

## IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE WESTERN-CENTERED WORLD ORDER: NECMETTIN ERBAKAN'S FOREIGN POLICY VISION

EM BUSCA DE UMA ALTERNATIVA À ORDEM MUNDIAL CENTRADA NO OCIDENTE: A VISÃO DE POLÍTICA EXTERNA DE NECMETTIN ERBAKAN

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**Esra Polat Onbasi\***

\*Department of History and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4434-7263>

[onbasipolat@gmail.com](mailto:onbasipolat@gmail.com)

**Alparslan Onbasi\*\***

\*\*Department of Islamic Philosophy, Bartın University, Türkiye

[onbasialparslan@gmail.com](mailto:onbasialparslan@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

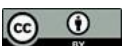
This article examines Necmettin Erbakan's foreign policy vision as a distinctive anti-imperialist and civilizational critique of the Western-centered international order. Departing from conventional realist or pragmatic approaches dominant in Turkish foreign policy analysis, Erbakan conceptualized foreign policy as an ethical and structural struggle against economic dependency, political domination, and cultural subordination. Central to his vision was the construction of alternative networks of cooperation among Muslim-majority and non-Western countries, most notably articulated through initiatives such as the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation. The study situates Erbakan's foreign policy thought within the broader intellectual traditions of Islamic political thought, Third Worldism, and Global South solidarities, highlighting his emphasis on "just order" and multipolarity. By analyzing parliamentary speeches, policy proposals, and institutional initiatives, the article argues that Erbakan's approach should not be reduced to ideological rhetoric but understood as an attempt to formulate a coherent counter-hegemonic foreign policy framework. In doing so, the article contributes to rethinking Turkish foreign policy beyond Euro-Atlantic paradigms and offers insights into non-Western alternatives to modern international relations theory.

**Keywords:** Necmettin Erbakan. Turkish Foreign Policy. Western-Centered World Order. Anti-Imperialism. Islamic Political Thought. Global South. D-8 Organization.

### Resumo

*Este artigo examina a visão de política externa de Necmettin Erbakan como uma crítica anti-imperialista e civilizacional distinta da ordem internacional centrada no Ocidente. Distanciando-se das abordagens realistas ou pragmáticas convencionais que dominam as análises da política externa turca, Erbakan concebeu a política externa como uma luta ética e estrutural contra a dependência econômica, a dominação política e a subordinação cultural. No centro de sua visão estava a construção de redes alternativas de cooperação entre países de maioria muçulmana e países não ocidentais, articulada de forma mais clara por meio de iniciativas como a Organização de Cooperação Econômica D-8. O estudo situa o pensamento de política externa de Erbakan dentro das tradições intelectuais mais amplas do pensamento político islâmico, do terceiro-mundismo e das solidariedades do Sul Global, destacando sua ênfase na economia moral, na ordem justa e na multipolaridade. A partir da análise de discursos parlamentares, propostas de políticas e iniciativas institucionais, o artigo argumenta que a abordagem de Erbakan não deve ser reduzida a uma retórica ideológica, mas compreendida como uma tentativa de formular um quadro coerente de política externa contra-hegemônica. Nesse sentido, o artigo contribui para repensar a política externa turca para além dos paradigmas euro-atlânticos e oferece subsídios para alternativas não ocidentais à teoria moderna das relações internacionais.*

**Palavras-chave:** Necmettin Erbakan. Política Externa Turca. Ordem Mundial Centrada no



*Ocidente. Anti-imperialismo. Pensamento Político Islâmico. Sul Global. Organização D-8.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Turkish foreign policy has been structured around two interrelated principles: the preservation of the status quo and a Western-oriented strategic alignment.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the status quo denotes an approach that prioritizes the maintenance of the existing political, territorial, social, and economic order, emphasizing stability over revisionist ambitions.<sup>2</sup> In the Turkish context, adherence to a status quo-oriented foreign policy has primarily entailed the safeguarding of internationally recognized national borders and the avoidance of expansionist or irredentist claims.<sup>3</sup>

This orientation was firmly articulated during the founding period of the Republic under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), who defined the consolidation and protection of Türkiye's sovereignty within its national frontiers as the central objective of foreign policy. Rejecting adventurism and excessive geopolitical aspirations, Atatürk emphasized realism, restraint, and international legitimacy as the cornerstones of the Republic's external relations.<sup>4</sup>

He articulated this perspective with remarkable clarity, stating:

“Gentlemen, we are not pursuing grandiose illusions. In the past, we did so and thereby drew the hostility of the world upon this nation. We did not pursue Pan-Islamism; yet even the mere suggestion of such an intention led our adversaries to seek our elimination. Nor did we engage in Pan-Turkism; nonetheless, the declaration of such ambitions provoked similar reactions. Rather than acquiring new enemies through unattainable dreams, we must recognize our limitations and, as a nation, seek only the

<sup>1</sup> Baskın Oran. (2010). *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006: Facts and Analyses with Documents*, United States: The University of Utah Press, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Plano & Roy Olton. (1988). *The International Relations Dictionary*, California: ABC Clío, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Baskın Oran, 20.

