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Neo-Ottomanism as the Basis of Turkey's Middle East Policy

In the article the author emphasizes that Turkey's current course of foreign policy is a reflection of its fear to remain a secondary, buffer state against the background of the past greatness of the Ottoman Empire. The author elucidates it as a reason that Turkey regards the traditional basis of its foreign policy (Ottomanism, Pan-Turkism) that is radically different to the pro-Western Kemalism. Direction of Turkish foreign policy towards neo-Ottomanism is explained by the peculiarities of geopolitics of the post-bipolar period, existence of the conflict identities, aspiration to take responsibility for the negative (from Turkey's perspective) processes in the countries of the "Ottoman legacy" (European, Asian, African areas) and other. It is highlighted that Turkey aims to reach a new (supraregional) level through the revival of political Islam, Ottoman traditions and ideology, however, officially it distancing itself from neo-Ottomanism in order to avoid accusations of its commitment to expansionism.

Keywords: Turkey, Turkey's Middle East policy, Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), neo-Ottomanism.

Неоосманізм як підґрунтя близькосхідної політики Турецької Республіки

У статті акцентовано на процесах розвороту в постбіполярний період зовнішньополітичного курсу Туреччини у східному керунку, що увиразнюється останні два десятиліття в намаганнях турецького істеблішменту активізувати співпрацю з країнами Близького Сходу. Авторка доводить: ці процеси ґрунтуються на ідеології неоосманізму, що зумовило озвучення Туреччиною претензій (наразі нерезультативних) на регіональне лідерство. Авторка розглядає неоосманізм як ідеологію, що ґрунтується на ідеї минулої величі Османської імперії, яка в часи свого піднесення контролювала великі території (Балкани, частину Близького Сходу та Північної Африки, Кавказ). Відтак цим у статті пояснюється посилення ролі Туреччини в цих регіонах. Відзначено: замість очікуваного лідерства Туреччини на Близькому Сході, відносини з більшістю акторів близькосхідної політики погіршуються (винятками названо ті держави, з якими в Туреччині сформувалося прагматичне партнерство, наприклад, Катар). Посилення близькосхідного вектора авторка пояснює комплексом причин, найперше – побоюваннями Туреччини залишитися периферійною державою через нереалізовану наразі перспективу членства в ЄС, що спричинило поворот до традиційних основ турецької зовнішньої політики – османізму (неоосманізму) та пантюркізму (неопантюркізму). Зауважено, що неоосманський дискурс відображає формування нової турецької ідентичності. У статті представлені підходи, запропоновані у зарубіжній політичній думці щодо змісту неоосманізму. Авторка аргументує, за якими параметрами неоосманізм у зовнішній політиці Туреччини кардинально відходить від прозахідного кемалізму. Відзначено, що хоч поняття «неоосманізм» від початку ХХІ століття широко використовується на позначення політики Туреччини щодо відродження османських традицій і культури, але його тлумачення та змістове наповнення залишаються дискусійними.

Ключові слова: Турецька Республіка (Туреччина), близькосхідна політика Туреччини, Партія справедливості та розвитку, неоосманізм.

Formulation of the research problem and its significance. The Middle East is a multi-conflict region: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the confrontation between Sunni and Shiite political forces, the Syri-

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an conflict, lack of democracy, major human rights violations, etc. have been drawing attention to this region for a long time. Most countries in the Middle East have strong geopolitical ambitions; they develop mainly neo-authoritarian models of governance, which is a threat to stability not only in the region but also overseas.

After the end of the active phase of the Arab Spring, the countries of the Middle East entered the phase of the Arab Winter, which developed from the failure of the participants' initial aspirations in the revolutions. Coalitions with contrasting interests have quickly formed in the Middle East. In fact, it is the most conflict-prone region on the planet which most accurate characteristic is "stable instability"². At the same time, the hydrocarbon resources, location at the intersection of three continents as well as a number of other factors make this region an important subject of international policy.

