

Political psychology of overconfidence and emotions in Turkey-EU relations

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Article info

Received: 3 September 2017

Accepted: 25 December 2017

Key words

Turkey-EU relations, political psychology, overconfidence, Eurocynicism, Euroscepticism.

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Abstract

In this article, domestic support for Turkish foreign policy and official Turkish attitude towards Turkey-EU relations are discussed and analyzed based on a number of political psychological concepts such as emotions, overconfidence, system justification tools and ideology. The Neo-Ottomanist revivalist international relations model as any other model revolves on emotions to make its point. International pragmatism and practicalities are downgraded to open the door for a more ideological and confrontational understanding of international relations. A political psychological analysis shows how the “world leader” rhetoric turns out to be an effective tool for domestic politics, as “world leadership” perception is mobilized to justify domestic policy-making as well. The paper concludes with a deeper understanding of this revivalist rhetoric within the context of Turkey-EU relations.

Introduction

Although emotions play a significant role in Turkish political discourse, they have so far received little attention by scholars. This article recognizes the significance of examining processes of discursive construction influenced by emotions and the manner in which they shape political perceptions and dynamics. Anxiety, fear and hatred are not the only main emotions that play an important role in politics. Overconfidence, for example, can be just as influential in political discourse and policy making as is the case in Turkey.

To provide ample textual material to analyse the social construction of Eurocynicism, we refer to 7 semi-structured interviews with conservative civil society organizations' (CSO) leaders. The excerpts that are focussed on for analysis are chosen particularly on the basis of their usage of argumentative strategies, their frequency and importance in the respondent's whole discourse related to the EU and Europe constructions throughout the data.

The structure of this study is as follows. The literature review on the emotions in politics and international relations will be laid out in the second part. The empirical part sets out the ways in which Eurocynicism is systematically constructed through the interviews. The fourth part analyses the interviews from a polito-psychological perspective. The conclusion brings together the arguments from the preceding parts and signifies new arguments.

Emotions in politics and international relations

Converging with the understudied subject of emotions in politics, psychological and economical literature on overconfidence usually interpret it as a cognitive bias about a specific domain of human activity such as probabilistic decision making rather than an emotionally motivated or grounded general mental state manifested in verbal expressions and certain behaviors (e.g. Harvey et al., 1997; Juslin et al., 1994; Lambert et al., 2012; McKenzie, 1997; Sieck et al., 2007). On the contrary, in this article, overconfidence especially within the context of international relations in general and Turkey-EU relations in particular is conceptualized as a system justifying ideology which is associated with strong emotions as well as self-esteem (group-esteem) and self-enhancement (group-enhancement).

An increasing number of international relations scholars highlight the role of emotions in international relations (e.g. Crawford, 2000; Hymans, 2010; Mercer, 2005). In this line of argumentation, which is quite dominant in contemporary political psychology, emotions weaken the capacity to reason and lead to distorted assessments of their condition (Sears, 2000). This reason/emotion dichotomy is important in terms of its explanatory value for the case at hand. Individuals too often act out of an extremely strong feeling that makes them do things without thinking rationally. Hence, this blind passion distorts social reality and hinders the perception of the situation as it is, and triggers unrealistic and inappropriate decision-making process.

Another line of argumentation suggests that emotions need not and cannot be distanced from reason, but reason can remain in executive control (see Marcus, 2003: 185). Here, the institutions play a crucial role to remove the detrimental effects of emotions and cognitive fallacies. The view of psychologist Ira Roseman is very important to link emotions and cognitive evaluations. He argues: *'It is the interpretation of events rather than events per se that determine which emotions will be felt.'* (Roseman, 1984:14, cited in Marcus, 2003:191).

We argue that human psychology is variable and unstable, but it can serve as a useful foundation for social-scientific analysis. By linking individuals' cognitive and emotional tendencies and the discourse analysis, we aim to open a new window to discourse analytical approach. In our empirical inquiry into overconfidence of the CSO (civil society organization)

leaders who support Turkish foreign policy making and official Turkish position regarding EU-TR relations, we also consider the crucial historical dimensions that take feelings into account. That corresponds to the suggestion of Hutchison and Bleiker (2007:9) that in a systematic study of emotions, one should focus on the crucial historical and broader societal dynamics that underlie feelings. Crawford (2000:131,136) also stresses that emotions, and the politicisation of emotions are linked to particular political, cultural and historical circumstances. Hence, the intertextuality and the interdiscursivity of the leaders' European discourses provide us important clues in understanding the historical and contextual side of the overconfidence phenomenon. The political significance of overconfidence is especially observable in the foreign policy failures of the government party. In this context, in analysing discourses, we utilise two main concepts: The first is 'intertextuality', meaning that texts always relate to other texts in the past or in the present. The second is 'interdiscursivity', and refers to discourses that overlap and interact with each other. Hence, in addition to providing an analytical toolkit in text analysis, the central concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity are incorporated into the discussion. Intertextuality draws on the connectedness of texts and transfer of main arguments, whereas interdiscursivity focuses on the connections between discourses and in which ways they are drawn from one another (Wodak, 2001).

