

TURKEY AS A “REGIONAL STABILITY CONTRIBUTOR” IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

TÜRKİYE’NİN GÜNEY KAFKASYA’DAKI “BÖLGESEL GÜVENLİK SAĞLAYICISI” OLARAK ROLÜ

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ABSTRACT

Turkey’s changing roles in world politics have lately been attracting significant scholarly attention. The goal of this article is to elaborate on Turkey’s role as a “regional stability contributor” in the South Caucasus by employing “role theory”, an approach used in international relations studies since the 1970s. The article will particularly focus on the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) initiative that was proposed by Turkish policymakers in the wake of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. The CSCP can be taken as an important sign of Turkish leaders’ emerging conception of Turkey’s role as a contributor to stability in its region. This notion is theoretically based on the two categories of national role conception that have been elaborated in role theory: “mediator-integrator” and “regional-subsystem collaborator”.

Key Words: Turkish Foreign Policy, Role Theory, National Role Conceptions, South Caucasus, Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform

ÖZET

2000’ler boyunca Türkiye’nin dünya siyasetinde üstlendiği rollerde meydana gelen değişim pek çok akademik çalışmaya konu edilmiştir. Bu makalenin amacı ise 1970’lerden bu yana uluslararası ilişkiler çalışmalarında da kullanılan “rol teorisi” yardımıyla Türkiye’nin Güney Kafkasya’da “bölgesel istikrara katkı yapan ülke” rolünü incelemektir. Bu amaçla özellikle 2008’deki Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı’nı takiben Türk hükümet yetkilileri tarafından gündeme getirilen Kafkasya İstikrar ve İşbirliği Platformu (KİİP) girişimi üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu girişimin Türkiye’nin yakın çevresinde bölgesel istikrara katkı yapan ülke rolü oynadığına ilişkin rol algısını ortaya koyan en önemli örneklerinden birisi olduğu da söylenebilir. Kuramsal olarak söz konusu ulusal rol algısı, daha önce rol

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teorisi kapsamında ele alınan “arabulucu-birleştirici” ve “bölgesel alt sistem ortağı” kategorileri temelinde şekillenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dış Politikası, Rol Teorisi, Ulusal Rol Algıları, Güney Kafkasya, Kafkasya İstikrar ve İşbirliği Platformu

Introduction

The changing roles of Turkey in world politics have lately become a popular subject for the scholars of Turkish foreign policy. Particularly after the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) rise to power in 2002, Turkey’s “new” foreign policy has come under more limelight due to its noticeably activist and multilateralist tones in comparison with the cautious and Western-oriented posture of the previous decades.¹ Some analysts have anticipated this change in more positive terms and viewed it as the indication of a “new geographic imagination”, while a few critics have denounced it as the “dismantling of Turkey”.² Still, many others have attempted at understanding the determinants of Turkish foreign policy by employing previously unapplied theoretical frameworks and concepts such as the “trading state”, “soft power” and “benign regional power”.³ Most recently, the US-based think-tank German Marshall Fund (GMF) has included Turkey in a group called “global swing states” along with Brazil, India and Indonesia as a country “that possesses a large and growing economy, a strategic location in its region and a commitment to democratic institutions.”⁴

A common argument in many of these studies that reflect on Turkish foreign policy is that Turkey has started to play a greater number of roles in the international system in parallel with its increasing political and economic influence

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- 1 Ahmet O. Evin, “Turkish Foreign Policy: Limits of Engagement”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, 2009, pp. 225-232.
 - 2 See Bülent Aras & Hakan Fidan, “Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a New Geographic Imagination”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, 2009, pp. 195-217, and Nur Bilge Criss, “Dismantling Turkey: The Will of the People?”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2010, pp. 45-58.
 - 3 See Kemal Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading Stat.,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, 2009, pp. 29-57; Tank Oğuzlu, “Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2007, pp. 91-97; Ziya Öniş, “Turkey and the Middle East after September 11: The Importance of the EU Dimension”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2003, pp. 84-95.
 - 4 Daniel M. Kliman & Richard Fontaine, *Global Swing States: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey and the Future of International Order* (Washington: CNAS, 2012), and Şaban Kardeş, “Global Swing States and International Order: A Turkish View,” *GMF On Turkey*, 21 December 2012.

in its neighbourhood. Central state, order setter, regional leader and model are among the roles that have been attributed to Turkey in the 2000s by political and intellectual circles both in the country and abroad. More remarkably, Turkish leaders like Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu have made well-publicized references to the emerging roles of their country in the twenty-first century.

