THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY:

THE CASE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)

ABSTRACT

Burcu Öztürk

This paper studies the role of religion in international relations by examining the relationship between Turkey and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in terms of Turkish foreign policy. The study analyzes this relationship in two terms: First, from the establishment of the OIC in 1969 until 2002, and the second, from the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2002 to present. In the first period, five cases which are subjects of Turkish foreign policy have been chosen; the Oil Crisis in 1974, the Cyprus Issue, the Bulgaria Events, the Palestine Issue and the Bosnian War. Moreover, in the second period, three cases have been chosen; famine in Somalia, the conflict between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the Syrian Crisis. The aim of choosing these cases is to compare Turkey’s attitude towards the OIC during the events of the cases.

Furthermore, has the OIC been used as a Turkish foreign policy tool and if so, were there any effects of the JDP’s conservative structure on the relations with the OIC were questions asked throughout the study. Taking all of these elements into account, the main concern of this study is whether or not religion is the driving force of the relations between Turkey’s foreign policy objectives and the OIC.

Key Words: Turkish Foreign Policy, Religion, OIC, the Justice and Development Party

1Burcu Öztürk is a M.Sc. from the Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.
Introduction

Religion has been one of the most debatable issues in social sciences for years. Even the definition of religion has raised several questions and hence there are several approaches concerning the definitions of religion in different fields.\(^2\) Furthermore, the discipline of international relations has also become interested in the role of the religion in politics especially since the early 1990s. The debate on this issue has increased in the post-Cold War world. From the rise of fundamentalist religious movements to the increasing role of religion in politics, the secularization theories, which had assumed the decline of the religion in social life thanks to the advance of modernization, had to be revised.\(^3\)

Moreover, this study aims at evaluating the role of religion in international relations by examining the relationship between Turkey and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is the second biggest international organization in the world after the United Nations, is one of the fundamental organizations of the Muslim world, in terms of Turkish foreign policy. From the beginning of the establishment of the OIC, Turkey has played a significant role in the Organization because of its Muslim majority, important geopolitical situation and national interests. In the 1960s and 1970s, although Turkey based its foreign policy on the West, she could not neglect development in the Muslim world. Although Turkey is not a legal member of the OIC and this is a problem in terms of internal and international law, this problem is ignored because of the mutual interests of Turkey and the OIC.

First of all, the limits are designated in terms of chronology, which starts from the establishment of the OIC, 1969 to 2002. This reason of that is; these relations have intensified especially after the coming of the Justice and the Development Party to power in 2002. Hence the period after 2002 will be analyzed in the second period; from 2002 to present.

Second, relations between the Turkey and the OIC are examined by using specific events from the history of Turkish foreign policy. The goal of this is on the one hand, to delimit the

\(^2\) To see different definitions of religion from the anthropological perspective; Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, United Kindom, 2007, pp. 18-25, and to see the comparative sociological and anthropological discussions about the definition of religion; Brian Morris, *Din Üzerine Antropolojik İncelemeler: Bir Giriş Metni*, (çev. Tayfun Atay), İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, Şubat 2004, Ankara, Türkiye

foreign policy issues because of the impossibility of evaluating the whole process in one article. On the other hand, the aim is choosing the specific events according to their relevance with this study. For these reasons, five cases, which are the Oil Crisis in 1974, and economic relations with the OIC, the Cyprus Issue, Bulgaria Events, the Palestine Issue, and the Bosnia-Herzegovina War, are selected. In the first instance, a general evaluation of the Turkish foreign policy from 1970s to 2002 will be given, and then the events will be evaluated in the designated framework of the study.

**The Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy (1969-2002)**

The key point of the establishment of the new republic was based on Western ideas which were caused to shape Turkish foreign policy towards the West. Until the transition to multi-party system it was seen that the Turkish foreign policy disregarded the East, that is, the Muslim world and the Turkic republics, which were part of the Soviet Union before. Foreign policies were configured to cooperate with the West in every field, such as being a member of NATO, and starting the membership process of the EU. Turkey wanted to be a member of all these Western institutions. Furthermore, this tendency had risen significantly in the Cold War atmosphere and Turkey regarded the Soviet Union as a menace for her national security until the middle of the 1960s.

However, relations with the West were not always smooth, such as during the Cuban Crisis, Cyprus Issue or Johnson Letter events. In the light of these experiences, it could be said that Turkey understood that the West was not a completely credible ally for herself. Hence, Turkey gave up the one-way foreign policy and significantly after 1967, especially with the Cyprus issue, increased economic relations with the Soviet Union which put the wind up the West about losing Turkey. As Mahmut Bali Aykan emphasizes, the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry explained the changes in the foreign policy as a multi-faceted foreign policy. One of

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7 Süleyman Demirel, the Prime Minister of that period, told in one of his memoires that after signing the economic agreements with the Soviet Union, the USA ambassador asked him if they were changing axis. Baskın Oran, “Göreli Özerklik- 3”, Baskın Oran (ed.), 2005, p. 676
these changes was the tendency to lean toward the Soviet Union, and the other one was the tendency to lean toward the Muslim world. According to Aykan, the expectation of foreign policy makers was to use the “bridge” role of Turkey by bringing religion into prominence.8

In this respect, Turkey tried to improve relations with the Non-Aligned Movement in 1960s. This attempt did not result in membership of the Non-Aligned Movement, because of Turkey’s close relationships with the West,9 but it is possible to think that it resulted in opening the way to a multi-faceted foreign policy. Moreover Turkey attended the first summit of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation. Furthermore, Aykan interprets this participation as part of the implementation of new foreign policy decisions.10

It is possible to argue that three main factors have been influential in these new foreign policy decisions: Economic problems, political isolation in the international arena and political views of different governments.

First of all, economic issues were the most significant turning point of Turkish foreign policy toward the Muslim world. In 1970s, one of the most crucial events was the 1974 Oil Crisis. The increase in oil prices after the implementation of the oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 pushed Turkey to warm up its relations with the Muslim world. Moreover, there was a serious decline in the amount of remittances to Turkey. Hence, Meliha Benli and Mahmut Bali Aykan evaluate these two factors as one of the reasons of the changing axis of Turkish foreign policy toward the Muslim world.11

Thus, after the military intervention in 1980, economic relations have grown with the Muslim world.12 However, it is possible to say that the Prime Minister Turgut Özal’s policies and multi-directional vision in foreign policy were the peak point of improvement of relations with the OIC. It is possible to consider that Özal was one of the most important actors in

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8 Aykan, February, 1993, p. 95

9 Ibid, p. 94


developing relations with the OIC. Moreover, his conservative ideology and supporters made it easy to turn the foreign policy to the Muslim world, and Muhittin Ataman describes the ideology of Özal as a synthesis of cultural Turkism and Islamism and technological Westernism.\textsuperscript{13}

Second, the Cyprus Issue caused the isolation of Turkey from the international arena. The long-standing pro-West Turkish foreign policy created expectations from the West for all foreign policy problems. However, in the 1960s, the Cyprus Issue proved the lack of distrust to the West in the international arena.\textsuperscript{14} This event will be evaluated in this study in terms of using the OIC as a foreign policy instrument in Turkish foreign policy.