<sup>4</sup> İsmet Giritli. (1980). “*Nutukta İç ve Dış Politika*” Atatürk'ün Büyük Söylevi'nin 50. Yılı Semineri, *Bildiriler Tartışmalar*, Ankara :Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1990-1991.

right to exist and to remain independent. It is solely for these objectives that we are prepared to sacrifice our lives.”<sup>5</sup>

This realist orientation was further institutionalized through Atatürk’s foundational principle of “peace at home, peace in the world,” which constituted a normative and strategic guideline for Turkish foreign policy. Elaborating on this principle, Atatürk emphasized that sincerity in foreign relations, coupled with a firm commitment to national security and development, should shape the conduct of the state. A country that is internally stable and oriented toward progress, he argued, possesses the strongest incentive to pursue peace and stability both domestically and internationally.<sup>6</sup> Under the prevailing international conditions of the interwar period, this foreign policy framework proved to be pragmatic and effective, and its success has been widely acknowledged in the literature.<sup>7</sup>

The second foundational pillar of Turkish foreign policy—the orientation toward the West—was conceived as an effort to integrate Türkiye into an international system structured around Western political, economic, and cultural norms.<sup>8</sup> With the establishment of the Republic, the West was not merely regarded as an external actor but as a civilizational reference point and a strategic partner with whom cooperation was deemed essential for modernization. Accordingly, during Atatürk’s leadership, relations with Western countries were pursued with the dual objective of fostering cultural engagement and accelerating Türkiye’s modernization process.<sup>9</sup>

Following Atatürk’s death, successive governments deepened this Western-oriented trajectory. Particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, Türkiye sought to consolidate its position within the Western alliance system by joining key military, political, and economic institutions, including NATO, the Council of Europe, and the International Monetary Fund. Through this process, Türkiye increasingly identified itself with the Western bloc, a tendency that intensified during and after the

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<sup>5</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, (1997). *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri I-II-III*. Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu, 201.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 374.

<sup>7</sup> Yusuf Sarıncay (2000). “Atatürk’ten Günümüze Türk Dış Politikası Hakkında Genel Bir Değerlendirme”, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi* 16, (48) 863.

<sup>8</sup> Baskın Oran, 20

<sup>9</sup> Idris Bal, (2006). *Değişen Dünyada Uluslararası İlişkiler: Uluslararası Siyaset Uluslararası Hukuk ve Temel Sorunlar*, Ankara: Lalezar Kitabevi. 21-22;

Cold War. Despite global shifts in power relations and the realignment of alliances by many states during this period, Turkish policymakers perceived no compelling reason to abandon the Western-oriented foreign policy paradigm.<sup>10</sup>

Within this broader context, the Ankara Agreement signed between Türkiye and the European Economic Community on 12 September 1963 represented a critical milestone in Türkiye's Western-focused foreign policy. The agreement symbolized the formal initiation of Türkiye's economic and political integration with Europe, encouraging the adoption of Western institutional frameworks and norms while opening a pathway—albeit ambiguous—toward eventual European membership.<sup>11</sup> However, from the early 1970s onward, growing discrepancies between Türkiye's domestic political and economic developments and the evolving dynamics of the European Community began to cast doubt on the prospect of full membership. This scepticism was reinforced when Türkiye's formal application for full membership in 1987 was rejected approximately two and a half years later.<sup>12</sup>

For Türkiye, membership in the European Union was not merely a matter of economic or political cooperation; it also carried profound symbolic significance as an affirmation of modernization and civilizational belonging. Consequently, the rejection of Türkiye's application generated deep disappointment and frustration. A new phase in Türkiye–EU relations commenced with the signing of the Customs Union Agreement in 1995. However, Türkiye's accession to the Customs Union without attaining full membership sparked intense domestic debate and widespread concern. Critics warned that the removal of customs barriers would lead to an influx of imports, undermining domestic industry and exacerbating economic dependency.<sup>13</sup>

Among the most prominent critics of the Customs Union Agreement was Necmettin Erbakan. He argued that the agreement fundamentally contradicted Türkiye's national interests and was designed primarily to serve Western economic priorities.

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lewis (2001). *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London: Oxford University Press, 296.

<sup>11</sup> Selim İlkin, (1990). *A History of Turkey's Association with the European Community in Ahmet Evin and Geoffrey Denton, Turkey and the European Community*, Opladen: Leske & Buldrich, 35.

<sup>12</sup> İhsan Dagi. (1997). İnsan Hakları ve Demokratikleşme: Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkilerinde Siyasal Boyut, Türkiye ve Avrupa, edited by Atilla Eralp, Ankara: İmge, 120-176.

<sup>13</sup> Atilla Eralp. (1993). *Turkey and the European Community in the Changing Post-War International System*, in Canan Balkir and Alan M Williams, *Turkey and Europe*, London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 24.

