

## **TURKISH DOMESTIC ACTORS' ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY MAKING: CASE OF TURKEY – KRG'S STRATEGIC BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP**

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### **Abstrak**

*Tulisan ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan peran aktor sosial domestik Turki dalam proses pembuatan kebijakan negara dalam kasus kemitraan bilateral strategis antara Turki dan Pemerintahan Regional Kurdistan (KRG); sebuah quasi state yang berada dalam wilayah federal Irak. Minimnya literatur yang menggambarkan kekuatan-kekuatan domestik dalam Turki dan konsekuensinya terhadap kebijakan negara dalam membangun kerjasama kemitraan strategis dengan KRG merupakan celah yang akan diisi oleh penelitian dalam tulisan ini. Tulisan ini memiliki argumen bahwa aktor-aktor domestik Turki seperti individu, Partai Keadilan dan Pembangunan (AKP), militer Turki dan kelompok bisnis memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk preferensi dan kepentingan nasional Turki yang sangat dipengaruhi oleh pandangan mereka tentang bangsa dan regulasi ekonomi yang kemudian menjadi preferensi negara yang sah. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori liberal ideasional oleh Andrew Moravcsik yang menekankan keutamaan aktor-aktor domestik. Tulisan ini menghadirkan sebuah perspektif bahwa identitas atau nilai yang melekat kuat pada pandangan aktor-aktor domestik sangat penting dalam memahami perilaku negara baik berupa kerjasama ataupun konflik..*

### **Kata kunci:**

*aktor sosial domestik, kemitraan bilateral strategis, identitas, preferensi, kepentingan nasional, politik luar negeri Turki*

### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to describe the role of Turkish domestic societal actors in the state policy making in the case of strategic bilateral partnership between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG); a quasi state within the Iraqi federal state. The rareness of literature describing domestic forces within Turkey and the consequence for the state's policy in building a strategic partnership with the KRG was the gap that this research would be expected to narrow. The paper argues that Turkish domestic actors like the individual, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Turkish military and the business people had an important role; shaping Turkey's preference and national interests strongly determined by their views on nation and economic regulation which occupied its legitimate preference. The research applied the ideational liberal theory proposed by Andrew Moravcsik emphasizing the primacy of domestic actors. The research was qualitative with descriptive analysis model. The paper represents a perspective that identity or values well embedded in domestic actors' views do matter to understand the state behavior either cooperation or conflict.*

### **Keywords:**

*domestic social actor, strategic bilateral partnership, identity, preference, national interest, Turkey's foreign policy*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The paper is designed to provide the analysis of domestic social actors' role in the foreign policy making of a state. Recognizing domestic developments of a state is required to understand the state's behavior better as suggested by liberal views on foreign policy. According to the author, as a sub-discipline of international relations (IR), foreign policy becomes more interesting inasmuch as there is a trend of actors extension by which that a state can interact with a sub-state actor beyond its border in term of either conflict or cooperation is an event deserving scientific attention.

Turkey's relation with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) under the framework of strategic bilateral partnership is a reflection of the actor development dynamics in foreign policy study. The KRG is the only local government with a high degree of autonomy within Iraq sharing the border with Turkey, Syria, and Iran. Its privilege makes it resemble a quasi state and thanks to which it can conduct independent foreign policy to pursuit distinct interests. Today, Turkey is still the KRG's largest trading partner as well as the primary source of foreign direct investment (Ustun & Dudden 2017, 10) and was the most important actor propping to lay its economic independence from Iraqi federal government (Dalay 2017, 3).

Turkey once had a tense relationship with Iraq and the KRG due to its rejection of Kirkuk's incorporation into the KRG's territory within the Iraqi federal system and military campaign against the Kurds (Tol 2014, 2). Despite the bad experience, in 2008 the two entities were able to agree on a relationship rapprochement following Turkey's commitment and respect to the KRG as a political institution which led them to come up with common interests; security and energy interest. The two interests were solidified firmly in the form of bilateral partnership through which the two entities cooperated in creating stability in the border area and prosperity for their people

In term of security, both Turkey and the KRG perceived the PKK and ISIS as threats for stability, facilities, governments and people. Security cooperation was held in such various forms as joint military drills, patrols and campaigns in order not only to fight the PKK and ISIS but also to protect the vital oil and gas pipes (Ustun & Dudden 2017, 22-24). So did Turkey and the KRG make a new, gradual improvement in the strategic partnership enhancement successfully through energy cooperation. Both signed a range of ambitious deals including extensive energy trade, revenue sharing of energy transit and investment in energy infrastructure and block exploration (Morelli & Pischedda 2014, 109-110).

