



Rise of new centres of power in Eurasia: Implications for Turkish foreign policy



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ABSTRACT

The emergence of new centres of power in Eurasia has entailed a re-reading of Zbigniew Brzezinski's book which drew an analogy between the Eurasian supercontinent and a grand chessboard. Following the global financial crisis of the last few years, countries like China, Russia and India have started to project greater global political and economic influence. Eventually, Eurasia has become a geopolitical symbol signifying a multipolar world order unlike fifteen years ago when Brzezinski wrote his book in a world dominated by the US superpower. The changes in the geopolitical meaning of Eurasia have also been very important for Turkey for a number of reasons. First, it is a country that is strategically located at the meeting point of Europe and Asia. Second, its economy has grown at an impressive rate throughout the 2000s turning it into a rising Eurasian power. Third, its multi-dimensional foreign policy approach in the last decade has enabled it to develop closer relations with the Eurasian states.

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1. Introduction

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski who once served as President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor published his seminal book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostategic Imperatives* with the goal of formulating a long-term strategy for US foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. The central argument of the book was that the

US primacy in the world depended foremost on its success in maintaining political, economic and military dominance over the Eurasian supercontinent, which Brzezinski presumptuously depicted as "the chief geopolitical prize for America". Such a bold assertion, however, was actually based on the self-confidence of the US policymakers of the period who boasted a strong political standing and powerful economy at home and an unequalled political, economic, military and cultural influence abroad in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War.

Both the US power and prestige suffered a significant decline in the fifteen years that followed the publication of *The Grand Chessboard*. The September 11 attacks, two highly controversial and protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and finally the breaking out of a sweeping financial crisis have raised ever-increasing questions about the future of US influence in world politics. The EU and Japan – the two other leading power centres of the Western financial

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system – were also negatively affected by the tectonic changes that took place in the global dynamics throughout the 2000s. Around the same time, new actors have started to become increasingly visible on the global scene. Four of the “emerging economies” of the 1990s – Brazil, Russia, India and China – in particular were included in a special group called “the BRICs” due to their advanced economic development. Not only are they expected to lead the world economy by 2050, they also enjoy increasing influence in world politics as they currently account for more than forty percent of the world population.

Since the three members of the BRIC grouping are geographically located in the supercontinent of Eurasia, the policymakers and scholars have been compelled to reconsider the geostrategic significance of Brzezinski’s “grand chessboard” in the new millennium. This article seeks to explore the changing meaning of Eurasia in world politics by critically reviewing Brzezinski’s theory in light of the new global changes. As the centre of gravity in the world economy continues to shift from the West to the East and as the international system is becoming increasingly multipolar due to the rise of new powers, Eurasia seems to have become identified with the idea of a geopolitical balance or alternative against the West. Turkey is one of the countries that is affected the most by this new geopolitical reality not only because it is geographically located at the centre of the Eurasian supercontinent, but also due to its decision particularly in the last decade to develop its strategic relations with the rising Eurasian powers. In this regard, the article will also try to reveal the dynamics that have shaped the Turkish governments’ geopolitical outlook towards Eurasia in light of the current changes taking place in the global political and economic balances.

2. Revisiting the grand chessboard: From unipolarity to multipolarity

Eurasia is the landmass that shelters more than seventy percent of the world’s population and covers almost one tenth of the Earth’s surface. As a geographical term, it was first coined in late nineteenth century to define the supercontinent comprising Europe and Asia, which until that period have been generally treated as two separate continents. In geopolitics, it has been associated with an even more profound meaning as it is frequently referred to as the symbol of land power against sea power. British geographer Sir Halford J. Mackinder is probably the single most important figure who conceptualized Eurasia in traditional geopolitical thinking through his theory of the “Heartland” – the northern-central part of Eurasia which he had initially called the “geopolitical pivot of history” (Mackinder, 1904). According to Mackinder, a state could only achieve world hegemony by acquiring geopolitical control over the heart of the Eurasian supercontinent (Mackinder, 1944: 113).

