



## Turkey's Ambitions to Emerge as a Regional Power: Example or Counter-Example for Potential Aspiring Competitors

**Georgios C. Baltos**

*Ph.D.(c) of Business School,  
University of the Aegean, Chios, Greece*

**Ioannis G. Vidakis**

*Ph.D. of Business School,  
University of the Aegean, Chios, Greece*

**Janis Balodis**

*MA student, Belaruassian Economic Research and  
Outreach Center (BEROC), Minsk, Belarus*

Doi: 10.1515/ajis-2017-0019

### Abstract

*This paper aims to provide a functional assessment of a country's dynamics at a regional power level, through the development of a tool which shall examine the working hypothesis of a given country's "candidacy" to emerge as a regional power. The power equation applied in order to have such an evaluation has been formulated in a visually enriched and prototype format, given that particularly the geopolitics activate systems of interactions dynamically changing into many dimensions. The scope also includes the criteria verifying the achievement of the regional powers' objectives as well as the review of future relevant prospects through a SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis in a specific spatial and temporal context. Contemporary Turkey shall be taken as an example of this application and, therefore, while enumerating the assessment criteria, it will be briefly examined whether Turkey meets the conditions under discussion. This country has been selected on the grounds that its intentions have been overtly declared and its efforts are underway. The study consequently emphasises on the policy implications of the dilemmatic question if the on-going Turkish regime transformation may be or keep being a pilot for other states' progress in the heavily turmoiled Middle Eastern area.*

**Keywords:** *power measurement, geopolitics, Turkey, regional power, power equation*

### 1. Introduction

In international politics, concentrations of power have been given, at times, several descriptions, "superpower" being prominent, namely a state capable of wielding power and influence at a global level, as introduced in an analysis by W.T.R. Fox and N. Spykman during the 1940's - at the dawn of the then forthcoming post-war new order of things - but also, some decades earlier, by F. Ratzel who was prompted by the super power (Weltmacht) enjoyed by any certain country mainly through its maritime power (Waibl; Herdina, 1998).

Power is a significant attribute in the behaviours of countries that largely determines international relations. It should be underlined that power is defined in the context of certain circumstances and some of its aspects can be measured and, therefore, categorised on the basis

of the degree to which a certain country is able to persuade, influence and/or even coerce other countries into complying with its wishes or otherwise suffer consequences and/or penalties should they refuse (Zagorin, 2006). An important “variation” of the meaning of superpower is “regional power”, namely a powerful state whose capabilities, however, in wielding power and influence are geographically limited. Studies on such a political phenomenon have produced certain theoretical listings of the characteristics identified in principle in regional powers over numerous historical instances. For example, according to the European Consortium for Political Research (University of Oxford, 2008), an inherent characteristic of a regional power is the hegemonic influence, in economic and military terms, exercised in a geographically defined region whose peoples recognise, accept or, at least, tolerate such an influence.

This study, however, aims to provide a more practical assessment of a country’s dynamics at regional power level, through the development of a tool which shall examine the working hypothesis of a given country’s “candidacy” to emerge as a regional power. The scope also includes the criteria verifying the achievement of its target and the review of its future prospects through a SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis in a specific spatio-temporal context. Contemporary Turkey shall be taken as an example of such application and, therefore, while enumerating the assessment criteria, we shall be briefly examining whether Turkey meets the conditions under discussion. This country has been selected on the grounds that its intentions have been overtly declared and its efforts are underway.

According to a speech made by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and incumbent Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who has the “trademark theory” of the so-called Strategic Depth (Statejik Derinlik): “... Turkish foreign policy is driven by three basic principles: a) a vision guiding its course, b) a no crisis-oriented attitude taking measures before crises emerge, and ultimately c) an integration course through systematic deployment on more than one axes...” (Karabat, 2010)). Also, according to one of his previous interviews: “... The region belongs to us. This is our home ... We should take our destiny into our own hands, and for this we need full cooperation and regional integration. The foundation for it is in our history and geography ... we shall combine our assets to get back the golden era in the region, which produced so many of the world’s important civilisations ...” (Karabat, 2010).

## 2. Methodology: A New Form of Power Equation

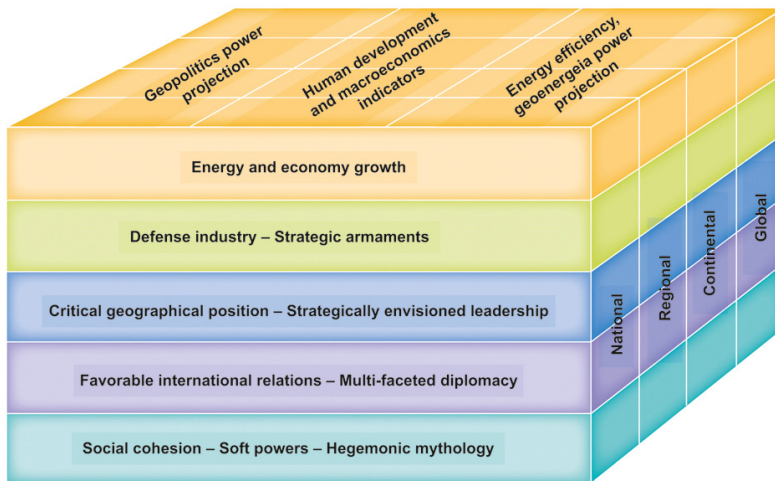
The multi-level and complex issue of gaining or losing power is usually described by means of a polynomial. It is a useful method in so much as it condenses a series of thoughts under a brief and systematic formula which, on the one hand, can be easily communicated and, on the other, it demonstrates the variability of the solution. The causal variables are numerous, the criteria and the respective measurements varied. In the issue under consideration and in the Turkey case study, its prior Prime Minister himself, A. Davutoğlu (Davutoğlu, 2014), proposes such an equation in his book, namely:

$$P = \{(Hi + G + Po + Cu) + (EC + TC + MC)\} \cdot \{SM + SP + PW\}$$

whereas the acronyms are translated and explained as follows:

*Hi: History, G: Geography, Po: Population, Cu: Culture, EC: Economic Capacity, TC: Technological Capacity, MC: Military Capacity, SM: Strategic Mentality, SP: Strategic Planning, PW: Political Will*