According to Erbakan, the Customs Union constrained Türkiye’s capacity for independent industrial development and effectively relegated the country to the role of a peripheral market for Western economies. More critically, he portrayed the agreement as a neo-colonial mechanism aimed at subordinating Türkiye economically and politically, thereby reinforcing its dependency on the West.<sup>14</sup>

From a broader perspective, assessments of the Customs Union indicate that Türkiye made disproportionately greater economic concessions than the European Union. Notably, Türkiye was denied meaningful access to the European agricultural market and excluded from decision-making processes on key EU policies—such as the determination of the common external tariff—that directly affected its economy. Beyond these economic asymmetries, Türkiye’s principal grievance lay in its exclusion from full membership, which effectively relegated the country to a second-tier status within the European framework.<sup>15</sup>

This sense of exclusion was further reinforced in March 1997, when leaders of major European Christian Democratic parties—including German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and former Belgian Prime Minister Wilfred Martens—issued a joint statement declaring that the European Union constituted a “civilization project” in which Türkiye had no place.<sup>16</sup> Such statements, widely perceived as exclusionary and culturally prejudiced, appeared to validate Erbakan’s long-standing critique of the European Union. He famously characterized the EU as a “Christian club”<sup>17</sup> and contended that Türkiye, having been consistently marginalized within this framework, should instead pursue the establishment of alternative economic and political partnerships with Eastern and Muslim-majority countries with which it shared historical and cultural ties.<sup>18</sup>

These views, articulated well before Erbakan assumed the office of prime minister, signaled the substantive shift he sought to introduce in Turkish foreign policy. During his tenure, Erbakan made concerted efforts to challenge the entrenched pro-

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<sup>14</sup> Kemal Kirisci. (2005). “Turkey and the European Union: The Domestic Politics of Negotiating Pre-Accession” *Macalester International* 15, no.10 (2005): 58..

<sup>15</sup> Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi 19, (83) (1995).

<sup>16</sup> William Hale. (2000). *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, London: Routledge, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Meltem Müftüler-Baç. (1998). “The Never-Ending Story: Turkey and the European Union”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (4) 241.

<sup>18</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, 177.

Western orientation and to articulate an alternative foreign policy vision grounded in autonomy, regional cooperation, and non-Western solidarity.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive research methodology to examine Necmettin Erbakan's foreign policy vision as an alternative framework to the Western-centered international order. Rather than adopting a positivist or policy-output-oriented approach, the article prioritizes the analysis of political discourse, intellectual foundations, and institutional initiatives in order to capture the normative and ideological dimensions of Erbakan's foreign policy thinking.

The primary sources of the study consist of Erbakan's parliamentary speeches, party programs, policy statements, and public addresses delivered before and during his tenure as prime minister. These materials are analyzed through discourse analysis to identify recurring concepts, normative assumptions, and critiques directed at Western political and economic structures. In addition, official documents related to the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation and debates surrounding the Customs Union Agreement are examined to contextualize Erbakan's ideas within concrete policy initiatives.

Secondary sources include scholarly works on Turkish foreign policy, Islamic political thought, anti-imperialism, and Global South solidarities. By situating Erbakan's discourse within these broader intellectual and historical contexts, the study adopts a contextualist approach that avoids reducing his foreign policy vision to ideological rhetoric or short-term political maneuvering. This methodological framework allows for an evaluation of Erbakan's foreign policy not only as a reaction to Western dominance but as a coherent attempt to articulate a counter-hegemonic international vision.

### 2.1 Results

The analysis reveals that Necmettin Erbakan's foreign policy vision constituted a systematic critique of the Western-centered world order rather than a mere rejection of Western actors or institutions. At the core of this vision was the argument that the existing

international system perpetuated structural inequalities through economic dependency, political asymmetry, and cultural hierarchy. Erbakan consistently framed Western-led institutions—such as the European Union and the Bretton Woods system—as mechanisms that constrained Türkiye’s industrial development and strategic autonomy.

One of the central findings is that Erbakan conceptualized foreign policy as an ethical project grounded in the principles of justice (*adil düzen*), moral economy, and sovereignty. Unlike mainstream Turkish foreign policy traditions that prioritized security alignment and institutional integration with the West, Erbakan emphasized the construction of alternative networks of cooperation among Muslim-majority and non-Western countries. This approach materialized most clearly in the establishment of the D-8 Organization, which aimed to promote economic cooperation, technological exchange, and political solidarity outside Western-dominated frameworks.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that Erbakan’s critique of the European Union—particularly in relation to the Customs Union Agreement—was not limited to economic concerns but extended to civilizational and epistemic dimensions. He interpreted Türkiye’s exclusion from full EU membership as evidence of a deeper cultural and religious boundary within the European project, reinforcing his argument that Western integration offered limited prospects for genuine equality or partnership.

## 2.2 Discussion

The findings suggest that Necmettin Erbakan’s foreign policy vision represents a significant yet underexplored alternative within the history of Turkish foreign policy. Rather than positioning Türkiye as a peripheral actor seeking inclusion within the Western order, Erbakan articulated a foreign policy paradigm that sought autonomy through multipolarity and South–South cooperation. In this sense, his approach resonates with broader intellectual currents such as dependency theory, Third Worldism, and postcolonial critiques of global power hierarchies.

From a theoretical perspective, Erbakan’s vision challenges the dominance of realist and liberal frameworks in International Relations by foregrounding ethical norms, civilizational identity, and structural inequality. His emphasis on moral economy and justice introduces a normative dimension that is often marginalized in conventional

foreign policy analysis. Moreover, the D-8 initiative can be interpreted as an early attempt to institutionalize Global South cooperation in a manner that transcended both Cold War alignments and Western economic orthodoxy.