It is believed that Mackinder’s geopolitical vision greatly influenced the world politics of the twentieth century, since “the continuing struggle for Eurasian mastery was the geopolitical essence of the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War ... [and] the Great Power struggles of the twenty-first century will likely repeat this pattern” (Sempa, 2002: 20–21). This has also been the main

theme of Brzezinski’s book which likened the Eurasian supercontinent to a “grand chessboard” – an immense geopolitical stage over which the great powers continuously fought for political and economic control (Brzezinski, 1997: xiv). Drawing heavy inspiration from the Heartland theory, *The Grand Chessboard* has become a major influence on the Western policymakers’ and scholars’ geopolitical imagination of Eurasia in the following decade.

The novelty of Brzezinski’s book did not only lie in its representation of Eurasia as a geopolitical battlefield for the world’s leading states, but also its powerful emphasis on the emergence of the US as the most influential actor over the political and economic balances of the supercontinent. Brzezinski believed that the appearance of a number of unprecedented conditions in the post-Cold War period required a thorough reassessment of the geopolitical state of world affairs. The most significant condition he thought was the rise of the US as the only comprehensive global superpower that enjoyed clear supremacy in all four domains of power (military, economic, technological and cultural). For Brzezinski, this meant that for the first time in history a non-Eurasian power became the globally preeminent state and controlled the globe’s central arena (Brzezinski, 1997: xiii). Viewing Eurasia as the “chief geopolitical prize”, he seemed to be convinced that the end of the Cold War granted the US a huge advantage over other powers to achieve political and economic domination over the supercontinent (Brzezinski, 1997: 30).

It may be claimed that Brzezinski’s depiction of Eurasia was at the same time greatly influenced by the theories of “unipolarity” which were popular among the international relations scholars of the immediate post-Cold War period. Unipolarity, which refers to an international system where a single state possesses capabilities that far exceed those of any other state, was an academic response to the collapse of the Soviet Union which left the US as the only superpower in the world. Its principal exponent was political analyst Charles Krauthammer who drew attention to the unipolar character of the post-Cold War world politics and claimed that the centre of global power became the unchallenged superpower of the US (Krauthammer, 1990/91).

Although Krauthammer’s views were later criticized by prominent international relations scholars including Christopher Layne (1993), Kenneth Waltz (1993) and Charles Kupchan (1998) who all thought unipolarity was only temporary and would be sooner or later replaced either by a bipolar or multipolar international system, the US continued its unrivalled supremacy in world politics throughout the 1990s, despite the presence of other notable actors like China, Japan, and the EU. It is interesting to view in this regard that even when political scientists like Samuel Huntington took notice of these actors and revised Krauthammer’s theory into something called “unimultipolarity” at the turn of the millennium, they still found it necessary to underline the superior position of the US within the international system (Huntington, 1999: 36).

It was not until the second half of the 2000s that some cardinal questions were raised about the sustainability of the unipolar structure of world politics. Particularly after 2008, there has been an intensified debate about the decline of the US primacy vis-à-vis the growing political,

economic and military influence of the emerging actors. This does not mean that the US has become a secondary power in the international system. On the contrary, it still maintains its superiority in Brzezinski's four domains of power. For instance, it accounts for more than 40 percent of the world's military spending, produces approximately 20 percent of the global economic output, allocates greater finances to research and development than other powers and continues to exercise immense cultural influence all around the world. However, it has also been facing serious challenges since early 2000s. The highly controversial policies implemented by the George W. Bush administration in the post-September 11 period, two very costly and prolonged wars fought in Afghanistan and Iraq and finally the global financial turmoil of the last few years which is considered by many as the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression have raised serious doubts about the US leadership in world politics.

On this last point, one should particularly recall the warning of the British historian Paul Kennedy, who claimed that "all of the major shifts in the world's military-power balance have followed alterations in the productive balances" (Kennedy, 1987: xiv). In this regard, one may expect the current global financial crisis to trigger significant changes in the military-strategic power map of the world. Joseph Nye Jr., for example, draws attention to the ongoing changes in the distribution of power in the international system and indicates the emergence of a "three-dimensional chess game" where he places military power in the top board, economic power in the middle board and transnational relations in the bottom board (Nye Jr., 2008: 58). Although the top board is still defined by the unipolar structure led by the US, Nye argues that there has been a significant trend towards multipolarity in the middle board. The bottom board which symbolizes the distribution of power in the field of transnational relations, on the other hand, has already become widely dispersed between states and non-state actors.