Third, the political views and tendencies of the governments which were in power after the 1970s were effected in turning to the Muslim world and warming relations with the OIC by using religion as a political argument. The foreign policies of the Justice Party with Süleyman Demirel, the Motherland Party with Turgut Özal and the National Salvation Party with Necmettin Erbakan were significant in terms of increasing relations with the OIC between the 1970s and 2000s. Hence one of the arguments of this study is that right wing parties shaped relations with the Muslim world and OIC.

After this general evaluation of Turkish foreign policy, it will be more suitable to analyze relations between Turkey and the OIC by using specific events in Turkish foreign policy. The aim is to find an answer as to whether Turkey used religion and the OIC relations as a foreign policy instrument to gain more credibility in the international arena, new variations and a new perspective in its foreign policy, or not.

**The Oil Crisis and Economic Relations with the OIC**

The aim of this section is to understand the developments between Turkey and the OIC in terms of economic issues. As Benli indicates, the economic factor plays a fundamental role in Turkey’s relations with the OIC.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, she argues it is considering that the economic relations and issues have influence on Turkish foreign policy. Hence it will be discussed...


\textsuperscript{15} Benli, p. 19
whether economic events prompted Turkey to reinforce relations with the Muslim world or not.

While investigating Turkish foreign policy since 1970s, one of the most significant economic events which affected Turkey was the Oil Crisis in 1974. After the Fourth Arab- Israel War in 1973, the oil-exporting Arab countries increased the price of crude oil from $2.5 in 1973 to $11.6 on December 24, 1974. And this increase led to the increase in Turkey’s foreign trade deficit, as Turkey was dependent on the oil-exporting Arab countries. Turkey realized the importance of the Muslim world economically and intensified its relations with members of the OIC.

In the 1980s, Turkey’s foreign policy was increasingly active in improving economic relations with the OIC. As Benli argues, it is possible to argue that the effect of the Oil Crisis provided Turkey with a new market. In the same way, according to Aykan, in the 1980s Turkish exports increased because of the implementation of the economic resolution of January 1980. Hence this increase affected the importance of the markets of the Islamic countries positively. In this manner, the OIC became an opportunity for Turkey. Moreover, Turkey took leadership in the implementation of the “General Agreement for Economic, Commercial and Technical Cooperation” for the Islamic countries which was approved in the Eighth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1977. It provided Turkey to be the host country of the discussion the “Plan of Action” for the Islamic countries in 1980 in Ankara. The aim of this meeting was crucial in terms of constituting the framework of the economic integration and the establishment of an Islamic Common Market. The Plan was approved in the Third Islamic Conference in Taif, Saudi Arabia, in 1982. Moreover, its importance was declared in the summit with the following: “the turning point in the history of the OIC as far as economic cooperation among member states is concerned.”

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16 For details of Oil Crisis, see; Tayyar Arı, Geçmişten Günümüze Orta Doğu, Siyaset, Savaş ve Diplomasi, Alfa Basım Yayın Dağıtım Ltd. Şti., İstanbul, 2004, pp. 396- 406


18 Aslan, pp. 120-122 and Benli, pp. 21-24

19 Aykan, 1993, pp. 105-106

As Aykan indicates, the rate of total export of Turkey with the Islamic countries was increased from 22.51% in 1980 to 45.79% in 1983. Moreover this increase resulted in a decline of the share of the West. Aykan interprets it as a shift in the direction of the Turkish economy towards the Islamic countries.\textsuperscript{21} According to Altunışık, this increase reflected the growing importance of the oil-producing countries for Turkey. Again, Ataman emphasizes that as the first Özal government increased Turkey’s share of the Islamic Development bank of the OIC to 160 million Islamic Dinar (ID) in 1985, Turkey gained the right to be represented at the Executive Committee of the bank as the fifth largest shareholder.\textsuperscript{22}

It can be said that the Oil Crisis, turned Turkey’s economic attention to the Muslim world. Moreover, Turkey set economic relations with the Muslim world via gaining more importance in the OIC. Hence its interest increased and it invested more money into the organs of the OIC.

**The Cyprus Issue**

The Cyprus Issue has been an inseparable part of Turkish foreign policy since the 1960s. This caused a problem for pro-Western Turkish foreign policy. Süha Bölükbaşi argues that this pro-Western foreign was damaging for Turkey’s interests in Cyprus.\textsuperscript{23} Hence, from the middle of the 1960s, Turkey started to gain support for its cause in Cyprus from the Muslim world. According to Altunışık and Demo Ahmet Aslan, the isolation of Turkey in the international arena was changing the axis of Turkish foreign policy towards the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{24} For this reason, as Aslan indicated, Turkey sent unofficial delegates to two Islamic Congresses to gain the support of the Muslim world in 1965.\textsuperscript{25} In the 6\textsuperscript{th} Islamic Congress, a decision condemning the Greek Cypriots’ violent actions was accepted by the Congress thanks to the efforts of the Turkish Committee.\textsuperscript{26} This can be considered as part of the politicization of religion in Turkish foreign policy. Although Turkey rejected the invitations to

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 106- 107

\textsuperscript{22} Ataman, p. 138

\textsuperscript{23} Bölükbaşi, p. 25

\textsuperscript{24} Benli, pp. 12- 13, Aslan, pp. 66- 69

\textsuperscript{25} Islamic Congresses were held before the establishment of the OIC to discuss the problems of the Muslim world, to gain support of the Muslim world, and led by Saudi Arabia. For details of these Congresses see; Aslan, p. 67

\textsuperscript{26} Aslan, p. 67
officially join the Islamic Congress, it is possible to say that Turkey did not hesitate to use the Congress for her foreign policy interests. Yet, as Aslan emphasizes, Turkey could not surpass the influence of Egypt on the Arab countries which were in the Congress, because the Greek Cypriots had gained the support of Egypt on this issue. Hence Turkey clearly realized the negative effects of its pro-West foreign policy. Thereby, it started to make radical changes in its foreign policy via getting close to the OIC.

However the turning point of the Cyprus Issue in relations between Turkey and the OIC came in the 6th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in July 1975. As Aykan argues, Rauf Denktaş was invited to the Conference as “the leader of the Turkish Muslim Community in Cyprus”; however, he was not the official leader at that time. This invitation shows the growing sympathy of the OIC to Turkey’s Cyprus policy.