At the same time, the limitations of Erbakan's foreign policy project must be acknowledged. Structural constraints within the international system, domestic political opposition, and Türkiye's deep economic integration with Western markets limited the practical implementation of his vision. Nevertheless, the enduring relevance of Erbakan's ideas lies not in their immediate policy outcomes but in their capacity to offer a conceptual alternative to Western-centric models of international order.

In conclusion, examining Erbakan's foreign policy through an analytical and theoretical lens contributes to a more pluralistic understanding of Turkish foreign policy and highlights the importance of non-Western perspectives in rethinking contemporary international relations.

### **3 THE PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF NECMETTIN ERBAKAN'S FOREIGN POLICY**

Necmettin Erbakan, who served as prime minister of the Republic of Türkiye between 1996 and 1997, occupies a distinctive position in modern Turkish political history as a politician, engineer, academic, and public intellectual. Among the political leaders active during his era, Erbakan was distinctive in openly defining himself as a conservative figure and in explicitly foregrounding religious sensibilities within the political sphere. Rather than relegating religion to the private domain, he articulated a political discourse in which moral and religious values were presented as legitimate components of public policy debates and political legitimacy. His intellectual trajectory was shaped by sustained engagement with Türkiye's structural problems—particularly economic dependency, industrial underdevelopment, and political subordination within the international system. Rather than addressing these challenges through short-term policy adjustments, Erbakan pursued a long-term, systemic approach aimed at transforming both domestic governance and foreign policy orientations. Throughout his political career, Erbakan consistently framed Türkiye's challenges within a broader critique of global power hierarchies, emphasizing the need for economic sovereignty,

indigenous industrial capacity, and ethical governance. This perspective informed not only his domestic policy proposals but also his foreign policy vision, which prioritized autonomy, justice, and cooperation among non-Western and Muslim-majority societies.<sup>19</sup>

According to Erbakan, foreign policy should not only contribute to the strengthening of Türkiye, but should also serve for the peace and salvation of humanity. In this context, Erbakan established his foreign policy goals based on four basic principles.

1. **Strong Foreign Policy:** Erbakan emphasized that Türkiye should follow a foreign policy in line with its own values, culture, and history. He argued that Türkiye's own identity and uniqueness should be preserved in international relations.
2. **Protection of Rights:** Erbakan stated that the main purpose of foreign policy is the protection of human rights. He emphasized that a foreign policy that is fair, egalitarian, and respectful of human rights should be followed. This principle is Türkiye's commitment to justice and human rights both domestically and internationally. It aims to be a country where human rights are respected.
3. **Leading Role of Türkiye:** Erbakan stated that Türkiye should be a leading country in international relations.
4. **Cooperation:** Erbakan stated that Türkiye should encourage cooperation in the international arena. He argued that common interests should be observed, and an active role should be taken in international relations by cooperating with other countries in economic, political, and cultural fields.

These four basic principles formed the basis of Erbakan's understanding of foreign policy. According to him, foreign policy should be achieved through Türkiye's strengthening, protection of human rights, becoming a leading country, and cooperation. It must serve the peace and salvation of humanity.<sup>20</sup> Erbakan became Prime Minister in 1996 by establishing a coalition cabinet with *Doğru Yol Partisi* (True Path Party) leader Tansu Çiller (b. 1946). This Erbakan-led coalition had two opposing foreign policy orientations: a pro-Western orientation promoted by Foreign Minister Çiller, who

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<sup>19</sup> Esra Polat. (2025). *Modernization in Türkiye : An analytical Study on Attila İlhan (1925-2005) and Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011)*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, International Islamic University of Malaysia, Passim.

<sup>20</sup> Necmettin Erbakan, (2014). *Erbakan Külliyyatı Cilt 4*, edited by Tacettin Çetinkaya, (Ankara: MG V Yayınları, 2014), 415.

cemented ties with Western countries including Israel, the USA, and the EU; and an eastward-oriented policy advanced by Erbakan that sought to strengthen ties with the Arab and Islamic worlds.<sup>21</sup> In this context, he moved away from Europe-centred cooperation and turned towards Islamic countries during his years in office. According to him, it was more beneficial for Türkiye to cooperate with Islamic countries than to cooperate with the West.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Erbakan planned his first trip abroad in this direction. Within the scope of this travel plan, he would first visit Iran and Pakistan, two key countries of the Islamic world. Then he would visit Malaysia and Indonesia, which are rapidly developing in Southeast Asia and constitute the best synthesis of Islam and economic development. He also added Singapore, an Asian country of European standards, to his travel plan.<sup>23</sup> In addition to ministers and journalists, the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association, formed by Islamist businessmen, also participated in this trip.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.1 Iran, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia trips

Erbakan made his first international visit to Iran in August 1996, where he advocated for improved relations. During this visit, a natural gas agreement worth USD 23 billion was signed, according to which the existing natural gas pipeline in Tabriz, Iran, would be upgraded and extended to Doğubeyazıt-Erzurum-Kayseri-Adana-Ankara, to be connected to Türkiye's existing natural gas network. Thus, Türkiye would have a second important source after Russia, from which it sourced most of its natural gas.<sup>25</sup> This gas agreement was made to meet Türkiye's increasing energy needs, which are essential for industrialization (which remained a key underlying concern for Erbakan). However, the Western press emphasized that establishing friendly relations with Iran could lead to

<sup>21</sup> Hasan Kösebalaban(2011). *Turkish Foreign Policy Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Hakan Köni.(2018). *Transformation of Politic Islam in Turkey: Causes and Effect*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

<sup>23</sup> Saban Taniyici, (2003).“Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey Islamist Welfare Party's Pro-EU Turn”, *Party Politics- Sage Journal*, 9 (4), 473.