The middle board in Nye's three-dimensional chess game which determines the power relations in the economic sphere have become quite fluctuant due to the striking changes that have been taking place in the global economy since late 2007. In this sense, it is not only the superpower of the US, but also the global economic influence of the West that is being questioned. One should particularly indicate the worsening financial situation in the US, EU and Japan, which are sometimes called the mighty "triad" of the Western financial system (Amin, 2006). For instance, only in 2009 the yearly industrial production dropped 13 percent in the US, 38 percent in Japan, 29 percent in Germany and 13 percent in the UK (Germain, 2009: 673). The EU's economic prospects became gloomy after the Eurozone debt crisis and the Union's share in world GDP is expected to decline drastically by 2050 (Steinbock, 2012: 41). The picture is not much different for Japan as the total value of its stock market collapsed by almost 75 percent in the last twenty years (Serfaty, 2011: 12).

As also indicated by several recent studies that attempt to explain the changes in world politics under such catchy names as the "rise of the rest" or "a world without the West", there seems to be a clear shift in the world economy

from the West to the East (Barma, Ratner & Weber, 2007; Zakaria, 2008b). It is important to underline in this regard that the Asian share of global economy in terms of purchasing power parity increased almost threefold in the last thirty years. In fact, today Asia's stock markets account for 32 percent of global market capitalization above both Europe and the US (Herd, 2011: 14). As an indication of all these remarkable changes, China finally surpassed Japan and became the world's second largest economy in 2010.

China is not the only actor that has benefited from the current shift in the world's economic balances. As early as 2003, the US-based Goldman and Sachs company coined the acronym BRIC to refer to Brazil, Russia, India and China – the four countries that were expected to overtake the G-7 members and lead the world economy by 2050 (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003). In 2001, the BRIC countries' share in the global GDP was around 17 percent. In only ten years, this figure has increased to 25 percent despite the negative impacts of the financial turmoil (Müller, 2011: 1616).¹ Their better performance in comparison with the Western economies during the financial crisis even compelled the US National Intelligence Council to predict in its report that the BRICs would soon take their place among the world's eight largest economies (Global Trends 2025, 2008: 7). Against this backdrop, the four BRIC countries held their first official summit meeting in 2009. Two years later, they were joined by South Africa – a development which changed the group's name into the BRICS.

Apart from the formation of the BRICS, a major development which strengthens the view that the world's economic axis is changing direction is the rising influence of the G-20 mechanism which has greatly overshadowed the G-7 and G-8 schemes in recent years. Although it was established in 1999 as a forum for the finance ministers of the advanced and emerging economies with the aim of stabilising the global financial markets in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the influence of the G-20 grew only very recently. In 2008, its meetings were turned into summits of heads of states and governments. The 2009 summit at Pittsburgh was a turning point where the G-20 was affirmed by the world's leaders as the principal forum for international economic cooperation. This can also be regarded as the Western leaders' clear acknowledgement of the rising influence of non-Western states in the world economy. In Pittsburgh, the Western leaders also agreed to shift at least five percent of quota share to emerging economies at the expense of their own countries in the IMF (G-20 Ministers, 2010). A year later, the World Bank decided to increase China's voting rights in the organization. This made China the third most influential voter, while the total voting share of the emerging economies increased to almost 47 percent within the World Bank voting system (James, 2010).

3. Eurasia in a multipolar world

As a result of all these tectonic changes in the world economy, the geopolitical meaning of Eurasia has also been

¹ The figure is when we adjust GDP growth for purchasing power.

transformed. In particular, Brzezinski's depiction of Eurasia as a grand chessboard which is dominated by a single non-Eurasian superpower has become out of date in light of the current geopolitical realities. In fact, in his latest book, even Brzezinski confesses that the US wasted the opportunity to "fill the void created by the disappearance of the once continentally dominant Sino-Soviet bloc" in Eurasia and now "the task has to be undertaken in circumstances considerably more challenging" for the US policymakers (Brzezinski, 2012: 120–121). This is mainly because the three BRIC countries which are at the same time considered the new centres of global influence are located in the Eurasian supercontinent. In parallel with their growing global economic influence, China, India and Russia are today playing a much more significant role in the reshaping of the political, economic and military balances in Eurasia. They also enjoy close historical and cultural ties with the other Eurasian countries which can be regarded as an additional advantage in terms of their competition with the US.

