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Foreign Policy During 2011 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey: Both an Issue and Non-issue

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ABSTRACT *This article focuses on the foreign policy sections of 2011 election manifestos of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) (AKP), the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party) (CHP), the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party) MHP, and the Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloku (Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc) (EDÖB) the pre-election Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party) (BDP). Foreign policy is both an issue and a non-issue for Turkish electorate because although foreign policy issues have almost no impact on voters' choices, the parties still continue to devote space to foreign policy performances, promises, and projections in their election manifestos. The analysis of 2011 election manifestos reveals that the AKP primarily envisions a Turkey with more commonalities with the East than with the West, but yet ranked Turkey's relations with Europe and the West higher; for the MHP while Turkey's commonality with the East was defined in terms of common history and culture, the West was portrayed to have commonness only in terms of values; the CHP equated European values with universalism and prioritized Turkey's ties with Europe; finally, the EDÖB manifesto was an anti-thesis of all manifestos where foreign policy was instrumental for the ideological goals of the bloc and subsequently of the BDP.*

Pre- and post-election surveys conducted in Turkey in the 2000s have illustrated that foreign policy issues have not been the main determinants of Turkish voters' party choice. Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, for example, found that during the 2002 general elections it was the ideological position of the voter that determined the vote.¹ In 2007, general elections economic factors won over other considerations in shaping voter preference.² As Kalaycıoğlu has concluded for the 2007 general elections, issues of international relations or foreign policy considerations had almost no effect on voter behavior in Turkey.³ Some preliminary surveys published in newspapers following the June 2011 elections also illustrated that these elections were not an exception in terms of voter preferences. Public service, leadership,

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ideology, future investment projects, and the conduct of election campaign were some of the central issues that determined the voter preference for the Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), the Republican People's Party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*), though in differing order.⁴

The fact that issues other than Turkish foreign policy and international relations determine Turkish voters' choice has not precluded political parties from including foreign policy issues in their election campaigns. This article examines the party manifestos declared before the 2011 general elections in Turkey. Specifically, it explores the ways in which foreign policy issues were taken up by the AKP, CHP, MHP, and the Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc (EDÖB, *Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloku*), the precursor of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP, *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*).⁵ These are the four parties that currently have seats in the new parliament formed after the June 2011 elections.

The main focus here is on the election manifestos rather than speeches of the party leaders because the access to the public speeches was not uniform across the parties. For instance, while the AKP placed every single speech that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made on the party's official website, this was not the case with other parties. They were selective in placing their leaders' speeches on their websites. When these speeches were published on their official websites, they were in the form of selective quotes rather than full transcriptions. Yet even skimming through these speeches, differing points of emphases for each of these parties can easily be detected. For the AKP, as the incumbent, public services that were promised and delivered and would be delivered in the future figured prominently in campaign speeches. For the opposition parties, focus was different. While the CHP emphasized the AKP's alleged corrupt practices and promised to end poverty, the MHP echoed these corruption allegations and constantly highlighted the need to "provide" the unity of the state by ending the AKP rule. In other words, foreign policy did not appear as a major concern in the election speeches of these political parties.

When foreign policy issues came up during the election campaign, it did so indirectly, as it was instrumental to highlight other issues that the parties perceived to be crucial. For the AKP, for example, foreign policy was used to highlight Turkey's increased international standing, on the grounds that foreign policy helped Turkey gain esteem in international arena.⁶ The AKP's attitude culminated in Prime Minister Erdoğan's famous balcony speech, where after winning the election, he declared the winner of the 2011 elections as "Sarajevo, Beirut, Damascus, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza . . . the Middle East, Caucasia, the Balkans, Europe . . . democracy, freedom, peace, justice and stability"⁷—a remark that ranks and prioritizes Turkey's areas interest, as well as insinuates, from the perspective of the AKP, at Turkey's increased international standing.

Although foreign policy issues do not determine voter preference, it is impossible to disregard foreign policy discussions during the election campaigns because these debates on foreign policy, big or small, eventually become part of the larger discourse giving researchers clues about the foreign policy perceptions and positions of the

parties and their leadership. As David Campbell argues, foreign policy delineates the line between “us” and “them” between the “alien” and the “similar.”⁸ Moreover, exploring the geopolitical delineations in these discourses of foreign policy, doubly informs the researchers about a state’s elite perceptions of belonging. In other words, exploring the foreign policy discourses of political parties is not only informative about the perceptions and positions of these respective parties and their leaders, but also gives a preview of wider identity projections of the state and the society.