This paper seeks to answer the question of what role does the Turkish domestic actors played in the state's foreign policy making regarding the policy of the strategic bilateral partnership with the KRG. Next to the main question, the paper describes who the influential domestic actors were and how they contributed to the policy making. The case elaborated in the paper is restricted between 2008 and 2017.

The research revealed that such Turkish decision makers as the individual (Erdogan), the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Turkish military and business people with embedded values on social identity determined the state's preference which interacted with the KRG's. The interaction driven by convergent preferences between the two actors resulted in a harmonious relation in which a meaningful alliance took shape through strategic cooperation.

The paper is comprised of introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, materials and methodology, result and discussion and conclusion. Since understanding the state foreign policy through the lens of domestic development can enrich the realm of IR and there has been a shortage in literature describing the domestic societal actors' role in the case the paper presents, it can contribute to narrow the gap with which academics can get an alternate perspective on how the state behavior and national interests are both formed. Besides, the paper is projected to benefit those who are taking into account the state domestic development to their researches on relevant issues.

There has been some research literature investigating or evaluating the impacts of domestic development to Turkey's foreign policy. Kara (2011) found Turkish foreign policy transformed following the arrival of the AKP to power which created new sets of principles raising the perception of an axis shift. The study, however, revealed that in spite of the new practice of rhythmic diplomacy, the AKP's administration still held its ties with the west in addition to its active engagement in world politics. Dalacoura (2017) argued both Davutoglu's departure as a prime minister and a coup attempt became the turning points and catalysts for a new phase of Turkey's foreign policy meaning transactional, unplanned and ad hoc based on the expediency or pragmatism for the AKP's survival.

Kirişçi (2009) believed the Turkish foreign policy as a trading state was increasingly shaped by economic considerations domestically such as employment and wealth which made it a domestic issue where the sensitivity of Turkish financial markets to a host of foreign policy issues could be best explained as the indicator. Giannotta (2010) argued pro-market policies, migration from rural areas to cities and an expanding middle

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class had huge political implications which made Turkey such a prosperous and confident state that it exceeded the rigid Kemalist state security schemes towards independent diplomacy to pursue its national interests.

Demirtaş (2015) found that despite de-Europeanisation experience in its domestic politics, the impact of Europeanisation on Turkey's foreign policy towards the Western Balkan states still sustained. Uzgel (2003) argued the military's role in Turkey's foreign policy formation and even execution was directly constituted by its place in domestic politics and society starting from the early 1990s which, on the other hand, decreased from the early 2000s due to domestic and international developments.

Meanwhile, the literature about domestic developments affecting Turkey's foreign policy only confirms domestic forces' role in general, so is there some describing the mutual relationship of Turkey and the KRG. Paasche and Mansurbeg (2014) analyzed the partnership complexity driven by mutual interest with which Turkey could solve its vulnerability, while the KRG had no choice with its energy transfer to international market through Turkish soil. Yılmaz (2017) argued that internal drivers like mainly Turkish fight against the PKK and energy security and external drivers like the United States' influence both encouraged the energy relation between Turkey and the KRG. Ahmed (2015) found that the KRG-Turkey relations contributed to the Turkish public opinion change on the Kurdish issue, but the KRG's effort to disarm the PKK was barred by the power struggle between Turkey's Kurdish political parties.

The literature is certainly helpful constituting the issue in the research when the findings confirm the Turkey-KRG relationship generated by mutual interests; security and energy interest. Nevertheless, they do not provide information about the interest formation process, the state domestic actors as influencers and more importantly, the role they had in Turkey's strategic partnership policy making. Therefore, the paper seeks to fill the gap which has not been unveiled by the whole literature previously reviewed.

### ***ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK***

The research applied the liberal ideational theory developed by Andrew Moravcsik. As the liberal theory believes, the universal condition of world politics is globalization with which states are always embedded in a domestic and transnational society which create incentives for various interactions across borders (Moravcsik 2010, 1). The interactions may either give benefits for or harm domestic groups that they may support or blockade state policies through political institutions.

Moravcsik (1997, 516-521) argues the fundamental premise of the liberal theory embracing the embedded relationship between states, surrounding domestic and transnational society bears three core assumptions of the theory:

- 1) The primacy of societal actor. The liberal theory believes that rational individuals and social groups are the most significant actors in international politics advancing their material and ideational interests through political exchanges and collective actions within a state. Such actors own differentiated tastes, social commitments and resource endowments and interact under the state policy-making constraint.
- 2) Representation and state preferences. In the liberal conception of domestic politics, a state is not actually the actor, but merely a representative institution. The institution constitutes the critical transmission belt in which the individuals and social groups' preferences are translated into a state policy. While embedded in the representative institution, they are able to achieve goals efficiently rather than with sole private behaviors. Thus, the government's policy is constrained by the underlying identities, interests and power of individuals and domestic groups consistently thriving to conceive the state preferences resembling theirs.
- 3) Interdependence and international system. The liberal theory embraces that the patterns of interdependent state preferences determine state behaviors. Each state seeks to realize their distinctive preference in order to pursue national distinctive purposes while interacting with others. Where the preferences are naturally compatible or harmonious, there are strong incentives for coexistence between the two states with which a convergent relationship like cooperation can be agreed. Where, by contrast, a state's preference imposes cost on another state (dominant social actors within) in the form of deadlock or zero-sum relationship, there are tensions and conflicts between them.