This geopolitical transformation is perhaps best reflected in the emergence of new ideas that treat Eurasia as a geopolitical counterbalance against the Western influence in world politics. Most notably, in Russia and some other former Soviet states the school of thought known as Neo-Eurasianism attracted considerable attention in the last decade due to its proposal for the formation of a kind of anti-Western geopolitical alliance between the countries of Eurasia (Dugin, 1997; Nazarbajev, 1997). In the field of international relations, in particular, the last few years witnessed a significant increase in the number of scholarly works focussing on the rise of the Asian powers. It is no coincidence in this regard that three of the most influential works that elaborate on the shift of power in the international system were published in 2008 when the Western economies were plunged into serious financial difficulties. Journalist Fareed Zakaria, for example, perceived this shift in light of the emergence of a "post-American world" in which global power moved further away from the US dominance (Zakaria, 2008a). Parag Khanna argued in a similar fashion that the world's superpower map was being rebalanced towards three relatively equal centres of influence based in Washington, Brussels and Beijing (Khanna, 2008). Singaporean academic Kishore Mahbubani, on the other hand, not only drew attention to the rise of the East in world politics, but also claimed this was a "peaceful rise" that should also be welcomed by the Western countries (Mahbubani, 2008).

All these intellectual endeavours are not detached from the developments taking place in the practical foreign policy sphere. One should particularly make reference to the theory of "soft balancing" which became influential in international relations studies in the 2000s due to its claim that a number of secondary states are capable of balancing a powerful state in the system through forming effective diplomatic coalitions with one another (Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005). There have been many occasions in the last decade where the rising Eurasian powers allied either with each other or other states to oppose the US supremacy in world politics. One of the most remarkable examples of such soft balancing behaviour was the joint Franco-German-Russian

declaration of 2003 that rejected the US invasion of Iraq. Russia, in particular, effectively made use of soft balancing instruments, most notably its permanent seat and veto power in the UN Security Council which it frequently utilized in order to form a diplomatic front with China. Thus, the two countries achieved to block a number of Western resolutions on such contentious issues as Kosovo and Iraq. Most recently, they acted in concert in the prevention of the UN from taking more effective action against Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. Furthermore, all five members of the BRICS abstained in the March 2011 voting of the Security Council resolution for imposing a no-fly zone over Libya.

Since the early 2000s, Russia and China have also been improving their cooperation in the field of security within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which additionally includes the countries of Central Asia as members and India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Iran as observers. Aside from the fact that it brings together all major Eurasian states under the same roof, the SCO has become increasingly prominent in world politics due to its frequent calls for a multipolar world order. Russian President Vladimir Putin, in particular, has been one of the most outspoken advocates of multipolarity as also indicated by his much publicized speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference in which he harshly criticized the unilateral policies of the US (Putin, 2007). The Eurasian powers' quest for a multipolar world was also evident in the SCO and BRIC summits that were held back to back in June 2009 in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg which was labelled as the "epicentre of world politics" by the Russian leader Dmitry Medvedev (Medvedev, 2009). This is also an important sign of the tightening institutional links between the SCO and BRIC which together symbolize the growing political and economic influence of the Eurasian states in world politics.

4. Turkey and the new geopolitics of Eurasia

The remarkable changes that have been taking place in the geopolitical setting of Eurasia in the post-2007 period also had major implications for Turkish foreign policy. Firstly, mainly due to its impressive economic growth in the 2000s, Turkey itself became one of the "new powers" of the world as also acknowledged by Western politicians including the EU's High Representative Catherine Ashton (Ashton, 2010). In this regard, it is frequently associated with the BRICS and other similar groupings as a country that is expected to increase its global economic influence in the next few decades (Welch, 2013). Secondly, the fact that it acts as a natural bridge with its territories both in Asia and Europe makes Turkey a truly Eurasian country. Particularly in the post-Cold War period, this Eurasian pillar of Turkish foreign policy became increasingly visible due to the country's geographical proximity to many sub-regions of the Eurasian supercontinent. And finally, the Turkish governments under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) attached special importance to strengthening Turkey's bilateral relations with the rising Eurasian powers like China, Russia and India. These three factors contributed to Turkey's emergence as an influential actor on the

Eurasian political and economic stage in the twenty-first century.