The power equation can be originally reformulated in a visually enriched format of analysis which is more appropriate to demonstrate that such an equation is a system of interactions dynamically changing into many dimensions. On the basis of the linear formulas, the polynomials are shown on one dimension, but the political realities derived from power projections are multi-dimensional and subject to a high degree of sensitivity, given that the power factors interact in a manner similar to the rotation of the “Rubik’s Cube” sides and edges:



**Fig. 1.** The 3d power equation is a system of interactions dynamically changing over multiple dimensions (Source: author self – work based on (Williams, 2010) and (Stoiciu, 2010))

In a first theoretical description of the above presented figure (Fig. 2), the five components/power criteria at the front side of the cube are the means and/or the short-term objectives:

1. Energy and economic growth
2. Defence industry – strategic armaments
3. Critical geographical position – strategically envisioned leadership
4. Favourable international relations – multi-faceted diplomacy
5. Social cohesion – soft powers – hegemonic mythology, which interact with the three long-term objectives/strategic power indicators on the top cube's surfaces:
  - I. Geopolitics power projection – II. Human development and macro-economics indices – III. Energy efficiency, geoeconomic power projectionon the four geographical fields of operations as they appear on the third dimension at the side of the cube:
  - i. National – ii. Regional – iii. Continental – iv. Global,in order to configure, on the basis of the probable rotations of the cube sides around the 3d axes, hundreds of statistically possible power projection pathways, which are indicative of the complexity and the multiple factors involved in the achievement and sustenance of the major objective of acquiring and keeping power. It is worthy to highlight that a Rubik cube may 43.252.003.274.489.856 possible combinations (Stoiciu, 2010)!

### 3. The Criteria of a Regional Power's Emerge

On the basis of possible rotations of the faces around the alternative axes, dozens of statistically possible paths are shaped, indicative of the complex and multi-factorial requirements in achieving and maintaining specific objectives, we may proceed into the discussion of the major criteria that qualify countries as regional powers. This is possible because of the analogy between the country states, which motivate their societies towards the well-being of their people, with the majority of public and private sector organizations whose purpose is also to accomplice certain missions motivating their members, stakeholders and resources. In this context, leaders and managers are expected to wisely deal with the knowledge of where their organizations head to and how they get there; the wisdom itself is not related to any superficial skills but to the knowledge management, the

configuration of processes and procedures supporting to the objectives' achievement, the contingency planning, and most of all to the moderate mind-set required for effective crisis management. The risk analysis by definition involves forecasting, feedback, updating and worst case scenario development, given that any risk is no other than the probability of adversary to our objectives events to take place. The success of the leaders is directly interconnected to the extent they are capable of identifying, analysing and assessing risks, executing respective mitigation actions and follow up controls.

### 3.1 The 1<sup>st</sup> criterion: Energy sufficiency

It is taken for granted that superpowers consume exceptionally large energy resources and, consequently, shape their strategies and policies, in general, with a view to ensuring sustainably high availability in energy resources. Likewise, regional powers, although they manage smaller energy quantities, tend to play an active role in the energy issues of their broader region, in fact "dominating" the production or, alternatively, the supply of valuable energy resources.

By applying this specific criterion in the case of Turkey, it can be easily assessed that this country systematically pursues its objective to become a leading actor in the so-called energy diplomacy. Many analysts, in the scope of adopting a respective geo-energy approach (Vidakis, 2015) have identified besides the traditional geopolitical considerations an abundance of geoenergy-related examples in Turkey's respective policies (Energy security and Greece, 2009). Since the R.T. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) took over the government in 2002, Turkey has been energetically pursuing to become a highly crucial energy hub for the European and American imports as well as for Russian exports. It has focused its efforts on playing a politically and technically decisive role in the various projects for the construction and operation of an extended network of gas and oil pipelines (Asche, 2016).

In a similar way, Turkey is also an energy hub for the Middle East since it provides an overland route for the transport of large quantities of the Iranian natural gas, while at the same time it manages the significant water resources of the rivers Tiger and Euphrates, which are a major energy source of the Iraqi and Syrian economies. On the domestic front, during the first terms of the AKP government, major development programmes have been initiated and implemented as well as large-scale financial restructuring programmes in south-eastern Turkey (Karkazis, Vidakis, and Baltos, 2014).

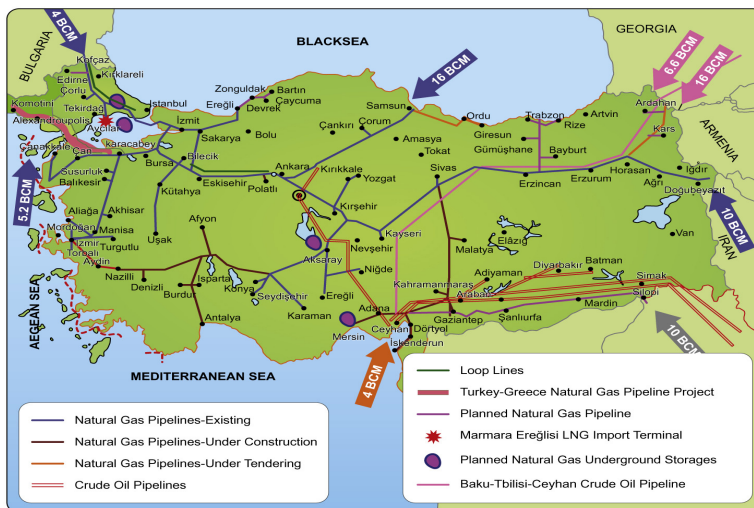


Fig. 2. Turkish planning on gas and oil pipelines' networking (source: Vidakis; Baltos, 2015)

The first decade of AKP governments signalled an ambitious, robust and well-structured national and international energy policy. The latest updates though, referring to the last five years have indicated fatigue in the execution of the original planning, identified over projects cancellation and energy security issues prevailing. In the Oil Pipelines front, Kirkuk-Ceyhan Pipeline (Iraq-Turkey, 970 km-long twin pipeline system ferrying the quarter of Iraq's crude exports). It has been damaged since the first Gulf War, leaving a capacity of just 500,000 b/d, while it is being repeatedly targeted by terrorists. In 2013, it faced 54 separate attacks, reducing the average throughput to the half. In early 2014 Northern Iraq completed a pipeline connecting its oil fields to the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. The pipeline is independent of Iraqi government oversight, has a capacity of over 400,000 b/d, while further pumping upgrades are expected to almost double the flow capacity. Additionally, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, originating in Azerbaijan, with a length of 1,760 km and capacity of around 1mn barrels per day, keeps transporting since 2006 the Caspian crude via Georgia to Turkey (BMI Research, 2017).