During its republican period between 1923 and 2002, Turkey paid little attention to the countries that used to be the provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The historical trauma of the collapse of the empire, especially of the Arab Revolt in 1916–1918³, which the Turks call the "Arab betrayal", has left a deep imprint on the collective consciousness⁴. It is possible that this trauma resonated in the political course of the republican Turkey: the new Turkish elite sought to make Turkey part of the West and have no common ground with the Middle East. At this stage of Turkey's history, the Middle East region was identified with a complex set of issues that Turkey preferred not to be involved in⁵.

Turkey's ties with the Middle East during the Cold War were particularly strained. Notably, relations with Iran deteriorated after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, as the secular regime in Ankara feared the influence of Iranian mullahs on Turkish Islamists⁶. Territorial disputes remained in Turkey's relations with Syria and Iraq as to the province of Hatay (tension with Syria)⁷ and the city of Mosul (now the territory of Iraq)⁸. The control over the water system of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was one of the most intense issues. Syria has repeatedly accused Turkey of manipulating water resources, including attempts to build dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that have threatened dehydration in Syria and Iraq; in 1998, Turkey's plans to build the dam on the Euphrates River almost led to war with Syria. These are just a few examples of the Turkey's tense relations with the Middle East during the Cold War.

Today, Turkey is committed to the concept of the seven circles of Eurasian security (Central Europe, the Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia), which overlap in Turkey. This location raises Turkey's dispute to the role of the regional leader. Thus, Turkey's foreign policy and national security strategies are based on the fact that this country must significantly influence the course of processes in the Middle East, as well as in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Turkey's latest foreign policy demonstrates Ankara's efforts to change the peripheral position into the central role in the international politics.

The coming to power of the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 shifted the paradigm of Turkish politics⁹. In terms of foreign policy, these changes derived from the fact that for a long time Turkish Islamists have been critics of Ankara's policy of indifference to the Middle East. Also, they were not very keen on Turkey's membership in NATO, but concede it during the Cold War to prevent a communist threat. As a result, relations with the Middle East began to acceler-

² Volokhov, V. (2019), Middle East: Stable Instability. Available from <https://bintel.org.ua/en/analytics/geopolitics/blizkij-sxid-stabilna-nestabilnist/> [Accessed 08.11.2020].

³ The events of 1916-1918 are mentioned, that is opposition of the Arab army to the Ottoman rule at the Arabian peninsula. Its aim was to create a single Arab state from Syria to Yemen.

⁴ Bengio, O., Özcan, G. (2001), Old Grievances, New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and Its Alignment with Israel, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37 No 2, pp. 50-92.

⁵ Mufti, M. (2016), *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture. Republic at Sea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ Özcan, N. A., Özdamar, Ö. (2010), Uneasy Neighbors: Turkish-Iranian Relations since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 17 No 3, pp. 101-117.

⁷ Altunışık, M. B., Tür, O. (2006), From Distant Neighbors to Partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish Relations, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 37 No 2, pp. 229-248.

⁸ Coşar, N., Demirci, S. (2006), The Mosul Question and the Turkish Republic: Before and After the Frontier Treaty, 1926, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42 No 1, pp. 123-132.

⁹ Sözen, A. (2010), A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11 No 1, pp. 103-123.

ate rapidly on the Turkish side. This process was accompanied by the revival of the ideology of Ottomanism (neo-Ottomanism) and Pan-Turkism (neo-Pan-Turkism) in Turkey. It is clear that Turkey is trying to form a new historical and geographical (Islamist) identity to assert its significance, as well as to transform the Turkish status from a buffer country to a diplomatically active state, the leader of the Middle East, by virtue of the romanticized attributes of the Ottoman past.

Thus, the priorities of Turkey's foreign policy became the intention to embody national geopolitical interests and to claim the regional leadership. However, Turkey did not achieve the expected results in almost two decades of implementation of this course. Moreover, relationship with some participants of the Middle East policy have even deteriorated. Taking into consideration these processes, Turkey's policy towards the Middle East needs to be studied in order to identify possible vectors, determine potential threats, and assess the prospects of Turkey's leadership in the Middle East.