<sup>24</sup> Hakan Akpınar. (2001). *28 Şubat Postmodern Bir Darbenin Öyküsü*, Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Ömer Bolat. (1996). *Başbakan Necmettin Erbakan'ın Doğu Asya Gezisi (10-20 Ağustos) ve MÜSİAD'ın Bosna-Hersek gezisi (7-11 Ağustos 1996) Raporu*, (İstanbul: Müstakil Sanayici ve İş adamları Derneği, 16.

dissatisfaction in the USA, and the economic interests of the state were not emphasized much. Erbakan was criticized by Western governments and Western supporters for the gas agreement with Iran.<sup>26</sup>

After he visited Iran, Erbakan visited Pakistan as the second stop of his foreign trip. During his contacts in Pakistan, he met with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (b. 1953) on the morning of 13 August. As a result of the negotiations, an agreement was reached with Pakistan to eliminate customs costs for the use of Turkish engines. An agreement was also reached on Türkiye's sale of 700 military vehicles to Pakistan and Türkiye's export of engines and engine parts to Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> After Pakistan, Erbakan went to Singapore for a three-day visit on 14 August.<sup>28</sup> Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (b. 1941) organized a dinner for Erbakan's visit.<sup>29</sup> At the dinner, the Prime Minister of Singapore said that Türkiye and Singapore enjoy warm and friendly relations, and that he was delighted to host Erbakan and the Turkish delegation in Singapore. He also noted that just as visitors from Türkiye want to learn more about Singapore, Singaporean businessmen are also keen to learn about the business potential in Türkiye.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, the negotiations held during this visit, it was aimed to increase the trade volume between the two countries to USD 2.5 billion within three years. It was decided to sign the agreement on mutual promotion and protection of investments between the two countries as soon as possible. It was decided that Singaporean tourists would be encouraged to visit Türkiye on holiday, and a mutual military ammunition supply would be established.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, areas of cooperation such as the training of Singapore's F-16 pilots in Türkiye and the development of Trabzon and İskenderun ports were emphasized.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Philip Robins. (1997). Turkish Foreign Policy Under Erbakan, *Survival*, 39, (2), 90-91.

<sup>27</sup> Ömer Bolat, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Turkish PM Arrives Today, *The Straits Times*, 14 August 1996, 2 <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/straitstimes19960814-1.2.7.4>

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/19960815\\_0001.pdf](https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/19960815_0001.pdf);

Ravi Velloor, Singapore Offers to Help Turkey Forge Business Link for Asia, *The Straits Times*, 16 August 1996, 2 <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/page/straitstimes19960816-1.1.2>

<sup>30</sup> Press Release, Release No: 41/AUGUST 15-1/96/08/16, National Archive Singapore.

<sup>31</sup> Alparslan Onbasi & Esra Polat Onbasi. (2023). "Economic and Cultural Bridges: Necmettin Erbakan's Southeast Asia Trip (Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia)", *Al-Risalah Journal*, 8 (2), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Işıl Arpacı.(2017). *Türk Siyasetinde Erbakan*, İstanbul: Kopernik Kitap, 316.

After he visited Singapore, Erbakan visited Malaysia on 16 August 1996 for economic and political talks.<sup>33</sup> At the dinner organized for Erbakan, Prime Minister Mahathir expressed his pleasure that Erbakan chose Malaysia as one of the first countries he visited abroad. He also announced that in their meeting in the morning, Malaysia and Türkiye agreed to continue strengthening their relations, especially in the economy and trade. More importantly, he announced that they aim to work more closely with Türkiye to increase and enhance their economic and trade relations.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the negotiations, Türkiye and Malaysia agreed to strengthen the activities of the Islamic Development Bank. It was agreed that Malaysia's oil company (Petronas) would invest in Türkiye, and the countries would cooperate in the automotive, high technology, and electronics industries. In addition, it was decided to import 60-70,000 skilled workers from Türkiye to close the workforce supply gap, which was hampering Malaysia's rapid economic development.<sup>35</sup> In addition, during his visit to Malaysia, Prime Minister Erbakan visited the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, and received information about the university from Rector Dato' Dr. Abdul Hamid Ahmed Abu Suleiman and Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Mohd. Kamal Hasan. He also gave a lecture to approximately 1,000 students who filled the University's Melik Faisal Hall and met with Turkish students studying in Malaysia.<sup>36</sup>

The last stop of Erbakan's trip was Indonesia, where he arrived on 18 August.<sup>37</sup> During this visit, which was his second visit to Indonesia, Erbakan visited Indonesia's aircraft factory, which he admired and appreciated technologically.<sup>38</sup> Despite all the obstacles raised by Western countries, Indonesia produced the CN235 model transport and passenger aircraft under the Spanish CASA license. It also managed to produce the N 250 aircraft with a capacity of eight passengers. More importantly, it produced these

<sup>33</sup> Lawatan Rasmi TYT Prof. Dr. Necmettin Erbakan, Perdana Menteri Republik Turki ke Malaysia - 16.08.1996-18.08.1996, National Archive of Malaysia, 356 1999/0025650;

<sup>34</sup> Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad, Jamuan Makan Malam Meraikan TYT Professor DR. Necmettin Erbakan, Perdana Menteri Republik Turki, 17-08-1996, National Archive of Malaysia.

