

A Bridge with Multiple Faces: Competing Identities in Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1988-2016)

Abstract

This article examines how Turkish parliamentarians continuously (re)shape Turkey's identity and geopolitical role by using the metaphor of a bridge in parliamentary debates from 1988 to 2016. First, the article argues that parliamentarians use this metaphor in identity-formation processes to mediate between competing identities, thereby constituting Turkey's liminal identity. Second, it illustrates how the bridge metaphor remained a dominant discourse even though parliamentarians constantly challenged and refilled the meaning of it. This constantly (re)shapes Turkey's geopolitical role to function as a bridge between the West and East.

Keywords: geopolitical discourses, identity formation, bridge metaphor, geopolitical role, Turkish parliament

1. Introduction

When looking at Turkey you will notice its unique multifaceted geographical location. Turkey is an Asian country, a European country, a Balkan country, a Middle Eastern country, a Black Sea country, a Mediterranean country, and is even closely related to the Caspian Sea. It is, therefore, obvious that Turkey cannot neglect these regions. When facing a problem in the Middle East we [Turkey] need to act as a Middle Eastern country. It could be, therefore, also necessary that we [Turkey] sometimes act as a European country or a Caucasian country.¹

Former Turkish prime minister and minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu claimed with this quote Turkey's diverse identity by referring to the country's geographical location. According to him, Turkey was part of several regions and, therefore, had the ability and responsibility to approach and understand all these. Turkish political elites have continuously constructed Turkey's exceptionalism by drawing on the country's geographical location and its historical and cultural legacy. They argued that Turkey was neither European nor Asian, but was rather both – and, therefore, had an in-between, a liminal or a hybrid status.² Moreover, these elites frequently used metaphors to strengthen Turkey's exceptionalism; the one of a bridge seemed to be especially popular in geopolitical discourses.³ Some academics argued that the bridge metaphor was

1 Davutoğlu 2011, 428.

2 Rumelili 2007; Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017; Yanik 2011.

3 Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017; Yanik 2009.

used after the Cold War⁴ whereas others traced the usage of this metaphor back to Turkey's accession process to the NATO⁵ or even the foundation of the Turkish Republic.⁶ These pieces of research illustrated that this metaphor was constantly challenged and reproduced. More recently, Justice and Development Party (AKP)-elites were sceptical about the usage of this metaphor. For example, Davutoğlu himself criticized Turkey's bridge role as he perceived it as being too passive. He instead preferred to frame Turkey as a 'central country'.⁷ This article aims to understand how Turkish parliamentarians used the metaphor of a bridge in parliamentary debates from 1988 to 2016. It illustrates how metaphorically framing Turkey as a bridge remained a dominant discourse of Turkish parliamentarians within a broader political arena and across a longer period of time. First, the article argues that Turkish parliamentarians used this metaphor in identity-formation processes to mediate between competing identities, more specifically between European and Asian/Islamic identities. Secondly, the usage of this metaphor shaped Turkey's geopolitical role to function as a bridge and Turkish parliamentarians constantly challenged, reinforced, redefined, and refilled this role based on domestic and regional developments.

Turkey's potential to function as a bridge has been extensively researched. Conventional approaches took this role for granted, and perceived it as fixed⁸ – whereas a critical geopolitics approach did not focused structurally on the usage of the bridge metaphor in discourses⁹. From a constructivist perspective, Özlem Demirtaş Bağdonas (2012) applied a more state-centric approach to the bridge metaphor without giving insights into the discursive strategies that constituted and challenged this role. Lerna Yanık (2009) conducted research on the usage of the bridge metaphor in Turkish foreign policy discourse from a post-structuralist perspective. This article draws upon the latter, but takes a systematic approach to metaphorically framing Turkey as a bridge in a broader time period and political context, more specifically in Turkish parliamentary debates from 1988 to 2016. This adds a new dimension to existing debates, namely that of parliament. The focus hereon is relevant because it is an empirical site of explicit articulations of identity, an arena of contestation, represents a formal authority, and includes a wider political debate – as its inclusion incorporates a variety of political texts as debates, speeches and statements. In these, a broad range of political actors like the cabinet, the opposition and the president define their political positions. This increases the likelihood of identifying the discursive strategies regarding Turkey's identity formation and geopolitical role.¹⁰ The article focuses on the Turkish parliament as an actor in the constitution of the country's national identity, therefore, ideologies of individuals, political groups and parties fall outside the scope of this research.

4 Bilgin 2007; Rumelili 2008; Yanık 2009.

5 Yanık 2012.

6 Durgun 2011; Tank 2006.

7 Arkan and Kınacıoğlu 2016; Davutoğlu 2011, 350.

8 Aksu 2014; Aras and Gorener 2010; Lesser 1992; Ögütçü 1994; Öztürk et al. 2011.

9 Altunışık 2014; Bilgin 2007; Durgun 2011; Tank 2006; Váli 1971.

10 Hansen 2006, 61-62.

The first section assesses the academic debate on the role of metaphors in identity-formation processes and gives insight to the used methodology. The second section then analyses how Turkish parliamentarians constructed spatial, temporal and ethical identities and used processes of association and dissociation. It will give, therefore, insights in discursive strategies that existed in parliament regarding Turkey's identity and how the metaphor of a bridge was used to mediate between these competing visions. The last section will then elaborate on what it meant to metaphorically frame Turkey as a bridge regarding its role in international politics.

2. The Self–Other Relationship and Turkey's Identity Formation

Metaphors are integral with social and political life as they are important features of language.¹¹ They are used as a cognitive means to simplify and understand complex phenomena. The effect of the metaphor is strengthened through its reference to the physical and perceptual world.¹² They are useful pattern-making devices, thereby effectively uniting reason and imagination.¹³ Metaphors are more than just words, by being linked to new meanings or by being used in new contexts they make a particular interpretation of a certain situation or event possible. William Flanik described this process as: *“agents create new meanings by drawing on existing metaphors and applying them to new situations, by extending metaphorical entailments in novel ways, and by articulating and sharing new metaphors.”*¹⁴ They are not extra-discursive tools that add an additional sense to social relations; instead they make these social relations possible.¹⁵ This article, therefore, takes a post-structuralist approach to metaphors by perceiving it as being part of discursive strategies that constitute reality instead of only describing it.¹⁶ This also entails that this research is not interested in the cognitive processes behind the actors that use a particular metaphor, but focuses on metaphors at the discourse level and how they shape and are shaped by social reality instead.