Analysis of recent research on the problem. The following researchers suggest research approaches to Turkey's Middle East policy – H. J. Barkey, S. Cagaptay, A. Davutoğlu, A. Didić, E. Ertosun, S. M. Jovanović, O. Göksel and others. The problem of Turkey's Middle East policy is one of the most important in the pages of such magazines as *Foreign Affairs*, *International Affairs*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *International Security*, *Middle East Policy*, *Insight Turkey*, *The Middle East in London*, *Turkish Studies*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, *Security Dialogue*, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, *Middle East Quarterly*.

Formulation of the purpose and tasks of the article. The purpose of the article is to study the conceptual framework and practical realisation of the Middle East policy of the Republic of Turkey. The following tasks were set to achieve the purpose: to analyse the ideological grounds of the Middle East policy of Turkey; to determine peculiarities of the course of the foreign policy of Turkey in the Middle East.

Research methodology. The research methodology is based on the role theory (concepts of Holsti¹⁰ and Chih-yu Shih¹¹). "Role" refers to the policy pursued by a certain state (Turkey) in a particular region (Middle East). The role gives foreign policy purpose and content to the foreign policy, reflects the perception of Turkey as a member, as well as the leader, of international relations, in terms of place, position and behavior in a particular social reality of the Middle East. The category of role helps to understand Turkey's mission in the Middle East.

The role of Turkey is studied in vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension involves reference to the majestic past of the state (in the case of Turkey, this is the period of the highest prosperity of the Ottoman Empire) and to the promising future (neo-Ottomanism conveys the dream of restoring the past greatness of Turkey). The horizontal dimension is expressed in the realization of the role through the interaction of Turkey with other participants of international relations, which also perform their roles. Within the scope of the analysis of Turkey's bilateral relations with the Middle East, the role of Turkey in the horizontal dimension is clarified.

Turkey is the proof that the choice of the role of the state in the past (vertical dimension) indicates the existence of problems that arise when searching for identity in the horizontal dimension. Turkey is trying to project the past (Ottoman) into the future (the potential leader of the Middle East region, and in the long run, the world superpower), to view current events and future plans through the past greatness of the Ottoman Empire and finds itself as its successor. Fear of remaining a secondary state has prompted Turkey to create a neo-Ottoman identity based on political Islam, but it is clear that this ideology is rejected by many Middle Eastern states.

If a state is satisfied with its current position at the regional or international levels in general, it tends to implement the national concept of the role in present, through an active interaction with other countries¹². This cannot be said of Turkey, as it not only idealizes the past, but its contemporary interaction with the Middle East is not an example of effective cooperation. Nowadays, Turkey has a pub-

¹⁰ Holsti, K. J. (1970), National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 233-309.

¹¹ Chih-yu Shih (1992), *Seeking Common Causal Maps: A Cognitive Approach to International Organization*. In: *Contending Dramas: A Cognitive Approach to International Organization*. New York: Praeger.

¹² Balakhova, Z. (2016), National role conception in foreign policy of a modern state, *Science and World*, Vol. 7 No. 35, pp. 108-110.

lic confrontation and tension with most states, and the relations that are still developing are more pragmatic, situational, rather than friendly and predictable.

Due to the dependent on the Ottoman Empire colonial past of many countries, especially, of the Arab people of the Middle East, there are many examples of the consequences of collective trauma. This distressing experience still prevents most Middle Eastern states from building constructive relations with modern Turkey, and its commitment to neo-Ottomanism alienates even further the once enslaved nations. This effect is exacerbated by the policies of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as well as the Turkish AKP. They actively promote narratives about the continuity of the traditions of the Ottoman Empire, the need to revive the Ottoman values, ideology, etc.