<sup>35</sup> Ömer Bolat, 50.

<sup>36</sup> Protocol Division Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Malaysia, Official Visit by His Excellency Necmettin Erbakan Prime Minister of Turkey to Mahathir Muhammed 16-18 August 1996, National Archive Malaysia.

<sup>37</sup> Keven Sullivan, Turkey offers to be S'proe's springboard to Central Asia, *The Business Times*, 17 August 1996, 2 <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/biztimes19960817-1.2.9?q=erbakan&q=erbakan>

<sup>38</sup> Yavuz Donat. (1999), *Öncesi ve Sonrasıyla 28 Şubat*, Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 263.

aircraft 20% cheaper than the West. Seeing this success of Indonesia in the aviation field, Erbakan was very impressed by Indonesia's aviation sector and wanted to cooperate in its development. As a result of the official meetings, it was planned that the Minister of Research and Technology Development, Yusuf Habibi, would come to Ankara within a month to develop economic cooperation in all areas. In addition, it was agreed to develop tourism trips related to Hajj and Umrah to encourage Indonesian tourists to come to Türkiye.<sup>39</sup> However, these political relations and collaborations of Erbakan were not possible because a new government replaced the Erbakan administration due to the military coup that took place on 28 February 1997.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 Erbakan's trip to Africa and Libya

After his trip to Pakistan, Singapore, Iran, Indonesia, and Malaysia on 10 August 1996, Erbakan planned to go to Nigeria and Egypt in October. Libya was also included in the African trip at the last minute. Thus, the route of this trip, which started on 2 October 1996 and ended on 8 October 1996, was Egypt, Libya, and Nigeria.<sup>41</sup> The reason why Libya was added to this trip at the last minute was that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (1942-2011) did not assist Turkish contractors to recover debts owed to them by Libya. Governments before Erbakan's rule did not go to Libya due to wanting to signal their loyalty to the USA and Israel. A request was made for the solution of this problem by the contractors' union, which suffered from the fact that this problem was not solved.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Libya was included in Erbakan's Africa Trip upon the request of contractors doing business in Libya to collect their uncollectible receivables accumulated over the years.<sup>43</sup>

As part of this trip, he first went to Egypt on 2 October, where he presented the cotton union project prepared by MÜSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen

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<sup>39</sup> Ömer Bolat, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Abdul Razak Baginda. (2004). *Malaysia and the Islamic World*, in *Malaysia and Turkey: Comparative Experiences and Bilateral Relations* by Sabri Orman, London: ASEAN Academic Press, 147.

<sup>41</sup> Sevket Kazan. (2006). *Refah Gerçeği-2*, Ankara: Keşif Yayınları, 262.

<sup>42</sup> Serdar Cam. (1997). *Müsiad'ın Afrika ve İngiltere İş Gezi Raporları*, İstanbul: Müstakil İş Adamları Derneği, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Sevket Kazan, *Refah Gerçeği-2*, 262.

Association) to the Egyptian Prime Minister Hosni Mubarak (1928-2020) and achieved positive results. In addition, an agreement was reached on the development of mutual investments during official visits.<sup>44</sup> Erbakan left Egypt on 4 October and went to Libya. This trip was criticized by many ministers in Türkiye. For example, before Prime Minister Erbakan made his trip to Libya, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mehmet Ağar (b. 1951) made statements to the public that Erbakan should not make this trip. However, Erbakan did not give up despite all the objections and still went on a trip to Libya.<sup>45</sup> The Turkish contractor problem was resolved in the meetings held between the official delegations of the two countries, and it was agreed to seek to diversify and increase the trade volume between the two countries.<sup>46</sup> However, this trip was marred by Muammar Gaddafi's accusatory statements against Türkiye, which Gaddafi said had forgotten Islam and was under occupation by Western powers, apparently alluding to its membership of NATO. Also, he said that Türkiye's future lay not with NATO, US bases, and repressing the Kurds, but in returning to its noble past. Moreover, he said that an independent Kurdistan should be established.<sup>47</sup> In addition to creating a diplomatic scandal, Gaddafi's speech also served the purpose of discrediting the government.<sup>48</sup> Responding to Gaddafi's provocations, Erbakan emphasized that Türkiye's Arab and Kurdish citizens were collectively part of one nation at the press conference he held in Libya. He emphasized that the Constitution of the RoT does not discriminate against race in any way and grants equal rights to all citizens. It was also emphasized that Türkiye's only problem is terrorism by ethnic separatists.<sup>49</sup>

Erbakan, who left Libya on October 6, last visited Nigeria. A trade agreement was signed between the two countries, and it was aimed at increasing total exports to USD 1 billion.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Serdar Cam, 10-11.