Many studies illustrated the importance of the usage of metaphors in identity making processes, particularly related to the constitution of the nation.¹⁷ When Turkish parliamentarians metaphorically frame Turkey as a bridge, they imagine Turkey's national identity and geopolitical role as it deals with Turkey's geographical borders and location. It shapes a certain reality that illustrates certain opportunities and limitations for foreign policy behaviour.¹⁸ From a post-structuralist perspective these metaphors and identity constructions are only temporarily fixed as parliamentarians constantly (re-)negotiate and challenge the meaning of framing Turkey metaphorically as a bridge.

11 Chilton 1996, 2.

12 Cameron 2011, 344.

13 Miles et al. 2013, 281.

14 Flanik 2011, 432.

15 Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 96.

16 Šaric and Stanojevic 2019, 1.

17 Putz 2019; Šaric and Stanojevic 2019; Wodak et al. 2009.

18 Yanik 2009, 533.

To illustrate this instability, post-structuralist researchers focus primarily on processes of differentiation within identity formation processes.¹⁹ Within this perspective, identities are constructed through a series of juxtaposed signs otherwise understood as a Self–Other relationship.²⁰ This is, for example, evident in literature regarding the Self–Other nexus between Europe/the European Union and Turkey.²¹ Such research gives insights into how Europe’s identity was shaped in part by differentiation from Turkey as its historical Other, or as an EU candidate. Its focus on identity formation is geared toward the Other as a threat and the bearer of difference.²² The Self–Other relationship does not have to be defined by mutual exclusivity or radical difference.²³

Hansen (2006) and Rumelili (2007) both offered an analytic framework to systematically analyse different dimensions of identity making, without solely taking processes of differentiation into account.²⁴ Rumelili introduced the mechanism of social distance within identity interactions, which dealt with how the Self either associated with or dissociated from the Other based on inclusive identities or exclusive identities. Inclusive identities dealt with acquired characteristics like political ideology whereas exclusive identities focused on inherent characteristics such as religion or geographical location.²⁵ The Self only associated with the Other when the former had an inclusive identity and when the latter was not seen as a threat to the Self, thereby paving the way to construct the Other’s identity similar to that of the Self. Disassociation, on the other hand, focused on exclusive identities and strengthened the boundaries between the Self and Other – and emphasised that the Other can never become like the Self.²⁶ Hansen proposed three dimensions of identities to conduct analysis namely, spatial, temporal and ethical, which this research will also touch upon. Spatial identities dealt with the construction of boundaries, thereby delineating a space for existence.²⁷ In the case of Turkey, this could refer to the construction of Turkey’s geopolitical role as a bridge by referring to its geographical location as it is located between Europe and the Middle East thereby also determining the relations with these regions. Temporal identities referred to discourses of progress and intransience. In other words, it dealt with how the Self’s identity is constructed in time.²⁸ A good example would be how Turkish parliamentarians referred to Turkey’s Ottoman legacy in terms of culture to strengthen Turkey’s role in international politics. Ethical identities dealt with how discourses constructed certain responsibilities.²⁹ The fact that Turkish parliamentarians constructed Turkey’s geopolitical bridge role based on its geographical location and Ottoman heritage implicitly or explicitly brought certain respon-

19 Guillaume 2014, 19.

20 Campbell 1992; Doty 1993.

21 Müftülier-Baç 2000; Neumann 1999.

22 Bucher and Jasper 2017, 5.

23 Aydın-Düzgit 2013, 536-37; Rumelili 2004, 29.

24 Rumelili 2007, 36.

25 Rumelili 2004, 37; 2007, 39.

26 Rumelili 2004, 38-39; 2007, 42.

27 Hansen 2006, 47.

28 Arkan and Kınacıoğlu 2016, 385.

29 Hansen 2006, 50.

sibilities towards these former Ottoman territories. Combining Hansen's three dimensions of identity making together with Rumelili's social distance give insight to how Turkish parliamentarians construct different degrees of difference and similarities with different Others, like the EU and the Middle East/Asia, and how the metaphor of a bridge is used in these discursive strategies. Additionally, it provides a framework to systematically analyse identity formation processes and what they entail for Turkey's geopolitical role to function as a bridge.

The article particularly focuses on how Turkish parliamentarians associate Turkey with different 'civilisations' and regions, thereby constructing Turkey's liminal, in-between, or hybrid identity. Wodak et al. argued that if inclusive and exclusive identity markers played an important role within every identity formation process, then the constitution of hybrid identities could counteract these processes of exclusion and differentiation.³⁰ Rumelili illustrated how Turkish political elites successfully constructed Turkey's dual identity that consisted of European/Asian and Islamic/Western identities, which were not mutually exclusive or incompatible. According to her, this liminality paved the way to selectively use identity markers in the West and the East while still incorporating and addressing both regions and blocs.³¹ Metaphors played an important role in the constitution of hybrid identities due to its capacity to unify reasoning and shape discursive structures, thereby bringing these identity constructions together.³² The usage of the bridge metaphor is in this context particularly relevant as academics argued this metaphor illustrated Turkey's liminality and in-between identity. From a post-structuralist perspective, Yanık analysed a selection of speeches of Turkish political elites and argued that the metaphor of a bridge was used to portray Turkey's hybrid international identity and role as a mediator or an arbiter during the 1990s. According to her, this role changed after the 9/11 attacks and the AKP's ascension to power – as religion was now introduced into the discourse, with the aim of transforming Turkey into the spokesperson for Islam and thereby differentiating the country from Europe.³³ This article draws upon this research, but applies a systemic approach to the usage of the metaphor of a bridge to identify and analyse discursive strategies in a broad political landscape, like the Turkish parliament, over a longer period of time. It illustrates that the metaphor of a bridge played an important role to constitute Turkey's liminal identity as both Western and Eastern as the metaphor served as a mechanism to mediate between competing identity constructions within parliament from 1988 to 2016.

The article adopts Hansen's research design to analyse discourses, which centres around four dimensions, namely the number of selves, the temporal perspective, the number of events, and intertextual models. This research focuses on a single Self, which is Turkey in relation to multiple Others such as the EU, Europe, Middle East, and Asia. The article aims to identify how discourses and counter-discourses within the Self continuously (re)shapes the official national Self in Turkish parliament. This means that

30 Wodak et al. 2009, 17.

31 Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017, 564.

32 Šaric and Stanojevic 2019, 210-211.