The romanticization of the former Ottoman Empire continues to influence Turkey's view of its own role in the world. Nations which once founded empires are often characterized by an exaggerated perception of their former greatness, as well as a willingness to follow politicians who promote such narratives. In fact, Turkey's search for status and role, overestimation of its regional impact referring to the "majestic Ottoman past", for the second decade argues the true role of this state in the Middle East as the area which has different geopolitical priorities. The vast majority of Middle Eastern countries publicly reject Turkey's claims to leadership in the region. On the contrary, this state is attributed (at the Saudi Arabia initiative) to the so-called "Triangle of evil" (Turkey – Iran – Islamic State) and is identified as a destabilizing rather than integrative factor in the territory. The latest officially undeclared Cold War is actually being waged with some Middle East countries (Bahrain, Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, etc). Turkey managed to solidify even the antagonistic states in criticizing its actions, first of all in Syria. The complexity of Turkey's leadership in the Middle East is evident in a situation where even the normalization of relations with individual states is problematic. Countries that are opposed to Turkey and led by Saudi Arabia are not only unwilling to recognize Turkey's leadership, but also active in all sorts of restrictions on its regional influence.

We should note that in performing its role, any state feels anxious for two reasons: 1) fear of losing its role; 2) facing the need to find a new role and not fulfil it. In fact, Turkey, claiming the role of leader in the Middle East, faced the problem of establishing itself. Currently Turkey does not perform the desired role of the leader of the region due to a number of factors; however, the foreign policy of the country is aimed at it.

Research results. Due to the problematic prospects of the EU accession, Turkey has gradually strengthened its fear of remaining a secondary state that is important to the West only in terms of its own (but not Turkish) military, strategic, economic, and political interests. The popularity of the idea of Turkey's European policy declined, and instead, the interest in the traditional foundations of Turkish foreign policy – Ottomanism (neo-Ottomanism) and Pan-Turkism (neo-Pan-Turkism) – quickly revived.

In Turkey neo-Ottomanism is not officially enshrined in the regulations. This concept is used by experts and scholars to denote the new policy of Turkey in the Middle East, which has its historical roots in the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923). In 1865, a secret political organization of the nationalist Ottoman intelligentsia, the Young Ottomans, emerged in the empire. This organization developed the concept of Ottomanism, which generally supported progressive ideas (liberalization, adoption of the constitution, the transition to a parliamentary republic, etc.). Ottomanism was conceived as a plan to democratize the empire in order to preserve it. However, in practice, it resembled to be a doctrine that aimed at further enslavement of nations (especially of those who lived in the Balkans and the eastern part of the country). For the public, Ottomanism, first of all, was associated with the struggle for the greatness of the people, for their "imperialism". And only Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) managed to break with this ideology; he believed that the new Turkey needed to be built on other principles.

Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey's foreign policy has radically separated from pro-Western Kemalism. The latest interpretation of this ideology was suggested by Greek intellectuals in 1974, when Turkey invaded Cyprus¹³. In fact, neo-Ottomanism began to evolve into the concept in the mid-1980s; an English historian David Barchard used this term to denote a possible vector of the development of Turkey¹⁴. From the beginning of the 21st century, the term "neo-Ottomanism" began to be widely used to

¹³ Karpat, K. H. (2002), *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays*. Boston: Brill.

¹⁴ Barchard, D. (1985), *Turkey and the West*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

depict Turkey's policy of reviving Ottoman traditions and culture. Neo-Ottomanism contains elements of denial of the Western (neoliberal) values, a pragmatic recognition that the interests of Turkey do not correspond to the pro-Western orientation¹⁵.

Supporters of neo-Ottomanism among the Turkish establishment often argue their loyalty to this ideology by the historical responsibility for the negative processes that take place in the countries of the "Ottoman heritage". In particular, according to the Turkish neo-Ottoman theorist Ahmet Davutoğlu (a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister), Turkey's Ottoman past has placed a burden of geocultural and geopolitical responsibility on the country and required the reformation of Turkish strategic thinking. Davutoğlu stated that the return to the historical heritage opens new opportunities for Turkey¹⁶.