This was especially true for the 2011 elections, given the fact that the year preceding the elections was eventful in terms of Turkey’s foreign policy. The Gaza Flotilla incident, that resulted in the death of nine Turks in the hands of Israeli soldiers in international waters not only led to the deterioration of Turkey’s relations with Israel, but also created a public uproar in Turkey. Turkey’s desire to play a part in the Arab Spring was also intensely debated in the foreign and domestic media. Furthermore, Turkey’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu’s policies such as “zero problems with neighbors” and their results were also subject of a fierce debate, creating a circle of both admirers and critics inside and outside academia.⁹ Overall, it can be said that just like the recent election campaigns, in 2011, foreign policy was both an issue and a non-issue. Foreign policy can be regarded as a non-issue because in the recent elections the conduct of Turkey’s international relations and foreign policy did not markedly affect voter preferences. Yet as will be explained in the following pages, even the miniscule coverage that these issues received highlighted Turkey’s current and potential leaders’ identity representations about the country.

This article unfolds in three sections. First, it briefly examines how the AKP, the CHP, the MHP and the EDÖB prioritized various campaign issues other than foreign policy. As suggested, issues of foreign policy were not a top concern. Second, it explores the ways in which foreign policy issues surfaced during the 2011 election campaigns and it analyzes how various issues were presented. Finally, it sums up the main points in the conclusion.

Reading the 2011 General Elections Campaign Through Party Manifestos

The Listing of the Issues

Foreign policy not being an issue in shaping voter preference in Turkey’s general elections was a fact that did not escape the attention of the AKP, the CHP, the MHP, and the EDÖB leadership. For all of these political parties, foreign policy was listed at the bottom of their itemized manifestos.¹⁰ It was democracy/democratization at the top of the AKP’s five-item, the CHP’s six-item, and the EDÖB’s eight-item manifesto. In this regard, it can be concluded that the AKP, the CHP, and the EDÖB had a similar way of listing issues of profound importance to them, with slight differences to the list or an additional ideological touch that parties wanted to signal in their respective manifestos.

For the AKP, the listing in its election manifesto titled “Turkey is Ready, The Target is 2023: The Manifesto for 12 June 2011 General Elections” (*Türkiye Hazır*

Hedef 2023:12 Haziran 2011 Genel Seçimleri Beyannamesi) was: “progressive democracy,” “large economy,” “powerful society,” “a livable environment and trademark cities,” and finally, “leader country”—the last of which foreign policy goals and achievements of the party were mentioned. In the CHP’s manifesto named “The Country of Freedom and Hope, Turkey for Everyone: CHP 2011 Election Manifesto” (*Özgürlüğün ve Umudun Ülkesi, Herkesin Türkiye’si: CHP 2011 Seçim Bildirgesi*), the itemized list was similar to the AKP’s, with the section “freedom and democracy” ranking first, followed by “economy that produces, grows, shares, and is environment friendly,” “equality and societal solidarity,” “transparent, quality public service, and administration,” “developing regions, urbanizing Anatolia, global city Istanbul,” and lastly “a foreign policy with foundations in peace, democracy, and development.” Therefore, for both the AKP and CHP, the issues were almost the same with one extra item on the CHP’s manifesto: “transparent, quality public service, and administration.”

A similar assessment for the MHP’s manifesto titled “National Action Party 2011 Election Manifesto, Towards 2023 The Contract for Rising Turkey” (*MHP 2011 Seçim Beyannamesi, 2023’e Doğru Yükselen Ülke Türkiye Sözleşmesi*) was slightly more difficult. While technically the MHP’s manifesto was also an eight-item list, the party’s would-be policies were listed as item number seven and foreign policy as the 31st sub-section under this section, immediately before the sub-section called “informing the public” and immediately after the section “security and defense policy.” Justice, for the MHP, ranked first in this sub-section where foreign policy was listed as almost the last. There is no heading for democracy in this sub-section where the MHP lists its would-be policies. Yet this does not mean that democracy or democratization was not included as a goal in the MHP’s election manifesto. While democratization is not outlined in this section, the first section of the party’s election manifesto begins with “reading the century in Turkish,” and points to the need for democratization in Turkey. This section is followed by “Towards 2023, The Vision of Rising Turkey,” “Towards Turkey as a Global Power during the MHP Rule,” “Our Primary Goals and Ideas,” “Basic Rights and Our Understanding of Democracy,” “Our National and Democratic Understanding of Constitution,” “Policies,” and ends with “Building the Future Together.”