What is missing in all these debates, however, is a theoretical framework to help understand the real nature of Turkey’s sometimes conflicting roles. This paper argues that it is possible to fill this gap by using “role theory” which elaborates on the various roles a state performs in the international system. It should be indicated in this regard that although it is originally developed in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, role theory has become increasingly utilized also in the field of foreign policy analysis and international relations since early 1970s owing to the studies of scholars like K. J. Holsti. Holsti’s theory of “national role conceptions” in particular continues to be a major reference for international relations scholars who try to understand the foreign policy decisions of national elites in different countries.

The goal of this paper is to employ role theory for the analysis of Turkey’s role as a “regional stability contributor” in the South Caucasus. For this purpose, it will particularly focus on the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) initiative that has been proposed by Turkish policymakers in the wake of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. This is because the CSCP can be taken as the most important sign of Turkish leaders’ emerging conception of their country’s role as a regional stability contributor in its neighbourhood. This conception is theoretically based on the two national role conception categories that have been elaborated in role theory: “mediator-integrator” and “regional-subsystem collaborator”.

Role Theory and National Role Conceptions

Role is a concept that is borrowed from the theatre. In late nineteenth century, it was started to be used by sociologists, social psychologists and anthropologists in their analysis of the behaviour of individuals in a community.⁵ Starting with 1930s, social scientists made substantial contribution to the development of “role

5 Bruce J. Biddle & Edwin J. Thomas, *Role Theory: Concepts and Research*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966), pp. 3-19.

theory”, through which they drew parallels between the individual in a social setting and an actor on a stage, since both were expected to behave in predictable ways according to a script, whether it be written by a playwright or socially constructed through norms, images and traditions.

Despite the recognition it received in other fields of social sciences, role theory has not been employed in the field of international relations for at least four more decades. It was K. J. Holsti who first applied role theory to the foreign policy decisions of various nation-states. In his seminal article that was published in 1970, Holsti argued that the reasoning of the national political elites, which rested upon their interpretation of the international system and particularly the role they perceived for their own states within it, could be a useful tool to speculate on their foreign policy decisions. He particularly focused on two major concepts of role theory: “role prescriptions” (or role expectations) indicating the norms attached to particular positions by cultures, societies or institutions and “role performance” which referred to the concrete decisions and actions of policymakers.⁶ For Holsti, role conceptions came into existence as a result of the interplay between these two and included “the policymakers’ own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems.”⁷

To defend his thesis, Holsti analyzed a total of 972 statements made by highest-level policymakers from various countries between 1965 and 1967, identifying at least seventeen role conceptions that were expressed during this period.⁸ His analysis aimed to show that national role conceptions could change depending on various factors such as a state’s geographical location, economic resources, traditional policies and national values. He also believed that that no state played a single role in the international system – contrary to the traditional view that dominated foreign policy analysis scholarship of the time.⁹

6 K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1970, pp. 238-239.

7 Ibid., pp. 245-246.

8 These were bastion of revolution-liberator, regional leader, regional protector, active independent, liberation supporter, anti-imperialist agent, defender of the faith, mediator-integrator, regional-subsystem collaborator, developer, bridge, faithful ally, independent, example, internal development, isolate and protectee. Ibid., pp. 260-273.

9 Ibid., pp. 246-278.

Holsti’s study of national role conceptions is regarded as the first successful attempt to apply role theory in explaining realities at the international level.¹⁰ Thus, it was a source of inspiration for a number of other academic studies which also elaborated on the uses of role theory in foreign policy analysis.¹¹ The emergence of the social constructivist theory of world politics in the post-Cold War period provided further impetus to role theory mainly because both theories agreed on the importance of identity in the study of international relations. In fact, as also noted by scholars of role theory, “much of the constructivist work on identity, self-images, culture and even norms shares a close kinship with the literature on national role conceptions.”¹² Recently, this kinship seems to have been acknowledged by a number of European political scientists who have made increasing use of role theory in their analyses about the EU’s regional and global roles in world politics.¹³

A similar trend can also be noticed in the academic literature on Turkish foreign policy. The number of scholarly works on Turkey’s emerging roles in its neighbourhood has considerably increased in the last few years. Although many of these studies use “role” and “identity” quite interchangeably,¹⁴ some have recently started to make direct reference to role theory – and especially national role conceptions – in their analysis of Turkish leaders’ foreign policy

10 Carl W. Backman, “Role Theory and International Relations: A Commentary and Extension”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1970, p. 311.