It should be mentioned that the first deviations from Kemalism in Turkish foreign policy were observed during the administration of Turgut Özal (1983-1989) which was before the AKP governance. During his presidency (1989-1993) Özal proclaimed the XXI century "the century of Turkey", and a then-Prime Minister Demirel considered the giant Turkish world from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China and Turkey as a cultural center and historical magnet for the newly created states (meaning first of all, the post-Soviet states of Central Asia).

However, the active practical implementation of the neo-Ottomanism ideology began after the AKP came to power in Turkey. The fact that the political party established only in 2001 and won the election on November 3, 2002 (363 out of 550 seats in the Grand National Assembly) may indicate the existence in Turkish society of a significant demand for the ideas which the party has presented in their political program. The AKP described itself and its supporters as "descendants of the Ottomans", "the new Ottomans".

Turkish neo-Ottomanism is based on the principles of blood, Ottoman thinking, soil and language. The principle of blood is applied to the Turkic peoples. The principle of the earth is connected with the Ottoman past, which was rejected by Kemal Atatürk, but which was accepted by the current political leaders of Turkey. Closely related to these two principles is the desire of the Turkish leadership to develop the contemporary Ottoman thinking, a supra-Turkish identity that would take Turkey to a new, supra-regional level. For instance, Arabic borrowings are introduced into the Turkish language, which were previously eliminated with the efforts of Turkish linguists.

Thus, the course of disruption of the traditions of Ottoman rule, links with traditional Islam, and the integration of Turkey as a nation state into Europe has changed over the last two decades. For the twenty years, the country has been actively restoring political Islam, spreading its influence on society, ceasing pressure on the Islamic clergy, which was common for the Kemalist times, etc. There is a strong connection between Islamism and neo-Ottomanism¹⁷. Supported by the AKP, neo-Ottomanism is motivated by Islamist identity to some extent¹⁸. Statesmen increasingly refer to the continuity of the imperial traditions in the present-day Turkey, the need to revive Ottoman customs and ideology. The primary function of the agents of political socialization and resocialization of citizens is to form a new, imperial thinking.

Neo-Ottomanism is based on the idea of the past greatness of the Ottoman Empire which at the time of its rise controlled large areas, such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, parts of the Middle East and North Africa. So, the current political course of neo-Ottomanism encourages the strengthening of Turkey's role in these regions¹⁹. If we check the historical map of the Ottoman Empire during its golden age, the areas of the Turkey's potential interest due to the "Ottoman legacy" are obvious. These are European (a large part of the Balkan Peninsula, the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, the Republic of Cyprus, the Greek island of Rhodes, etc.), Asian (countries of Caucasus and Levant, much of the Ara-

¹⁵ Çolak, Y. (2006), Ottomanism vs. Kemalism: Collective Memory and Cultural Pluralism in 1990s Turkey, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42 No. 4, pp. 587-602; Yavuz, M. H. (1998), Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism, *Critique: Critical Studies of the Middle East*, Vol. 7 No 12, pp. 19-41.

¹⁶ Davutoğlu, A. (2001), *Stratejik Derinlik, Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*. İstanbul: Küre Yayınları.

¹⁷ Hristov, I. (2019), Neo-Ottomanism – Emergence, Ideology and Political Doctrine, *Social Evolution and History*, Vol. 18 No 1, pp. 139-156.

¹⁸ Ozkan, B. (2014), Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism, *Survival*, Vol. 56 No 4, pp. 119-140.

¹⁹ Taspinar, Ö. (2008), *Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism*. Carnegie Papers No 10. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Publications Department.

bian Peninsula, modern Iraq and parts of Iran), African (Tunisia, northern Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Sudan and Eritrea) territories.