Moreover, the most important event for the Cyprus Issue in the OIC was the 7th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Istanbul, Turkey, on May 1976. It was decided that the Turkish Cypriot Community will have a seat in all OIC meeting in a ‘guest’ capacity. This newly gained status for the Turkish Cypriot Community brought legitimacy to the Cyprus Issue in the OIC. Later, this position was elevated to that of ‘observer’ position in the 10th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Fez, Morocco, in May 1979. As Aykan emphasized, this change was significant for the interests of the Turkish Cypriot Community. The OIC members agreed on providing assistance for Turkish Cypriots by using the Islamic Solidarity Fund and the all organs of the General Secretariat, and giving economic aid via the Islamic Development Bank. In the next summits, such as the Dhaka Conference in 1991 and

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27 Ibid, p. 80
28 Ibid, pp. 67-68
29 Aykan, 1993, p. 105
33 Mahmut Bali Aykan, The OIC and Turkey’s Cyprus Cause, The Turkish Year Book, Vol: XXV, 1995, p. 53
the Casablanca Conference in 1992, the position of the Turkish Cypriot Community was strengthened in the OIC.\textsuperscript{34}

Furthermore, the 6\textsuperscript{th} Islamic Summit held in Dakar, Senegal in 1991, was another turning point in relations between the OIC and the Turkish Cypriot Community. With this summit, the OIC decided to expand relations with the “Turkish Muslim Community of Cyprus”.\textsuperscript{35} This point is important in terms of emphasizing the use of the word “Muslim”, because in the previous declarations of the OIC, the wording was “Turkish Cypriot Community”.\textsuperscript{36} Identifying the Cyprus Issue from a religious perspective could make it more suitable to become a popular issue of the OIC. Moreover, with the Dakar Conference, it was decided to increase relations with the Turkish Muslim Community of Cyprus in significant fields such as trade, tourism, information, investment and sports and also to develop the Turkish Muslim Community of Cyprus’s economy through consultation with the Islamic Development Bank.\textsuperscript{37} These developments could be considered as significant developments for Turkish Cypriots in terms of gaining international support.

These were regarded as victories of Turkish foreign policy.\textsuperscript{38} Although the OIC members did not recognize the Turkish Cypriot Community de jure, the reaction of the OIC was significant to show the international arena that there were supporters of Turkey in this issue.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, Aykan interprets the reservations of the members of the OIC on the recognition issue from another perspective. He argues that most of these countries were the members of the UN and of the Non-Aligned Movement. Hence, their attitudes towards the Turkish Cypriot Community were balanced against their position in these international organizations.\textsuperscript{40}

Furthermore, as Aykan states, the support of the OIC for the Turkish Cypriot Community in all fields was more important than the de jure recognition of the island for Turkey. Because the most important result of the position of the Turkish Cypriot Community is the economic

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Aykan, 1993, p. 121
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 121
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Aykan, 1995, pp. 53-55 and Aykan, 1993, p. 105
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Aykan, 1993, p. 121
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Aykan, 1995, p. 57
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
support of the OIC. Moreover he emphasizes that the Turkish Cypriot community had taken place in the OIC as “unnamed full members”.\footnote{Aykan, 1993, p. 121} Aykan’s evaluation could have been assimilated into Turkey’s position in the OIC. Turkey is still not a de jure member of the OIC. However this situation indicates that although Turkey is not an official member of the OIC, its power in the organization is not different from the other members. After examining the decisions and the attitudes of the OIC towards the Turkish Cypriot Community, it is probable to draw conclusion that Turkey’s influence is enough to influence the OIC’s policies to some extent.\footnote{For details of the emergence of the Cyprus Issue, see; William Hale, Türkçe Dış Politikası, Mozaik Yayınları, İstanbul, 2003, pp. 153-169 and Turan, Barlas, Sönmezolu (der.), p. 59


\footnote{Yılmaz emphasizes that Turkish Foreign Minister Mr. Halefoglu used the term “assimilation” for the Bulgaria Events officially for the first time in the Summit of the Foreign Ministers Islam Countries, in New York, in 1985. Yılmaz, p. 114}  

The Bulgaria Events (1980-1990)

The Bulgaria Events, which started in 1985 and continued until 1989, were one of the most significant issues of Turkish foreign policy in this time. Bulgaria under Jivkov had discriminatory policies towards its Turkish Muslim minority in Bulgaria. These policies included the restriction of the cultural, educational and religious rights of the minority. The Bulgarian government banned the Turkish language in every field, closed the mosques and forced people to change Turkish surnames into Bulgarian surnames. The result of these policies was that most Turks in Bulgaria wanted to migrate to Turkey or another country.\footnote{Yılmaz emphasizes that Turkish Foreign Minister Mr. Halefoglu used the term “assimilation” for the Bulgaria Events officially for the first time in the Summit of the Foreign Ministers Islam Countries, in New York, in 1985. Yılmaz, p. 114}

During these events, violence towards the Turkish Muslim minority disturbed Turkey. Because Turkey regarded the policies of Jivkov as an attempt to assimilate the Turkish Muslim minority.\footnote{Yılmaz emphasizes that Turkish Foreign Minister Mr. Halefoglu used the term “assimilation” for the Bulgaria Events officially for the first time in the Summit of the Foreign Ministers Islam Countries, in New York, in 1985. Yılmaz, p. 114} Hence Turkey tried to mold international public opinion by using the
OIC.\textsuperscript{45} The Secretary General of the OIC, Şerafettin Pirzade stated that the Muslim world will not accept the corrosion of the Turkish Muslim minority’s rights.\textsuperscript{46} In other words, the OIC was already disturbed by these events.

Moreover, Turkey gave more importance to the Bulgaria Events in its foreign policy. Hence, this event is considerable for this study in terms of Turkey’s usage of the OIC as a foreign policy instrument. First of all, as Saad S. Khan argues, Turkey requested a resolution to condemn the Bulgarian government, which was included in the 16\textsuperscript{th} Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministry in Fez, Morocco in March 1986. The decision of the Conference was to constitute a committee which would investigate the conditions of Bulgarian Muslims.\textsuperscript{47} The Committee went to Bulgaria for an investigation in May, 1987. However, Rüştü Yılmaz and Khan stated that the Bulgarian government hid many signs of assimilation and gave permission to the OIC Committee to talk only to designated people and visit only designated places such as mosques and schools which were chosen by the Bulgarian government.\textsuperscript{48} The Committee declared its report to the 17\textsuperscript{th} Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministries, in Amman, Jordan in 1988.\textsuperscript{49} According to Khan the report recommended the OIC ambassadors to visit the areas where Turkish Muslim Bulgarians live and express their concerns about the conditions of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. Yet the Deputy Foreign Minister of Bulgaria, Lyubomir Popov, criticized this report and blamed Turkey for misleading and manipulating the OIC.\textsuperscript{50}

Moreover, in 1989, Turkey reported that the condition of Turkish Muslim Bulgarians had not changed, and requested a special session of the OIC. Although this session was on the agenda of the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministries, it was not realized.\textsuperscript{51} This situation can be read as the last attempt of Turkey concerning discussion of the Bulgaria


\textsuperscript{46} “Bulgar Zulmünü İslam Konferansı’nda Tel’in Etti”, Tercüman Gazetesi, 07.03.1985, p.1 and p. 10.