It may be argued that the continuous growth of its economic power throughout the 2000s is the most significant factor that shapes Turkey's prospects in Eurasia. It is true that the country entered the decade with one of the worst financial crises of its history, which eventually paved the way for the newly founded AKP's rise to power in the 2002 general elections. However, the AKP governments' adherence to tighter fiscal policies and facilitation of Turkey's EU membership process reversed this negative situation. Eventually, during this period the Turkish economy grew ahead of many other countries at an average of five percent. This credible economic performance helped Turkey become the world's seventeenth largest economy and therefore a natural member of the G-20 platform. This is also why it was included in the so-called Next Eleven (N-11) group, which consists of the emerging economies that are expected to play a substantial role in the world economy along with the four BRIC countries (O'Neill, Wilson, Purushothaman, & Stupnytska, 2005: 7).²

The fact that Turkey achieved to sustain impressive growth rates in the 2010–2011 period at a time when both the US and EU were dealing with serious difficulties further contributed to its emergence as an influential power in its neighbourhood. Another major contribution to Turkey's regional influence, however, came from the AKP elites' redefinition of the country's geopolitical identity in accordance with the views of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Even before his appointment as foreign minister in 2009, Davutoğlu's multilateral and multi-track foreign policy vision that included the resolution of all problems with neighbouring countries and strengthening Turkey's influence in regional and global issues was already quite influential on the policies of the AKP governments. Likewise, his seminal book *Strategic Depth* that is based on the reassessment of traditional geopolitical theories from the viewpoint of Turkey and underlines the need for Turkish policymakers' to reconcile with the country's Ottoman past and Muslim roots is generally treated as a manifesto of the AKP's foreign policy vision (Davutoğlu, 2001: 52–58).

Davutoğlu's personal interest in traditional geopolitical theories and particularly his depiction of Turkey as a "central country" in world politics inevitably highlighted the Eurasian dimension of Turkish foreign policy. However, one should note that his anticipation of Eurasia is quite different from his predecessors who generally tended to associate the region with Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus, i.e. the former Soviet space. Davutoğlu, in contrast, frequently referred to Turkey "as a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast landmass" (Davutoğlu, 2008: 78). The addition of Africa into the geopolitical depiction of Eurasia can be interpreted in two regards. First, "Afro-Eurasia" strongly resembles the concept of the "world island" (the supercontinent formed by Europe, Asia and Africa), the geopolitical control of which was illustrated by

Mackinder as a key for global domination (Mackinder, 1944: 113). In this sense, it may be claimed that by placing Turkey right in the centre of this "world island", Davutoğlu legitimizes his "central country" argument which implies a much more significant role for Turkey in world politics. Second, the concept of "Afro-Eurasia" suggests that the Middle East and North Africa are gaining more importance in Turkish officials' geopolitical outlook towards Eurasia. This is not very surprising especially when one considers the AKP leaders' traditional interest in the Arab and Muslim world due to the strong religious and cultural ties between Turkey and the countries of this region. As a matter of fact, the sharp deterioration of Turkey's relations with Israel in the 2009–2011 period, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rising personal profile in the Muslim countries due to his political support for the Palestinian cause and Turkey's active diplomatic efforts during the so-called "Arab Spring" are usually regarded as signs of the AKP officials' special interest in this region (also see Altunışık & Martin, 2011). Another important sign is the salient Turkish role in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which is regarded as the leading institution for international cooperation between the Muslim countries. It should be indicated in this regard that since 2005, the OIC has been led by a Secretary-General from Turkey.

On the other hand, one should note that the Middle East is only one of the sub-regions of the Eurasian supercontinent. Turkey, however, is regarded as a bridge or a passage point between many of the Eurasian sub-regions. This is also very clearly emphasized in Brzezinski's illustration of Eurasia where Turkey emerges as an important geopolitical pivot that "stabilizes the Black Sea region, controls access from it to the Mediterranean Sea, balances Russia in the Caucasus, still offers an antidote to Muslim fundamentalism, and serves as the southern anchor for NATO" (Brzezinski, 1997: 47). This very special geographical location between three continents not only provides Turkey with the opportunity to promote itself as a "central country" in world politics, but also helps it acquire multiple geopolitical identities that continuously shape the geopolitical vision of the Turkish elites.