Based on what shapes the state preferences, the liberal theory is divided into three variants, namely ideational liberalism; state preferences based on identity and legitimate social orders, commercial liberalism; state preferences based on the economic assets and cross-border transactions, and republican liberalism; state preferences based on representation and rent-seeking (Moravcsik 2001, 2). However, as stated earlier in the theoretical framework, this research purposively applied the ideational liberalism. The theoretical framework can be seen as follows.

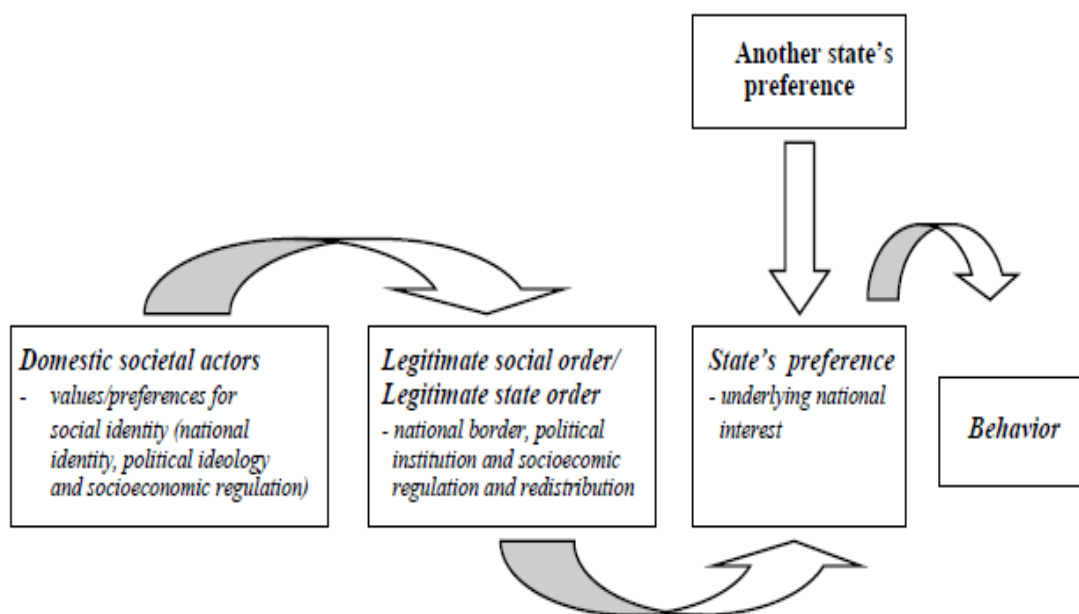


Figure 1. Ideational Liberal Theoretical Framework  
(extracted from Moravcsik 1997; 2001; 2010)

The ideational liberal theory believes that domestic social identities (values) are basic determinants of state preferences (Moravcsik 2010, 6). Tracing the liberal tradition, social values are sets of preferences held by various individuals and groups in society concerning the proper scope and nature of legitimate state objectives or provision of public goods (Moravcsik 2010, 6; 1997, 525; 2001, 11). Social actors both individuals and groups also called social coalition have their views about the nation, political ideology and socioeconomic regulation considered as public goods. These identity-based views are transferred into conceptions of what legitimate domestic social order such as national border, political institution, and socioeconomic regulation and redistribution.

Moravcsik (2010, 6) argues that foreign policy is an effort to realize such views domestically. Social actors provide support to the government who can shape and implement their identity-based preferences as state preferences. Nevertheless, social actors do not always shape a new legitimate social order and preference for the state, but supports the existing legitimate social order and preference as long as they match their view or preference. Now that preferences are seen as goals the state wants to achieve, state preferences are basically state interests which are also shaped or supported and maintained by social actors through the legitimate social or state order.

Due to the interdependency of the international system, state certain preferences will always interact with the others. As the liberal theory assumes, only if the national preferences reflecting the conceptions of legitimate national border, political institution and socioeconomic regulation are compatible with others' do harmonious behaviors take shape between the states (Moravcsik 1997, 520). On the other hand, provided those preferences and conceptions are incompatible, the conflicting behaviors occur between them (Moravcsik 1997, 521).