\textsuperscript{47} Khan, p. 362
\textsuperscript{48} Yılmaz, p. 116, Khan, p. 363
\textsuperscript{49} Yılmaz, p. 116
\textsuperscript{50} Khan, p. 364
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
Events in the OIC. As Yılmaz indicated, the OIC could not take an effective decision about this issue. Yet, it could be possible to infer the attempts of Turkey to use the OIC for its own foreign policy interests.

**The Palestine Issue**

Since the 1950s, relations with Israel and the Palestine Issue have been an important issue for Turkish foreign policy. They were sensitive issues in terms of balancing the pro-West foreign policy of Turkey with its foreign policy toward the Middle East. As Benli emphasizes, Turkey’s relations with Israel, especially trade relations, were always a cause of conflict with the Muslim world. For instance, the Syrian Foreign Minister in 1965 said about their discontent about relations between Turkey and Israel clearly in one of his statements; “Our attitude is related to Turkey’s relations with Israel. If Turkey insists on not giving a sincere form to these relations, it would be difficult to establish desired relations between Turkey and Syria.”

While considering the importance of the Palestine Issue and relations with Israel in Turkish foreign policy, it could be said that the attitudes of Turkey towards the OIC were shaped via these issues. First of all, as Çağrı Erhan and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu indicate, Turkey supported the Arab countries that were against the idea of sharing out Palestine in the UN General Assembly in the meeting about the Palestine Issue. The support of Turkey interpreted by the West as ‘the brotherhood of Muslims’ and despite this interpretation of the West, the real reason for the support of Turkey was not related to its sympathy to Arabs and the Muslim world, it was that Turkey was concerned about the possibility of instability of the region after this decision. Additionally, Aslan evaluates the consequence of this attitude of Turkey caused cooling off relations with Israel, yet it was not breaking up relations completely.

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52 Yılmaz, p. 116

53 For details of Turkey and Israel Relations, see; Gencer Özcan, “Türkiye- İsrail İlişkileri”, Sönmezoğlu (der.), pp. 329–357

54 Turkish Year Book… 1965, op. cit., p. 246, Quoted by Benli, p. 28

55 Çağrı Erhan – Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “Filistin sorunu ve İsrail’le İlişkiler”,Oran (ed.), p. 637

56 Aslan, p. 93
Secondly, from the establishment of the OIC, the Palestine issue constituted an ever-present part of the OIC agenda. As Aslan indicates the most important issue of the Rabat Conference in 1969 was the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) at the Conference. In this discussion, on one side, Egypt and Algeria supported the attendance of the PLO; on the other side, Iran and Turkey, who both had close relations with Israel, objected to its participation. Furthermore, in the end, both sides accepted the offer of King Hasan, the King of Morocco, and the PLO attended the Rabat Conference as “observers”. Moreover, the Conference condemned Israel explicitly. The Turkish delegate declared that they will not approve this final declaration without reservation and Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil said that they support the declaration "...to the extent that it is compatible with the United Nations resolutions Turkey had voted for or supported." Hence it could be possible to say that in the beginning of relations of Turkey with the OIC, Turkey was not close to the OIC’s position on the Palestine Issue.

During the Fourth Arab-Israel war in 1973, Turkey declared its neutrality and did not give permission to the USA to use the İncirlik Air Base on its soil: Neither did it allow the Soviet Union to use Turkey’s airspace. Moreover, Turan Güneş, the Turkish Foreign Minister, attended the Second Islamic Summit which was gathered to discuss the results of the war in February 1974 in Lahore, Pakistan. Mr. Güneş declared that Turkey did not accept the OIC’s pressure to cut off relations with Israel.

But, after the war, Turkey’s attitude towards the PLO was moderated. According to Gencer Özcan, one of the reasons for this shift was the negotiations between the head of the Political Bureau of the PLO and Mr. Güneş in 1974. Another reason was the Arab League’s declaration in 1974 the PLO was the only legitimate representative of the Palestine people.

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57 For details of the OIC agenda see, Benli, pp. 42-107 and Aslan, pp. 80-140
58 Aslan, p. 85
59 Aykan, February, 1993. p. 96
60 Aykan, Ibid., p. 96 and Aslan, p. 100
61 Belleten 60, September 1969, p. 48, quoted by Aykan, Ibid, p. 96
62 Özcan, Ibid, p. 335
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
Also, in the same year, the UN accepted the PLO’s participation to the meetings of the General Assembly of the UN as “observer”.\(^{65}\) Turkey announced that the PLO would open a bureau in Turkey.\(^{66}\) However, according to Aslan, one of the reasons for this decision was related to Turkey’s concern with another oil crisis. This positive attitude towards the OIC was also in line with Turkey’s new balanced foreign policy \textit{vis-à-vis} the West.\(^{67}\)

Nevertheless, Turkey did not let the PLO open a bureau until 1979.\(^{68}\) Aykan gives several reasons for this delay such as the support of the PLO to terrorist groups in Turkey.\(^{69}\) According to Yavuz and Aykan, the reason of this delay was related with the support of the PLO to Greek Cyprus on the Cyprus Issue\(^ {70}\) and Turkey’s balanced policy towards the PLO. However, Yavuz differentiates his approach to relations between the Cyprus Issue and the PLO. He claims Turkey’s behaviors toward the PLO, in the OIC, have been shaped by Turkey’s acquisitions about the Cyprus Issue by the OIC. He argues that the reason for opening the PLO bureau in 1979 was parallel with gaining observer status of the Turkish Cypriot Community in the OIC in 1979.\(^ {71}\) In fact, the process of opening of the PLO bureau demonstrated how the issue became more and more important as Turkey’s role and effectiveness in the OIC grew hosting one of the most important conferences of the OIC, and gaining legitimacy for the Cyprus Issue in the OIC.