Unlike the rest, the EDÖB’s manifesto neither had a fancy title nor imaginative subsections. Named simply as “The Election Manifesto of Labor, Freedom and Democracy Bloc” (*Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloğu Seçim Beyannamesi*), the EDÖB’s manifesto listed the issues of prime importance as: “democratization,” “economy, education, health,” “women,” “environment, nature, ecology,” “youth,” “cities,” “the disabled,” and “foreign policy”. Overall, democratization and democracy were issues of prime importance, at least in the election manifestos for all of the parties in question, while foreign policy was ranked the last.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the way that the parties titled their manifestos. First, both the AKP and the MHP take 2023, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic as a target and consider Turkey as a rising power. Hence, by way of implication, both parties, without referring to the foreign policy vision of Turkey

per se, promise their constituents improvement of the international standing of Turkey and to turn the country into a greater power. Second, while issues such as democracy, economy, urbanization, and environment are common concerns for these parties, the extra items listed in their manifestos or differing ways of describing the shared concerns denote the issues that are missing or, in their view, not given enough attention by the AKP administration. The CHP's "transparent quality public service and administration," is a case in point where the party points out the alleged corruption of the current administration, something that was also brought up during the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's campaign speeches. Similarly, the BDP, a party where women and men equally co-chair the party leadership, has a separate section on women in the election manifesto, while in the MHP's manifesto, the subject of "women" is dealt as an issue along with "family and kids." This shows the way that parties prioritize and frame the issue. For the MHP, the creation of two sub-sections named "*asayişin tesisi*" (establishing order) and "*terörle mücadele*" (fight against terrorism) and their placement before foreign policy are worth noting, as this is an indication of issues that are more significant and urgent for the party.

Analyzing the Foreign Policy Sections in the Manifestos

The analysis of foreign policy as a campaign issue begins with the way parties present their sections on foreign policy. While the MHP and the EDÖB simply titled these sections as "foreign policy," the AKP and the CHP did not list foreign policy that simply in their manifestos. The section where the AKP dealt with its foreign policy performance and projections was sub-titled as "*lider ülke*" (the lead country). The CHP, on the other hand, used the sub-title "*barış, demokrasi, ve kalkınma temelli dış politika*" (foreign policy with foundations in peace, democracy, and development), again an indication of the differing levels of foreign policy projections as well as representations of Turkey.

This difference in sub-titles is an obvious result of the "Davutoğlu factor." Reading the AKP's election manifesto, from the very first paragraph of the section that explains the AKP's foreign policy achievements and promises, one can hear the echoes of Ahmet Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position (*Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*). In this work, which appeared in 2001, before the election of the first AKP government, Davutoğlu argued that the way to advance Turkey's international position depended on its foreign policy, which had to be based on the creation of concentric zones of influence that took Turkey's history and geography into consideration.

The AKP's claim for Turkey's improved standing as a result of taking Turkey's history and geography into consideration is continuously repeated in this section. Moreover, this claim for Turkey's improved standing is not only presented textually, but also in a visual manner by three very meaningful pictures right at the beginning of this section. The very first picture belongs to Prime Minister Erdoğan shaking hands with the American President Obama. The second is a Middle Eastern woman (possibly a Palestinian) holding a picture of Erdoğan (possibly during a rally). The third is

Erdoğan addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations.¹¹ This is followed by an introduction that gives an overview of the paradigmatic transformation that the AKP has engendered on Turkey's foreign policy. The paragraph starts as

The foreign policy vision of the AK Party involves realistic understanding of Turkey's historical accumulations, geopolitical location and the new dynamics of a globalizing world. Our party, which has turned globalization into an opportunity, has managed to establish a balance between national and universal values, and has made "paradigmatic transformation" that will make Turkey a leading country in the 21st century.¹²

Here, not only the AKP's foreign policy vision is stressed, but also the location where this vision is taking place, as the party seems to be very proud of unleashing this new

vision, in one of the most important regions of the world, at the intersection point of the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus. Thus making our region's continuity, historical depth, cultural fluidity and human geography as the bases for our foreign policy.¹³

Reminding the reader how this "transformation" and "vision" are appreciated by Turks and their allies, and how they have "turned Turkey into a country from one that quarrels with its neighbors to a one that exports peace and stability," the manifesto goes on repeating one more time that the AKP has finally managed to

make peace with Turkey's history and geography [which] has long been regarded as a burden and see them as a strategic value. A policy based on historical richness and geostrategic location leads to the empowering of Turkey, its neighbors and its region [*sic*].¹⁴

According to the AKP manifesto, creation of this win-win situation for both Turkey and its neighbors and turning Turkey into a country that "occupied a spectator position into a one that shaped the events," is also related to Turkey's geostrategic location.¹⁵

After highlighting the AKP's foreign policy achievements such as various negotiations, Turkey's ability to show its soft power, the establishment of the office of Public Diplomacy, the mutual abolishing of visas between 90 different countries and Turkey and the creation of Yunus Emre Centers around the world to teach Turkish, the manifesto touches upon an issue dear to the AKP: civilization. The manifesto very proudly talks about the Alliance of Civilization that Turkey co-chairs with Spain founded under the auspices of the United Nations, arguing that the AKP's "civilization perspective has proved that differences in the world are not the source of conflict, but rather a world based on virtue, justice, and respect is possible," and the manifesto promises to continue to make this "civilizational perspective" as one of the central foundations of the AKP foreign policy, along with the fight against