On the other front of the Gas Pipelines, the Blue Stream, since 2007 at a capacity of 16.0bcm, connects the Russian gas transit system to Samsun in Turkey, crossing the Black Sea and running on a joint venture between Gazprom and Eni. Strong demand in Turkey has driven to negotiations for the pipeline expansion. The Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) will then take the Shah Deniz Phase II gas from Azerbaijan via Turkey onto Europe. The construction started in 2015 towards estimated works delivery in 2018, winning out over other proposals, like the Nabucco pipeline that was initially supported by the U.S. and the EU. On the other hand, the 900 km South Stream gas pipeline, designed to carry up gas from Russia, through the Black Sea, to Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria has been cancelled, since Gazprom was unable to realise the project in accordance with EU law.

Last but not least, since October 2016, Russia and Turkey have agreed on the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline, with a delivery date around 2019. As of May 2017, the construction of the subsea pipeline has begun close to the Russian coast, there is though scepticism as to the size and effectiveness of this project in regard with the sufficiency of the existing infrastructure and/or the weak demand for gas in Europe.

The Turkish relevant strategy, although it is based completely on transportation rather than production of energy presents strengths and opportunities (Karkazis., Vidakis., Baltos, 2013) however, given the unstable political, internal and external environment, weaknesses and threats stem out of the limited operational freedom the cost disadvantages, the volatility of national and international energy policies, jeopardizing the sustainability of the Turkish energy prospective. It is indicative of the vulnerability afore-mentioned that following the collapse in oil prices in 2014, instead of reducing the fuel taxes that make up the bulk of the retail consumer basket, the government accused petroleum distributors of "profiteering", imposing profit caps which operators complained made it impossible to operate at a profit (Wigen 2012). As a result, Turkey's fifth-largest distributor, Total, sold up and left in 2015 (OxResearch Daily Brief Service, 2017).

### 3.2 The 2<sup>nd</sup> criterion: Economic growth

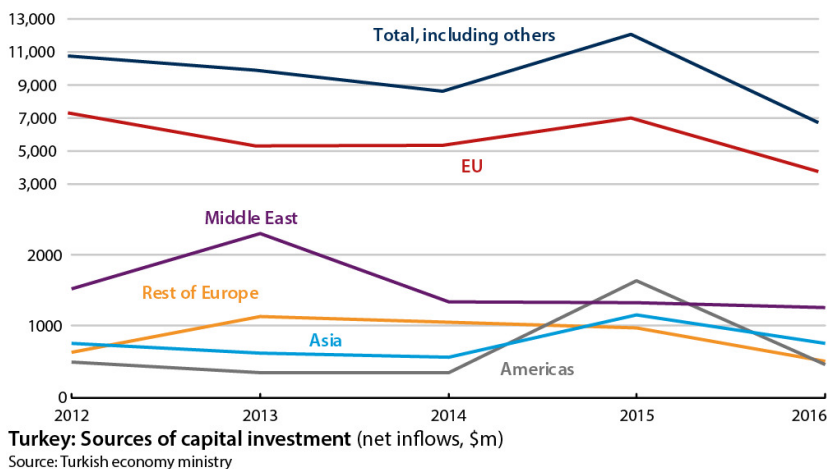
It is also self-evident that regional powers should be economically robust in proportion to the standards of their region. No country can emerge as a "regional leader" if it is drowning in uncontrollable debts and financial deficits. Almost all of the other criteria/prerequisites for the emergence of a regional power, in any part of the world, entail respective financial resources. It is also true that a flourishing economy, by itself, does not provide sufficient basis to this end. Such economy should be maintained on a continuous upward trend of growth and progress.

If we turn our attention to Turkey's economic situation and relevant prospects during the first decade of AKP governance, we notice that the so called "neo-ottoman" governance had implemented radical changes, in terms of quality and quantity, insofar as the markets are concerned (Kinoğlu, 2014) pages 12-18. It is standard practice to refer to the so-called Anatolian Tigers, an elite of entrepreneurs affiliated to the governing party spreading not only in large cities but also into the depths of Anatolia, whose names increasingly occupy positions in the Forbes' multi-millionaire lists, having lead Turkey to join the G-20 at frenzied growth rates with a relative

stability, despite the undergoing crisis in the international economic environment. More and more “Made In “Turkey” products are exported to the international markets; not only the traditional textiles but also complex equipment and devices which require specialised labour in terms of production and industry. Furthermore, Turkey’s economic penetration in the other Muslim countries had been unprecedented, particularly with respect to the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Turkey’s success in attracting outside investment peaked in 2007; since then it has been failing to match its peers and keep long-term and high levels of foreign direct investment (FDI). On the opposite, over the last years numerable high-profile investors have started leaving operations. In the context of growing worries connected with threats of companies’ and assets’ seizures under the government’s anti-Western rhetoric as well as the excuse that owners and executives have been alleged to be related with the failed coup of July 2016, the FDI rises but slowly. Given the regional insecurity, the immense concentration of power under the president’s control, combined with the “draconian” reaction to the coup attempt, it seems the past investment levels are likely out of reach over the next months. It depends on the duration of the political instability whether international investors stay or cut their (Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service, 2017).

The financial analysts expect that the failed coup, the aggressive government’s crackdown on the opposition, along with the recent security risks from terrorist attacks have blurred the country’s global economic outlook towards negative medium-term economic results. The real GDP growth was in 2015 upwardly revised to 5.9%, due to methodological adjustments on the national accounts, but then it was revised down from 3% to 2.2% in 2016 and an estimated 2.6% in 2017. It is assessed that a gradual stabilisation of internal political situation over 2018-21 will drive to real GDP growth of average 3.7% per year. Nowadays, the possibility of a serious disruption to capital inflows is considered likely and taken into account by the subject matter experts (EIU ViewsWire, 2017).