\textbf{Bosnian War (1992- 1995)}

In 1990s, one of the significant issues in Turkish foreign policy was the Bosnian War. The declaration of independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which came after the approval of the referendum of independence in 1992, brought the attacks of the Serbs that started the war.\(^ {72}\)

\(^{65}\) Özcan, p. 335 and Aslan, p. 130


\(^ {67}\) Aslan, p. 135

\(^ {68}\) “FKÖ’nün Türkiye’de Büro Açması Kesinleşiyor”, www.gazetarsivi.milliyet.com.tr, 15.08.1979, p. 9, (acessed on December 15, 2012)

\(^ {69}\) Aykan, February, 1993, p. 98


\(^ {71}\) Yavuz, Sönmezöğlu (der.), p. 246

\(^ {72}\) For details of the war, see; Şule Kut, “Yugoslavya Bunalımı ve Türkiye’nin Bosna – Hersek ve Makedonya Politikası: 1990- 1993”, Sönmezöğlu (der.), pp. 592- 601 and Hale, pp. 276- 283
According to William Hale, the interest of Turkey in Bosnia was related to the widespread perception that the Muslims of Bosnia were the last remaining Muslims of Eastern Europe although their ethnic roots were not Turkish.\(^{73}\) Hence the active Turkish foreign policy aimed at stopping the war, including attempts to use the OIC.

Turkey called the OIC to meet of an Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in İstanbul, in 1992.\(^{74}\) According to Aykan, this call of Turkey was crucial in terms of chairing the meeting, which confirmed the prestige of Turkey in the eyes of the members of the OIC. Furthermore, this position was a sign of emergence of Turkey as a rival to Saudi Arabia and Iran for leadership in the OIC.\(^{75}\)

Moreover, Turkey attended the UN’s extraordinary convention to discuss the measures to put an end to the war as the Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1992.\(^{76}\) Turkey declared that unless necessary measures were taken to protect the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the UN, it would send troops with the members of the OIC in December, 1992.\(^{77}\) After this declaration, Turkey vouched to the decision of lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia-Herzegovina in the meetings of the OIC in 1993. Additionally, Turkey proposed the Muslim countries to send Special Forces to protect the ‘safety zone’, which was declared by the UN in 1999 and that it would establish perimeters around the region where Muslims of Bosnia live.\(^{78}\) However, although Turkey tried to use the OIC as an international power in the Bosnian events, the efforts of Turkey were not enough to stop the war.\(^{79}\)

\(^{73}\) Hale, p. 277


\(^{75}\) Aykan, 1993, p. 124

\(^{76}\) Aykan, Ibid., p. 117

\(^{77}\) Hale, p. 278

\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Hale, p. 279, Kut, Sönmezoğlu (der.), pp. 599- 601
The General Attitudes of Turkish Foreign Policy Since 2002

The Justice and Development Party’s (JDP) foreign policy is a controversial topic for many observers since 2002. Researching the relationship between Turkey and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in terms of its effect on Turkish foreign policy reveals many different approaches to this issue. Thereby, this study tries to put the effect of the relationship between Turkey and the OIC on Turkish foreign policy across by analyzing these approaches.

Since the coming to power of the JDP, the first outstanding event was the JDP’s attitude towards the European Union (EU). This attitude did not exist only in the JDP period, but had started in the mid-1990s. However, Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yıldırım describe the JDP’s attempts for the EU as the “golden years of the JDP”, which indicates the period from November 2002 to the formal opening of EU accession negotiations in October 2005. Moreover, Burak Bilgehan Özpek interprets this process in terms of two possibilities. According to Özpek, one possibility is that the JDP tries to balance the tension between a secular army and the ex-Islamist politicians of the JDP through supporting the EU membership process by revising many legal codes to meet the Copenhagen Criteria (such as the promotion of democracy and the subordination of the military to civilian authority). The other possibility is that the JDP regards democracy as the key of keeping stability in domestic affairs. Moreover, Özpek emphasizes that the JDP differs substantially from its predecessor, the Welfare Party in terms of the EU policies.

However, since 2005, the JDP’s foreign policy has changed to multi-dimensional foreign policy which is described by Öniş and Yılmaz as “loose Europeanization” or a “soft Euro-Asianism” strategy. Yet, according to them, “soft Euro-Asianism” does not just apply to the former Soviet Union region and the Middle East, but to all of Turkey’s neighbors. Furthermore, in the literature, this strategy is described as “zero problems towards neighbors”, which is one of the foreign policy principles of Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu.

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81 Ibid.
82 Burak Bilgehan Özpek, “‘Arab Spring’ or ‘Turkish Winter’?”, *NearEastQuarterly* · September 7th, 2011, p. 3
83 Öniş and Yılmaz, p. 13
84 For more details of “zero problem towards neighbors” strategy and its effects, see; Ayhan Şimşek, “Turkey's Foreign Policy From Regional to Global Player”, http://en.qantara.de/From-Regional-to-Global-
Davutoğlu explains the policy-making process of Turkish foreign policy with the help of five principles. The first is the “balance between security and democracy”; the second is “zero problems towards neighbors”; the third is “proactive and pre-emptive peace policy diplomacy”; the fourth one is “multi-dimensional foreign policy”; and the fifth is “rhythmic diplomacy”. This last principle is important in terms of this study, because Davutoğlu emphasizes that this principle aims at active involvement in all international organizations.

It is possible to consider that one of the reasons of increasing relations with the OIC in the JDP period is due to this last principle. Moreover, it could be argued that these principles have changed the leaning of Turkey toward the Middle East and OIC. However, it is discussed in the literature that the only reason for this turn is not these foreign policy principles of the JDP. There are also different approaches for this turn as analyzed below.

The Reasons of Turning to the Middle East and The OIC

Since the JDP came to power in 2002, while it has been widely argued that the JDP’s primary foreign policy concern was the membership process of the EU, the JDP has started relations with the Middle East. While researching this process, it could be said that there are different approaches to the JDP’s Middle East policies. These approaches could be examined under the following themes; 9/11 and the UN effect, Turkey’s position between the East and the West, the desire of an active role in the region, and the issues of identity. Moreover these approaches are significant in terms of understanding the OIC in Turkish foreign policy by scholars.

Moreover, Hassan Fattah also interprets this change of Turkish foreign policy in terms of identity by referring to Bülent Aras’s following statement; "Turkish domestic politics has led to a new orientation in foreign policy." Fattah agrees with Aras and claims that Turkey emphasizes its interest in the Muslim world by gaining the position of Secretary General of

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85 Davutoğlu, Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Quoted by Hassan Fattah, “Turkey Club”, The New Republic, 11.10.2004, p. 18
the OIC in 2005. What is more, Fattah adds that the JDP’s Islamic identity prompts their foreign policy decisions as in the case of the OIC. Additionally, another scholar, Robins, interprets the interest of the JDP to the OIC with Turkish society’s Islamic identity and its accordance with the structure of the JDP; however, he adds another perspective to the JDP’s interest in that there is the crucial effect of Abdullah Gül on the JDP’s attitude towards the OIC, which Robins traces back to Gül’s term as the Foreign Minister. Robins also argues that Gül worked a number of years in the Islamic Development Bank, which is the one of the four specialized institutions of the OIC, and that hence the experience of Gül has an influence on the decisions of the JDP. Emiliano Alessandri also agrees with these arguments and emphasizes that the JDP uses relations between Turkey and the OIC to get the support of its constituency as the latter’s interest in the Muslim world is growing.