11 See for example Stephen G. Walker, “National Role Conceptions and Systemic Outcomes”, in Lawrence S. Falkowski (Ed.), *Psychological Models in International Politics*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979); Naomi Bailin Wish, “Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1980, pp. 532-554, and Chih-Yu Shih, “National Role Conception as Foreign Policy Motivation: The Psychocultural Bases of Chinese Diplomacy”, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 599-631.

12 Marijke Breuning, “Role Theory Research in International Relations”, in Sebastian Harnisch et al. (Ed.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p. 22.

13 See for example Ben Tonra & Thomas Christiansen, *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), and Ole Elgström & Michael Smith (Ed.), *The European Union’s Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

14 See S. Gülden Ayman, “Türk Dış Politika Seçkinlerinin Ortadoğu Algılamaları ve Irak Savaşı”, *Akademik Ortadoğu*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2006, pp. 1-20; Lerna K. Yanık, “The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: ‘Bridging’ Turkey’s Location, Role and Identity after the End of the Cold War”, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2009, pp. 531-549, and Bahar Rumelili, “Turkey: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Socialization in a Post-Enlargement Europe”, *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2011, pp. 235-249.

decisions.¹⁵ One particular problem about these studies, however, is that they are almost entirely dedicated to Turkish policymakers' role conceptions with regard to the Middle East and EU. This study will therefore attempt to apply a similar theoretical framework to the South Caucasus, which should be viewed as an important region for assessing the development of a regional stability contributor role conception in Turkey in the 2000s.

Regional Stability Contributor: A New Role Conception for Turkey?

Holsti's original study does not include any role conception category as "regional stability contributor". However, his mediator-integrator and regional-subsystem collaborator categories can be used in order to determine the factors that shape this role conception. The former is based on a state's capability and/or responsibility in reconciling conflicts between other states, whereas the latter envisages "far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities or to cross-cutting subsystems."¹⁶ It is interesting to note that even in the Cold War period when national role conceptions were quite limited due to the strictly bipolar nature of the international system, many government officials perceived their country's role either as a mediator-integrator or regional-subsystem collaborator.¹⁷ In this regard, these two role conceptions can be considered as complementary since they indicate a state's intention to be involved more actively in the problems between other states. At the same time, both are "collaboration type roles" which aim to facilitate cooperation with other actors in order to achieve desired goals.¹⁸ The only notable difference between them, on the other hand, is that whereas mediator-integrator role conception is more preoccupied with security-related matters, the major source of the regional-subsystem collaborator role conception is the promotion of stability through regional cooperation.

15 See Bülent Aras & Aylin Görener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2010, pp. 73-92; Vic Beneš, "The Demand Side of the EU Enlargement: Understanding Our Neighbours", in Petr Drulák & Mats Braun (Ed.), *The Quest for the National Interest: A Methodological Reflection on Czech Foreign Policy*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), and Emre İşeri and A. Oğuz Dilek, "Beyond a Turkish Model in Transforming the Penetrated Middle East: The Nexus of Domestic Authority and International Prestige", *Ortadoğu Etüdüleri*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2012, pp. 119-142.

16 K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1970, p. 265.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 290.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 291-293.

Turkey can be viewed as a significant case where the mediator-integrator and regional-subsystem collaborator role conceptions came together in order to form a distinct regional stability contributor role conception.¹⁹ It might be argued in this regard that the Turkish leaders have developed this role conception not only as a means for elevating their country’s diplomatic profile in the international system in accordance with the ambitious foreign policy vision of the AKP governments, but also for creating a regional environment that is conducive to peace and stability around Turkey. As such, it should be noted that Turkish policymakers have striven to present their country as a mediator in a number of regional conflicts in the Middle East and Balkans, trying to reconcile the problems between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, Syria and Israel, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Hamas and Fatah in Palestine and Sunni and Shia groups in Iraq. Thus, as also argued by Sami Kohen, mediation has actually become an important “sector” in Turkish foreign policy during the AKP period.²⁰