The research viewed the individual (Erdogan), the AKP, the Turkish military and business people as domestic societal actors in Turkey's policy making in conducting the strategic bilateral partnership with the KRG. Their values or preferences about national identity and socioeconomic regulation became the driving factors determining Turkey's preference. Due to fact that Erdogan was a key figure occupying the Turkish government's office, the AKP's power dominated the state politics, the military was long opposing to threats and maintaining a main role in the state defense and security, and the interest groups made up by business people had access to government's agencies, the transformation of such values into the state policy operated properly. These domestic actors strongly embraced the concept of Turkish nation-state as a unitary entity with clear borderline which needed security within its domestic and regional level. In term of economic regulation, they championed the liberal economy in line with Turkey's projection as an industrialist state which increasingly required energy to further prosperity.

Social actors' preferences on such particular identity (values) which then became the legitimate state order encouraged the rise of Turkey's national security and energy interest. Turkey sought to maintain its security from the PKK's threat and the recent ISIS' emergence. The PKK had been trying to destabilize the state and threat its sovereignty for the southeastern area independence or autonomy. At the same time, Turkey was enjoying its significant economic development, which in turn helped boost its military development and political influence in the region in addition to domestic prosperity. In order to maintain such progress, the state needed energy certainty flowing into its home industry.

Turkey's preference was convergent with the KRG's preference, which brought about a harmonious relationship from which mutual cooperation arose. Turkey's concept on its nationality was not against the KRG's view about its nation. Turkey and the KRG (and Iraq) did not compete for border claims. In addition, Turkey needed security and

stability from the threats of the PKK to maintain its nation and border. So did the KRG as a quasi state need stability and security as well as independence from the PKK's influence and ISIS's conquest. Turkey was one of the fastest economically growing states in the world having to double energy supply to carry out its economic development. Such development was required to maintain its status as an important regional actor. The KRG could provide the energy for Turkey, which in return transferred advantages for its domestic development through cooperation.

The convergent national interests between the two actors were formalized through a strategic bilateral partnership. For Turkey, the partnership was viewed to meet its national interests both security and energy interest which were actually determined by the domestic social actors' preferences. In other words, the state's interests, which were the representatives of domestic societal actors, were the motivating variables for the government to conduct the strategic bilateral partnership with the KRG. With the theoretical explanation, the paper argues that Turkish domestic societal actors had significant role; creating the state preference and national interests based on their identity or values.

### ***RESEARCH METHOD***

The research applied the qualitative method with descriptive analysis model so the sole independent variable, causing Turkey to take a policy to build a strategic bilateral partnership with the KRG, was analyzed. As it was a library research, the recorded data ranging from journals, books, policy briefs, working papers, conference papers, press releases and interview videos were counted on processing the information needed.

The research applied the interactive model of data analysis technique as Miles and Hubberman proposes comprising four steps as followings:

First, collecting data; at this state, the author collected as many data as possible relating to the issue and raised some alternative questions to map the research course. Second, reducing data; the author began to choose the main question as the focus in the research and simplified the data by reducing the unnecessary, keeping the relevant. At this stage, the role of domestic social actors was the main question the author would track; nevertheless, the activity of data gathering still continued. Third, displaying data; at this state, the data were organized and structured so that the author could find a chance for conclusion. However, the data collection and reduction were still conducted to get a better understanding the conclusion. The last, drawing the conclusion; the author could finally



make the conclusion clearly after recording the information pattern which was previously vague but eventually turned detail. The conclusion verified by the author was that Turkish domestic societal actors with their identity determined the national preference and interests which paved the state to have a strategic bilateral partnership with the KRG.

## **DISCUSSION**

As previously mentioned, the research revealed four important domestic societal actors influencing Turkey's policy-making process; Erdogan (individual), the AKP, the Turkish military and business people. Each had the role within a state structure to create the national preference and interests which matched their views such as nation (and borderline) and economic regulation as the paper further describes.

### **The Individual**

Erdogan can be the most attractive figure for many researchers for his political behavior that has affected Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy. Görener and Ucal (2011, 368) examined how Erdogan's belief led him to challenge constraints in his environment. Shortly after taking the Turkish national leadership in 2002 as a prime minister, Erdogan was a key person occupying the government's office who would push the limits and tried to overcome the limitation on his role in order to adopt a proactive orientation. In term of foreign policy, due to the fact that his perceptions of operational environment became translated into policy choices, Turkey under Erdogan made a sharp departure from long standing status quo-oriented policy positions (Görener & Ucal 2011, 369). Further, in regional politics, the state declared itself as an important regional actor and was extending the active and ambitious foreign policy especially in cooperation with the neighborhood.