<sup>45</sup> Şamil Tayyar. (2009). *Kıt'a Dur! : 28 Şubat'tan 27 Nisan'a İktidar Kavgası*, İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Serdar Cam, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "Tirade by Qaddafi Stuns Turkey's Premier", *The New York Times*, 9 October 1996, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Gencer Özcan. (1998). *Onbir Aylık Saltanat: Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Dış Politikada Refahiyol Dönemi*, (İstanbul: Boyut Yayınları, 192-193.

<sup>49</sup> İhsan Dağı. (2015). *Kimlik Söylem ve Siyaset*, İstanbul: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 104.

<sup>50</sup> Serdar Cam, 35.

As a result of this tour, Erbakan tried to establish authentic and tangible relations with Muslim countries, to support mutual economic development and defy the paradigm of colonial dependency on the West and its foreign policy, which had been the prevailing force in Turkish foreign and domestic policy since the foundation of the RoT. However, his move away from Western countries and his cooperation with Eastern and Islamic countries disturbed both Western countries and the Turkish Armed Forces. As a result, Erbakan's rule ended with the "post-modern" coup.

### 3.3 Relations with Israel

Erbakan's foreign policy vision was fundamentally about anti-Zionism. According to Erbakan, Zionists aimed to control the world at the political and economic levels, by dominating the global economy and exploiting the people of the world through their usurious capitalist system, maintaining their political domination on the earth through imperialist states.<sup>51</sup> Erbakan alluded to the implicit assumptions of Zionism that Palestinians are inferior, and the Jewish doctrines that all humans are inferior to the Israelites, who are a superior race designed to be served by others. He posited the religious Zionist ambition of gathering all Jews in the Holy Land to establish Greater Israel, with its capital in Jerusalem (illegally occupied since 1967).<sup>52</sup> However, Erbakan did not consider "Jews" and "Zionists" to be synonymous, and unlike many people of his generation, he was aware that not all Jews are Zionists.<sup>53</sup> It was a matter of curiosity how Israel- Türkiye relations would be after Erbakan became Prime Minister, given that he expressed his antithetical thoughts about Zionism at every opportunity. In addition, the public predicted that Türkiye -Israel relations would progress negatively.<sup>54</sup> Before Erbakan became Prime Minister, Israel and Türkiye signed the "Military Training and

<sup>51</sup> Necmettin Erbakan. (1991). *Adil Ekonomik Düzen*, Ankara: Semih Ofset Matbaa, 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> Necmettin Erbakan. (2022). *Milli Görüş İktidarı: Niçin ve Nasıl*, edited by Üzeyir Türk Ankara: MG V Yayınları 34-35.

<sup>53</sup> Necmettin Erbakan (2021). *Arkasındakilerle ve Türkiye'nin Kayıplarıyla Darbe*, edited by Tacettin Çetinkaya, Ankara: MG V Yayınları. 108.

<sup>54</sup> Levent Duman. (2020). Israeli-Turkish Rapprochement in the 1990s: Why an Alliance?, *Analytical Politics*, 1 (2) 26.

Cooperation Agreement” on 23 February 1996.<sup>55</sup> Erbakan and his party harshly criticized Türkiye’s military ties with Israel and openly called for the termination of the Israeli-Turkish military cooperation agreement.<sup>56</sup>

As a result, the Turkish Armed Forces decided to conclude a “Defence Industry Cooperation Agreement” with Israel, to defy the Prime Minister. This Agreement was signed between the two countries on August 28, 1996, which basically envisaged the transfer of information between the parties in the field of defence and the mutual training of technicians, and the modernization of Türkiye’s military equipment was also initiated by Israel. In this context, it was decided to develop 26 F-4 warplanes in Israel and 28 F-4 warplanes in Türkiye. It was also decided that the financing of this project, which cost approximately USD 600 million, would be financed by loans obtained from Israel.<sup>57</sup>

Initially, Erbakan opposed the deal for upgrading Turkish F-4 Phantoms, because it would be too expensive for Türkiye; additionally, as per his anti-interest economic vision, the Agreement amounted to forcing the Turkish people to be enslaved to Israel to pay for their own defence. He instructed members of his party not to ratify the Agreement, but the Turkish military exerted extraordinary pressure on him to eventually ratify the deal. Thus, the army clearly warned Erbakan that it would not allow him to jeopardize his ties with Israel. General Çevik Bir (b. 1939), then deputy chief of staff, showed that despite the change of government, Türkiye’s strategic relations with Israel would remain a permanent state policy.<sup>58</sup> As a result, relations between Israel and Türkiye remained intact, despite Erbakan’s rhetoric and opposition to its partnership with Israel.

Thus, the Turkish armed forces made it clear that no change regarding Israel would be tolerated.<sup>59</sup> Thus, with the Israeli incident, problems between the army and Erbakan came to light. The armed forces were already opposed to Erbakan’s rapprochement with Iran, and they could never accept Erbakan’s attempt to challenge the

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<sup>55</sup> Dov Waxman.(1999). Turkey, and Israel: A new balance of power in the Middle East, *Washington Quarterly*, 22 (1) 31.

<sup>56</sup> Alan Makovsky & Sabri Sayari.(2000). *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 69.

<sup>57</sup> Yavuz Gökalp Yıldız. (2000). *Global Stratejide Ortadoğu*,(İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 167.