**Fig. 3.** Sources of capital investment in Turkey (2012 - 2016) (Source: OxResearch Daily Brief Service, 2017)

### 3.3 The 3<sup>rd</sup> criterion: Strategic armaments and Defence Industry

Military power is the main lever for regional recognition. This is not directly related to aggressive or imperialistic behaviours. The mere existence and availability of military capacities are taken additionally into account in favour of a country towards peacekeeping and stability. Should circumstances arise, in the course of time, that demand high efficiency and effectiveness, it stands to reason that such a country may achieve further positive results. Nevertheless, in the case of a regional power, military equipment and its subsequent management should have specific “quality”



features indicative of a special dynamic influence in the surrounding geopolitical and geostrategic scene. Such armaments should have enhanced "range" and surpass the standard conventional numbers existing in neighbouring countries.

If, for instance, Turkey seeks - and it is indubitably working towards this goal - to emerge as a regional power with increased control in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean affairs, numerous armed forces, aircrafts and frigates are no longer sufficient, as the case was in the past decades. On the contrary, current requirements urge for force multipliers, state-owned satellites, infrastructures for exploiting nuclear power, smart weapons such as unmanned and surveillance aircrafts, stealth technologies, aerial refuelling capabilities, cyber warfare, air-carriers, partnerships with pioneering manufacturers and, primarily, a domestic defence industry which ensures a high degree of independence in the political and military decision-making process. The above brief reference to strategic force multipliers is, at the same time, a listing of those that Turkey is systematically and gradually trying to have completely implemented by the dawn of the next decade. It is the precise answer to the rhetorical question asked in the beginning of this paragraph with respect to the steps that Turkey should take in its armaments sector, if it aspires to become in the long run a regional leader in the Eastern Mediterranean basin (Pamuk., Gurses, 2016).

In line with the above, Turkey has reached the world's 14th top military spending position in 2013 from the 16th place in 2012, according to April 2014 data published by SIPRI. Turkey's military expenditure was of \$19.1 billion for 2013 (2.3% of GDP). The increase in the long run, between 2004 and 2013, was of 13% in real terms. It should also be taken into consideration that Turkey has been met with new security problems, particularly those related with the civil war in Syria (BBC Monitoring European, 2014).

Apart from the fact that the Turkish army is the NATO's second biggest, it also launches plenty of indigenous weapons programs, including missiles, battle tanks and vehicles, a fighter jet, corvettes and frigates, helicopters, satellites, and drones. However, the 15 of July 2016 attempted coup reconsidered the military planning and programming in terms of human capital, given that more than 8,000 officers, including almost half of the generals and the admirals in the Turkish military's ranks, were discharged, weakening consequently the command structure from the top to the bottom. The government transferred military industries under civilian authority.

In an environment of several asymmetrical wars, terrorist attacks and long-lasting militarily engagement in Syria crisis, numerable military training units were shut down. Just after the coup attempt, the government issued an executive decree almost evacuating the traditional military academies. They are being replaced by new academies operated by universities while the Defense Ministry establishes a strict oversight of their programs and activities. In a highly symbolic way, female and non-commissioned officers have been allowed to wear Islamic headscarves in the armed forces, while thousands of senior officers have been detained on the accusation that they are keeping ties with Fethullah Gülen, who, despite that he had been a spiritual and respectful mentor for R.T. Erdogan and his political movement far away in the past, was according to the government the master mind behind the preparation and execution of the 2016 coup attempt. On the other hand, the latter Turkish Imam himself, denies any involvement and declares himself as a victim of political conspiracy (Grove, 2017).

The severity of the internal security problems created by the failed coup attempt in 2016 may have tremendous impact not only on the current Turkey's political direction but also on the fighting morale and capabilities. It has already caused a major trouble for NATO and western allies due to the purging of thousands of Turkish officers, giving the impression that Turkey is sliding away from democracy and rapidly damaging relations with allies such as Germany (CBRN Assessment, 2017).

At the background of the actions that compile the socio-political surface of the current state of emergency, it is already proven that Turkey's military has been of the most politicized institutions. It has represented the secular elite for decades, it repeatedly overthrew elected governments and fiercely opposed the religious political parties like R.T. Erdogan's AKP. However, the July 2016 military putschists not only demonstrated operational ineffectiveness towards their irregular way of pursuing political power but also failed in projecting legitimacy and social recognition. The fact that AKP in the aftermath of the failed coup constructed and disseminated an authoritative as well as heroic "narrative of the July 15 resistance", enabled the government to perform deep institutional

changes that will configure a new order in the cultural, economic, and socio-political domains of Turkish state (Altinordu, 2017).

#### 3.4 *The 4<sup>th</sup> criterion: Geopolitically critical position*

Quite a few countries may carry the attributes of a regional power, remaining though at the margin of geopolitics if not at the margin of geography itself. Since politics are relative and subject to changes, no one is in a position to know where the history's spotlights will focus on over the forthcoming decades. Let us consider, for instance, the time when the exploitation and distribution of wealth on the earth's poles will commence; the time when, as a consequence, the countries bordering the Arctic and the Antarctica will play a leading part, no matter if they are eager to get involved, in vigorous redeployments with respect to taking over the title of superpowers and regional powers.

For the time being, however, the "known" world of western history, the centuries-old Europe and, further afield, the "blazing" Middle East are, to their peoples' blessing or discontent, some of the "iron threshing floors" at the edges of which forces and underlying leadership aspirations are thronged and crushed. This is where "the soil is drenched in blood and bears witness to biblical conflicts", both just and unjust, while people's collective memory has registered dreadful disasters and liberating visions in the dynamic wake of history. Given the relevant opportunities, those who possess maritime passages, points of access to energy treasures and traditional crossroads of nations, are virtually "driven" to contemplate and envision a place in the pantheon of the regional, to say the least, and international political powers (Bekdil, 2017).

There is no doubt that, in terms of geography and geopolitics, Turkey is uniquely placed, as described above with a dash of surrealism, which is justifiable to a certain extent given the political importance and the history of the strip of land connecting Europe with Asia and Africa. The same geo-cultural area is the cradle of great nations and civilisations. The United States, as the most significant super power on the planet, often appear to recognise Turkey as a key-country for the control of the political and military situation on the Middle East scene, but also as a bulwark to a potential expansion of Russian control over the Eastern Mediterranean for many decades and irrespective of the socio-political changes in Russia (Reuters stuff, 2016).