Apart from its mediation activities, Turkey has also become saliently active in regional cooperation platforms such as the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. More recent examples of Ankara’s interest in multilateral initiatives in its immediate neighbourhood include the establishment of an economic and trade association council with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon and launching of a trilateral political dialogue mechanism together with the governments of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

The objective of fostering peace and stability in the neighbouring regions is also closely related with the new principles of Turkish foreign policy as defined by Foreign Minister Davutoğlu. For instance, Davutoğlu’s “visionary approach” principle indicates an active Turkish involvement in regional conflicts before they turn into crises. Similarly, the famous “zero problems towards neighbours” principle includes a strong regional dimension that is based on political and economic cooperation in order to achieve development and stability in the neighbouring regions. Finally, proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy is “based on security for all, high-level political dialogue, economic integration and interdependence, and multicultural coexistence.”²¹ The emphasis on building confi-

19 Tuncay Babalı, “Losing Turkey or Strategic Blindness?”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2011, pp. 32-33.

20 Sami Kohen, “Dış Politikada Yeni ‘Sektör’: Arabuluculuk”, *Milliyet*, 2 November 2009.

21 See Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı”, *Radikal*, 26 February 2004; Ahmet

dence and stability in Turkey's immediate neighbourhood can also be found in the latest government programme as well as the statements and speeches of top-level Turkish officials including President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan.²² Taken together, these are strong indications of Turkish leaders' conception of their country's emerging role as a regional stability contributor in its neighbourhood.

Turkey's Role in the South Caucasus: CSCP Initiative

In the context of the South Caucasus, Turkish policymakers' regional stability contributor role conception has become most visible in the wake of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. Although Ankara has already provided strong support to multilateral regional initiatives since early 1990s such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Minsk Group of OSCE, the five-day war between Russia and Georgia has shown that "the initiatives designed to pacify the region had not produced a security system capable of preventing or containing internal and interstate conflicts."²³ More importantly, the war highlighted the need to revitalize regional cooperation projects like the Caucasus Stability Pact which was proposed by former Turkish president Süleyman Demirel almost a decade ago in order to facilitate political stability and economic development in the region.²⁴ Although Demirel's proposal that was mainly inspired by the OSCE's Southeast European Stability Pact in the Balkans received some degree of regional and international support, it could not be realized due to the ongoing ethnic/territorial conflicts in the region.²⁵

Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2008, pp. 77-96; and Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy*, 20 May 2010.

22 The government program can be accessed at <http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/pgGovProgramme.aspx>. For Gül's speech at the opening of the Turkish Parliament in 2007, see (<http://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/371/56530/yasama-yili-acilis-konusmasi.html>). For Erdoğan's speech at the Alliance of Civilizations Forum in 2010, see (<http://www.bbm.gov.tr/Forms/pgNewsDetail.aspx?Type=5&Id=841>).

23 Mitat Çelikpala, "Escalating Rivalries and Diverging Interests: Prospects for Stability and Security in the Black Sea Region", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2010, pp. 287-302.

24 For details of Demirel's proposal see Deniz Zeyrek, "Kafkas Paktı Teşebbüsü", *Radikal*, 16 January 2000.

25 See Michael Emerson et al., "A Stability Pact for the Caucasus in Theory and Practice: A Supplementary Note", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2001, pp. 115-147.

As also indicated by a number of scholars, until the Russian-Georgian war, the South Caucasus has generally remained secondary to the EU and Middle East in the foreign policy vision of the AKP governments.²⁶ It is true that Turkey’s bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia improved noticeably throughout the 2000s and the initiation of energy projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline advanced Turkish economic interests in the region. However, these did not transform into a comprehensive political vision that would provide a lasting solution to the complicated regional problems. Most importantly, the ethnic/territorial conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained unresolved. In this regard, one may claim that the Russian-Georgian war came as a “crude awakening to the region”²⁷ which also forcefully shaped the Turkish policymakers’ conception of their country’s role in the South Caucasus.