<sup>58</sup> Neill Lochery,. (1998).Israel and Turkey: Deepening ties and strategic implications, 1995–98, *Israel Affairs*, 5 (1) 50- 56.

<sup>59</sup> Özlem Tür, (2012),Turkey and Israel in the 2000s-From Cooperation to Conflict, *Israel Studies*, 17, (3) 48.

army on an issue it considered vital, such as relations with Israel.<sup>60</sup> Dissatisfied with Erbakan's foreign policy, the Turkish armed forces pressured Erbakan to resign. Thus, Erbakan left his post with the "post-modern" military coup on 28 February 1997, which was designed with the joint efforts of the army and various groups and institutions in Türkiye.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.4 Developing eight organization for economic cooperation (D-8)

Erbakan put forward a new foreign policy approach for Türkiye that first floated the concept of looking East to Muslim-majority countries and (in some cases) former Ottoman lands, instead of obediently capitulating to Western Europe at every turn, which had been the tenor of Turkish foreign and domestic policy in one way or another since Abdül Hamid II was overthrown in 1909. Erbakan sought to reorient Türkiye's foreign policy from West to East, and tried to develop closer political relations with Islamic countries as an alternative to the West. Erbakan highlighted the ideas of "Just Order" and "Islamic Union" from the first days of his entry into politics, and took an anti-Western and anti-Zionist stance in foreign policy when he was Prime Minister.<sup>62</sup>

Erbakan thought that it was more beneficial for Türkiye to cooperate with Islamic countries rather than cooperate with the West, and he established the D-8 during his term as Prime Minister, seeking to empower the constituent nations (Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Türkiye) to develop without imperialist domination and subterfuge from the world economic order dominated by the West. In this context, D-8 is a result of Erbakan's non-Western foreign policy.<sup>63</sup> D-8 was officially established under the leadership of Erbakan at the meeting in İstanbul on 15 June 1997, attended by the prime ministers of the constituent nations. Its main purpose is to organize a potential economy among countries representing rich resources, large populations, and geographical regions. It also aims to develop economic cooperation within the framework

<sup>60</sup> Ofra Bengio. (2004). *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 86.

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Ghariani, (2024), Turkey-Israel Relations: "Golden Years", 1991–2000, *Israeli Affairs*, 30 (1), 14.

<sup>62</sup> Işıl Arpacı. (2022), Necmettin Erbakan Örneğinde Türk Dış Politikasının İslamcı Eleştirisi, *Anadolu Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 4 (2), 250.

<sup>63</sup> Necmettin Erbakan, (2020). *Davamız* edited by Yusuf Aktaş, İstanbul: Aktaş Yayınları. 209-210.

of joint projects and strengthen the position of developing countries in the world economy.<sup>64</sup> The D-8's objectives include:

1. The establishment of the Common Market Order and Union instead of the EU.
2. Using a common currency among Muslim countries instead of using the US dollar and Euro.
3. Establishing a United Nations Organization of Muslim Countries instead of the United Nations.
4. Establishing a Defence Cooperation Organization of Muslim Countries instead of NATO.
5. There is a plan to establish the Organization for Cultural Cooperation of Muslim Countries in place of UNESCO.<sup>65</sup>

D-8 countries have six basic principles: peace instead of conflict, dialogue instead of conflict, justice instead of double standards, equality instead of discrimination, cooperation instead of exploitation, and democracy instead of oppression.<sup>66</sup> The establishment of the D-8 as an alternative to the West greatly disturbed Western countries, and Erbakan's being the pioneer of the concept and organization made him a target. The agreements he made with Iran and Libya and his move away from the West in foreign policy and trade and towards Muslim countries greatly disturbed Western countries, some large capital groups in Türkiye, and the Turkish Armed Forces. As a result of all these initiatives of Erbakan, he was ousted and banned from politics with the 28 February "postmodern" coup.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4 CONCLUSION

By conceptualizing Necmettin Erbakan's foreign policy as a counter-hegemonic response to the Western-centered international order, this study advances a theoretical perspective that foregrounds normative agency, moral economy, and civilizational plurality in foreign policy analysis. Erbakan's vision challenges the dominance of realist

<sup>64</sup> Necmettin Erbakan. (2022). *İslam Birliği*. edited by Tacettin Çetinkaya, Ankara: MG V Yayınları, 172.

<sup>65</sup> Recep Karabulut. (2017). Günümüz Dünyasından D-8'e Yeniden Bir Bakış, *International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish*, 12 (8 ), 422.

<sup>66</sup> Necmettin Erbakan, *İslam Birliği*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> Şevket Kazan. (2013). *28 Şubat Posmodern Bir Darbenin Anatomisi*, Ankara: MG V Yayınları, 274.

and liberal frameworks by demonstrating how ethical principles and historical identity can function as structuring elements of international political engagement rather than as mere rhetorical devices.

The examination of policy initiatives such as the D-8 Organization illustrates how alternative normative frameworks can be translated into institutional practices within the constraints of the international system. While the material impact of these initiatives remained limited, their conceptual significance lies in expanding the analytical boundaries of International Relations theory to include non-Western and Global South perspectives.

Ultimately, revisiting Erbakan's foreign policy contributes to a more inclusive and plural understanding of international order, emphasizing the necessity of integrating non-Western intellectual traditions into contemporary debates on global politics.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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