As also argued by some Turkish scholars, "the new foreign policy places Turkey within various regions in such a way that it occupies not only an important geo-political position, but that it also would be able to emerge as a meaningful player in political and economic settings" (Aras & Fidan, 2009: 199). In geo-economic terms, the fact that Turkey is located between the energy supplying countries of Asia and energy consuming countries of Europe highlights the country's new role as a major transit route for various oil and natural gas pipelines. Thus, making Turkey an "energy hub" or a terminal for pipelines running in the East-West and North-South directions becomes a popular slogan for Turkish policymakers since the end of the Cold War. The commencement of a number of grand energy transportation projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline and the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline in the 2000s provided further impetus to Turkey's new geo-economic role in Eurasia (İşeri, 2010: 183–185). The most recent example is the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) which is planned to

² Other than Turkey, the group included Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines and Vietnam.

carry significant amounts of Azeri natural gas through Turkey to Europe.

Turkey's geographical position also holds significant cultural implications in terms of Turkish policymakers' outlook towards Eurasia. It is argued, for instance, that the vision of Davutoğlu represents "civilizational geopolitical thinking" which emphasizes the religious differences not only between Turkey and the West, but also some non-Muslim countries like Armenia and Israel (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2011: 180, 192). The same religious differences are at the centre of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis that portrays Turkey as a "torn country" between the Western and Islamic civilizations. On the other hand, Turkey's prominent role in the launch of the UN's Alliance of Civilizations initiative in 2005 "which aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions" shows that religion does not necessarily play a factious role (United Nations Alliance of Civilizations). This last point also suggests that Turkey's geographical significance in the Eurasian supercontinent is based foremost on its capacity to link and separate two opposite realms at the same time – whether it be the East and West, Asia and Europe, Islam and Christianity.

It may be argued that this two-dimensional geo-cultural identity is one of the most influential factors that prompt the Turkish governments to develop a multidimensional foreign policy approach which aims to strengthen traditional ties with the West while forming new links with other regions and states. Such an approach quite naturally contributes to the significance of rising Eurasian powers for Turkey in the 2000s. In fact, as also indicated by some scholars, one might even witness the emergence of "soft Euro-Asianism" in Turkish foreign policy particularly in the second half of 2000s especially after a number of problems started to block Turkey's EU membership process (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009). Most notably, relations with Russia improved at an unprecedented speed and the two countries developed a "multidimensional partnership" that is based on close political and economic cooperation. Today, Turkey and Russia are top partners in trade and energy, the visa requirements between the two countries have been removed for stays of up to thirty days since 2010 and there is a high-level inter-governmental Turkish–Russian council that meets on a regular basis. All these developments make sharp contrast to the pessimistic geopolitical conflict scenarios of the previous decade which focussed on the two countries' conflicting positions in many strategic issues in post-Soviet Eurasia.³

Apart from the intensified cooperation with Russia, the Eurasian dimension of Turkish foreign policy has also been strengthened by the fresh impetus in Turkey's relations with China (Çolakoğlu, 2013). The Turkish–Chinese rapprochement is based on enhanced cooperation in many fields including trade, nuclear energy, tourism and logistics. The most remarkable sign of the new framework of relations between the two countries has been the

increase of the bilateral trade from 10 billion dollars in 2006 to 24 billion dollars in only five years (Shi, 2012). Another sign came in the sphere of cultural relations as 2012 was declared the China Culture Year in Turkey, while 2013 was celebrated as the Turkey Culture Year in China. Most importantly, Turkish–Chinese cooperation became noticeable also in the field of military relations especially when the air forces of the two countries held joint military exercises in the Turkish city of Konya in 2010. These were the first such exercises that China held with a NATO member state. The rising importance of Turkey in Chinese foreign policy was also hinted by Turkey's acceptance as a dialogue partner in the SCO summit in 2012. Most recently, the Turkish government decided to buy the missile defence system produced by a Chinese company over rival American and European companies.