#### 3.5 *The 5<sup>th</sup> criterion: Leaders with mastery of powers*

Modern Turkey has been governed for almost two decades by leaders alternating roles but always under the political Islam orientation: A. Gül, R. T. Erdogan, B. Arınç, A. Davutoğlu, etc. have certain particularly noteworthy leadership characteristics. For the purpose of this analysis, it would suffice to mention that the former prime minister has worked his way up to the office of president while the minister of foreign affairs has become prime minister. In addition, the former minister of foreign affairs was previously the main advisor to the prime minister in creating a modern international policy, the president was minister of foreign affairs, the prime minister with the deputy prime minister founded the governing party (AKP, Justice and Development Party), while all of them were not only displaying common party origins but were also sharing a leader's profile which is obviously nurtured by the vision of a powerful Turkey and, also, a vision of political ethics driven by political Islam and distant to the old times kemalists' militaristic and elitist practices.

Ten years ago, who could have even remotely contemplated that, in Turkey, about three hundred senior military officers would have been arrested in the fight against the "Ergenekon" organisation and the "Sledgehammer" (Balyoz) operation without destabilising the political and social balance, and the party's balance... And yet it happened, which means that the so-called Islamic leading group, "the neo-Ottoman leadership" mentioned earlier, has deep and broad popular support but, at the same time, it has closed ranks with middle-class administrative mechanisms which bring intentions to fruition and fight for the making and execution of decisions in a particularly adverse environment politically undermined by competing kemalist coalitions. Such a feat cannot be achieved without inspired and determined leaders that assiduously mastermind the necessary plans in order to implement them step by step (Esayan, 2013).



### 3.6 The 6<sup>th</sup> criterion: Favourable international relations

Although regional powers have been described above as small-scale replicas of the superpowers, this comparison, albeit helpful to understand attitudes and behaviours, is not entirely valid. One of the obvious differences between regional powers and superpowers is that the former are dependent on the latter far more than the latter depend on the former. From another perspective, regional powers should not, at least, raise problems to the superpowers in the execution of their plans. Ideally for both, regional powers should develop policies and strategies in line with the objectives of the superpowers in every region and worldwide (Pipes, 2017).

In Turkey's case, the path to its establishment as a regional power is conditional upon the consent of the United States and Russia. It further depends on Turkey's strategic choices which will convince the superpowers that their "ally" will protect their interests accordingly. The hypothesis that Turkey meets this specific criterion calls for careful and thorough consideration because both the interests and policies of the "Great Powers" are often unclear, relative, changeable and competing, while there may be unforeseen surprises which history holds in store for all nations on earth, irrespective of their size and their rationally estimated capacities.

It is, however, certain that the international environment, and especially during the 2000s, was in general lines favourable for Turkey. One of the main requirements of the then Obama's first administration was that Turkey would actively strive to project a more secular, moderate and pro-western profile of political Islam in the Middle East. It was an ambitious experiment in order to disengage the West from the ghost of Islamic fundamentalism by winning "the hearts and thoughts" of the Muslims in the wider region. On the other front, Putin's Russia chose Turkey as its strategic partner in geo-energy matters and thus succeeded, even indirectly, in realising its centuries-old aspiration to have a gate open to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Taken into consideration that the currently most wanted political enemy of the government in Turkey, Fetulah Gülen, has found resort on U.S. territory, the AKP government keeps the U.S.-Turkey relationship in tension by continuously challenging the White House for the F. Gülen's immediate extradition. The two traditional NATO allies have also been diverged widely in regard with the role and support of the Syrian Kurds, whom Ankara considers terrorists, while Washington appreciates in several ways their ground operations' effectiveness against the Islamic State. R.T. Erdogan's even claimed that a lot of U.S. official statements criticising the Turkish government's stance in the aftermath of the coup were indicators (Daily Herald, 2016) that western politicians, academics and journalists were somehow siding with the coup plotters (Daily News - Leading News Source for Turkey and the Region, 2017).

In the same page, Turkish Defence Minister Fikri Isik highlighted that NATO should sit down and think where it went wrong in response to the coup attempt (Daily News - Leading News Source for Turkey and the Region, 2017). Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ stated that U.S. would be sacrificing its alliance with Ankara to "a terrorist" [Gülen] if it were to refuse to extradite him (Daily Herald, 2016). Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu even threatened that Turkey might look outside NATO for defence cooperation (Zorthian, 2016). Turkey kept normalizing its multi-level ties with Russia, implying against NATO that it may change direction. R.T. Erdogan apologized to President Vladimir Putin for shooting down a Russian military aircraft in November 2015 (Yinanç, 2017). Putin afterwards recalled his economic sanctions and travel bans against Turkey, and recovered all government-to-government relations (Jamieson, 2016)). The developments please not only V. Putin but also Tehran, his partner in the Syrian civil war, and puts Ankara on an ironic trade off by siding the Russian-Iranian Assad's coalition with whom Turkey suffered an almost five year-old hostile relationship and conflict.

A strategic axis of responses to the failed coup was the further weakening of Turkey's links with the West (Bekdil, 2017). The latter calls on Ankara to respect the "rule of law" and democracy, but instead, R.T. Erdogan declares intentions to reinstate the death penalty, making rhetorical questions like "Why should I keep them [the mutineers] and feed them in prisons for years to come?" (Pamuk., Gurses, 2016)) On the other side, Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy chief, answered that the re-introduction of the death penalty, would cancel any Turkey's option to ever enter EU (Daily News - Leading News Source for Turkey and the Region,

2017). German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmaier characteristically added that because of the mass arrests and sweeping purges the two countries are like "emissaries from two different planets." (Reuters, 2016).

### 3.7 The 7<sup>th</sup> criterion: Social Cohesion

A first approach to regional powers as geopolitical phenomena places emphasis on the international diplomacy scene. However, there is also the national dimension to be taken into account, namely all that happens on the domestic front, within each regional power's society. In such a context, the critical factor for gaining state control, which will also reflect in the country's international relations, is the internal political cohesion, expressed in national, social and other axes of the institutional life. If a country seeks to play a catalytic role in its neighbours' problems, it must ensure that its internal problems have been solved and the actual or potential instability hotbeds affecting its citizens' daily lives have been eliminated. How could it convince of its capability of dealing not only with its own external rivals but also with those of other countries, if it cannot deal effectively with its internal enemies?