It is important to track Erdogan's personal views on national identity before arriving at Turkey's preference. Regarding the nation conception, once in an interview Erdogan (2014) conveyed:

*"We have no interest in distributing autonomy in Turkey. We would not allow such thing in a case because Turkey with its 780 thousand square kilometer territory as a whole. There are 30 different ethnic elements in Turkey and these people are each other's brothers. We are the sons of this motherland, we have gathered under a single flag and we are the citizens of the Republic of Turkey."*

Erdogan preferred a unitary state made up by a variety of ethnic groups with equal rights without discrimination. The idea led to the national conception that Turkey would

not grant any autonomy to any area of its sovereignty as the PKK struggled for. Such policy would only bring discrimination and instability to the state. Further Erdogan (2014) said:

*“There has never been a prime minister in this country who calls someone from a different ethnic entity his brother. This started with me, that is because this is included in my values judgments. Since this part of my value judgments, I cannot pull it in another direction. We cannot discriminate among us. If you notice in the public opinion polls among our Kurdish citizens, our party is the most popular one getting the highest number of votes because we are not discriminating. My Kurdish origin citizens predominantly live in southeastern Anatolia. The southeastern region has distanced itself during the past year and now the infrastructure and investment have reached the region.”*

Erdogan argued that the Southeastern area already changed where people could engage in national politics and feel the infrastructure and investment. Such development was supposed to attach the Kurds as part of the Turkish nations equally treated like others. The borderline of Turkish state is only with neighbouring states, not within the areas that Turkish nations inhabit. The nation conception and borderline for Turkey are undoubtedly clear and in order to maintain the national unity, it would take any measure to tackle the threats from both the inside and outside, especially those orchestrated by the PKK and ISIS.

While Turkey was facing threats from the armed groups, KRG was facing the similar things. The KRG was struggling to get rid its territory of the PKK and ISIS's efforts to destabilize and take control of its sovereignty. Not only targeting the citizens, the armed groups are also targeting the energy infrastructures, which were the vital resources for the KRG's economic and political development. Instead of seeing the KRG as a part of its security problem, Erdogan saw the Kurdistan regional government as a solution as both did not possess the conflicting nation and national border concept, but mutual security as both need paving the way to the security cooperation.

Regarding the economic regulation, Erdogan embraced liberal economy and preferred international cooperation between states. Once at the World Economic Forum, Erdogan addressed:

*“Turkey is leading the initiatives that aim at vitalizing regional cooperation mechanisms and said Turkey will continue to take steps to bring together the regional actors from the Balkans to Caucasus, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea around common projects in all areas including the energy sector, transportation, trade and tourism. The bilateral high level strategic cooperation councils with its neighbors are of great importance, adding that these councils*

*also contribute to international diplomacy.” (Presidency of Republic of Turkey 2014)*

From the statement above, Erdogan believed in internationalism, especially in regional economic development. Regional cooperation was such an important tool for the state through strategic projects that the scheme could bring all actors together to gain common gains. Such idea was supported by Turkey’s economic achievement as Erdogan further stated:

*“Turkey is a rising power with its young and qualified manpower, dynamic and stable economy, competitive private sector, large-scale domestic market, robust financial discipline and developing infrastructure is Europe’s 6th biggest and the world’s 17th biggest economy. Through its strong public finance and banking system, Turkey was among the least affected countries by the global economic crisis unfolding as of 2008.” (PRT 2014)*

As suggested by the liberal theory, Erdogan’s preference on liberal economic regulation was one of the significant reasons why Turkey needed to have a strong bilateral tie with the KRG in terms of energy sector. International economic cooperation seemed to be impossibly avoided because of the interdependence cause among the states. Energy was vital for Turkey in order to maintain its domestic economic progress; on the other hand, the KRG could exploit its energy and export it to Turkey and other states in order to take economic returns for its domestic development.

### **The AKP**

The AKP was another important actor that contributed to the formation of Turkey’s preference and national interests. Having ruled the state since 2002, the AKP is perceived as the most powerful political party within Turkish politics which influenced the state foreign policy through legal political institution in both Turkish executive and legislative body. While the former allowed the party to transform its value to the state agendas through the governance it formed, the latter guaranteed the predominantly AKP-made up legislature’s support to the value-laid agenda executed by the government. Önis (2011, 46) suggested the AKP make an active foreign policy approach as a central future of its governance and the party maintained the continuity strongly after securing the second term in office. Furthermore, Barkey (2011, 6-7) argued that 2007 was the consolidation of the AKP’s rule bringing up a far more assertive foreign policy from which the AKP’s

government made a very drastic change in Turkey's relation with the KRG, escaping their trouble relation.