In contrast, F. Stephen Larrabee criticizes this identity debate and relates the closer relations with the OIC to Turkey’s security concerns. He argues that the JDP’s Islamic root has an effect on foreign policy, yet the main reason for Turkey’s interest in the Middle East and the Muslim world is its fragile relations with its neighbors such as Iraq, Syria, and indirect effects of relations with the other countries in the region, such as Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Iran.

**Turkey’s Initiatives towards the OIC**

In light of the Turkish foreign policy picture illustrated above, it is possible to understand the interest of the JDP in the OIC more easily. However, there is another debate on relations with the OIC. It is the attempts of the JDP to win the election of Secretary General of the OIC and then Turkey’s efforts to gain the OIC’s leadership.

After coming to power in 2002, it was discussed that the primary foreign policy concern of the JDP government was the EU. However, JDP was really enthusiastic about gaining a significant role in the OIC. As George E. Gruen indicates, Turkey made successfully lobbied to win the position of the Secretary General of the OIC. He implies that some Turkish officials visited many countries in the Muslim world to gain their support in the elections. For

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88 Ibid.

89 Robins, p. 301

90 Emiliano Alessandri, “Turkey’s New Foreign Policy and the Future of Turkey–EU Relations”, *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 45: 3, p. 86

instance, the Parliament Speaker, Bülent Arınç visited Morocco to ask for their support for Turkey’s candidature. Moreover, during this visit, Arınç signed an agreement on behalf of Turkey to strengthen bilateral Turkish-Moroccan relations.\textsuperscript{92} Gruen mentions Ha’aretz interview with Tayyip Erdoğan in 2004. In this interview, Erdoğan furiously condemned Israel’s military attacks against Palestinians. Gruen argues that the timing of the anger of Erdoğan to Israel was related with the JDP’s closer relations with the Muslim world and the forthcoming elections in the OIC and Turkey’s desire to win the leadership election. However, Gruen claims that the close relations with the OIC will decrease the chance of Turkey in the membership process of the EU.\textsuperscript{93} Yet, Şimşek advocates that the close relations with the Muslim world are an advantage for Turkey’s membership process of the EU because of the special position of Turkey. Şimşek refers to Hüseyin Bağcı’s description of Turkey as a “middle power”; “... a country which cannot determine or regulate political developments alone, but has valuable "soft power" assets to make a systematic impact together with other countries or through international institutions”\textsuperscript{94} Robins agrees that being the member of the OIC provides Turkey bilateral advantages. “To the West they presented themselves as the proselytizers of democratization among the membership of the ICO; to the Islamic world their posture was that of an acceptable and effective voice for Islamic piety within the West.”\textsuperscript{95} Furthermore, Öniş and Yılmaz interpret the effort of Turkey for the leadership role in the OIC besides Turkey’s membership process of the EU, from another perspective that it was a result of Turkey’s March 1, 2003 decision which did not allow US troops to use Turkish territory during the invasion of Iraq.\textsuperscript{96}

Moreover, Baran sees the active role of Turkey in the OIC as a consequence of Davutoğlu’s multi-dimensional foreign policy principle.\textsuperscript{97} However, Öniş and Yılmaz claim that the active role of Turkey in the OIC is a consequence of Davutoğlu’s rhythmic diplomacy principle


\textsuperscript{93} Gruen, p. 444

\textsuperscript{94} Şimşek, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{95} Robins, p. 302

\textsuperscript{96} Öniş and Yılmaz, p. 10

\textsuperscript{97} Baran, p. 17
which aims to gain a more active role in an international organization. Hence, the lobbying of Turkey for the election could be explained with this principle.

**The New Period of the OIC and Relations with Turkey**

The OIC has the first democratically elected Secretary General, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu in its history. It is possible to say that on the one hand this situation represents a new period for the OIC, and on the other hand, it represents a new process for Turkey as well. Turkey made crucial efforts to win the elections; hence it could be implied that relations with the OIC have grown after the elections. It should be more suitable to analyze both the changes in the OIC with İhsanoğlu than relations between the OIC and Turkey. This provides us the opportunity to compare the new period of the OIC and Turkey’s position within it.

**Turkey and the OIC After 2002**

As it is mentioned at the beginning of this study, Turkey has changed its attitude towards the Muslim world after 2002. In this period, relations with the OIC gained more importance on the agenda of Turkish foreign policy. The most significant attempt of Turkey in relation to this change was to win the Secretary General position of the OIC. Furthermore, with this new role in the OIC, relations between Turkey and the OIC have grown considerably in political, economic and in social issues.

**Political Issues**

In political issues, the general discussion is about the efforts of Turkey’s leadership of the OIC. However, it is possible to say that Turkey has not changed its policy which was to use the OIC as a foreign policy instrument since the 1970s. Turkey continues to push the OIC to take action in several issues. It should be remembered that, until the 2000s, Turkey prompted the OIC to support mainly Turkish minorities by emphasizing their Muslim identity, for example the Cyprus issue and the Bulgaria Events, in foreign countries. However, it is possible to say that after 2002 Turkey has changed this policy. Recently, it can be observed that Turkey has tried to use the OIC for supporting Muslim minorities all over the world. To understand this change, three cases have been chosen: famine in Somalia, the conflict between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Burma, and the Syrian Crisis.

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98 Öniş and Yılmaz, p. 12
Famine in Somalia

The first significant effort in this sense is the Somalia case. Turkey called the OIC to take action for an urgent meeting on the famine in Somalia in 2011.\(^{99}\) Turkey was the first country to draw world attention to the famine in Somalia that year. Thanks to this urgent meeting of the OIC, the OIC pledged $350 million in financial aid for Somalia.\(^{100}\) According to TİKA (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı), Turkey sent financial aid amounting to 640 million TL to Somalia up until February 2012.\(^{101}\) Moreover, it is possible to say that the peak of relations with Somalia was reached with the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s official visit to Somalia in August 2011.\(^{102}\) This visit attracted the attention of the world because Erdoğan was the first Western Prime Minister who visited Mogadishu despite the domestic conflicts of Somalia over the last twenty years. Furthermore, besides this financial aid for Somalia and Erdoğan’s visit, Turkey developed relations with Somalia in every field. The President of Somalia, Sheikh Hasan Mahmud paid his first official foreign state visit to Turkey in September 2012. Additionally, during this visit, bilateral military and financial aid agreements were signed and it was decided to cooperate in different fields such as education, trade, health, infrastructure, etc.\(^{103}\) These efforts of Turkey could be interpreted as a new foreign policy expansion of Turkey towards Africa.\(^{104}\) Hence, it is possible to consider that Turkey’s efforts to prompt the OIC in this case can be considered at the same time as one of the Turkish foreign policy’s steps toward the development of relations with Africa.