“all kinds of discrimination, racism, xenophobia” including Islamophobia.¹⁶ This section concludes by reiterating several times how the AKP’s foreign policy is about turning Turkey into a leader country, and how this is “in tandem” with the Turkey’s “historical accumulations, cultural depth, geostrategic location.”¹⁷

This extreme consciousness over Turkey’s geography and history in the AKP’s election manifesto is followed by the section that deals with the primary targets of Turkey’s foreign policy. Starting with the European Union (EU), then followed by the USA, Cyprus, the Middle East, the Balkans, Russia and the Caucasus, Central Asia and Turkish [*sic*] Republics, Africa, and East and South-East Asia, the section comes to an end by pointing to the AKP’s foreign policy achievements and projections in Latin America. Obviously, the way these countries and regions are listed indicates the level of priority in terms of the relationship. Yet what is worth noting is that the EU, USA, and even Cyprus precedes the Middle East and the Balkans, places where the Ottoman Empire once ruled, where the AKP would have a more appropriate venue for utilizing Turkey’s “geographical and historical depths.”

But the rhetoric used in portraying Turkey’s affairs with the West and the rest is different. Turkey’s relations with the former are described in a very technical, “it is all business” manner—listing issue areas and the mutual benefits of maintaining and further developing ties with the EU, USA, Cyprus, and with Russia. Interestingly, Turkey’s relations with the Caucasus gets treated within the section that deals with Turkey’s relations with Russia and, what is more, Turkey’s relations with the Caucasus and also with Azerbaijan are just described as “special.” Geography and history-conscious language commence in the part of the manifesto, examining Turkey’s past and future relations with the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia and the Turkic Republics, Africa and East, and South-East Asia. Hence, in the AKP manifesto, with the exception of the Balkans, identification by way of especially geography (and to some extent history) is a constant and is more pronounced when depicting Turkey’s past and future ties with “the East,” a point developed more in depth in this volume in the article by Emel Parlar Dal.¹⁸

The opening paragraph of the section that deals with the Middle East is a case in point of geography and history-conscious language, where Turkey’s geopolitical belonging is highlighted more than other regions, or camps, or any other groupings.

[Our] deep and historical relations with the Middle East region is a factor that contributes to Turkey’s new foreign policy vision. The historical accumulation, geographical location and cultural depth that Turkey has in the region are an important strategic value. Neither in the Balkans nor in the Middle East is Turkey an external or an artificial actor. Turkey is a fundamental part of this geography.¹⁹

After mentioning the AKP’s support for and its efforts toward “protection of peace and stability, prevention of conflicts and meeting the legitimate demands of the people,” the AKP gives its definition of the Middle East:

As part of our foreign policy vision; we see the Middle East not as the center of conflicts, wars, backwardness, poverty and misrule; but rather the center of peace, stability, welfare, culture and civilization. We reject Orientalist approaches related to the Middle East. We support the will of the Middle Eastern people to become the actor of their history.²⁰

The AKP also declared removing the “artificial borders and fake walls between the people of Turkey and the Middle East geography” as one of its goals. The AKP considers this part of a normalization process, which the party promises to

Further develop in the second half of the 21st century [as] this will start a new period of brotherhood, friendship and give and take between the people of the Middle East. The goal is to help citizens of Republic of Turkey travel, trade and to develop projects easily with their partners in all of the Middle East. We also would like to take the steps that will make the people of the Middle East see Turkey as an important center of trade, diplomacy, education and culture.²¹

The very same perspective that blends history and geography and regards Turkey as an integral part of the Middle East is noticed in the case of Balkans, Central Asia, Africa, and South and East Asia as well. These sections start with a clear geographical repositioning of Turkey that relates Turkey to the region in question. In the same vein, Turkey’s ties with Latin American countries are even justified with an ambiguous reference to the Ottoman links of the region. This is done not geographically *per se*, but on the grounds that “Turkish and Latin American societies historical and cultural ties,”²²—a covert reference to migrations to Latin American countries from the Levant in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. The quotes below are the first sentences of the paragraphs that detail Turkey’s relations with different regions.

- The most important area of application of our global vision is the Balkans where we have very strong historical and cultural ties.²³
- Our relations with Central Asia region, Turkish Republics, and greater Turkish geography have gained momentum during the AKP’s rule and have advanced in a manner not comparable to any period in time.²⁴
- Turkey is in the intersection point of European, African, and Asian continents. Our historical ties with Africa, provides us with strategic advantage, in a world that is globalizing and getting smaller.²⁵
- Far East and Southeast Asia are two of the regions, where the expansion of Turkey’s foreign policy vision is experienced. During the AKP rule, Turkey’s political and economic relations with the greater Asian geography had gained momentum and Turkey had become an important trading partner of the region.²⁶