As argued earlier, role theory suggests that a role conception comes into existence in close interaction with the expectations of the other actors from the role owner. In the case of the South Caucasus, both Western and regional leaders have already been expressing expectations for the formation of a regional cooperation platform long before the eruption of the Russian-Georgian crisis.²⁸ As the crisis escalated into an outright war between two of its neighbours, the role conception that the Turkish policymakers developed towards the region was therefore greatly determined by such external expectations for regional peace and stability. One should also note that by 2008, the experience it gained in conflict resolution and crisis management in the Middle East and Balkans had already made Ankara a credible regional stability contributor in the eyes of the international and regional actors. This has also strengthened Turkish policymakers’ emerging role conception towards the South Caucasus.

It can be claimed that the regional stability contributor role conception has urged the Turkish leaders to work actively for the resolution of the conflict be-

26 See for example Soner Çağaptay, “The AKP’s Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of ‘Neo-Ottomanism’,” *Turkey Analyst*, Vol. 2, No. 8, 2009, available at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2009/090424B.html>; Şaban Kardaş, “Turkey’s Push for Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform”, *Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy Biweekly*, Vol. 1, No. 14-15, 1 September 2008; Mitat Çelikpala, “Türkiye ve Kafkasya: Reaksiyoner Dış Politikadan Proaktif Ritmik Diplomasiye Geçiş”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 7, No. 25, 2010, p. 104.

27 Oksana Antonenko, “Towards A Comprehensive Regional Security Framework in the Black Sea Region after the Russia-Georgia War”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2009, p. 264.

28 Sergiu Celac et al. *A Stability Pact for the Caucasus*, (Brussels: CEPS, 2000), p. 1.

tween Russia and Georgia. To this end, they have once again made use of mediation and multilateralism as two effective instruments for performing such a role in the region. Mediation came in the form of Prime Minister Erdoğan's regional tour of Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan immediately after the Russian-Georgian crisis. In terms of multilateralism, on the other hand, Erdoğan proposed the establishment of the CSCP – a multilateral regional mechanism which was to be formed between Russia, Turkey and the three Southern Caucasian states for preventing similar crises in the future.²⁹

The CSCP project can be regarded as one of the most remarkable indications of Turkish policymakers' conviction that their country had to play a primary role for achieving peace and stability in the South Caucasus. This conviction has been quite noticeable in the statements made by Turkish officials during and after the Russian-Georgian war. President Gül for example said he believed that the idea of a stability forum in the Caucasus was important because "if there is stability in the region and if problems can be solved before they grow in magnitude and if there is a secure environment, then this will bring economic development and welfare to the people in the region."³⁰ Similarly, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan stated very clearly in his speech at the OSCE Ministerial Council that "being an inseparable part of the region" and the drive to discharge its responsibility as the neighbouring country were the key incentives that led Turkey "to bring its contribution to bear on the resolution of conflicts in the Caucasus."³¹ The Turkish government's strict adherence to the 1936 Montreux Convention in the face of the US request to send military ships with the purpose of humanitarian aid to Georgia through the Turkish Straits can also be viewed in relation with the regional stability role conception, since a swift Turkish permission to US ships could have been perceived as a hostile move by Moscow and further aggravated the geopolitical tension in the region.

29 For details of Erdoğan's proposal see Igor Torbakov, "Turetskii Pakt dlia Kavkaza", *Gazeta.ru*, 18 August 2008, available at http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2008/08/18_a_2814298.shtml; Burcu G. Punsmann, "The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform: An Attempt to Foster Regional Accountability," *ICBSS Policy Brief*, No. 13, 2009, and Eleni Fotiou, "'Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform': What is at Stake for Regional Cooperation?", *ICBSS Policy Brief*, No. 16, 2009.

30 Hasan Kanbolat, "What is Caucasian Stability and Cooperation? What Can Turkey Do in the Caucasus?", *Today's Zaman*, 20 August 2008.

31 Ali Babacan, *Address at OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting*, Helsinki, 5 December 2008, available at <http://www.osce.org/mc/35422>.