The question of what caused the Turkey's neo-Ottoman shift remains debatable. There is no consensus among the researchers in understanding the reasons, content and consequences of the neo-Ottoman course of the Turkish Republic. A number of scholars describe such changes in Turkey's foreign policy as an "axis shift" aimed at refocusing Turkey to countries represented by the Muslim majority, in line with the AKP's ideological course²⁰. Other researchers do not support this assessment, arguing that it is not a dissociation from the West, but a pragmatic approach to increase Turkey's chances of EU membership by diversifying its foreign policy vectors in other regions²¹. The AKP's transition from the deep Europeanization to the soft Eurasianism is identified as a testament to Ankara's traditional focus on multivector foreign policy²².

The secular / Islamist divisions are a central motive for the Turkish politics, so conflicting identities may explain the reasons for the neo-Ottoman shift²³. It is said that the proclamation of the secular Turkish Republic was not an inevitable result of the war for independence (1919-1923), because there were many people loyal to the throne in the country. Since then, Turkish policy has been characterized by a gap between socio-political groups depending on the place of religion in political life.

An alternative explanation for Turkey's neo-Ottoman shift is an attempt to expand the country's trade and economic ties²⁴. These arguments are quite plausible considering that the AKP's governing policy is essentially commercially opportunistic²⁵. A year before the AKP came to power Turkey faced one of the biggest financial crises in its history: a series of banking failures; GDP per capita decreased by more than 6%²⁶, an increased public debt and so on. However, in the first decade of the Justice and Development Party's governance, the trend was reversed: the market reacted positively to a single-party rule and to the end of a long period of shaky coalition governments²⁷. Some economic accomplishments, especially in 2002-2012, increased public support for AKP policies²⁸. A key aspect of the economic upturn of that period was the growth of the foreign trade. Its total volume increased from 72 billion US dollars in 2001 to 400 billion US dollars in 2014. As trade increased, so did the influence of interest groups (big business) on Turkey's foreign policy decisions²⁹. It is no coincidence that large delegations of entrepreneurs often accompany Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at official visits abroad.

²⁰ Cornell, S. E. (2012), What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?, *Middle East Quarterly*, Iss. 19 No 1, pp. 13-24; Hounshell, B. (2010), "Mr. Zero Problems". *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 183, pp. 45-46; Keating, J. E. (2010), The World's Kissingers, *Foreign Policy* No 178; Taspınar, Ö. (2011), The Rise of Turkish Gaullism: Getting Turkish-American Relations Right, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13 No 1, pp. 11-17.

²¹ Oğuzlu, T. H. (2008), Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9 No, pp. 3-20.

²² Öniş, Z., Yılmaz, Ş. (2009), Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10 No 1, pp. 7-24.

²³ Hoffmann, C., Cemgil, C. (2016), The (un)Making of the Pax Turca in the Middle East: Understanding the Social Historical Roots of Foreign Policy, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Iss. 29 No 4, pp. 1279-1302.

²⁴ Kirişçi, K. (2009), The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 40, pp. 29-56; Kirişçi, K., Kaptanoğlu, N. (2011), The Politics of Trade and Turkish Foreign Policy, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 47 No 5, pp. 705-724; Kutlay, M. (2011), Economy as the "Practical Hand" of New Turkish Foreign Policy: A Political Economy Explanation, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13 No 1, pp. 67-88; Tezcür, G. M., Grigorescu, A. (2014), Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy: Balancing European and Regional Interests, *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 15 No 3, pp. 257-276.

²⁵ Pope, H. (2010), Pax Ottomana: The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89 No 6, pp. 161-171.

²⁶ Demiroğlu, U. (2013), The Effects of the Investment Decline on Potential GDP in Turkey's 2001 and 2009 Crises, *Central Bank Review*, Vol. 13 No 3, pp. 25-44.

²⁷ Öniş, Z. (2009), Beyond the 2001 Financial Crisis: The Political Economy of the New Phase of Neo-Liberal Restructuring in Turkey, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 16 No 3, pp. 409-432.

²⁸ Gurkaynak, R. S., Sayek-Boke, S. (2013), AKP Döneminde Türkiye Ekonomisi, *Birikim*, Vol. 296, pp. 64-69; Subaşat, T. (2014), The Political Economy of Turkey's Economic Miracle, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16 No 2, pp. 137-160.