In addition to Turkey’s clear geographical repositioning, the word “geography” is liberally used throughout the manifesto to re-emphasize Turkey’s identification with

these regions. For example, the universities established in Central Asia by Turks are labeled as “‘two important educational and cultural projects in this geography,’ and the goal of improving relations between Turkey and Turkish [*sic*] Republics as an important leg of [the AKP’s] work towards greater Turkish geography.” Overall, in AKP’s 2011 election manifesto, geography has become a clear sign of belonging for Turkey and is a term that is rather used to emphasize Turkey’s ties with the East, rather than the West. What also should be noted is that, for each and every region, it all boils down to highlighting Turkey’s trade ties and also mediation efforts as a peacemaker. These two traits are constantly highlighted regardless of geographical region. Finally, this section of the manifesto concludes with two sub-sections, namely: foreign aid and defense—an obvious reference of the two being as an extension of foreign policy. In this case, both are portrayed as tools that will contribute to Turkey’s international standing indirectly. While it is argued in the manifesto that “the AK Party’s performance in the realm of foreign aid during its leadership, has brought Turkey into a respectable position in its region and in the world,” defense is seen as a tool not only for protecting “the state and the citizens from outside threats, but also for contributing to ‘regional and global peace and stability.’”²⁷ In this sense, the AKP sees peace and stability as two important elements that will increase Turkey’s international standing.

Unlike the AKP, however, the CHP refers to peace, democracy, and development as its foreign policy goals. The section of the manifesto, which states the CHP’s foreign policy goals starts with an appeal “for a just and secure world” and defines the CHP’s envisioned foreign policy as “a foreign policy based on peace, democracy and development.”²⁸ The CHP, whose social democratic qualities were debated in the past few years, does its most to show its subscription to social democracy throughout its election manifesto, but even more so in the section that deals with foreign policy. The manifesto lists ten key principles of Turkish foreign policy under the CHP. These are: peace, equality, respect for human rights and freedoms, solidarity, respect for international law and multilateral institutions, integration, European orientation, universalism, maintaining and establishing regional alliances of peace and security and, finally, realism. Among these principles, the CHP’s “European orientation” and the party’s desire to Europeanize Turkey are repeated several times—even before the section that deals with the CHP’s policy projections with respective regions and/or countries of the world, including Turkey’s relations with the EU. The CHP’s manifesto states that

The orientation toward Europe, which has been rooted in the history of Turkish foreign policy will be continued during CHP’s rule. The CHP defines Europe as a whole that contains values such as democracy, human rights and social state in its foundations. Turkey being part of a Europe defined with these values will empower Turkey. Turkey’s EU membership process has come to a halt as a result of AKP’s mistakes and attitudes of other conservative parties. This process can only be saved as a result of the cooperation of the CHP, which has universalism at foundations of its thinking, with other social democratic

parties. The CHP has started Turkey's EU membership and it is CHP that will bring a happy end to this process.²⁹

The quotes above and below are a powerful contrast to the AKP's approach to Europe and the West. When the CHP highlights Europe, it uses the concept of "universalism" and equates that with Europeanization and European values. "Universalism" by way of European values is also used to make a critique of the AKP's understanding of "civilization" having religion at its core. It is interesting to note that while the CHP accuses the AKP of essentialism, it seems to be unaware of the fact that the wholesale equation of "European values" with "universalism," brings the CHP to the brink of yet another kind of essentialism. Put differently, arguing for the wholesale superiority of one set of values, be it Middle Eastern or European, over the other, can analytically be sometimes the same.

As a social democratic party that links itself to Europe via universal values, one of the most important principles in the realm of foreign policy that CHP will highlight will be the principle of universalism. AKP argues that it is against the clash of civilizations thesis, maintains an introvert civilizational rhetoric, and is under the influence of belief and ethnic based prejudices. Under CHP rule this will come to an end, and relations with all countries will be established through universal values.³⁰

Moreover, the CHP uses the term "center" to describe Turkey's position in the world—a concept, which is (re) popularized by the AKP and Davutoğlu. Though this "central country" concept is not used in the AKP's manifesto, the CHP leadership, critical of the AKP foreign policy, has managed to slip in a term that is popularized and used by the AKP into its own manifesto. The CHP argues that while the main goal should be integration with the EU, it also promises integration with Turkey's immediate region as well. This, according to the CHP, is integration at such a level that it will place Turkey in the "center of North-South and East-West axes in the midst of global mobility."³¹