As Erdogan was one of the party's founding fathers and a senior figure, the AKP seemed to have many similarity to his stands in understanding the Turkish nation and economic development. The AKP believed in and was committed to the process of the National Unity and Fraternity Project that was formulated to solve the internal conflict within the state. In this regard, in its vision book, the AKP (2012, 24) clearly states:

*“Ethnic, religious and regional nationalisms have constituted the red lines of our politics because we reject all kinds of discrimination. Our effort has been characterized by a vision that values differences as part and parcel of our social unity and cohabitation on the basis of citizenship of the Republic of Turkey. Religious, ethnic, social and cultural rights have been freely exercised under successive AK Party governments we have taken all the necessary measure to make it happen.”*

The AKP refused any type of discrimination within Turkish society and supported the cohesion of all Turkish people as citizens of the state. This means the party also rejected any demand for either secession or autonomy based on ethnicity within the state since all regions and ethnicity should be equally treated. The PKK's demand for such thing was contrary to the party's ideal as further stated:

*“The Project of National Unity and Fraternity is a major democratic initiative implemented by AK Party to expand the sphere of civil liberties while fighting against PKK terrorism.” (AKP 2012, 24)*

A range of terror activities targeted by the PKK were the threats for the Turkish unity and the AKP (Turkish government) would take any measure to tackle them. The AKP also suggested the government responds to not only the threats driven by domestic problems but also those coming from the outside which could threaten the state and nation security. This commitment is recorded as follows:

*“We will continue to pursue policies that aim to protect the welfare, rights and freedoms of the local people and the structure of the unitary state with the aim of solving problems definitely in an effective way that would not lead to a weakness in the struggle against terrorism which is threatening the region. AK Party, implementing a multidimensional struggle against terrorism will continue to take all the necessary legal and legitimate steps and means to put a complete end to the problem.” (AKP 2012, 29)*

The ISIS had targeted Turkish people and facilities through the bombing actions and disturbed security in the border area. Despite its emergence following the Arab Spring, the armed group was a real threat for stability as well as the people of Turkey and it was considered as dangerous as the PKK to the state unity. The concept of nation that the AKP embraced was not against that the KRG believed in. The AKP did not see the KRG as a threat and the interaction between Turkey and the Iraqi autonomous region could bring positive results. Both entities did not have any border conflict with each other. Furthermore, the two encountered the common threats coming from the PKK and ISIS to their stability and security. The AKP was a strong supporter of liberal the economic system applied in Turkey. The party's view on liberalism was generated by the state's opportunities and global changes aimed to develop the people's creativity and development. The AKP (2012, 47) states:

*“The center of our focus in the economy has been the individual and improving his condition. Rather than adopting a strictly centralized developmental model, we gave priority to establish a productive environment in which the entrepreneurs and workers can realize their potential. The state has acted as a facilitator rather than a force preventing creativity and development.”*

The liberal economy was believed to contribute to the productive environment which brought prosperity to the people in the state. To support this idea, private sectors were considered important to push the state competitiveness, as the AKP (2012, 52) states as follows:

*“The pioneering force in the high growth rate has been the private sector and will continue to be so. We, as AK Party, will continue to pave the way for strong, effective private sector. To do so, alongside macroeconomic stability, we will continue to implement reforms for increasing quality and competitiveness in goods and service sector.”*

Thanks to the government's capability of managing liberal economic regulation, Turkey was able to enjoy high development backed by its good and service products. Besides, not only being an industrialist state, Turkey transformed to be one of the world's most significant economies which positively affected its defense sector. This achievement was not merely caused by domestic progress but also good relationship with other states in trades and other kinds of cooperation.

The AKP believed in free trade and fair distribution of wealth through cooperation between states. In this regard, the party states:

*“We will continue to support free capital movements and free trade. Floating exchange rates will continue and we will implement structural reforms for a more efficient economy. While working toward a stronger economy we will continue to ameliorate regional and social difference in income distribution.” (AKP 2012, 52-53)*

Such view suggested that the liberal economic approach paved many possibilities for Turkey to engage with international actors especially its neighbours in economic cooperation. Turkey’s industries developed significantly, but it could not meet its energy needs domestically. The liberal value motivated the state to cooperate with the outsiders to guarantee its energy fulfilment in order to maintain the domestic development and the KRG was one of the important energy-rich neighbours. In fact, the idea of a liberal economy that the AKP preferred was not divergent with the KRG’s interest.

As the liberal economy proposes that prosperity can be achieved if the states cooperate in trades and other kinds of cooperation and from which distribution of wealth between nations can be realized, interdependence occupies the relation between states. The KRG could provide Turkey with energy and in exchange, the regional government could take advantage of such exports in addition to being allowed to transport its energy to international market via Turkish land on the basis of mutual benefit.

