursue regional integration with new groups like the Turkic states. It would be wrong to blame the country for developing its relations on multilateral platforms, however, since Türkiye made that decision mainly due to its loss of trust in its Western allies.

Moreover, the growing importance of regionalization on the global agenda influenced Türkiye's decision to focus on various regional organizations. Another important point is that many countries, not just Türkiye, launched new regional initiatives on different levels. Since no country can address most of its problems alone, they must cooperate with others to overcome challenges. Having formed the informal consultation and coordination platform MIKTA with Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea and Australia in 2013, Türkiye also plays an active role in many regional and global organizations like the Group of 20 (G-20), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Developing Eight (D-8) and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Last but not least, Turkish diplomats and citizens have been assuming high-level roles within various international organizations in line with the country's growing profile and increasing level of activity at international organizations. For example, Turkish diplomats and officials have served as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, President of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Deputy Secretary General of NATO.

In the Century of Türkiye, the primary objective of Turkish foreign policy is to build the Türkiye Axis based on the principles of justice, stability, inclusiveness, multilateralism, and the rule of international law

Conclusion

It is possible to view the vision titled The Century of Türkiye as a grand design for a more powerful country. The vision signals the AK Party government

Having restructured its official institutions and increased its capacity to meet those targets, Türkiye shall continue to use all resources at its disposal to further its national goals

and President Erdoğan's intention to launch new programs and projects shaping the next century. In other words, the vision represents a "new world order" manifesto that defines Türkiye as a regional leader and an influential player globally. At the same time, it is a call on global powers to stop meddling in the country's internal affairs. Demonstrating its readiness to deter any domestic or external threat with its own resources and capacity, Türkiye is determined to signal its growing strength and influence in the age of global power politics and instability.

Having restructured its domestic and foreign policies in line with the above-mentioned vision, Türkiye diversified its foreign policy actors to increase its state capacity and signal its intention to adopt a holistic approach, as do other global powers. With the introduction of additional stakeholders, which would contribute to efforts to maximize Turkish interests through the implementation of foreign policy within their respective areas of responsibility, the country opted for a more complex yet more inclusive approach to foreign policy.

In the Century of Türkiye, the primary objective of Turkish foreign policy is to build the Türkiye Axis based on the principles of justice, stability, inclusiveness, multilateralism, and the rule of international law. President Erdoğan made that point as follows at the vision document's unveiling ceremony: "We share with humanity that the Century of Türkiye represents a revolution that will bring democracy, development, peace, and welfare to the entire world –starting with our country and our region."⁷² Türkiye aims to build that axis by using all of its different identities (Turkic, Muslim, Middle Eastern, European, etc.) simultaneously and actively. Having played an active role in the management of regional and global crises over the last two decades, the country continues to become an influential player amid the ever-deepening and ever-escalating global struggle for power.

In conclusion, as part of its efforts to build the Türkiye Axis, Türkiye aims to become a country with the state capacity and a powerful economy to pursue an independent foreign policy and to have a military might to deter domestic and foreign threats and diplomatic instruments to involve itself in regional and global developments. The main purpose of that plan is to promote national security, attain regional leadership, and build a just global order. At the same time, Türkiye highlights the importance of not repeating the mistakes of the 20th century and calls for shaping the next century on the basis of shared values

and common reason. Having restructured its official institutions and increased its capacity to meet those targets, Türkiye shall continue to use all resources at its disposal to further its national goals. ■

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