The CHP's manifesto also lists Turkey's would-be ties with different regions and/or countries. This is worth examining from several aspects. First, unlike the AKP, it does not only list countries or regions, but it is a mix of projections about Turkish foreign policy. This sub-section starts with depicting how the CHP would shape Turkey's ties with the EU and the USA, as well, but these two sections, unlike in the AKP's manifesto, are not followed by Cyprus, but with a section that states the CHP's objectives on Turkey's membership to international organizations and alliances. Given that during the Cold War, Turkey's Western identity was secured through membership to institutions such as Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,³² it is not surprising to see that once again to highlight CHP's Western orientation, these institutions were mentioned along with the EU and the USA. Second, there is a difference between the way the CHP and AKP list these

countries in their respective manifestos. In the CHP's election manifesto, after the subsection highlighting Turkey's Western identity, the manifesto contains sections on Cyprus, Turkish–Greek relations, the Middle East, Iraq, Russia, South Caucasus, Central Asian Republics, Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, Far East and Developing Countries, and Africa. Certain regions and countries get a separate treatment in the CHP's manifesto showing what counts as significant and what does not. Devoting a separate section to Iraq in addition to the section on the Middle East, and separating the South Caucasus from Russia are two cases in point. Moreover, while the CHP disobeys the official lexicon and views that label Turkic Republics in Central Asia as “Turkish Republics,” it only spends three lines on the policies related to that region under a future CHP rule. Third, reading through this section, it can be concluded that neoliberal currents also affect the CHP's discourse as the CHP's manifesto does not neglect to mention the improvement in economic and trade ties with all of the regions in this section. Needless to say, unlike the AKP, the CHP, with the exception of Europe does not associate Turkey, neither historically nor geographically, with any other region. Geopolitics, in other words, exists for CHP only as far as Europe and the West are considered—a reflection of the maintenance and perpetuation of the Kemalist modernization.

For the MHP, foreign policy, like the AKP, is largely about security and geopolitics. The key goals of foreign policy in the election manifesto are listed as: protecting and developing national security and the national interest, constructing a belt of peace and security around us, starting with our neighbors establishing relations based on mutual respect and benefit, [and] resolving existing problems with protecting Turkey's rights and interests and within the framework of international law. These goals, according to the MHP, should be based on foreign policy “with a character” that is “not only based on trade,” but also on Turkey's “location, history and socio-cultural structure and the fact that [it] is a great country with deep roots.”³³ For the MHP, Turkey is in the “center of Eurasian geopolitics,” and the MHP would do everything to transform Turkey into a “powerful country with an esteemed position in international relations and world politics, whose friendship is sought.”³⁴ Turkey being a “central country” is also repeated. In addition to this, the MHP manifesto, unlike others, does not list the MHP's would-be policies with respective countries and regions. Rather, there are seven sub-sections with declarations on the would-be policies of the MHP and that also touch upon countries and regions. Accordingly, and not surprisingly, the MHP manifesto lists “Caucasus and Central Asia Turkish World” as areas of prime importance to the MHP, followed by Cyprus, where the MHP argues that the party will not permit “the destruction of Cypriot Turkishness under the name of political solution.”³⁵ Turkey's relations with the EU, according to the MHP manifesto, will not be regarded as an issue of “identity and destiny.” Turkey's relations with the rest, i.e. “the US, Russia, the countries of the Black Sea, the Caspian Basin, the Balkans and the Middle East” are dealt under the subsection that says “a multidirectional politics will be pursued.” But here the MHP goes into an interesting differentiation between East and West. While “the geography that expands between the Balkans, the Caucasus,

the Middle East and Central Asia” is associated with common culture and history, the common ground with “the Western world” is the “democratic values that has strategic accumulation.”³⁶ Put differently, the commonalities with the East are represented by way of common history and culture, while the commonalities with the West are with the values. Hence, for the MHP, Turkey is Western because of its democratic values, but nothing more. Interestingly, this approach, in some ways, concurs with that of AKP’s that prioritized relations with the East and substantiated this prioritization with common history and geography.

The EDÖB’s very short section on foreign policy is a collection of radical actions that would be taken in the case of the EDÖB’s rule. As one can easily guess, the EDÖB’s manifesto is kind of an anti-thesis of all manifestos that are examined so far. The manifesto proposes policies such as leaving diplomatic relations to local authorities that would be established under “democratic autonomy,” Turkey’s withdrawal from the NATO, and supporting a wide array of ethnic groups abroad that are fighting against their rulers. It does not get into the specifics with other countries or regions like other parties do, but ends with a note on the EU that states “relations with the EU will be conducted within the above said framework.”³⁷ As a result, this section highlights not the bloc’s foreign policy agenda *per se*, but it is more of a demonstration of the bloc’s specific concerns such as the “democratic autonomy” by way of foreign policy agenda. Foreign policy, in other words, is instrumental to make the case for the BDP’s one of the items on its agenda, i.e. “democratic autonomy.”

Conclusion

During the 2011 elections, foreign policy continued to oscillate between being an issue and a non-issue for political parties in Turkey. It was a non-issue because past surveys had shown that Turkish voter preferred to vote on economic issues. Yet despite being relegated into a tertiary role, foreign policy still could not be disregarded and discarded in the greater scheme of things for two reasons. First, foreign policy has become one of the ways and means to make the point for the AKP’s “leader country” or the MHP’s “rising country,” and even the CHP’s “free country” visions, respectively. Second, these manifestos show us the perspectives that these parties hold on Turkey’s past, present, and future identity.

