
Turkish Foreign Policy's Bosnia and Herzegovina Exam (1990-1995)

Yiğit Anıl GÜZELİPEK

guzelipek@gmail.com

Abstract

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the status quo within the Balkans had changed very dramatically in any aspect. In particular, the “new born” states started to attract the attention of the Turkish foreign policy in the sense of defense, security and economic interests. Taking the Turkey's strong historical and cultural connections with Bosnia and Herzegovina under consideration it is quite possible to investigate the Turkish perspective in the frame of Alexander Wendt's famous social constructivism theory. Needless to say that, despite forming the fundamental approach of the Turkish foreign policy; social constructivism cannot explain the Turkish approach by itself. Concerning the war period, there were several political actors and internal/external dynamics which affected the Turkish foreign policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. This paper seeks to analyze this approach not only in the framework of social constructivism but also including global and domestic realities.

Key Words: Turkish Foreign Policy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Social Constructivism, Neo-Ottomanism, Realism

Türk Dış Politikasının Bosna-Hersek Sınavı (1990-1995)

Özet

Yugoslavya'nın parçalanması, Balkanlar'daki dengeleri her bakımdan derinden değiştiren bir gelişme olarak karşımıza çıkmıştır. Özellikle de bağımsızlığını ilan eden yeni devletler, savunma, güvenlik ve ekonomik ilişkiler bağlamında diğer politik aktörlerin olduğu kadar Türk dış politikasının da dikkatini çekmiştir. Türkiye'nin Bosna-Hersek ile olan tarihsel ve kültürel ilişkilerinin derinliğini düşündüğümüzde Bosna-Hersek Krizi Alexander Wendt'in ünlü sosyal yapısalcılık teorisiyle açıklanabilir bir hal almaktadır. Ancak, her ne kadar sosyal yapısalcılık Türk dış politikasının Bosna-Hersek perspektifinin temelini oluştursa da tek başına Türk perspektifini açıklamada yeterli değildir. Savaş zamanında, Türk dış politikasını etkileyen birçok içsel ve dışsal unsurlar göze çarpmaktadır. Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin savaş zamanı Bosna-Hersek politikasını sosyal yapısalcılığın yanında küresel ve içsel dinamikleri de dâhil ederek açıklamayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dış Politikası, Bosna-Hersek, Sosyal Yapısalcılık, Yeni-Osmanlıcılık, Realizm

1. Introduction: Social Constructivism

The theory of social constructivism is on human and identity awareness consciousness and its place in world affairs. Much international relations theory, and especially neorealism, is materialist; it focuses on how the distribution of material power, such as military forces and economic capabilities defines balances of power between states and explains the behavior of states. Constructivists reject such a one sided material focus. They argue that the most important aspect of international relations is social, not material. Furthermore, they argue that this social reality is not objective, or external, to the observer of international affairs. The social and political world, including the world of international relations, is not a physical entity or material object that is outside human consciousness. Consequently, the study of international relations must focus on the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene as well as the shared understandings between them.¹

Alexander Wendt lists the basic standpoints of social constructivism as follows:

- a) States are the principal units of analysis for international political theory;
- b) The key structures in the state system are inter-subjective, rather than material;
- c) State identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics.²

Wendt's first standpoint argues that states are the major political actor of the international system. In this context, second and the third standpoints focus on the importance of identity and state interests during the building process of foreign policy rather than the material conditions.

As soon as the war broke out in Bosnia, the state identity of Turkey in the sense of its mutual social structures became significant in the policy formulations of the Turkish Parliament throughout the war. Unlike the western actors, immediately, this formulation led Ankara to mark the distinction between the victim and aggressor right from the beginning of the war.

2. Turkish Perspective on Bosnia and Herzegovina Crises

In 1991, when the armed conflict broke out in Croatia, Turkey had perceived the existing developments in Yugoslavia as a civil war and Turkey also decelerated

¹ Social Constructivism, http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199285433/jackson_chap06.pdf, (Reached: 30.12.2010) (Dead link)