\(^{100}\) http://www.oic-oci.org/topic_detail.asp?t_id=5585, (accessed on 30.01.2013)


\(^{104}\) Özkan, p. 676 and http://www.dunyabulteni.net/?aType=yazarHaber&ArticleID=18838, (accessed on 31.01.2013)
Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar

Another example of Turkey’s effort for Muslim minorities around the world is the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (Burma). Since 2012, Turkey had a growing interest in Myanmar and opened an Embassy on March 9, 2012. Furthermore the violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar had attracted Turkey’s interest since June 2012. The foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and the wife of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Emine Erdoğan visited Myanmar in August 2012. According to the media, the violence in Myanmar has come into the world’s agenda thanks to Turkey. During their visit, Davutoğlu indicated that their aim was both to develop relations with the Myanmar government and to help Rohingya Muslims. Additionally, the Prime Minister Office started a financial aid campaign for Rohingya Muslims. Furthermore, besides these efforts, Turkey has called the OIC to protect the Muslims in Myanmar. Hence, the OIC has increased its efforts, such as when İhsanoğlu tried to press the Myanmar government to prevent violence, and when he draws attention to violence in different international platforms. The first meeting of the Contact Group of the OIC for the Rohingya Muslims called upon the government of Myanmar to launch a rehabilitation and reconciliation process in the region, resettle the internally displaced persons to new homes, and to take measures for the long-term economic development of the region. Despite these efforts from Turkey and the OIC, they were not enough to stop the violence. Moreover, the desire of the OIC to open an office in Myanmar to help the Muslims was blocked by the Buddhists in October 2012. It is possible to say that the result of these initiatives was to ease the entrance of Turkey into Myanmar.

The Syrian Crisis

Furthermore Turkey continues to cooperate with the OIC in ongoing foreign policy issues such as the Cyprus issue and the Balkans, as well as initiatives from Turkey in Africa and Asia. However, it is observed that Turkey has increased its relations with the OIC in the conflicts in its neighborhood. For instance, in the Syrian crisis, from the beginning of the crisis, the OIC always expressed its readiness to contribute to host countries for the refugees of Syria. During the second meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, which was hosted by Turkey in April 2012, the OIC declared that the OIC supports all the initiatives and efforts which are decided by the Group of Friends of the Syrian People. Furthermore, the OIC suspended Syria from membership in the 4th Extraordinary Summit of the OIC in Mecca, in August 2012. İhsanoğlu explained that with this decision, Syria has lost its chance to become a prominent member in the organization. However, Shamshad Ahmad indicates that this decision of the OIC is an effective attempt to stop the Assad regime. According to him, the OIC should focus on peace-making and the process of dialogue instead of taking this decision. In this case, it should be emphasized that the final significant attempt of Turkey was to prompt the OIC to recognize the Syrian opposition in the 39th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers on 15 November 2012, in Djibouti, Somalia.

Economic Issues

On economic issues, Turkey has significantly increased relations with members of the OIC. According to the statistics of Turkish Statistical Institute, the total export of Turkey to the members of the OIC has increased from $4,725,287,000 to $50,953,608,000 in 2012. It is possible to argue that this increase may be related to the recent economic growth of Turkey. However, it is also necessary to look at the total exports of Turkey to the members of the EU.

to make a comparison with the rates of the members of the OIC. The total export of Turkey to the members of the EU has increased from $20,415,034,000 to $54,332,912,000 in 2012.\textsuperscript{118}

Furthermore, the import rates are in the same period as follows. The total amount of imports to Turkey from members of the OIC has increased from $3,749,777,000 in 2002 to $29,500,525,000 in 2012.\textsuperscript{119} In comparison with the EU, the import rate with the members of the EU has increased from $25,688,833,000 in 2002 to $79,814,239,000 in 2012.\textsuperscript{120} The reason for this increase could be explained with the rising interest of the Turkish companies in the region. For instance, according to Dinar Standard’s research, among the Turkish companies, Koç Holding was 6\textsuperscript{th} and Sabancı Holding was 18\textsuperscript{th} largest company in the list of Top 100 Companies in the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{121} Furthermore, this increase took place in the media as the success of Turkish companies in the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{122}

\textbf{Social Issues}

The social issues between Turkey and the OIC have especially risen since 2010. The developments have been not only related to Turkey, but also their aim to make a difference in the whole Muslim world. One of the most significant attempts was the establishment of the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF- DC) as an affiliated institution of the OIC at the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Sana’a, Yemen, in June 2005. The aim of this institution was to coordinate the youth activities in the OIC countries. Furthermore, its activities are the following: advocacy of youth interest, supporting sustainable development, promoting formal and non-formal education, strengthening moral values of young generation and engaging in the dialogue among cultures and civilizations.\textsuperscript{123} The importance of Turkey in this activity is its being the host country of the headquarters of the institute in Istanbul. Furthermore, Turkey wants to be more active in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{119} http://tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=12, (accessed on 19.12.2012)
\item \textsuperscript{120} http://tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=12, (accessed on 19.12.2012)
\item \textsuperscript{121} http://www.dinarstandard.com/rankings/ds100/index.html, (accessed on 19.12.2012)
\item \textsuperscript{122} “Türk Şirketleri İslam Ülkelerinin Gözdeleri”, http://www.dunyabulteni.net/index.php?aType=haber&ArticleID=145111&q=%C4%B0slam+Konferans%C4%B1, 30.01.2011, (access on 20.12.2012)
\item \textsuperscript{123} http://www.oic-org.org/page_detail.asp?p_id=66#icyf-dc, (accessed on 29.01.2013)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the issues of ICYF- DC. It also hosted the 1st International Model Organization for Islamic Conference, in June 2012, in İstanbul. The aim of this organization was to promote the knowledge of the youth of the OIC countries by training and simulating the OIC model among them. By doing so, the institute aims to arouse the interest of the youth to understand the OIC, and to raise the familiarity with the structure and the actions of the OIC.  