This article has explored ways in which the three parties and a bloc that gained seats in the current parliament approached various issues of foreign policy in their election manifestos during the 2011 parliamentary elections in Turkey. The AKP and MHP manifestos were the most geopolitically charged. The echoes of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu’s “geographical and historical depth” and his approach to civilizations were all obvious in the AKP’s manifesto where the AKP primarily envisioned Turkey with more commonalities with the East than the West, although it ranked Turkey’s relations with the West first in the section dealing with foreign policy. Similarly, the geopolitical intonations were very clear in the MHP’s manifesto, but the East and the West were clearly demarcated on a thematic basis. Turkey’s commonality with the East was defined in terms of common

history and culture. For the MHP, the West and Turkey, on the other hand, portrayed as only sharing democratic values in common. By way of foreign policy, with nothing but a Europe attitude, the CHP, yet again highlighted its Kemalist orientation. It also made a critique of the AKP, arguing that European values were the universal ones. The EDÖB's short notes on foreign policy, on the other hand, became a venue where some of BDP's demands including "democratic autonomy" were highlighted.

While the AKP continues to give ambiguous signals, the CHP's and MHP's dealing with the West and the rest is interesting, especially given the level of Euro-scepticism of these two parties. Hakan Yılmaz, according to the data collected in 2003, has concluded that the MHP voters were the "most intense Eurosceptics," and that CHP's slow conversion, as a party, after 2002 to "soft Euroscepticism" was concomitant with the patterns of the other Eurosceptic parties elsewhere.³⁸ While it is quite unexpected for a party like MHP known for its high level of Euro-scepticism to embrace Europe even if this is on a value basis, the CHP's insistence on Europe and European values might be a combination of "Kılıçdaroğlu effect," mixed with Kemalism, at least at a rhetorical level. Yılmaz also projected that the CHP might reconvert pro-EU position without losing voters,³⁹ and that how much of the pro-Europe attitude in foreign policy presented in the CHP's 2011 election manifesto might be translated into a pro-EU politics is a big unknown. Overall, election manifestos one more time became venues, where clear and distinct identity perspectives of the respective parties were conveyed to the general public. All these messages relayed through foreign policy performance and projections might not have too much effect on voter preferences, yet continue to be indicators of parties' respective worldviews on identity.

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Notes

1. Ali Çarikoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *Turkish Democracy Today: Elections, Protest and Stability in an Islamic Society* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2007), Ch. 7.
2. Ali Çarikoğlu, "A New Electoral Victory for the 'Pro-Islamists' or the 'New Centre-Right'? The Justice and Development Party Phenomenon in the July 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2007), p. 518. For others examining the role of economy in shaping voter behavior at the ballot box at particular times and also in general please see Ali T. Akarca and Aysit Tansel, "Economic Performance and Political Outcomes: An Analysis of the Turkish Parliamentary and Local Election Results between 1950 and 2004," *Public Choice*, Vol. 129, No. 1/2 (2006), pp. 77–105; Ali T. Akarca and Aysit Tansel, "Social and Economic Determinants of Turkish Voter Choice in the 1995 Parliamentary Election," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3