² Alexander WENDT, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No.2, 1994, p.385. See also <http://www.theory-talks.org/2008/04/theory-talk-3.html>, (Reached: 30.12.2010)

the capability of Yugoslavia Federal Army (JNA) to suppress the armed conflict. In this context, during the course of early conflicts, Turkey and Yugoslavia maintained their friendly relations which were particularly based on the economic involvements. Shortly before the war erupted, State Minister Cemil Cicek Mother Land Party (MP) went to Belgrade in order to attend the 8th Meeting of the Turkish-Yugoslavian Economic Cooperation Joint Commission. After five months, Yalim Erez, the former President of the Turkish Union of Chambers and Stock Exchange, decelerated that joint investments could be launched between the two states to sell goods to third parties. In the same way, in October 1990 the 2nd Turkish-Yugoslavian Business Conference stated the mutual understanding signed by Yalim Erez and Milan Pavic, former President of Yugoslav Economic Chamber. We can easily argue that in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the two states continued to preserve their mutual economic practices.³

On the other hand, when separatist tendencies within Yugoslavia became obvious by 1991, Ankara maintained that the constituent republics should resolve their disputes through negotiation, on several occasions, including during former Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic's visit to Ankara on 15 July, former Foreign Minister Safa Giray's (MP) visit to Sarajevo on 30 August and a Turkish delegation's visit to Yugoslavia on 23 October.⁴

In the light of this information, we observe that Turkey's initiatives towards Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) became a priority during the shuttle diplomacy efforts between Turkey and Yugoslavia and official Turkish perspective started to comprehend Balkans territory as BiH and rest of the territory. Turkey's watchful and moderate attitude was reserved on following standpoints:

- a) Since 1980, Yugoslavia was Turkey's collaborator allied against the Greece and Bulgaria;
- b) Yugoslavia was securing Turkey's commercial safety in Balkans;
- c) The collapse of Yugoslavia was very open to cause an immigrant flow to Turkey when Turkish economy was experiencing a difficult period;
- d) Ultimately, Turkish foreign policy makers were avoiding causing Orthodox-Muslim decomposition in Balkans.

Besides the Turkey's domestic concerns related with the ethnic mobilization in BiH, there were some important external factors which had to taken into consideration by Turkish foreign policy makers respectively:

³ Didem EKINCI, "The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach", *International Relations Academic Journal*, Vol.6, No.22, 2009, pp.40-41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41.

In the first place, the unwilling attitude of the American foreign policy was limiting the effectiveness of the Turkey's attempts. Without any doubt, a single sided attempt against the BiH would not be a rational foreign policy choice for Turkey when we consider the nature of the Turkish-American relations at those years.

In the second place, the Slav-Orthodox axis within the Yugoslavia territory, basically built by Russia and Greece was a very strong obstacle for the Turkish foreign policy makers. During the war, this axis also blocked the movement area of UN on its attempts in order to stop the ethnic war.

Lastly, Turkey's chronic terrorism problem was becoming a priority for Turkey despite of the fact that the war within the Yugoslavia was a irrefutable foreign policy issue for the foreign policy makers.

Nevertheless, in the face of increasing attacks, the former Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin Social Democrat People's Party (SDPP) declared that Turkey is ready to send troops to the United Nations Protecting Force (UNPROFOR) in January 1992 upon request. European Community (EC) recognized BiH in April 1992 and this approach is very welcomed by Turkey. Immediately afterwards, when the local conflicts turned into an intense fighting, the former Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel stated that Turkey would bring the issue to the agenda in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in April 1992. In this context, Ankara sent a diplomatic delegation to Belgrade in April 1992 for a six day diplomatic visit to hold discourses with the political leaders of Serbia, BiH, missions of the EC and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Meanwhile, Bosnian Deputy Prime Minister and State former Minister Erdal Inonu (SDPP) to state that despite the recent ceasefire, Serb militants were out of the international control. Additionally, Turgut Ozal contacted with Bush, Mitterrand, King Fahd, Rafsancani and Mubarek for active support.⁵

On the other hand, we can observe that Turgut Ozal sought to use Turkey's geostrategic position during the course of Gulf War to mobilize the international community by publicly stating:

“Failure of the UN to stop Serbian aggression against Bosnian Muslims has cause growing anger in Turkey, where the population is overwhelmingly Muslim. Turkey will probably refuse to permit the continued use of a Turkish air base for bombing Iraq unless the world community does something to stop the bloodshed in BiH.”⁶

⁵ EKINCI, “The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach”, p.42.