### **The Turkish Military**

The military has played such a significant role in Turkish politics both domestic and foreign policy. In Turkish history, the state republic era was built on authoritarianism and the military interventions (Ozkan, 2018). The Turkish military used to be the strongest Kemalism (nationalism and secularism) defender post Kemal Attaturk’s era which self-encouraged a series of coups against democratically elected leaders. In spite of interferences in civilian politics, the military contributed to the state’s sovereignty safeguard and long-lasting fights against rebel groups and consequently, such role affected the civil-military relations in Turkish politics.

Uzgel (2003, 187) suggested that the military’s role in foreign policy be expanded when it perceived the unity of internal and external threats which could destabilize and even break off the state territorial integrity, one of which originated in the Kurdish

separatism bolded by other states' interventionist foreign policy. Similar to Uzgel's study, Ozcan (2009, 84) suggested the military's consolidation and legitimacy in foreign policy making be driven by regionalization of Kurdish problem, in addition to the effective PKK's operation within and outside Turkey. Meanwhile, the most effective mechanism for the military's involvement in foreign policy was the National Security Council (NSC) which was responsible for national security and defense policy (Uzgel 2003, 191).

As stated earlier, military was also important in forming Turkey's policy towards relationship building with the KRG due to its role as both a security body and a key political actor. It regards to its value on Turkish nation and sovereignty of the state. Much of its national vision has been determined and guided by Turkey's constitutions. Article 5 of the Turkish Constitution states that:

*"It is the fundamental aim and duty of the state to safeguard the independence and integrity of the Turkish Nation, the indivisible unity of the country, the Republic and democracy, and to ensure the welfare, peace and happiness of the individuals and society." (Turkish Armed Forces General Staff 2018)*

Based on the constitution, the Turkish military is a key state tool functioning to assist the government to maintain the independence of the state and integrity of the Turkish nation. The nation integrity means that the state would exploit all of its power to guarantee the security for the sake of national unity. Stability was a core need for the state and with which the government would be able to ensure democracy, welfare, peace and happiness of the Turkish people. With such mission, the Turkish military stood at the forefront to encounter all possible threats targeting the state. Since the inception of Turkish Republic, the military had been confronting the Kurds rebels consistently demanding either secession or autonomy. In line with the government, the military viewed that such demand would be a threat for the nation unity and therefore; it always supported Turkey's military policies against the PKK and other armed groups.

According to the Whitepaper of National Defense Ministry (2000, in Cizre 2009, 303) security for the state of Turkey is defined as protection and maintenance of the state's constitutional order, national presence, integrity, all political, social, cultural and economic interests in an international level, and contractual law against any kind of internal and foreign threat. This definition furthermore explains that security for the state has a broad context in term of not only military but also non-military. As an element that makes up the state government, the Turkish military is supposed to cooperate with the

ruling government to create stability and fight against all possible threats to the Turkish nation.

Though there has been a fundamental change in civil-military relations since 2002 where the civil government becomes stronger over the military control and the political role of military has been marginalized, the military is still an important part for the government and has even been transforming to a solely professional security institution especially to tackle the acts of terrorism and destabilization to the state. The Turkish military showed its willingness to work together with the democratic civil government despite the contested measures for some degree as the military used to prefer non-compromised measures against the transformation to a solely professional security threats. Under the government's framework, the Turkish military worked with the KRG forces in response to the PKK and ISIS' threats not only in the border areas but also in the KRG's territory. Regarding the security of border area, furthermore, it is the mission of the Turkish military to protect and provide the security of land borders as mandated by article 2 of the Act 3497 on Protection and Security of the Land Borders (TAFGS 2018).

The Turkish military did not possess any conflicting concept on nation and claim on borderline with the KRG for the security interest of mother state. In the Turkish military's view, the PKK had been a national threat for decades since its inception in 1970s and the ISIS targeted the Turkish people, military personnel and facilities in order to provoke domestic instability and border area insecurity. Meanwhile in the KRG, so did the PKK and ISIS target the energy resource facilities besides domestic stability and border security. With the strategic bilateral partnership, the military-backed government of Turkey and the KRG could improve security and maintain stability which met both sides' security interest now that both were facing the common threats.

### **The Business People**

Business people are the last domestic group categorized as interest groups influencing the state decision making in Turkey's strategic bilateral partnership policy with the KRG elaborated in the paper. The AKP-ruled government could be the most successful Turkish government to create the middle class thanks to the urban policy combined with the ambitious capitalism radically designed to achieve economic growth. In its study, Birdsall (2012, in Uner & Yilmaz 2013, 5) shows that the total number of Turkish middle class population between 2005 and 2006 reached around 25% and the ratio increased up to 35% between 2008 and 2009 that equaled 27 million people. Meanwhile, the World Bank



recorded that the Turkish middle class seemed higher up to 40 million people in 2012 (Uner & Yilmaz 2013, 4). Though there are various studies showing different results in its number due to differing criteria, the ratio of middle class to other classes within Turkish society is significant.