²⁹ Atli, A. (2011), Businessmen as Diplomats: The Role of Business Associations in Turkey's Foreign Economic Policy, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13 No 1, pp. 109-128; Kirişçi, K. (2009), The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No 40, pp. 29-56.

The factors of Turkey's neo-Ottoman course include the features of geopolitics after the end of the Cold War. It has forced Turkey to reconsider its security policy in the rapidly changing situation in the Middle East and other areas. Since Turkey and the United States did not have a common adversary after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they no longer shared an existential perception of the threat. In the United States, the sense of threat has shifted to the rogue states of the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, and Syria). However, Turkey was dependent on these states as it had upward commercial relations with them, thus, it was wary of any actions that could potentially destabilize the situation in the region.

A. Davutoğlu based the new foreign policy course of Turkey on the concept of "strategic depth". Davutoğlu believed that Ankara had been mistaken for decades separating from the Arab world, and it was time to intensify the "strategic depth of Turkey". According to Davutoğlu, it is the time for Turkey to assume fundamentally new roles in the Middle East, such as "the natural leader" of the region, "a historical big brother", the "protector of the Muslim minorities", etc³⁰. Thus, Turkey has identified the growth of economic, political and cultural presence as its significant task in the region. It tried to establish the role of "a force that grows stronger". In order for Turkey to regain its role as a regional power and influential player in the international platform, after a long period of inactivity, it must realize and assert its own historical and geographical identity. The concept of "strategic depth" is based on the fact that Turkey cannot pursue a one-dimensional policy due to its historical and cultural heritage; instead, it must present itself at the center because of its strengths.

It should be noted that Davutoğlu worked on establishing the attitude of the new way of Turkey's foreign policy as a policy of "zero problems with neighbors" and not as neo-Ottomanism. The politician accurately feared that neo-Ottomanism would be perceived as a form of modern expansionism. The then-President of the Republic of Turkey, Abdullah Gül (2007-2014), also distanced himself from accusations that his country had changed its foreign policy axis³¹. Nevertheless, Turkey's new foreign policy quickly intensified political discourse. The matter was whether Turkey had distanced itself from a pro-Western orientation and was moving toward the Middle East and Asia. Especially in 2009-2010, the world media attracted attention with headlines such as: "The West has lost Turkey", "What will happen if Turkey leaves the West?", "Turkey is no longer an ally of the West", etc. First of all, in the spotlight was the transformation of Turkey's identity from a buffer state to a diplomatically active, multidimensional state.

An example of the practical expression of the neo-Ottomanism concept as an unofficial Turkey's foreign policy principle is the doctrine "The Blue Homeland" ("Mavi Vatan"). This doctrine, contrary to the norms of public international law (violation of the legal regime of maritime borders), expands Turkey's borders within the Mediterranean. Initially, under the name "The Blue Homeland" naval trainings were conducted (February-March 2019), and in September 2019, Erdoğan took a provocative photo. The map ("Turkey - the blue Homeland") on the background had incorrectly marked sea borders of Turkey and Greece. The concept of "The Blue Homeland" was first voiced in 2006 by Turkish Admiral Ramazan Cem Gürdeniz. The vision of Turkey's maritime jurisdiction included large areas of the Black, Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, but further inclusion of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea was not eliminated. Thus, "The Blue Homeland" is not just a code name, but a holistic geopolitical concept that shows Ankara's military political plans for the next decade. Turkey's deployment of troops to Libya (January 2020) can be interpreted as part of the implementation of "The Blue Homeland" doctrine. The task is to embody the disputed agreement signed on November 27, 2019 between Erdoğan and Fayeze al-Sarraj which provides Turkey with access to economic maritime areas rich in hydrocarbon resources that Greece and Cyprus are empowered to.