33 Yanık 2009, 534.

one cannot truly speak of a single Self.³⁴ In order to understand the development of Turkey's identity within a longer historical period, the article scrutinised a total of 3,576 transcripts of Turkish parliamentary debates between 1988 and 2016 through qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 11.³⁵ This period embraces a wide variety of political parties and parliamentarians, thereby providing a broader overview of the bridge metaphor's use in parliament outside of the current AKP-period. Moreover, this time span is valuable for exposing any shifts in discursive strategies over a long period. The article is particularly interested in how in the context of the end of the Cold War Turkey reformulated its identity and geopolitical role by using the metaphor of a bridge and what that entailed over the long run such as within the AKP-period. Moreover, it was under the President Turgut Özal era (1989-1993) that Turkey actively diversified its relations and showed foreign policy activism in the Middle East and Central-Asia.³⁶ Additionally, the 1987 parliamentary elections in Turkey were the first relatively free elections after the military coup of 1980, thereby giving the parliament a somewhat more legitimacy and authority. The analysis stops at 2016 due to constitutional referendum in 2017 that reformed the Turkish political system which significantly decreased the parliament's power. Next to the temporal perspective, the analysis identified the number of events as moments when parliamentarians used the bridge metaphor in the constitution of Turkey's identity and geopolitical role in relation to multiple Others. Moreover, the article focuses on the parliament as an actor, thereby taking the wider political debate as the intertextual model. In other words, the research goes beyond official discourse as it tries to identify how discourses and counter-discourses take place within parliament that contribute Turkey's official discourse and identity.³⁷ Additionally, reading strategies, like intertextuality were applied to identify trends in discursive strategies:

[Intertextuality] highlights that texts are situated within and against other texts, that they draw upon them in constructing their identities and policies, that they appropriate as well as revise the past, and that they build authority by reading and citing that of others.³⁸

Deductive and inductive coding strategies were combined. The deductive strategy entailed systematically searching the word 'bridge' within each transcript as the main coding strategy. The analysis focused on the word bridge in a metaphorical sense and did not include other usages, for example the actual construction of bridges in Turkey. The initial outcome illustrated that Turkish parliamentarians metaphorically framed Turkey

34 Hansen 2006, 69.

35 All parliamentary debates from the 18th Parliament up to the current 26th Parliament have been included in the analysis, which means that the first parliamentary debate dates back to 14 December 1987 and the last scrutinised one to 7 April 2016. All texts are translated by the author himself, and as such all errors are his own. Transcripts can be accessed via the website of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM): <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/>.

36 Tufekci 2017, 4-5.

37 Hansen 2006, 54-55.

38 Ibid., 55.

as a bridge 631 times throughout the years. The coding was further narrowed down by only focusing on the metaphor of a bridge in identity formation processes which included different identity markers that were either linked to the West or the East. These identity markers were part of either processes of dissociation or association. The following sub-codes based on (imagined) regions and geographies were created: the West, the East, Europe, the Caucasus, Asia, Central-Asian Republics, the Middle East, the Turkish Republics, the European Community/Union, the Balkan, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Northern hemisphere, the Southern hemisphere, Eurasia, Africa, and West-Asia. Additionally, sub-codes were created on cultural, religious, historical and political values as democracy, Islam/Muslim population, secularism, liberal/market economy, modern, civilised, brothers, Turkishness and Ottoman. An inductive strategy led to finding out patterns during the course of data analysis. This entailed assigning the bridge metaphor to Turkey to function as a role model for the East, a bridge that connects the West with the East, a bridge to open a path to the West in the Muslim world, and a bridge to bring the Western and Islamic civilisation together. These coding and reading strategies gave insight to how spatial, temporal and ethical dimensions in Turkish identity formation processes were constituted.

3. Europe versus Asia: Identity Constitutions and the Bridge Metaphor in Parliament

This section analyses how Turkish parliamentarians associated the country with Europe/the EU and Asia or the Middle East in parliamentary debates between 1988 and 2016. Turkey's geographical location is at the centre of its identity-formation processes. Turkish parliamentarians spatially constructed the country's identity as geographically part of multiple regions and continents, thereby emphasising that it is not solely European or Asian or Middle Eastern. Parliamentarian Ismail Cem, later the minister of foreign affairs, already illustrated in 1988 the country's advantage within international politics by stating that: *"Turkey is, above all, located between the West and the East. However, it is not only a bridge between West and East, but also between the Northern and Southern hemisphere."*³⁹ In that same debate, the then minister of foreign affairs Mesut Yilmaz draws upon Cem's statement by referring to the European Commissioner Claude Cheysson who apparently also mentioned this spatial identity and Turkey's advantage.⁴⁰ This explicit intertextual link gave more authority to Yilmaz's statements regarding Turkey's identity and geopolitical role, especially in the context of Turkey's formal application to the European Community in 1987. This is also an example of a discursive encounter in which the Self's identity constitution is strengthened by discourses of the Other.⁴¹ In 1991, former minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Kurtcebe Alptemoçin also emphasised Turkey's role as a bridge between West and East, and North and South, but he

39 TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 9, Birlesim: 58, 18 April 1988, 455.

40 TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 9, Birlesim: 58, 18 April 1988, 58.

41 Hansen 2006, 68.

was more detailed in his description – as he also specified it as a Black Sea, Mediterranean and a Middle Eastern country.⁴² He made this statement in the context of the approaching Gulf War. Even though Turkey remained mainly neutral, as a NATO member, it did ask for air defences to protect the country from possible missile strikes from Iraq. This also showed how Turkey perceived itself as being part of the Western bloc. However, Alptemoçin also constructed Turkey's identity spatially as Middle Eastern, which was particularly visible in discursive strategies under Turgut Özal's presidency (1989-1993). Özal believed that Turkey could not neglect its own historical ties with neighbouring regions and, therefore, it should formulate policies towards the Middle East. This was particularly relevant in the post-Cold War context as Turkey was in the process of redefining its role and significance within international politics. This increased Turkish foreign policy behaviour in its eastern neighbourhood, which was also reflected in discursive practices of parliamentarians. Others went even further and explained in detail how Turkey's geographical location constructs the country's spatial identity. For example, in 1999 parliamentarian Mehmet Sait Değer stated the following:

Turkey is located in a place where Europe and Asia meet. It is truly defined as bridge between the East and the West. This unique geographical location gives Turkey its European, Balkan, Middle Eastern, Caucasian, Mediterranean and Black Sea identity.⁴³

Turkish parliamentarians interpreted this geographical location as unique by referring to the diversity of the region and culture Turkey is surrounded, thereby paving the way to associate Turkey with Europe and Asia. The usage of the bridge metaphor brings these regions and cultures together, thereby emphasizing that these identities could coexist.