Insofar as Turkey is concerned, fulfilling the above criterion appears to be particularly difficult. More than 15% of its population consists of the Kurdish ethnic minority with which the official state has been in continuous and multi-form conflict for decades (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). The Kurds' resistance to the restriction of their ethnic and political rights is a time-bomb threatening Turkey's political edifice. In any case, the mere existence of the Kurdish matter constitutes not only a critical destabilising factor but, potentially, a means of pressure to be used by the superpowers in order to control future developments in the region.

At a state level, the rift between the incumbent government and the opposition is not limited to the narrow context of power struggle between political parties. Turkey is constantly undergoing a political revolution with leading actors the institutions themselves, the political parties, the armed forces, the justice system, the universities, the press, financial and religious players, etc. It is the majority of this specific society's gravity centres which are themselves in conflict with each other given that they have taken sides either with the neo-ottomanism or kemalism proponents.

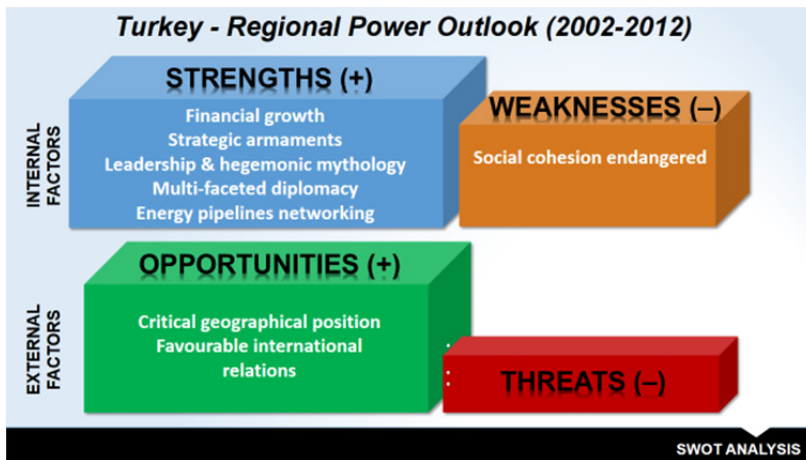
These two constitutional ideologies reflect, as a whole, the different approach to the national structure and administration of the state, while they are painstakingly trying to close ranks with individual decision-making centres across the entire spectrum of Turkish society. Thus, it can be assessed that, traditionally from the establishment of the Turkish Republic till the dawn of this century, the armed forces, higher education, the justice system and business entrepreneurs have taken the Kemalist line but, currently, the neo-Ottomans have sided not only with the government but also with the security forces, the religious centres, the masses of ordinary citizens and important business centres of the country (Kinoğlu, 2014). However, the latest constitutional revision on the roles of the army and justice is another ongoing situation representative of the conflict among Turkish institutions, and it has taken such extent that it is close to giving rise to potential violent reversals with unforeseeable consequences for the political and social cohesion of the country.

In the context of the newly established Turkish presidential system, the prime minister "disappears" while the president holds vast power over the other powers, namely the parliament, the judiciary, as well as the budget and the military (Ege, 2016). The political emphasis on imbuing the presidency with complete socio-political control was for decades a top priority for the political Islam agenda in Turkey, as it has been also promoted by N. Erdogan and other leaders of the Islamic parties since the 70's (Al-Arian, 2017). However, the current surrounding social environment is full of severe conflicts and turmoil. In the name of the imperative for a strong presidency, the referendum procedures have been criticised as non-transparent, near-civil war has started with the Kurds, while a crisis with Europe is being continually provoked. R.T. Erdogan cracked down on Gülen's followers, leading to approximately 47,000 arrests, 113,000 detainments, 135,000 firings or suspensions from jobs, etc (Başaran, 2017). The cautiousness and admirable efficiency with which R.T Erdogan became prime minister in 2003 and governed for eight years, achieving remarkable economic growth, containing the military leadership's abusive overpowers and pursuing a policy of

"zero problems with neighbours", since 2011, has been vaporised (Pipes, 2017).

#### 4. Comparative and SWOT Analysis - Policy Implications

In a SWOT analysis a basic distinction is made, on the one hand, between strengths and weaknesses which are identified in the internal environment of the entity assessed and, on the other hand, between the opportunities and threats which reflect the entity's external environment (Pahl and Richter 2009). More specifically, with respect to Turkey's internal strengths on the path to emerge as a regional power, during the AKP ruling period from 2002 to 2012, it can be said that Turkey was meeting, to a satisfactory degree, the criteria mentioned in the above analysis as well as at the figure below (Fig. 5):



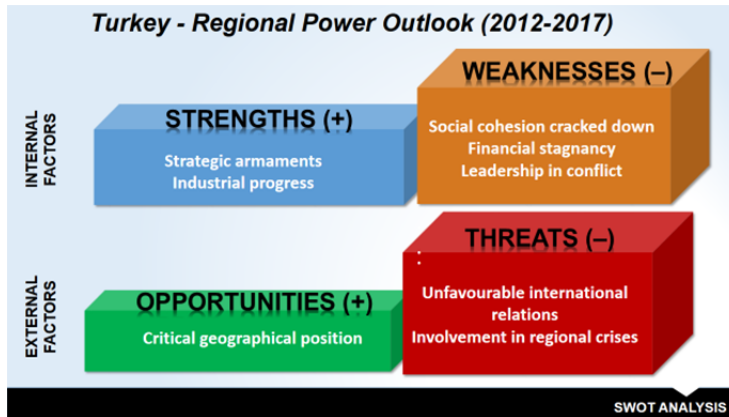
**Fig 5.** During the AKP ruling period from 2002 to 2012, it can be said that Turkey was meeting, to a satisfactory degree, the majority of the Regional Power criteria in discussion (Source: self-author, based on template from (SmartSheet, 2017).