⁶ Angry Over Bosnia, Turks May Halt Use of Airbase, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-01-28/news/mn-2374_1_incirlik-air-base, (Reached: 01.01.2011)

BiH held a referendum on 1 March 1992 and on 22 May 1992 the country became a member of UN.⁷ Shortly after, Mustafa Baş Welfare Party (WP) reminded the BiH's wide support during the Turkish-Greek War in 1919-1922 and he stated that Turkey's support to BiH has to be on the same level with an intimacy.

In parallel, he also suggested an active stance from the Turkish Parliament against the arrestment of Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic by stating the longing to 13th century Ottoman sultans Sultan Murad and Osman Ghazi's spirit.⁸ Shortly after, at the Turkish Parliament, Bosnian Deputy Minister Muhammed Cengic stated that Bosnian officials thought the West would not allow ethnic cleansing in the middle of Europe and that the crises in Europe had now become a thing of the past. As the weak measures taken by the UN did not suffice for even moving physically from one point to another in Sarajevo, the Bosnians look to Turkey for help.⁹

From thus far mentioned developments, we may outline that the war in BiH that is created by Serbian forces set a very serious set of problems for Turkey. Based on the fact that Serbian nationalist ideology was identifying all Muslims, whether they are Albanians, Bosnians, Pomak or Romanies as Turks and this situation was making the Turkish public opinion more sensitive and competitive against the war in BiH. Thus, the Turkish government has felt considerable pressure from public opinion that has called for action and accused the government.¹⁰

Besides that, Turkey's concerns was not limited to religious ties. As of 31 December 1994, there are an estimated 20.000 Bosnians living particularly around Istanbul area, which continues to maintain close ties with Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹¹ In this context, Neo-Ottomanists in Turkey such as Cengiz Candar and Nur Vergin who had very close ties to former Turkish President Turgut Ozal, used this as a way of arguing that Turkishness is not an ethnic category but rather a construct for and by Anatolian, Balkan and Caucasian Muslim populations on the basis of their common Ottoman experience.¹² Thus, as a result of the domestic and international pressure, Turkey is pushed to ally itself with the Bosnian Muslims.

⁷Tulay SOBUTAY and Cem AKGUN, "Bosna ve Hersek: Ulke Etudu", Istanbul Ticaret Odasi, Istanbul, 1998, p.19.

⁸Alija Izzetbegovic was taken into custody on 2 May 1992 and released within 24 hours.

⁹EKINCI, "The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach", p.42-43.

¹⁰Cigdem BALIM, et al., *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, BrillPress, Leiden, 1995, p.7.

¹¹Migration Case Study,

<http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/library/Balkans/Turkey%20+economic%20effect%20of%20%20emign.pdf>, (Reached: 03.01.2011)

¹²Hakan M. YAVUZ, "Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy In Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism" *Middle East Critique*, vol. 7, no.12, 1998, p.21.

Exactly at this point, I would like to discuss the Turkey's initiatives until the London Conference which aimed to stop the war by forming a political solution receipt as a result of the worsening situation in BiH.

As is known, there were several peace initiatives made by Turkey before the London Conference which took place between 26-28 August 1992 in London. The first initiative was the Resolution 749 which was adopted by the UNSC calling all the member states to cooperate with the efforts of EC to secure a cease-fire and political solution in BiH.

This diplomatic initiative had been followed by the application of Turkey to UN which was asking the necessary precautions to protect the territorial integrity of BiH. At the same time, Turkey also sent some diplomatic notifications to USA, Islam and European countries to draw attention against the worsening situation in BiH. In this context, Turkish proposal about humanitarian aid for the people of BiH was approved in the June meeting of Foreign Ministers of Islamic OIC which took place in Istanbul. Yet, the diplomatic attempts of the international community were insufficient to secure a ceasefire in BiH. Being aware of this, on 17 June 1992, Turkey called international community to carry out a military intervention to stop the war and at the same time, Turkey clearly expressed its readiness to contribute an international force in case of a potential military intervention.¹³

CSCE had been an organization where Turkish diplomacy played a very remarkable role for BiH. Mostly, as a result of the Turkey's diplomatic attempts, BiH has been accepted to CSCE. Yet, at this point it has to be said that, CSCE's attempts were unsuccessful in solving the conflict despite its self-formalized proposals.