Different discursive strategies in parliament were visible regarding Turkey's temporal identities. Turkish parliamentarians used ideational factors – such as Turkishness, Islam, secularism, democracy, modernism – in discursive practices so as to associate the country with multiple Others. These parliamentarians extensively emphasised common values like democracy and secularism when it came to Europe/the EU. Motherland Party parliamentarian Mustafa Hilmi Özen said the following about these common values:

Let's talk about our place in the world; according to the Turkish constitution, the secular Republic of Turkey is ruled by democracy. This means that Turkey is constitutionally closer to the West than to the East. We can only fully function as a bridge between Europe and Asia when we become part of the European Community.⁴⁴

According to Özen, Turkey was part of Europe – or, more specifically, the EC – based on its shared values like democracy and secularism. Parliamentarians, in this context, constructed a temporal identity that placed Turkey within Europe or the EC. The use of democracy in the process of association with Europe/the EU had become a domi-

42 TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 55, Birlesim: 64, 5 January 1991, 196.

43 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 6, Birlesim: 36, 21 July 1999, 588.

44 TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 17, Birlesim: 28, 22 November 1988, 312.

nant discourse, as it was extensively used by most political parties over time.⁴⁵ There seemed to be a strong interplay between discourses and Turkish foreign policy. Parliamentarians refrained from using democracy as a sign to associate Turkey with Europe in the period between 1997 and 1999. Turkey–EU relations were highly fraught in that period due to the EU’s decision to grant Cyprus instead of Turkey candidate state status at the Luxembourg Summit in 1997. Turkish parliamentarians started actively associating Turkey with Europe again just before and after the Helsinki Summit in 1999, at which Turkey received candidate state status. The process of association based on democracy went hand in hand with the one of the Europeanisation of Turkish domestic and foreign policy. The current stalemate in Turkey’s EU accession process was also reflected in discourses, as since 2010 Turkish parliamentarians have still framed Turkey as democratic – but did not use it as a sign to associate Turkey with Europe. This illustrated the dynamic interaction within a Self-Other nexus as discourses on identity formation from one side affect the other and vice-versa.

However, repeatedly associating Turkey with Europe by linking it with shared democratic values triggered processes of disassociation from Asia or the Middle East. It implied that these values were lacking in the East, to which Turkey also belongs. This became especially evident with the dissolution of the Soviet Union after 1991. Turkish parliamentarians believed that their country could function as a model to guide these newly independent republics in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia towards democracy – thereby emphasising the inclusive identity of Turkey.⁴⁶ Alongside democracy, these elites also used modernity, secularism and civilisation as signs of sameness in associating Turkey with Europe/the EU. Turkish president Süleyman Demirel argued that the country is integrated with Europe and contributed through NATO to the continent’s security. Moreover, he illustrated how Turkey functioned as an antidote to the-

45 TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 9, Birlesim: 58, 18 April 1988, p. 455; TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 17, Birlesim: 28, 22 November 1988, 313; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 16, Birlesim: 94, 25 Augustus 1992, 64; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 25, Birlesim: 48, 21 December 1992, p. 622; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 43, Birlesim: 29, 17 November 1993, 463; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 5, Cilt: 94, Birlesim: 1, 1 October 1995, p. 35; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 12, Birlesim: 8, 16 October 1996, 84; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 32, 20 December 1997, 621; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 18, Birlesim: 29, 7 December 1999, 419; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 20, Birlesim 37, 19 December 1999, 327; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 21, Birlesim 39, 21 December 1999, 140; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 31, Birlesim: 82, 18 April 2000, 214; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 80, Birlesim: 38, 12 December 2001, 22; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 4, 26 November 2002, 103; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 16, Birlesim: 87, 29 May 2003, 42; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 70, Birlesim: 39, 24 December 2004, 412; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 97, Birlesim: 16, 9 November 2005, p. 448; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 127-1, Birlesim: 124, 5 September 2006, 142; TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 44, Birlesim: 81, 23 April 2009, 252; TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 47, Birlesim: 109, 24 June 2009, 766; TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 5, Cilt: 79, Birlesim: 8, 19 October 2010, 204.

46 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 25, Birlesim: 48, 21 December 1992, 622.

ses about clashes of cultures by stating that: “*Turkey with its modern values as a parliamentary democracy, rule of law and human rights is a bridge that embraces the East*”.⁴⁷ Although President Demirel implied Turkey’s ties with the East, he also illustrated that the country shared modern European values, which the East is implicitly lacking – thereby disassociating Turkey from it. The fact that he used the catchphrase ‘clash of civilisation’ exposes a conceptual intertextual link to Samuel Huntington’s thesis. This illustrates the authority of Huntington’s work and the need for Demirel to challenge it, thereby constructing legitimacy for its own reading.⁴⁸ In 1988, parliamentarian Ismail Cem was even more explicit regarding Turkey’s European identity, as he argued that within the global Islamic community of then 800 million people Turkey is the only country that has successfully transitioned to modernity.⁴⁹ Although he disassociated Turkey from the Islamic community by emphasising modernity – thereby contrariwise also associating Turkey with Europe – he still nevertheless associated Turkey with it based on religion.

Turkish parliamentarians associated with Others like the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia by referring to their common heritage – more specifically, the Ottoman Empire, Islam and/or Turkishness. Although some scholars have argued that Turkish political elites introduced Islam into their identity after 9/11 and that it was thereafter more actively used specifically by AKP ones,⁵⁰ the research here revealed the contrary to be true in fact. Evidently, parliamentarians already used Islam as an important sign to associate Turkey with Others even during the 1990s.⁵¹ However, Islam was mainly used in the cultural context, as illustrated by Minister of Culture Fikri Sarıg r:

One of our main goals for 1993 is to build cultural bridges between Western societies and the Islamic world. In this way, we will have more intensive efforts to create certain institutions and provide certain structures to ensure exchange of views and thoughts between the two sides. We are convinced that there is no other country that can fulfil this role more effectively than Turkey.⁵²

In this context Islam was not approached in a particularly religious manner, but more regarding cultural and traditional values – which differentiated it from the West. Former prime minister Tansu  iller also illustrated this, by emphasising, in 1993, the secular nature of Turkey together with its Islamic tradition.⁵³ However, after the 9/11 attacks

47 TBMM, D nem: 19, Y.Y.: 5, Cilt: 94, Birlesim: 1, 1 October 1995, 37.

48 Hansen 2006, 51.

49 TBMM, D nem: 18, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 9, Birlesim: 58, 18 April 1988, 453.

50 Yanık 2009.

51 TBMM, D nem: 19, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 85, Birlesim: 103, 23 April 1995, 28; TBMM, D nem: 19, Y.Y.: 5, Cilt: 94, Birlesim: 7, 12 October 1995, 437; TBMM, D nem: 20, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 12, Birlesim: 8, 16 October 1996, 84; TBMM, D nem: 20, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 16, Birlesim 32, 13 December 1996, 641; TBMM, D nem: 20, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 25, Birlesim: 85, 24 April 1997, 302; TBMM, D nem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 31, Birlesim: 82, 18 April 2000, 214.