Despite Turkish policymakers’ enthusiasm about the CSCP, this bold regional initiative did not yield any concrete results.³² A major reason for its failure was the lack of consensus among the international and regional actors regarding the future of Turkey’s regional stability contributor role in the South Caucasus. In this regard, one should note that the CSCP was generally welcomed by the leaders of Russia and Armenia, while it received mixed reactions from Georgia and Azerbaijan.³³ The US officials, on the other hand, seemed quite disconcerted about Erdoğan’s initiative. Matt Bryza, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, for instance said they were surprised and had not been informed about this development.³⁴ A major source of Western scepticism regarding the CSCP proposal was its exclusion of the US and EU.³⁵ However, one should notice that even Iran was left outside the CSCP framework despite its strong political and economic influence in the region.³⁶ This has not only raised doubts about the prospects of the CSCP initiative, but also hampered the international expectations about Turkey’s role as a regional stability contributor in the South Caucasus.

A more significant reason for the failure of the CSCP initiative, however, is related with the third pillar of role enactment. “Role performance” where the actor takes action to meet the requirements of a particular role can also be regarded as the most important pillar, since it is the actual foreign policy decisions and behaviour of the policymakers that determine the sustainability of any role conception. In the case of regional stability contributor role conception, a state is first of all expected to resolve its own conflicts with the other actors in the region in order to be successful in the role performance phase. This was the principal motive that urged Turkish policymakers to launch the “Armenian initiative” which aimed to establish normal diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan.

32 The three meetings that were held in the 2008-2009 period were all at the level of deputy secretaries and consultants. See Bülent Aras & Pınar Akpınar, “The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus”, *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2011, p. 64.

33 Deniz Devrim & Evelina Schulz, “The Caucasus: Which Role for Turkey in the European Neighborhood?”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2009, pp. 177-193.

34 See Emine Kart, “Turkey’s Caucasus Boat Likely to Sail”, *Today’s Zaman*, 24 August 2008.

35 Tracey German, “‘Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives?’ Regional Identity and Cooperation in the South Caucasus”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2012, p. 148, and Mitat Çelikpala, “Türkiye ve Kafkasya”, p. 110.

36 It has been claimed that Iranian officials sought Russian support for joining the CSCP. See Hasan Kanbolat, “ABD, AB, Türkiye, İran Arasında Abhazya”, *ORSAM Dış Politika Analizi*, 24 August 2009, available at <http://orsam.org.tr/tr/yazigoster.aspx?ID=321>.

However, despite all efforts, the initiative failed due to some sensitive political issues between the two countries including the deadlock in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and lack of an agreement regarding the Armenian genocide claims.

The failure of the Armenian initiative can be regarded as the most important blow to Turkey's performance of its role as a regional stability contributor in the South Caucasus. On the other hand, one should note that in role theory an actor's performance of a role continues to shape the external role expectations.³⁷ Regarding this last point, Turkey's efforts for reaching an agreement with Armenia particularly alarmed the leaders of Azerbaijan who expected Turkey to perform its new role in the region in accordance with the Azeri interests over Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁸ Therefore, the diplomatic protocols signed between Turkish and Armenian delegations in 2009 were met with huge disappointment in Baku. President Ilham Aliiev even threatened Ankara with retaliatory moves such as cutting off the natural gas flow to Turkey and declined to participate in the Alliance of Civilizations meeting that was held in Istanbul.³⁹ Armenia, on the other hand, continued to insist that "a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is possible if Azerbaijan recognizes the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination; if Nagorno-Karabakh has a land border with Armenia; and if international organizations and leading nations guarantee the security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh."⁴⁰

It was not only Baku and Yerevan which understood different things from regional stability in the Southern Caucasus. It was soon revealed that Georgia's support for a regional cooperation platform in the Caucasus was also quite superficial. In fact, Tbilisi's controversial policies such as the lifting of visa restrictions for the residents of North Caucasus and recognition of the nineteenth-century Circassian genocide "have done little to promote regional unity."⁴¹ In the

37 Rikard Bengtsson & Ole Elgström, "Reconsidering the European Union's Roles in International Relations", in Sebastian Harnisch et al. (Ed.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p. 114.

38 Kamuran Samar, "Mammadyarov Warm to Turkey's Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform", *Sunday's Zaman*, 20 September 2008.

39 Emrullah Uslu, "Ankara-Yerevan Rapprochement Strains Turkey's Relations with Azerbaijan", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 6, No. 68, 9 April 2009.

40 Liz Fuller, "Russia to Host Talks between Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Commentary*, 1 November 2008, available at http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_To_Host_Talks_Between_Armenian_Azerbaijani_Presidents/1337251.htm.