With India, the third Eurasian power that rose to prominence in world politics in the last decade, the achievements of Turkish foreign policy have been quite modest due to the traditionally close relations between Turkey and Pakistan (Özkan, 2010). However, the fact that both Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül paid significant visits to India in the last five years has been a sign of Turkey's interest in upgrading its relations with this country. At the same time, there has been a gradual improvement in Turkish–Indian relations particularly in the fields of tourism and trade. Regarding the former sphere, Turkey started to implement a new visa policy in 2010 that aimed to attract more Indian tourists. In terms of economic relations, Turkish–Indian trade volume has significantly increased from 1.8 billion dollars in 2007 to 7.7 billion dollars in 2011, although these figures are quite low compared with Turkey's trade volume with Russia and China.⁴ On the other hand, Turkish economic ministry's latest decision to include India in its 2012–2013 list of "target/prioritized countries" is expected to contribute to better prospects for Turkish–Indian economic relations in the following years.

5. Conclusion

Much has changed in world politics during the fifteen years that passed following the publication of Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard*. Although some may argue that the Eurasian supercontinent still resembles a geopolitical chessboard in world politics, they would find it difficult to deny that the number of the main players in this chess game has drastically increased. Especially during the course of the global financial crisis of the last few years, countries like China, Russia and India – which are all located in the Eurasian supercontinent – started to project greater global political and economic influence at the expense of the Western powers. This has also inevitably altered the geopolitical representation of Eurasia in world politics. Today, it is quite hard to imagine it as the ultimate geopolitical prize for America. On the contrary, the concept of

³ On the improvement of Turkish–Russian relations in the 2000s see Aras, 2009; Özbay, 2011 and Erşen, 2011. On the impact of energy on Turkish–Russian rapprochement see Kardaş, 2011.

⁴ In 2012, Turkey's trade volume was around 33 billion dollars with Russia and 24 billion dollars with China. These two countries are currently among Turkey's top three trade partners. For details see Foreign Trade Statistics (2012).

Eurasia has become a geopolitical symbol associated with the rising powers and a multipolar world order.

The Turkish policymakers seem to have clearly anticipated the changing meaning of Eurasia in world politics. Apart from the fact that Turkey itself was recently labelled as a “rising Eurasian tiger”, its political and economic relations with other Eurasian powers like Russia, China and India also remarkably improved especially in the last few years (Champion & Parkinson, 2011). Prime Minister Erdoğan even declared in a televised interview in January 2013 that Turkey could consider full membership in the SCO as a reaction to its stalled EU membership process. Although it is currently difficult to imagine the SCO as a strong alternative for the EU or NATO in Turkish foreign policy, one should still emphasize that Turkey is the only NATO member state to enjoy a privileged institutional relationship with the SCO.

The dramatic shift that has been taking place in the world economy since 2007 is also a very important factor that shapes Turkey's new outlook towards Eurasia. Considering that the three members of BRIC are either full members or observers in the SCO, it can be claimed that the economic implications of the concept of Eurasia have become much more important for Ankara in the last few years. Particularly after the Eurozone debt crisis, it should be noted that Turkey's foreign trade with the SCO member states has risen from 49 billion dollars in 2010 to 63 billion dollars in 2012. The EU countries' share in Turkey's foreign trade, on the other hand, has declined during the same period (Şanghay Beşlisi, 2013).

Despite the current political differences between Turkey and the SCO member states regarding the Syrian civil war and despite Ankara's strengthened strategic relationship with NATO in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the Eurasian dimension of Turkish foreign policy will most likely grow stronger for two main reasons. Firstly, the centre of gravity in the world economy continues to move away from the West to the East. Turkish policymakers are fully aware that they need to improve their political and economic relations with rising powers like China and India in order to continue their claim of making Turkey a central country in world politics. It can be claimed in this regard that groupings such as the SCO and BRICS are perceived by the Turkish policymakers as a means rather than an end of realizing this ambitious goal. Secondly, although the financial crisis in Europe has slowed, it is far from being completely under control. This is another factor that complicates Turkey's already difficult EU accession process. Yet if the Turkish government and public completely lose their faith in the EU, then a possible “Eurasian alternative” may seem more promising – and perhaps even more convincing – for Turkish foreign policy.

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