52 TBMM, D nem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 26, Birlesim: 51, 24 December 1992, 480.

53 TBMM, D nem: 19, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 43, Birlesim: 29, 17 November 1993, 503.

and particularly within the AKP period, there is a discursive shift in the usage of Islam in identity formation processes, as from then on Islam was used, as noted earlier, as a reference to a civilisation – thereby representing a more comprehensive approach to Islam. For example, the Democratic Left Party (DSP) parliamentarian Mehmet Emrehan Halici explained in 2001 that the civilised world is under threat following the 9/11 attacks. He emphasised that Turkey was part of this endangered world, as it was secular, democratic and embraced modern values. Halici argued that Turkey had the historical responsibility to disprove that there was a clash of religions or civilisations. He stated that “*Turkey is a bridge between the Islamic world and the West*” and, therefore, is trying to tell the world that terrorism has no religion or geography. He also made a conceptual intertextual link to Huntington’s thesis, thereby illustrating the revival of this thesis in the context of the 9/11 attacks and the necessity of Turkish parliamentarians to respond and contradict it. Moreover, to further strengthen Turkey’s responsibility to contribute to world peace he explicitly referred to a quote by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: “*Peace at home, peace in the world*”.⁵⁴ The fact that he intertextually links his speech to Atatürk strengthens the authority and legitimacy of his words, but also gives and reaffirms legitimacy to Atatürk as being quoted. AKP elites regularly framed Turkey as part of the Islamic world or civilisation, and emphasised Turkey’s bridge role in this context.⁵⁵

However, while these parliamentarians actively referred to Islam to associate with the Middle East and Central Asia, they also realised that this had consequences within the Self–Other relationship with Europe – as it remained a challenge to reconcile their Islamic identity with the EU. Therefore, they actively tried to emphasise the importance of Turkey’s future EU membership for the body itself – as it would make EU identity more inclusive.⁵⁶ The metaphor of a bridge played a crucial role in using this form of association through disassociation. In 1993, for example, Prime Minister Çiller warned the EU to not become a Christian club that emphasises Christian values, as this would lead to double standards and polarisation between Islam and Christianity. She stated:

In order to prevent such a possibility that would lead to grave consequences, I would say that Europe needs to be built on modern universal values such as democracy and human rights and should be a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multireligious and a tolerant society. In this context, I would like to draw your attention to the role Turkey can play to protect these values within Europe, as Turkey, which is a secular country sharing modern values, takes place among European countries whereas the

54 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 80, Birlesim: 38, 12 December 2001, 22.

55 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 71, Birlesim: 5, 10 October 2001, 243; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 4, 26 November 2002, 103; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 70, Birlesim: 39, 24 December 2004, 412; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 127, Birlesim: 124, 5 September 2006, 126,142; TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 53, Birlesim: 21, 19 November 2009, 561.

56 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 31, Birlesim: 82, 18 April 2000, p. 214; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 127, Birlesim: 124, 5 September 2006, 126.

people of the secular Republic of Turkey have an Islamic tradition. An EC with Turkey would get rid of its appearance of being a Christian club, and Turkey would be able to fulfil its historical bridge role between the EC and the Islamic world.⁵⁷

This argument was especially used by AKP elites, because they needed to bridge the gap between Islamic and Western civilisation – which was growing due to a more comprehensive approach being taken to religion post-2001. Former minister of foreign affairs, prime minister and president Abdullah Gül illustrated this by underlining that Turkey as a Muslim country is democratic, open, transparent and modern – and is, therefore, a gift to the EU and world peace. He articulated the following, in 2002:

We want to show that a country with a Muslim population can coexist with a democratic, open, transparent, and modern world. In this context, Turkey's EU membership will be a gift to world peace and will create a real bridge between Europe and the East; between Europe and the Middle East, the Islamic countries, the Turkish republics, and together with all of these between the whole of Eurasia. Turkey's membership would strengthen the EU, if the EU wants to play a strategic role in world peace.⁵⁸

This quote illustrated how, in the context of the 9/11 attacks, Turkey's Islamic character was more profoundly used as a religion to construct the country's bridge role between civilisations. Gül made clear how Turkey as a Muslim country with modern and democratic values could be an important example to the world. In this context, Turkey's EU membership would contribute to the country's role as a bridge between different regions in the East – and thereby to world peace. This also entailed Turkey's membership contributing to the EU's role in international politics. In this quote, Gül also referred to the 'Turkish republics'. Parliamentarians repeatedly used Turkishness as a sign to associate Turkey with Others. This became especially evident after the dissolution of the USSR. These elites continually approached former Soviet states like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as 'Turkish Republics'.⁵⁹

57 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 43, Birlesim: 29, 17 November 1993, 502-3.