Another significant attempt of the OIC under Turkey’s initiative is the establishment of the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), with the Agreement on the Establishment of the SMIIC in Turkey, which was signed between the Republic of Turkey and the SMIIC during the 26th Session of the COMCEC Meeting held in Istanbul in October 2010. The aim of the SMIIC is to develop harmonized standards and other relevant specific standards through a voluntary standardization process to expedite the exchange of goods and services among member bodies/states targeting the uniformity in metrology and laboratory services, standardization, certification and accreditation activities supporting sustainable economic growth, within the frame of protection health, environment, promoting innovation and ensuring safety issues. Furthermore the establishment of this institute in Turkey means the establishment of the Halal Food Institute of Turkey. The President of the Turkish Standard Institute highly appreciated the establishment of this institute.

Conclusion

The OIC is a multi-purpose religious intergovernmental organization. It is both a religious and political organization. The religious feature of the OIC is understood not from its having a completely Islamic motivation behind all its actions, but it is understood from its membership process being based on being a Muslim country and acting in utmost accordance with Islamic doctrine. It is possible to conclude that after the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, the Muslim world could not gather under the Caliphate institution again, and instead, Saudi Arabia emerged as the "guardian" of the Muslim world through the establishment of the OIC. Hence, its establishment is a pan-Islamist movement. Furthermore, the emergence of the OIC is also political because of the competition between Nasser and King Faisal in the 1960s and


125 http://www.smiic.org/smiic, (accessed on 30.01.2013)


127 “Helal Gıda Enstitüsü Kuruldu”, http://www.dunyabulteni.net/index.php?aType=haber&ArticleID=123817&q=%C4%B0slam+Konferans%C4%B1, 03.08.2010, (access on 19.12.2012)
its main concern which is the Palestine issue. Despite the fact that the OIC is the second biggest international organization in the world, its effectiveness is debatable because of political differences among its members. It is possible to conclude that the competition among the members is an obstacle for the organization’s success. Until the OIC put an end to this competition, it cannot be effective in solving of the problems of the Muslim world.

Furthermore, this study examined the role of religion in international relations with a particular focus on the relationship between Turkey and the OIC under the two periods. To show the cooperation between Turkey and the OIC in Turkish foreign policy, the study classified Turkish foreign policy into two periods. The first started from the establishment of the OIC up to the JDP term (1970-2002) and the second is from 2002 to present day. By doing so, the evolution of the perception of OIC in Turkish foreign policy is emphasized. In the first period, the relationship between Turkey and the OIC was analyzed in five specific cases; the Oil Crisis in 1974, the Cyprus Issue, the Bulgaria Events, the Palestine Issue and the Bosnian War. In light of these cases, this study concluded that in the first period of the relations between Turkey and the OIC, the OIC was instrumentalized by Turkey in its foreign policy. However, Turkey could not gain substantial success in these cases by using the OIC. The main characteristic of these cases is that they were the main concerns or interests of Turkish foreign policy during that period. Furthermore, Turkey’s interest in the Cyprus Issue, Bulgaria Events, and Bosnian War was primarily related to Turkish identity, not Muslim identity. Its interest in the Palestine issue, however, was not the main concern of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey had to take interest in this issue to gain a place in the OIC, because of the importance of the Palestine issue within the OIC. It is possible to conclude that Turkey was not enthusiastic about the Palestine issue in that period because of its relations with Israel. Turkey’s interest in the Palestine issue was compulsory and reluctant during that period. From the establishment of the organization, Turkey has stood up against pressure from the OIC over its relations with Israel. Turkey’s attitude towards the Palestine issue in the OIC balanced this pressure. These cases show that Turkey has instrumentalized the OIC in its foreign policy, but only for its own interests.

These five cases are not all of the same importance in Turkish foreign policy. The Cyprus Issue, Bulgaria Events, and Bosnian War were main concerns of Turkish foreign policy, and they attracted the attention of the OIC through Turkey’s efforts. This means Turkey could change the attention of the OIC for its own foreign policy interests between 1970 and 2002. However, the Oil Crisis and Palestine issue were not directly related to Turkish foreign policy.
therefore they were regarded rather as instruments of sealing the relationship between the OIC and Turkey.

Furthermore, in the second period, relations were examined in three specific cases; famine in Somalia, the conflict between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the Syrian Crisis. The study tried to show that the interest of Turkish foreign policy has been shaped in these cases primarily by Muslim identity. In contrast to the first period of the relationship, it is stated that religion has had more influence on the interest of Turkey on these issues. It is possible to say that the JDP’s religious tone has changed Turkish foreign policy. The crucial conclusion here is that these cases are not related with the permanent concerns of Turkish foreign policy. Rather, they are the problems and concerns of the Muslim world. This presents a break in Turkish foreign policy with the JDP. The JDP has continued to instrumentalize the OIC in Turkish foreign policy. However this instrumentalization was reactive before 2002. As mentioned before, Turkey had a limited, narrow and more pragmatic approach towards the OIC. In that period, Turkey had used the OIC only for its own foreign policy concerns. Yet, since 2002, Turkey has had a proactive attitude towards the OIC with the JDP. This proactive attitude is the desire of pioneering not only in the more traditional and immediate issue of Turkish foreign policy, but also in the Muslim world and in world politics. The three cases in the second period of Turkish foreign policy show the proactive foreign policy of the JDP in the Muslim world by strengthening relations with the OIC. Moreover, these cases conclude that Turkey tries to open new foreign policy areas via this proactive attitude in its foreign policy. However, it should be emphasized at this point that the OIC has gained more importance in Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy agenda with the JDP, despite the fact that Turkey has still not legally become a member of the OIC.

In light of these statements, the study also emphasized the remarkable discussion in the literature on previous attempts by Turkey to increase its importance in the organization. It is stated that the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East after 2002 have increased the importance of the OIC in the agenda of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has a different position than the other members of the OIC because of her political experiences, Westernized face, and the position between the East and the West.\footnote{Aykan, 1994, p. x} Hence the study argued that Turkey tries to gain the leadership position in the OIC by using a different position in the

\footnote{Aykan, 1994, p. x}
OIC, and regards the election of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu as the Secretary of General of the OIC two times as a new step for its role in the OIC. This is another sign of the proactive attitude of Turkey towards the OIC.

Finally, this study concluded that religion has a substantial influence on the development of relations between Turkey and the OIC, especially since the coming to power of the JDP. Although the governments regard this relationship as a political issue, it is possible to conclude from this study that religion is as an invisible driving force behind these relations since 2002. Especially with the JDP's conservative ideology, the impact of religion both in domestic politics and foreign policy is more easily perceptible than from previous governments. Finally, despite the constitution, it is highly likely that Turkey will continue to cooperate with the OIC in every field and as long as the JDP continues this activity, they will continue to use the OIC and religion in domestic politics. The JDP government also continues to use the OIC as a foreign policy instrument through an emphasized Muslim identity to gain power in new areas of Turkish foreign policy.
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