On 10 June 1992, the Committee of Senior Officials of the CSCE called the UN to consider a military intervention to stop the armed conflict in BiH. This was the first call with such a nature by one of the international organization which was followed in the same way by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) under Turkish chairmanship.¹⁴

In brief, these 4 standpoints were forming the basics of the Turkish foreign policy towards BiH during the abovementioned period:

- d) all the leading western powers including the USA, Germany, France and Britain have to be involved to the problematic;

¹³Birgul DEMIRTAS COSKUN, "Ankara ve Berlin'in Bosna Savasina Yonelik Politikolari: Karsilastirmali Bir Inceleme", *International Relations Academic Journal*, vol.4, no.13, p.65.

¹⁴EKINCI, "The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach", p.46.

¹⁵*Ibid.*,

- e) definitely, BiH's territorial integrity has to be protected;
- f) none of the national communities in BiH should not be annexed by an any external power;
- g) BiH has to have a federal state structure and Bosnian Serbians have to join this political structure to maintain the BiH's multi-ethnic and religious sociocultural structure.¹

Thereupon, Serbian former Prime Minister Milan Panic visited Turkey and asked Ankara not to intervene in the Bosnian Conflict.¹⁵

In this respect, in January 1993, Mutman (SDPP) underlined that although it had the resolve, Turkey would not unilaterally engage in an intervention. First, any attack outside the UN framework would not be legitimate. Second, Turkey would have to ask Bulgaria for flight permission and call of the blockade in the Adriatic Sea.¹⁶ Turkey eventually joined the NATO operation in 1993 in accordance with the UN Resolution 816 for enforcement of the no-fly zone over BiH.¹⁷

In February 1994, NATO gave an ultimatum telling the Serbs to pull back all the heavy artillery. NATO announced that if the Serbs did not comply with the ultimatum, it would bomb the Serb targets. This ultimatum was very welcomed by Turkey and shortly after it was stated by the former Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller that the NATO plan had already been proposed to the UNSC by in Turkey in August 1992 and it was in essence the Turkish thesis.¹⁸

By March 1994, UN approved the deployment of Turkish troops in BiH.¹⁹ Following this, the Bosnians and Croats signed a peace treaty in Washington to establish a federation. Upon increasing Turkish efforts, the UN decided unanimously to send Turkish troops to BiH despite Greek opposition. Former President Süleyman Demirel openly expressed that Turkish troops did not go to BiH to revive the Ottoman Empire but to help bring peace.²⁰

As I mentioned before it is very arguable from where comes the Neo-Ottomanism issue but Süleyman Demirel's statement is a very good example in order to demonstrate how the western media detected the Turkish foreign policy activism towards BiH.

¹⁶ "Panic Turk Subayı İstedi", *Milliyet*, 13/08/1992

¹⁷ EKINCI, "The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach", p.49.

¹⁸This proposal was given by Sevket Kazan (WP/Kocaeli) on behalf of the WP. The proposal stated that Turkey could use force within the framework of Article 51 of the UN Charter against the Serbs.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pg:50

²⁰"Ve,Turk Askeri Bosna'ya Giriyor ", *Hürriyet*, 06/03/1994

²¹ "Bosna'ya 2700 Turk Askeri", *Cumhuriyet*, 25/03/1994

Despite of the fact that Turkey's intense interest against the war had been misunderstood, the belated NATO intervention began through the end of August eventually, joined by 60 war planes including Turkish F-16s. A total of 90 targets of ammunition depots, command centers and defense systems were hit with approximately 300 sorties.²¹ Shortly after, diplomatic traffic in Ankara accelerated. Alija Izetbegovic came to Ankara on 4 September and met US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke. During the visit, Holbrooke stated that any peace operation would necessitate Turkey's participation. It was also reported that the USA wanted Turkey to use its influence upon the Bosnian Muslims in future peace talks.²²

On 8 September, the Foreign Ministers of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia reached a compromise in Geneva. Bosnia was divided into Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) which meant that the Serbs officially recognized BiH. Serbs began to pull back in September upon which NATO ended its air strikes. Accordingly, the fighting parties convened in New York in late September for peace negotiations. The final document of the negotiation came into being as the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) and constituted the final settlement of 4 years of fighting.²³

Under the light of these information, Turkish foreign policy has been very active towards the BiH Crises. Turkey started and promoted some important initiatives within the framework of UN, other western organizations and OIC. Concerning the fact that in the spring of 1995 west finally decided to do what Turkey had advocated from the beginning of the war.