58 TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 4, 26 November 2002, 103.

59 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 23, Birlesim: 38, 10 December 1992, 7; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 26, Birlesim: 51, 24 December 1992, 447; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 29, Birlesim: 66, 10 February 1993, 276; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 34, Birlesim: 91, 14 April 1993, 135; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 73, Birlesim: 46, 6 December 1994, 166; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 85, Birlesim: 103, 23 April 1995, 28; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 5, Cilt: 94, Birlesim: 5, 10 October 1995, 408; TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 5, Cilt: 94, Birlesim: 7, 12 October 1995, 437; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 5, Birlesim: 54, 21 May 1996, 613; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 32, 20 December 1997, p. 633; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 54, Birlesim: 99, 9 June 1998, 82; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 21, Birlesim 40, 22 December 1999, 399; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 30, Birlesim: 75, 4 April 2000, 60-61; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 36, Birlesim: 114, 21 June 2000, 150; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 37, Birlesim: 118, 25 June 2000, 193; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 37, Birlesim: 119, 26 June 2000, p. 409; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 123, 30 June 2000, 62; TBMM,

Alongside Islam and Turkishness, parliamentarians also used the Ottoman legacy to construct Turkey's temporal identity. They argued that Turkey was the continuation of the Ottoman Empire and, therefore, had the privilege and the responsibility to approach former Ottoman territories in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East based on a common history and religion.⁶⁰ These signs of association with those three regions had important consequences for Turkey's association with Europe in general. The Ottoman Empire has been defined as Europe's historical Other from the latter's perspective and played, therefore, an important role in Europe's own identity-formation processes.⁶¹ The Europeans fought many battles against Ottoman forces and the Ottoman Empire was perceived as the border of Europe, mainly due to its Islamic identity; therefore, by actively referring to its Ottoman past, Turkish parliamentarians triggered processes of disassociation from Europe/the EU.

It is, therefore, not surprising that many scholars have researched the rise of 'neo-Ottoman' discourses and foreign policies.⁶² Such studies underlined that Turkish political elites do not necessarily use the Ottoman legacy to differentiate themselves from Europe but, on the contrary, many also used it to associate Turkey with that continent.⁶³ References were made, for example, to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Ottoman forces as the progress of civilisation, since due to the Ottoman Empire's influence Eastern and Western civilisation encountered each other and lived together peacefully.⁶⁴ However, it remained highly debatable if this was also perceived as such by Europe. Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) parliamentarian Mehmet Sandir argued in 2001 that his party supported EU accession because it saw the body as an important level of civilisation. In other words, he recognised the superiority of the EU in terms of development and civilisation. He stated the following:

Turkey should see itself in the mirror of Europe, and should compare itself with Europe. However, Europe should also see Turkey's EU candidacy as its own mirror. Turkey's EU accession process will expose whether Europe sees other cultures as 'others', 'alien' or even as 'hostile'. We expect Europe to take its responsibility.⁶⁵

Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 62, Birlesim: 95, 2 May 2001, 327, 359; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 4, 26 November 2002, 103; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 37, Birlesim: 39, 7 January 2004, 338; TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 47, Birlesim: 109, 24 June 2009, 766; TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 47, Birlesim: 85, 29 March 2013, 718.

60 TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 9, Birlesim: 85, 31 July 1996, 222; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 32, 20 December 1997, 619-20; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 55, Birlesim: 62, 21 February 2001, p. 552; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 78, Birlesim: 33, 7 December 2001, 490-91.

61 Neumann 1999.

62 Benhaïm and Öktem 2015; Ongur 2015; Tezcür and Grigorescu 2014; Volfová 2016; Yanık 2016.

63 Yanık 2016.

64 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 96, Birlesim: 106, 29 May 2002, 423-24; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 86, Birlesim: 106, 1 June 2005, 222.

65 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 57, Birlesim: 73, 22 March 2001, 234.

Sandir believed that the EU approached Turkey as its Other, but one inferior to the EU. He illustrated this with the following words: “*Turkey will never be seen as the blacks of Europe*”.⁶⁶ He implied that blacks are being discriminated against or seen as inferior, and Turkey should never find itself in that role.

The constructed spatial and temporal identities also created important ethical dimensions within Turkey’s identity. The fact that parliamentarians consistently referred to Others like the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia as ‘brothers’ – by linking them with Turkishness, Islam and the Ottoman legacy – also served to create certain responsibilities towards them.⁶⁷ It is important to note how often Turkish parliamentarians within a longer historical period referred to and built upon a quote of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk regarding the importance of Turkish ethnicity and language:

Under the administration of this friend [the USSR] live our brothers who share our language and our faith. We cannot wait for them [the Turks abroad] to reach to us. We must reach out to them and we must be prepared for this. We must prepare for this by building spiritual bridges. Language is a bridge, religion is a bridge, history is a bridge [...].⁶⁸

The frequent use of Atatürk’s quote illustrated the power of the intertextuality mechanism. By explicitly referring to Atatürk, the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, Turkish parliamentarians strengthened the country’s sense of responsibility towards these Turkish republics based on shared ethnic and cultural ties. In light of the dissolution of the USSR, parliamentarians believed that Turkey had a responsibility to guide those republics towards democracy and modernity.⁶⁹ As explained earlier, after 9/11 this was further expanded on and strengthened – as these elites believed it was Turkey’s responsibility to function as a bridge between the Muslim world and Europe, thereby contributing to world peace.⁷⁰ Turkey being part of both civilisations and combining these features successfully and peacefully served as an example and a model to both Europe and to Asia.⁷¹ The next section will further elaborate on this argument.

66 Ibid.

67 TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 32, 20 December 1997, 620, 633.

68 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 34, Birlesim: 91, 14 April 1993, 135; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 54, Birlesim: 99, 9 June 1998, 82; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 4, Birlesim: 23, 26 June 1999, 334; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 43, Birlesim: 14, 9 November 2000, 397; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 62, Birlesim: 95, 2 May 2001, 327; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 72, Birlesim: 9, 18 October 2001, 232; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 78, Birlesim: 31, 5 December 2001, p. 205–206; TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 95, Birlesim: 102, 21 May 2002, 694; TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 8, Birlesim: 30, 5 December 2007, 92; TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 77, Birlesim: 86, 7 May 2014, 124.

69 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 16, Birlesim: 94, 25 Augustus 1992, 64.

70 TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 39, Birlesim: 44, 20 January 2004, 100.

71 TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 61, Birlesim: 3, 7 October 2004, 124–25.

4. Turkey as a Bridge Between Civilisations

The previous section identified the discursive strategies in parliament regarding Turkey's identity. It revealed how parliamentarians constructed Turkey's spatial, temporal and ethical identities by using processes of association. Moreover, it also gave insights into how these processes of association within one Self-Other relationship trigger ones of disassociation in other such processes – but also how parliamentarians tried to use the metaphor of a bridge as a form of association. This section will now elaborate on how Turkish parliamentarians used the bridge metaphor to bring these narratives vis-à-vis the West and the East together, and how this mediation shaped Turkey's geopolitical role.