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3. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Public Choice and Foreign Affairs: Democracy and International Relations,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40 (2009), pp. 59–83.
 4. “Seçim Sonrası İlk Seçim Anketi,” *Milliyet*, 2 July 2011.
 5. In order to be able to evade the 10% electoral threshold set to win seats in the Turkish parliament, the BDP and various other smaller leftist parties and groups that did not have the chance to pass the ten percent electoral threshold formed a bloc in April 2011 named EDOB (Labor Democracy and Freedom Bloc). The bloc stated that they are representing different groups who are “repressed.” The bloc’s candidates ran independently in the elections. After winning the elections, most of the bloc’s candidates joined the BDP. See, “Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloğu Kuruldu” *Evrensel.net*, 6 April 2011, available at <http://www.evrensel.net/news.php?id=3607> accessed on 2 October 2011. This being said, not all bloc members of Kurdish origin eventually joined the BDP. Some of them preferred to stay independent or form their own parties as in the case of Şerafettin Elçi. As a result, for the BDP, it will be the EDÖB’s manifesto that will be under scrutiny.
 6. See, for example, Erdoğan’s campaign speeches delivered in Düzce and Ankara on May 7th and 29th, respectively. The Düzce speech is available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/neden-ak-parti-hedef-cunku/7498> and Ankara at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/insallah-chp-ve-mhpyi-sandiga-gomuyoruz/8157>, both accessed on 2 September 2011.
 7. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Hesaplaşma Değil, Hellaleşme Günüdür,” available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/hesaplasma-degil-helallesme-gunudur/8517> accessed on 3 October 2011.
 8. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
 9. For an example of literature that developed both praising and critiquing the foreign policy of AKP and Davutoğlu, please see Gürkan Zengin, *Hoca: Türk Dış Politikasında Davutoğlu Faktörü* (İstanbul: Inkilap Kitabevi, 2011); Ahmet Sözen, “A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges,” *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2010), pp. 103–123; Bülent Aras, “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy,” *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 32, May 2009, available at <http://www.setav.org/ups/dosya/7710.pdf> accessed on 2 October 2011; Nur Bilge Criss, “Parameters of Turkish Foreign Policy Under the AKP Governments,” *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No. 23, May 2010, available at <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/UNIS/article/view/UNIS1010230009A/26968> accessed on 2 October 2011; Ziya Öniş, “Multiple Faces of the New Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique,” *GLODEM Working Paper Series* No. 04/201 available at http://glodem.ku.edu.tr/10_004.pdf accessed on 2 October 2011.
 10. See *Türkiye Hazır Hedef 2023:12 Haziran 2011 Genel Seçimleri Beyanname* available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/beyanname2011.pdf> accessed on 2 October 2011; *Özgürlüğün ve Umudun Ülkesi, Herkesin Türkiye’si: CHP 2011 Seçim Bildirgesi* available at http://www.chp.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/secim_bildirgesi-web.pdf accessed on 2 October 2011; and *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 2011 Seçim Beyanname*, 2023’e Doğru Yükselen Ülke Türkiye Sözleşmesi available at http://www.mhp.org.tr/kitaplar/MHP_2011_SecimBeyanname.pdf accessed on 2 October 2011. For another and more visual version of AKP’s election manifesto please see <http://www.akhedefler.com/vaadler.pdf>. Accessing the election manifestos was another problem. The election manifestos of the AKP, CHP, and MHP were available in pdf format on their official websites with proper party name plus the regular org.tr extensions. Accessing the EDÖP, i.e. the pre-morphed BDP, manifesto online fully was slightly more difficult, as both during the election campaign and at the time of the writing of this article, what is now the official BDP website was and still is hosted at an open source

blogger website at <http://bdpblog.wordpress.com>. Moreover, on that website, one could see the itemized list of the issues; and foreign policy was listed, not surprisingly, the last. Yet of this itemized list only first three items were explained in detail on EDÖB's election manifesto, namely democratization; economy, education, and health; and women. The rest of the manifesto that included foreign policy was and still not at the [wordpress.com](http://www.ertugrulkurkcu.org) website at the time of the writing, another clear indication of what is and is not important for the bloc. However, luckily, the EDÖB's fully detailed election manifesto, including the bloc's foreign policy projections, was available on Ertuğrul Kürkçü's personal website, an EDÖB member, now a BDP member representing Mersin in the Parliament, giving the author of this article the chance to make a comparative analysis. For the copy of EDÖB's manifesto on Ertuğrul Kürkçü's website, please see *Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloku Seçim Beyannamesi* available at <http://www.ertugrulkurkcu.org/duyurular/emek-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-bloku-secim-beyannamesi/> accessed on 2 October 2011.

11. *Türkiye Hazır Hedef 2023:12 Haziran 2011 Genel Seçimleri Beyannamesi*, p. 146, 147.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Emel Parlar Dal, "The Transformation of Turkey's Relations with the Middle East: Illusion or Awakening?" *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2012), pp. 245–267.
19. *Türkiye Hazır Hedef 2023:12 Haziran 2011 Genel Seçimleri Beyannamesi*, p. 153.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–157.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
28. *Özgürlüğün ve Umudun Ülkesi, Herkesin Türkiye'si: CHP 2011 Seçim Bildirgesi*, p. 121.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–124.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
32. See, for example, Eylem Yılmaz and Pınar Bilgin, "Constructing Turkey's 'Western' Identity During the Cold War," *International Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2005–2006), pp. 39–59; Meltem Müftüler Baç, "The Never Ending Story: Turkey and the European Union," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (1998), p. 243.
33. *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 2011 Seçim Beyannamesi, 2023'e Doğru Yükselen Ülke Türkiye Sözleşmesi*, pp. 184–185.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
37. *Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloku Seçim Beyannamesi* available at <http://www.ertugrulkurkcu.org/duyurular/emek-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-bloku-secim-beyannamesi/> accessed on 2 October 2011.
38. Hakan Yılmaz, "Euro-scepticism in Turkey: Parties, Elites and Public Opinion," *South European Politics and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2011), pp. 185–208. On CHP's "soft-Euro-scepticism" please also see Seçkin Barış Gülmez, "The EU Policy of Republican People's Party: An Inquiry on the Opposition Party and Euro-Skepticism in Turkey," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2008), pp. 423–436.
39. Yılmaz, "Euro-scepticism in Turkey," p. 205.