We can argue that Turkish foreign policy towards the BiH offered a very realistic structure from the beginning of the war. The period between 28 August 1992 to mid 1995 has clearly proved the Turkish thesis that the aggressor can not be deterred by the tools of diplomacy.

However, being active and realistic are not the sufficient tools for the success of a foreign policy. If we analyze the Turkish diplomacy towards BiH from 1992 to 1995 with the regard to the length of the war, we can hardly view the Turkish foreign policy as successful. For all that, in my point of view, it is impossible to argue about full success of any foreign policy, including Ankara-Sarajevo cantered Balkan policies between 1992 and 1995.

²² "Korfez Savaşı Gibi", *Hürriyet*, 01/09/1995

²³ "Türkiye Balkanlar'a Ağırliğini Koydu", *Cumhuriyet*, 06/09/1995

²⁴ EKINCI, "The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach", pp.52-53.

3. Conclusion

As a result of those analyses, according to my point of view social constructivism sets the best explanation of the Turkish foreign policy towards BiH. Turkey's possessive attitude towards the issue shows us that the society which shares the similar socio-cultural conditions presents a similar perspective and interest against the political issues.

During the crises, Turkey's recent discovery of multiple identities and the need to have a historically framework of cooperation have transformed the Turkish politics from being an immobile and narrow perspective into a more outward looking and competitive structure. In other words, the turn toward imagined Ottoman roots of Turkish history is likely to offer new options and strategies.

Naturally, there are several counter arguments against the practicability and the success of the idea of Neo-Ottomanism which anticipates a new expansion throughout the former Ottoman Empire territory. One of the most common argument is that neo-Ottomanism is a nostalgic passion in the age of nation states. The second widely argued criticism against the neo-Ottomanism is the negative reaction of Turkey's Balkan neighbours' to such ideas. In my point of view, it should not be wrong to say that neo-Ottomanism does not provide any practical benefits for interests of Turkey and at the same time for the solution of the current problems. Yet, as I mentioned above neo-Ottomanism can be considered as a "springboard" in the course of multidirectional new Turkish policy expansion

In the second place, concerning the Turkish approach towards the BiH question, we can argue that ethnicism and the national identity in the politics which is very much shaped by domestic transformations and the new political and economic elite's perception are not fixed in tradition but rather they are reformulated by each generation and created dialectically in relation to changing the social and political conditions and to achieve the national interests. In other words, we might argue that social and political conditions are the most important decisive factor of the foreign policy course rather than the traditional foreign policy understanding.

References

- Balım Ç., (1995) et al., *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, Brill Press, Leiden,
- Demirtas C. B., "Ankara ve Berlin'in Bosna Savaşına Yönelik Politikaları: Karşılaştırmalı Bir İnceleme", *International Relations Academic Journal*, Vol.4, No.13.

Ekinci D., (2009) “*The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach*”, International Relations Academic Journal, Vol.6, No.22.

Sobutay T. and Akgun C., (1998) “*Bosna ve Hersek: Ülke Etüdü*”, İstanbul Chamber of Commerce Press, İstanbul.

Wendt A., (1994) “*Collective Identity Formation and the International State*”, American Political Science Review, Vol. 88, No.2.

Yavuz H., “*Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism*”.

“*PanicTurk Subayı İstedi*”, Milliyet, 13/08/1992

“*Ve, Turk Askeri Bosna'ya Giriyor*”, Hürriyet, 06/03/1994

“*Bosna'ya 2700 Turk Askeri*”, Cumhuriyet, 25/03/1994

“*Korfez Savaşı Gibi*”, Hürriyet, 01/09/1995

“*Turkiye Balkanlar'a Agirligini Koydu*”, Cumhuriyet, 06/09/1995

<http://balkaninfo.wordpress.com/2009/09/02/u-s-and-bin-laden-were-arming-bosnian-and-srebrenica-muslims-since-1992>

http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199285433/jackson_chap06.pdf

<http://www.theory-talks.org/2008/04/theory-talk-3.html>

http://articles.latimes.com/1993-01-28/news/mn-2374_1_incirlik-air-base

<http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/library/Balkans/Turkey%20+economic%20effect%20of%20%20emign.pdf>

<http://balkaninfo.wordpress.com/2009/09/02/u-s-and-bin-laden-were-arming-bosnian-and-srebrenica-muslims-since-1992/>