4.1 *A Window to the 'Civilised World'*

During the Cold War, Turkey's role as part of the Western world was defined as that of being a 'bastion' in the fight against Communism and the USSR. Once the Cold War ended, therefore, Turkey needed to redefine its role within international politics; the metaphor of a bridge started to be used more actively as part of this.⁷² The country's parliamentarians constructed Turkey's identity as being part of both the Western and Eastern world, thereby claiming its functioning as a bridge between these blocs. In other words, Turkey's unique identity made it possible to fulfil a role that other countries could not. This bridge role meant for the East that Turkey served as a model society that these countries could aspire to, since as a Muslim country it embraced democratic and secular values. Parliamentarian Mehmet Kerimoglu stated that Turkey is "*a window that opens to the civilised world*".⁷³ DSP MP Hasan Erçelebi had the following to say about this model role, meanwhile: "*Our country is referred to as a bridge between the East and the West and our secular and democratic principles have contributed to our regional importance. For this reason, Turkey serves as a regional role model.*"⁷⁴ This regional importance was – especially during the 1990s – emphasised as a way to approach the West. Turkish parliamentarians used this potential bridge role to illustrate the possibility for Europe to extend its interests to the East. This was particularly visible during and after the dissolution of the USSR, because, as outlined earlier, parliamentarians approached the newly formed republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia based on their common ethnicity and religion. Turkey served herein as a window, model and catalyst for these newly founded republics to reach modernity, development and democracy.⁷⁵

72 Yanık 2009, 531.

73 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 20, Birlesim: 21, 3 November 1992, 36.

74 TBMM, Dönem: 23, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 44, Birlesim: 81, 23 April 2009, 252.

75 TBMM, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 25, Birlesim: 48, 21 December 1992, 622; TBMM, Dönem: 20, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 16, Birlesim 32, 13 December 1996, 621.

4.2 *A Powerful Bridge to Create World Peace*

Turkey's bridge role shifted in the context of the 9/11 attacks together with Turkey's progress in the EU accession process. Initially Turkish parliamentarians focussed on the country's Islamic identity to illustrate its significance to Europe/the EU and to Asia or the Middle East. Turkey was framed as a 'laboratory', because it successfully harmonised Islam with democracy – something that could serve as an example for the rest of the world.⁷⁶ The focus on Islam as a religion within Turkey's bridge role gained significance especially after 9/11. Former minister of culture and tourism and former minister of EU affairs as well as the previous chief negotiator for Turkish accession to the EU, and currently the spokesperson of the AKP Ömer Çelik argued that Turkey is a bridge between civilisations and represents Western values in the East. According to him, this disproves the clash of civilisations argument.⁷⁷ Others referred to this divisive notion as well, and posited that Turkey has the responsibility to disprove its validity.⁷⁸

As mentioned earlier, there is an interesting discursive shift during the AKP period. Parliamentarians actively started referring to civilisations instead of cultures.⁷⁹ Turkey represents both Islamic and Western civilisation through its democracy and modernity, and thereby it has the responsibility to contribute to world peace.⁸⁰ This more proactive role is also strongly reflected in Turkish foreign policy in the period between 2002 and 2010. In 2005, Turkey together with Spain initiated the 'Alliance of Progress' by creating a platform to fighting extremism through international dialogue – thereby decreasing tensions between the Western and the Islamic world. Moreover, Turkey followed a foreign policy that was strongly guided by the zero problems policy that was formulated by Davutoğlu. In this period, Turkey successfully improved its relations with its eastern neighbours. The country took on, therefore, a more balanced bridge role with the aim of bringing civilisations together, and thereby also increasing Turkey's regional influence.

There is a strong interplay between discursive strategies on Turkey's geopolitical role and its foreign policy behaviour in the region. From 2010 onwards, counter discourses in parliament further challenged the meaning of the bridge metaphor as parliamentarians believed that the bridge role was insufficient to fulfil Turkey's growing ambitions to become a regional leader and an important international actor. This vision is also reflected in another quote by Çelik, who argued in 2011 that Turkey is both in the West as well as in the East. Further, he criticised the bridge role by stating that: 'We refuse the notion of Turkey being a strategical bridge between the East and the West. Turkey is not a bridge, but a strategic intersection where East and West meet. Turkey is a major

76 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 18, Birlesim: 29, 7 December 1999, 419.

77 TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 61, Birlesim: 3, 7 October 2004, 124-25.

78 TBMM, Dönem: 21, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 80, Birlesim: 38, 12 December 2001, 22; TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 54, 17 January 2013, 1108.

79 TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 61, Birlesim: 3, 7 October 2004, 124-25.

80 TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 4, 26 November 2002, 103; TBMM, Dönem: 22, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 16, Birlesim: 87, 29 May 2003, 42.

regional power.⁸¹ In 2004, as outlined previously, the same individual had, indeed, argued in favour of Turkey's bridge role. However, now he perceived the bridge role to be too passive, as it merely served as a connecting mechanism representative only of Western interest and values. In other words, the previous conceptualisation of the bridge did not reflect and align with Turkey's current ambitions to become a regional power and to actively influence the neighbourhood. Çelik is, therefore, emphasising that Turkey is an intersection where both civilisations meet.

The strong Western focus in the use of the bridge metaphor was criticised much earlier, in fact. Parliamentary Cemal Sahin from the Social Democratic Party made the following remark in 1990:

A bridge is something which people walk on to pass by. They find concepts like 'bridge' or 'shield' fit for Turkey [...]. We say, Turkey is not a bridge of the West nor it is a shield of the West. Turkey, a republic founded by Mustafa Kemal, where the blood of martyrs that watered the soils in Çanakkale, Sakarya, Dumlupinar, ending in the Aegean, are sealed with the Treaty of Lausanne. These soils represent the proud and honour of the Turkish nation. Turkey is not a bridge, nor a shield.⁸²

Sahin criticised the use of the bridge metaphor to associate with the West, as this role makes Turkey dependent on the latter without giving the country considerable power or taking its interests into account. However, the fact that the metaphor of a bridge is even criticised illustrates the prominence of it in parliament. Moreover, Turkish parliamentarians kept using this metaphor – but started attaching more activism and power to the bridge role over time. MHP parliamentarian Mehmet Günel illustrated this in 2013:

Turkey is not a simple bridge between the East and the West as many suggest. We are a synthesis that is filtered from the depths of history, with its peak in the Ottoman period, and a country that represents a deeply rooted tradition of bringing order to the world.⁸³