During the 2000s, in a rather paradoxical manner, Turkey earned the respect or at least the acceptance of Americans, Russians, Iranians and Israelis, while at the same time Europe was looking forward to having a special cooperation scheme with Turkey towards its accession to the E.U. Additionally many Balkan nations declared themselves to be Turkey's historical allies, while several Caucasian nations pursued cooperation or common politico-economic ground with Turkey. The fact is that Turkey was steadily and consistently intervening practically on all neighbouring fronts that could conceivably be open in its wider region.

According to A. Davutoğlu's various official statements, Turkey's foreign policy over the first AKP decade in power dealt with regional problems, aiming to eradicate problems with its neighbours through a balancing, "rhythmic" diplomacy ("zero problems" principle) and worked towards the objective that Turkey should be seen, naturally and freely, as the ideal mediator, the prime protector and guarantor of normality in the region.

Passing, however, from the 2002-2012 to the 2012-2017 period, which was marked by the absence of A. Davutoğlu's sophistication and Abdullah Gül's moderation, Turkish internal and external political scene has changed not only in the nature and characteristics of all its criteria and components described before, but also in terms of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, as the figure below (Fig. 6 succeeding Fig. 5) graphically illustrates, highlighting Turkey's main difficulty in bringing its efforts to fruition. Furthermore, both its "multi-faceted and outward-looking diplomacy" as well as its excessive "hegemonic mythology" turned from strengths to weaknesses, where meddling with the Arab Spring expansion and the Syrian crisis resolution

have led to severe military engagements, wastage and squander of resources, while mythology encourages superiority complexes and obsessions which, in turn, deprive policies of the realism and the risk management required for successful outcomes:



**Fig. 6.** During the AKP ruling period from 2012 to 2017, it can be verified that the overdose of its multi-faceted diplomacy and “hegemonic mythology” tend to turn from strengths to weaknesses (Source: self-author, based on template from (SmartSheet, 2017))

## 5. Epilogue

If the afore-mentioned Regional Power criteria were to be briefly assessed and distinguished between “mandatory” and “supportive”, criteria numbered: 1 (Energy sufficiency), 2 (Economic growth), 3 (Strategic armaments) and 6 (Favourable international relations) would be rated as mandatory (sine qua non) in the process and, more so, in maintaining a cutting-edge and long-term regional leadership, while criteria numbered 4 (Geopolitically critical position), 5 (Leadership) and 7 (Social Cohesion) would probably be rated as merely supportive for every regional power.

The above analysis certainly leads to conclusions with respect to the success, or the possibilities of success, of Turkey’s foreign policy in fulfilling its objective not only to emerge but also to be established as a regional power. Such conclusions can be quantitatively justified in a further research on the basis of percentage/numerical estimates for the assessed performances per criterion. It is also a pre-requisite that the review of a country’s candidacy for becoming a regional power is related to the competition that may be prevalent in a particular geopolitical region among several countries claiming the same or antagonistic leading role. This, surely, depends on the geopolitical circumstances prevailing each time, “how many leaders a kingdom can sustain”; in other words, how many regional powers and what distribution of power among them may lead the particular geopolitical region to balance and stability. Focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East regions, it is noted that Turkey is not the only suitor of leadership. Traditionally, Israel has been a leading figure in the region and it could certainly be the object of a similar study that would review the verification of the criteria under consideration insofar as Israel is concerned.

Another challenging suitor of the particular “leadership” is Iran which may also score a satisfactory number of points based on the scale of the criteria under consideration, particularly if ever acquire nuclear power for military purposes. Such list could be further extended if, for instance, Egypt’s influence in the Middle East and the Greater Maghreb is taken into consideration. Based on this premise, it would be interesting to know the answer to the question if and to what extent mainly Israel and Iran, each country for its own reasons, will try and manage to harness Turkish aspirations.

Last but not least, we have clearly identified and assessed a rift between the first ten years and the follow up five latest of AKP ruling. Actually, it is a progressive transition carrying though

extremely dynamic and revisionary characteristics. The study's title emphasise on the dilemmatic question, is the Turkish regime transformation a pilot for other states in this heavily turmoil area? The answer for Turkey is an example or a counterexample with a negative connotation, refuting the powerful expectations, is definitely related with the way the transformation itself is being developed; there are strong evidences that, despite the initial reasonable potential for democracy, progress and prosperity, the latest evolution worryingly indicates that regional peace and stability are challenged.

## 6. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to gratefully thank Prof. John Karkazis (Dean of Business School, University of the Aegean, Chios, Greece) for his insightful and constructive guidance over their research improvement.