The ultimate task of the "neo-Ottomans" was the transformation of Turkey not just into a regional but into a world power, due to its history and geographical location. This requires an independent foreign policy, not dependence on superpowers. Thus, Turkey has to pursue an active diplomatic and economic policy, raise its own international status, but at the same time avoid confrontation with neighboring countries. That is, based on the theoretical premises of neo-Ottomanism, Turkey would have to increase its influence on the countries of the post-Ottoman space primarily through "soft power". For example, today Turkish historical series which promote the veiled ideas of neo-Ottomanism

³⁰ Gürzel, A. (2014), Turkey's role as a regional and global player and its power capacity: Turkey's engagement with other emerging states, *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, Vol. 22 No 50, pp. 95-105.

³¹ Claims of axis shift stem from ignorance, bad intentions, says Gül (15 June 2010), *Today's Zaman*.

are a popular tool of “soft power”³². However, in recent years Turkey’s military campaigns (such as operations in northern Syria, troop deployments to Iran in 2015 and Libya in 2020) have demonstrated a combination of “hard” and “soft” powers in the Middle East policy. We do not reject that Turkey might interpret the synthesis of soft and hard (force) methods within the framework of a single strategy as the introduction of the smart power concept.

During the ceremony in memory of Kemal (Atatürk) on November 10, 2016, in his speech Erdoğan illustrated his imperial dreams, which, however, are incompatible with the views of Atatürk himself. According to the President of Turkey, “*You must know that Turkey is bigger than Turkey*”, “*We cannot stay locked in 780,000 sq.km. For our physical boundaries are one thing and our heart boundaries are something else. Our brothers in Mosul, Kirkuk, Aleppo, Homs, Misrata, Skopje, Crimea and the Caucasus may very well be outside our physical borders, they are [still] all within our heart’s borders*”³³. These words allow us to characterize Erdoğan as a hypernationalist who is convinced of the historical mission of Turkey. He builds his configuration of modern Turkey, combining neo-Ottomanism and Islamism (Islamist neo-Ottomanism). Since Erdoğan’s foreign policy is based on a policy of force in the name of domination, it can be considered as the latest model of imperialist policy.

Thus, despite the fact that Turkey separates from the characterization of its course as neo-Ottomanism, its current foreign policy demonstrates its intention to spread and strengthen its supremacy over other states and regions, first and foremost the Middle East. It seems that neo-Ottomanism ideally defines the principles of Turkey’s modern foreign policy. It became the ideological basis for the development of a new supra-identity through the use of political, economic, cultural and other influences. In our opinion, it is justified to consider Islamist neo-Ottomanism as Turkey’s latest geo-strategy.

Conclusions. Turkey’s current foreign policy is a reflection of fears to remain a minor, buffer state against the background of the past greatness of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey referred to the traditional foundations of Turkish foreign policy (Ottomanism, Pan-Turkism), which are radically different from pro-Western Kemalism. The neo-Ottoman shift of Turkey is explained by the peculiarities of the geopolitics of the post-bipolar period, presence of conflicting identities, the intention to take responsibility for certain negative (from Turkey’s point of view) processes in the countries of “Ottoman heritage” (European, Asian and African territories), etc. Turkey has set itself the task of reaching a new (supra-regional) level through the revival of political Islam, Ottoman traditions and ideology. At the same time, officially Turkey is distancing itself from neo-Ottomanism in order to avoid accusations of commitment to expansionism. However, expansionism is evident both at the doctrinal level (for example, the Blue Homeland doctrine) and at the practical level (for instance, activity in the economic maritime zones of Greece and Cyprus). Despite the fact that Turkey separates from the characterization of its foreign policy as neo-Ottomanism, specifically Islamist neo-Ottomanism is the ideology of the country’s modern foreign policy.

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³² Çevik, S. B. (2019), Turkish historical television series: public broadcasting of neo-Ottoman illusions”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 19 No 2, pp. 227-242.

³³ Nehme, M. (1 May 2020), Erdogan’s neo-Ottoman dreams was on Libya’s shores, *The Arab Weekly*.

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