In other words, the bridge metaphor remained a dominant discourse, although the meaning of the analogy gradually changed. Turkish parliamentarians attached more power to the bridge role and used different metaphors as intersections or syntheses to reinforce it, thereby reflecting Turkey's growing ambitions in the region. This was especially evident in the context of the so-called Arab Spring, in which these parliamentarians truly believed that Turkey would develop itself into a superpower or regional leader by 2023 – referring to the Republic's 100th anniversary.⁸⁴ However, although Turkish parliamentarians continued to frame Turkey as being part of both civilisations after 2010, discourses about the country's bridge potential actually started decreasing drasti-

81 TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 7, 11 July 2011, 149.

82 TBMM, Dönem: 18, Y.Y.: 4, Cilt: 53, Birlesim: 51, 17 December 1990, 636.

83 TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 54, 17 January 2013, 1108.

84 TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 1, Cilt: 1, Birlesim: 7, 11 July 2011, 149; TBMM, Dönem: 24, Y.Y.: 3, Cilt: 40, Birlesim: 54, 17 January 2013, 1108.

cally in the wake of the Arab Spring. An important explanation for this could be Turkey's failure to play an effective role in regime change and democratic reform in the Middle East – in Egypt and Syria, for example – which might have been counterproductive to the heightening of the country's regional role. Moreover, increased authoritarian rule domestically undermined Turkey's credibility in Europe and the Middle East, as an actor that supposedly embraces and promotes democracy.⁸⁵ This is also reflected in Turkish foreign policy, as the country currently has tense relations with many actors within the Western bloc – for instance the EU and the United States – and within the Middle East – for instance Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

5. Conclusion

This article analysed the usage of the metaphor of a bridge in Turkish parliament between 1988 and 2016. Parliamentarians framed Turkey metaphorically as a bridge to serve two purposes, namely, to mediate between competing identities in parliament and to carve out Turkey's geopolitical role to function as bridge between the West and the East.

In the post-Cold War context, Turkish parliamentarians started constituting Turkey's identity not only as Western or European, but also as Eastern, and more specifically, as Middle Eastern, Caucasian and Central-Asian. This was not only inspired by Turkey's geographical location, but also included ideational and cultural values. The construction of Turkey's temporal identity, meanwhile, triggered different discursive strategies, as parliamentarians constantly associated Turkey with Europe/the EU by using signs like democracy, civilised, modernity and secularism, while parallel to this associating Turkey with Asia or the Middle East by using ones like Islam, Ottoman legacy and Turkishness. The identity-formation processes within these multiple Self-Other relationships exposed simultaneous dynamics of association and disassociation. Thus, when parliamentarians associated Turkey with the EU based on modernity and democracy it triggered parallel processes of disassociation from Asia or the Middle East – marking the latter as uncivilised and undemocratic. Parliamentarians found it, vice versa, difficult to reconcile their Islamic and Ottoman identity with Europe. In these instances, the metaphor of a bridge helped to bring these conflicting identities together. In other words, the bridge metaphor was used to associate Turkey with both the Western and the Eastern world. This was initially visible during and after the dissolution of the USSR as parliamentarians used temporal identities as Turkishness to approach the newly independent 'Turkish republics' and used the bridge metaphor together with temporal identities as democracy and modernity to link these regions to the West. This article, therefore, illustrates how important it is to focus not on singular Self-Other relations and the role of metaphors in identity formation processes.

The analysis illustrated the relevance of researching the parliament as an actor within identity formation processes as it provided insights into how the usage of the bridge

85 Öniş 2014, 216–17; Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017, 562–63.

metaphor as part of discursive strategies became a dominant discourse and how counter discourses challenged the meaning of it, due to national, regional and international developments. It illustrates the evolution of identities in a longer historical time period and how parliamentarians constantly draw upon previous text, statement and speeches thereby creating legitimacy and realising continuity or disruption. The usage of the metaphor of bridge was embraced by different parliamentarians and parties.

The fact that the metaphor was continuously reproduced and referred to in parliament, transformed it into a conceptual intertextual link. In other words, using the bridge metaphor implicitly referred to a larger body of earlier texts in parliament that dealt with the metaphor. In the 1990s, this meant that the metaphor of a bridge mainly referred to Turkey's possibility to connect different regions with the West/Europe, which strengthened Turkey's significance to the West. However, counter discourses also challenged this authority and rearticulated and refilled the meaning of the metaphor. This was particularly visible after the 9/11 attacks and within the AKP-period as Turkey redefined its regional and international ambitions, by asserting itself a more prominent role. First, parliamentarians, particularly AKP-elites, challenged and redefined Turkey's Islamic temporal identity, which was initially defined as a culture and tradition. AKP-parliamentarians inspired by Islamic values, the country's history, and the post-9/11 context, approached Islam in a more comprehensive way, more specifically as a civilisation. In this context, the metaphor of a bridge was also redefined as it was aimed to bring the Western and Islamic civilisation together to mediate and create world peace. In other words, the ethical dimension of Turkey's identity entailed that Turkey had the privilege and responsibility to formulate policies towards different regions based on its Ottoman history, Islamic religion, and ideational values, like democracy and secularism. This also implied a more active, assertive and independent geopolitical bridge role for Turkey, which also reflected its foreign policy behaviour in the region and globally.

After 2010, the metaphor was further challenged by parliamentarians, particularly from the ruling AKP. Turkey envisioned itself as a regional leader and role model that could influence the region and mediate between conflicts, especially in the context of the so-called Arab Spring. These parliamentarians, therefore, believed that a bridge was too passive and did not reflect Turkey's regional and international ambitions. However, the fact that the metaphor needed to be challenged before a new one could be introduced illustrated the authority of the metaphor in parliament. Moreover, the bridge metaphor was reinforced with complementary metaphors as the metaphor of an intersection. More recently, however, the use of the bridge metaphor has drastically declined with Turkey seeming to lose credibility in terms of democracy, both in Europe and in the Middle East. Increased authoritarian rule on the domestic front together with the failure to effectively promote democracy and regime change during the Arab Spring have mainly contributed to this. This illustrates the importance to further research discursive encounters and analyse to what extent Turkey's Others, such as the EU, recognise or resist Turkey's self-defined identity and geopolitical role. In sum, even though the usage of the bridge metaphor has been challenged, redefined, refilled or less frequently used, it will remain part of discursive structures in Turkish parliament due to its capacity to constitute a (temporary) stable liminal/hybrid identity.

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TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 23, Birlesim: 38, 10 December 1992.
TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Dönem: 19, Y.Y.: 2, Cilt: 25, Birlesim: 48, 21 December 1992.
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