The increase of middle class affected the growth of business people that then played the important role in Turkey's political economy policy not only popular support for the AKP's government as the exchange of economic benefits. The business people belonging to the industries and associations had far closer connection with the Turkish government under the AKP since their growth was strongly supported within the state's economic scheme. Kirişci (2009, 46) recorded a number of powerful groups such as the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD), the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD), and the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM), the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK), the International Transporters Association (UND), the Turkish Contractors Association (TMD) and other local business associations.

The rise of business groups not only affected the state domestic politics but also profoundly affected its foreign relations since the interest groups through their lobbying were capable of interacting with the numerous government agencies as their business partners as well as having direct access to the government and forming alliances with other states' counterparts (Kirişci 2009, 46-47). Since the AKP took power, Turkey already engaged them in foreign policy projection meaning that their interests were well accommodated. In the case of northern Iraq (KRG), for instance, the Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce and other lobbying business actors operating in there had a role in the 2008 Turkish military operation in order to maintain stability in the area (Kirişci 2009, 47).

The Turkish business people preferred a liberal economic regulation applied by the state as the policy was able to upgrade business growth and improve the prosperity of citizens. Such preference affected Turkey's economic tie preference expanding as well as promoting more free trades with various neighbour states and those beyond the region where export-import activities, services and investments could transport more smoothly. The business people also encouraged the government to improve its relation with the energy-producer states like Russia, Iran, Iraq and the KRG as Turkey's energy consumption boomed following the significant development of domestic industries. For the relation with Iraq and the KRG, Turkey paved new business opportunities and

investments beyond oil imports (Ozkan & Turunc 2011, 78). Thanks to its strategic location, Turkey is a network node of international energy trade and infrastructure investments where energy is busily transported to the mainly Europe through Turkey's land (Ozkan & Turunc 2011, 78). Since the better relationships grew, The Turkish firms invested in the strategic megaprojects of energy infrastructure in their own state and the KRG. Furthermore, approximately a thousand Turkish firms were operating in the KRG in 2016 and the number made up 40% of whole active foreign firms in the region (Ustun & Dudden 2017, 10).

The Turkish business people's preference on the state economic regulation was also an important domestic factor to understand the relationship of Turkey with the KRG within the scheme of strategic bilateral partnership. The economic benefits could be mainly the reason why the group backed the state liberal economic foreign policy. Besides securing the energy supply to guarantee their industry operation, they could take advantage of infrastructure investments already agreed by Turkey and the KRG. For the Turkish government, such partnership maintained domestic industry development and the prosperity of its people; meanwhile, for the KRG, it eased the energy exports beyond the borders which created development at home in exchange.

### ***CONCLUSION***

The rational partnership in the paper can be the success example of neighborly tie encouraged by the interdependency cause between a sovereign state and an autonomous region of the other sovereign state. Turkey began to see the KRG as a solution instead of a problem for its domestic stability as well as its energy security in 2008. In addition to the liberal assumptions, that Turkey conducted the strategic partnership with the KRG was actually determined by the role of domestic societal actors whose identity mattered in the policy-making process. According to the liberal ideational theory framework, such domestic actors had a significant role; shaping Turkey's preference and interests.

The paper argues that Erdogan, the AKP, the Turkish military and business people were the prominent actors among the Turkish society and thanks to the working transmission belt in Turkey's political institution, their views on the nation and economic regulation could occupy the state's legitimate social order and preference leading to a cooperative behavior with the KRG. They preferred the concept of Turkish unitary state with a clear borderline requiring stability at home as well as security in the border area and liberal economic regulation applied to the state aimed to not only guarantee the energy

flow but also maintain domestic economic development. Such preference matched the KRG's which brought the two actors a mutual relationship under the scheme of strategic bilateral partnership in pursuing both security and energy interest.

While being able to come with the research findings, so does the paper actually have a weakness; the author did not conduct such direct interviews with the Turkish domestic social actors that much of the previously expected information was not gathered to emphasize particular aspects of their role during the research. In addition, the paper still leaves two questions which the future research project can be conducted and expected to resolve; firstly, if the strategic bilateral partnership affects positively to Turkey's Kurdish problem while it is believed to solve its energy vulnerability and secondly, who it is the most powerful and most significant one among those domestic actors in forming Turkey's foreign policy. The paper, however, contributes to the wider foreign policy study which can be used to analyse and investigate other states' foreign policy whose had domestic identity-based development is similar to Turkey's.

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