## References

- Al-Arian, Sami, (2017), Turkey, Erdoğan, and the Wisdom of the Presidential System. [Online] Available: <http://thenewturkey.org/turkey-erdogan-and-the-wisdom-of-the-presidential-system/> (September 5, 2017)
- Altinordu, A. (2017). A Midsummer Night's Coup: Performance and Power in Turkey's July 15 Coup Attempt. *Qualitative Sociology*, 40, 139-164.
- Asche, Christop, (2016), It's Time For 'Erdogan's Coup': Threatened Journalist Expects Widespread Backlash In Turkey. [Online] Available: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/can-dundar-journalist-turkey-coup\\_us\\_578e4dcee4b0a0ae97c38844](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/can-dundar-journalist-turkey-coup_us_578e4dcee4b0a0ae97c38844) (September 5, 2017)
- Başaran, Ezgi, (2017) Thinking Gülen is a peaceful scholar is a huge mischaracterization. Daily News - Leading News Source for Turkey and the Region. Available online at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/thinking-gulen-is-a-peaceful-scholar-is-a-huge-mischaracterization.aspx?pageID=449&nlID=102173&NewsCatID=548> (September 5, 2017)
- BBC Monitoring European, (2014), Turkey becomes world's top 15 military spender. BBC Monitoring European. [Online] Available: <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2014/04/15/turkey-becomes-a-top-15-military-spender> (September 5, 2017)
- Bekdil, B. (2017). Turkey's Slide into Authoritarianism. *Middle East Quarterly*, 24, 9-1.
- Bilgin, P. (2007). Only strong states can survive in Turkey's geography': the uses of 'geopolitical truths' in Turkey. *Political geography*, 26, 740-756. (September 5, 2017)
- BMI Research, (2017), Turkey Oil & Gas Report, [Online] Available: <http://store.bmiresearch.com/turkey-oil-gas-report.html> (September 5, 2017)
- Central Intelligence Agency, (2017), Turkey. [Online] Available: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html> (September 5, 2017)
- Daily Herald, (2016), Turkey: US shouldn't 'sacrifice' alliance over Muslim cleric, [Online] Available: <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20160809/news/308099977/> (September 5, 2017)
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet, (2014), Stratejik Derinlik Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu (Ciltli). [Online] Available: <http://www.kitapyurdu.com/kitap/stratejik-derinlik-amp-turkiyenin-uluslararasi-konumu-ciltli/33240.html> (September 5, 2017)
- Ege, Seckin. 2016. "Turkish president poised to seize more power." *Jane's Intelligence Review* 28, 1-8.
- EIU ViewsWire Turkey: Country outlook. [Online] Available: <http://store.eiu.com/product.aspx?pid=50000205&gid=1450000145&pubid=1690000969> (September 5, 2017)
- Esayan, M. (2013). Ergenekon: An illegitimate form of government. *Insight Turkey*, 15, 29-40.
- Reuters, (2016). German minister sees 'no basis' for talks with Turkey after failed coup. Reuters. [Online] Available <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-germany-idUSKCN10F23D> (September 5, 2017)
- Jamieson, Alastair, (2016), Turkey's Erdogan Meets Russia's Putin for 'New Page' in Restored Relations, [Online] Available: <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/turkey-military-coup/turkey-s-erdogan-meets-russia-s-putin-new-page-restored-n626101> (September 5, 2017)
- Karabat, Ayşe, (2010), Turkey Creates Balance in the Middle East. [Online] Available at: <https://en.qantara.de/content/interview-with-turkeys-foreign-minister-ahmet-davutoglu-turkey-creates-balance-in-the-middle> (September 5, 2017)
- Institute of Internal Auditors, (2017), Risk Management. [Online] Available at: <https://na.theiia.org/standards-guidance/mandatory-guidance/Pages/Standards-Glossary.aspx> (September 5, 2017)
- Karkazis, J, Vidakis, I. G., Baltos, G. C., (2013). The Energy Wealth of Syria. *Foreign Affairs, The Hellenic Edition*, 20, 104-118.

- Kinoğlu, S.D. (2014), Neo-Ottoman Perspectives: Turkish Identity and Culinary Culture in a Sociopolitical Context: Oregon State University.
- Oxford Analytica Daily Brief, (2017), MIDDLE EAST: Nuclear energy will diversify Middle Eastern ties. [Online] Available at: <https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/DB221905/Nuclear-energy-will-diversify-Middle-Eastern-ties> (September 5, 2017)
- Parisis, I. (2011). Power Factors in the International System. Infognomon Publications, 2,44-67.
- OxResearch Daily Brief Service, (2017), Turkey: FDI is unlikely to return to mid-2000s peak. [Online] Available: <https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/DB221494/FDI-is-unlikely-to-return-to-Turkeys-mid-2000s-peak>.
- Pamuk, Humeyra., Gurses, Ercan, (2016), Turkey widens post-coup purge, demands U.S. hand over cleric. Reuters. [Online] Available: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/turkey-security-int-idUKKCNOZX07Z>(September 5, 2017)
- Pipes, D.(2017). Turkey's man of mystery. Weekend Australian. 24, 10 – 15.
- Roberts, P. (2005). The End of Oil: On the Edge of a Perilous New World. Houghton: Houghton Mifflin.
- SmartSheet, (2017), 14 Free SWOT Analysis Templates, [Online] Available: <https://www.smartsheet.com/14-free-swot-analysis-templates> (September 5, 2017)
- Stoiciu, Mihai, (2010), Rubik's Cube Turns 30. [Online] Available: [https://math.williams.edu/rubiks-cube-turns-30/Turkey to be 'elephant in the room' at NATO summit](https://math.williams.edu/rubiks-cube-turns-30/Turkey%20to%20be%20%27elephant%20in%20the%20room%27%20at%20NATO%20summit). CBRN Assessment. [Online] Available <http://www.janes.com/article/70523/turkey-to-be-elephant-in-the-room-at-nato-summit> (September 5, 2017)
- Grove, Thomas, (2017), Turkey's First Post-Coup Recruits Mark Change in Military; President Erdogan rebuilding armed forces after last year's failed putsch.Wall Street Journal. [Online] Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/turkeys-first-post-coup-recruits-mark-change-in-military-1487848184> (September 5, 2017)
- Vidakis, I. (2015).Energy network security in the Eastern Mediterranean: Turkey's role. (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Aegean).
- Vidakis, I., and Baltos, G. (2015). Security Aspects of 'Geoenergeia' and the Significance of Energy Resources Management in International Politics. *Geopolitics of Energy*, 37, 2-16.
- Waibl, E., Herdina, P. (1998). German Dictionary of Philosophical Terms/ Woertbuch Philosophischer Fachbegriffe Englisch: English – German. Routledge: Abingdon-on-Thames.
- Western allies urge Turkey to maintain rule of law after failed coup. Daily News - Leading News Source for Turkey and the Region. Available online at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/eu-pushes-turkey-on-rule-of-law-after-coup-crackdown-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=101736&NewsCatID=351> (September 5, 2017)
- Wigen, E. (2012). Pipe Dreams or Dream Pipe? Turkey's Hopes of Becoming an Energy Hub. *The Middle East Journal*, 66, 598-612.
- Williams, (2010), Rubik's Cube Turns 30.. [Online] Available: <https://math.williams.edu/rubiks-cube-turns-30/> (September 5, 2017)
- Yınacı, Barçın, (2017), NATO needs to look in mirror on coup attempt, says Turkish Defense minister. Daily News - Leading News Source for Turkey and the Region. [Online] Available: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nato-needs-to-look-in-mirror-on-coup-attempt.aspx?pageID=238&nID=102818&NewsCatID=359> (September 5, 2017)
- Zorthian, Julia, (2016), Turkey May Look Beyond NATO to Defend Itself, Foreign Affairs Minister Says, [Online] Available: <http://time.com/4448459/turkey-nato-defense-foreign-affairs-minister/> (September 5, 2017)