41 Tracey German, "'Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives?' Regional Identity and Cooperation in the South Caucasus", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2012, p. 146.

case of Russia, on the other hand, analysts have argued that Moscow viewed the new geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus as an opportunity to advance its regional sphere of influence.⁴² Apart from its recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia has also presented itself as the chief mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as indicated by the signing of a “Moscow Declaration” between Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan only a few months after the Russian-Georgian crisis.⁴³ This has further undermined Turkey’s role performance, since the regional stability contributor role conception has foremost depended on the successful performance of the mediator role which in this case seemed to be performed by Moscow rather than Ankara in the region.

Due to these factors, by early 2010 it has become clear that the Turkish policymakers’ regional stability contributor role conception greatly lost its meaning in the context of South Caucasus. As also indicated by some analysts, this was mainly because apart from Turkey, none of the other partners of the CSCP seemed to be willing to devote time and energy for the realization of the project.⁴⁴ Eventually, Ankara has gradually returned to its old policy of developing bilateral ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia and the idea of a comprehensive regional approach including Armenia has been abandoned.⁴⁵ Following the eruption of popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in late 2010, achieving stability in the South Caucasus has faded into greater insignificance in Turkish foreign policy. This was also related with the emergence of new problems in Turkish-Russian relations due to Ankara’s decision to be included in the NATO missile defence system and the two countries’ diverging interests regarding the Syrian crisis. All these developments have made it more difficult for Turkish policymakers to maintain their conception of their country’s role as a regional stability contributor in the South Caucasus.

42 Nona Mikhelidze, “After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus”, *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2009, p. 27.

43 *Deklaratsiia Azerbaidjanskoi Respubliki, Respubliki Armeniia i Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2 November 2008, available at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/11/208670.shtml>.

44 Eleni Fotiou, “‘Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform’: What is at Stake for Regional Cooperation?”, *ICBSS Policy Brief*, No. 16, 2009, p. 20.

45 In 2010, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a strategic partnership agreement and established a high-level strategic cooperation council. Around the same period, Turkey became the most important trade partner of Georgia and initiated the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway project.

Conclusion

In role theory, a national role conception emerges in accordance with external role expectations and is sustained by a country's success in the performance of that role. In the case of Turkish policymakers' regional stability contributor role conception, the international and regional actors' expectations from Turkey's role in the South Caucasus seemed to be very mixed as also indicated by their reactions to the CSCP proposal. Most importantly, there has been a lack of consensus about the future of Turkey's role as a regional stability contributor. This has also negatively affected the role performance phase where Turkish policymakers found it increasingly difficult to present their country as the primary actor for achieving stability and peace in the South Caucasus. Eventually, the CSCP has turned into a stillborn project which also demonstrated the limits of Turkey's role in the region.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that the South Caucasus is a region of frozen conflicts and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war has further complicated the already delicate regional balances. In such a context, trying to perform the role of a mediator has become even more difficult in the case of Turkey, since it traditionally enjoys very close political and economic relations with Azerbaijan which will most likely block any Turkish initiative towards Armenia unless the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved. Similarly, promoting a regional mechanism in the South Caucasus may become even more futile in the event of a new military conflict between Russia and Georgia. One should note in this regard that the new Georgian government led by President Saakashvili's political opponent Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is claimed to be more leaned towards Russia, officially refuses to restore Tbilisi's diplomatic ties with Moscow as long as the latter continues its "occupation" of Georgian territories.⁴⁶ Lack of any major improvement in Georgian-Russian relations, however, will continue to hamper all the CSCP-like regional initiatives regardless of Turkey's capabilities to perform a regional stability contributor role in the South Caucasus.

Today, although Ankara continues to emphasize their desire to remain active for peace and stability in the region,⁴⁷ such statements seem only rhetorical in the absence of concrete initiatives such as the revitalization of the CSCP process

46 *RIA Novosti*, 26 September 2012.

47 See for example Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Fostering A Culture of Harmony: Turkish Foreign Policy and Russia", *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January-March 2010, p. 105.

or the Armenian initiative. However, even if Turkish leaders achieve reviving the regional stability contributor role conception toward the South Caucasus, it should be remembered that the sustainability of this role will once again be determined by the expectations of external actors which not only include Russia and the three Caucasian states, but also the US, EU and Iran.

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