Political psychology of Eurocynicism and Euroscepticism

As cynicism is inversely related to trust in different social, economic and political institutions (Mishler and Rose, 2001), Eurocynicism refers in the Turkish case to an increasing absence of confidence at the level of EU institutions. This cynicism visible at the civil society level may help to understand the dynamics of Euroscepticism. During the accession process, several statements of European leaders triggered civil society leaders' Euroscepticism. The declarations were regarded as "insulting" and "unacceptable" (Büyükbay, 2015:89). Some civil society leaders claimed that the EU looks down on Turkey and that this is reflected in the rhetoric of the European leaders. A conservative CSO leader states that the relations are not equal and balanced. In this sense, he sees disturbing elements in the attitude of the EU towards Turkish people without seeing its own contradictions, weaknesses and deficits (Büyükbay, 2015:91). This exclusive rhetoric of the EU is regarded by conservative civil society leaders as a major problem. Interview data¹ provides further insight into the different ways in which the "double standard topos" can be invoked, which increases distrust and leads to Eurocynicism by conservative CSO leaders. The order of the argumentation first cites the double standard implemented by the EU towards Turkey and then stresses the increasing distrust towards the EU and concludes with the perceived power of Turkey. As is generally observable in the Eurocynic argumentation strategy, the excerpts construct Europe as unconfident because of the discrepancy between European leaders' speeches and their actions. We can see that the topos of conflicting Europe is dominant in the conservative discourse.

Euroscepticism has been augmented by overconfidence particularly in the conservative discourses. The media and political discourses have stressed that Turkey has acquired a higher level of self-esteem, making EU membership seem less essential. The political scientist Cengiz Aktar (2011) mentions that the Euro crisis has increased public distrust towards the EU. Nevertheless the increasing confidence ignores the fact that Turkey is also economically tied to the EU, as the EU is Turkey's most important trade partner. Aktar says that after the general elections in June 2011, the reforms halted and argues that "there's a real tendency among Turkish politicians toward excessive self-confidence. That's very dangerous" (Aktar, 2011).

The interview data provides further insight into the different ways in which Eurocynicism is constructed. Until now, the notion of Eurocynicism has not been extensively elaborated upon.

¹ All the interview data referred throughout the article are from Büyükbay, 2015.

The rhetoric of a conservative civil society leader supportive of the government policies is a good example of the Eurocynic argumentation strategy. He refers to the beginning of the AKP era as a turning point and claims that the necessity of Turkey for Europe has been strengthened extremely (Büyükbay, 2015:103). In other words, according to him, the EU needs Turkey and it is not the other way around. The interviewee constructs a categorical duality between the pre-AKP and post-AKP periods in order to support his argument. Accordingly, it needs to be underlined that the beginning of the AKP era and the current situation are often compared in order to demonstrate how Turkey has become more powerful economically and in international politics. The referential strategy used here is the *éclat* of Erdoğan at Davos in 2009. Hence, this event has a strong symbolic value in the eyes of the Islamic and conservative civil society leaders and one of the most important sources of overconfidence, which is interpreted as a sign of power.

Discussions on AKP often leads to recurrent re-presentations of Turkey as an economically powerful agent. The predication of two different Turkeys are employed together in constructing the success of the AKP that excludes the democracy deficits that took place during the AKP period. Hence, the AKP government has a strong influence in the civil society discourses of the conservative camp. Moreover, it should be noted that in addition to its explicit forms, an implicit version of Euroscepticism is present here that stresses that Europe does not want Turkey to become a strong country (Büyükbay, 2015:102). Additionally, the way in which Turkey would contribute to the synergy of the EU is explained with the foreign policy choices of Turkey that are not only dependent on Europe, but also on good relations with the Arab countries that were ignored by the Kemalists for a long time (Büyükbay, 2015:106). The interviewees construct Turkey as a powerful country like Germany with the *topos* of overconfidence. The governing party's coming into power is marked as a historical turning point. Another Islamic CSO leader refers to the importance of the Ottoman history in the memory of European countries (Büyükbay, 2015:108). She notes that the subconscious of Europe is based on the rise of the Ottoman Empire in Europe and the crusades. According to her, the image of an Ottoman army trying to conquer Vienna is still influential (Büyükbay, 2015:109).

A frequent referential strategy is to mention the Siege of Vienna by the Ottoman Empire and the conquest of Constantinople.² Notwithstanding the fact that it is only an observation of the respondent regarding European countries, the metaphoric expressions such as the "subconscious of Europe" corresponds to the power of these memories. This argument firstly presupposes that Europe cannot forget its past with the Ottoman Empire. It reproduces the glorified history of Ottoman Empire and adapts to the context of the EU accession process. Both the discursive equivalence formulated between Ottoman Empire and power image and its effect on Europe's subconscious, as well as the bifurcation of Turkey before the AKP era and Turkey after the AKP came to power suggest a strong interdiscursivity with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's political discourse. This exemplifies the use of "departicularisation", which refers to the arbitrary selection of historical events in constructing historical narratives and in justifying the case in hand. Another CSO leader states that the responsibility of the Turkish citizens are not limited to their own geography. According to him, Turkish and Islamic society means hope for suffering and grieving countries: "*Palestine oppressed by the Israelis, the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the depressed society in Chechnya all call help from Turkey, Hocalı is occupied in Azerbaijan, who are they waiting help from? -Of course, Turkey*" (Büyükbay, 2015:109). The excerpt discursively constructs Turkey "*as a hope for suffering countries.*" As encountered earlier in the case of other discourses, Turkey is attributed a

² 'The Turkish Siege' (Türkenbelagerung) is often present in different political discourses in Austria and especially in Austrian collective memory. "*Constructing 'Turks' as 'Europe's other' as a consequence of myth-history and gender relations allows 'Europeans' to depict 'them' as uncivilised, threatening and traditional, and, consequently, to refuse them immigration and accession to the EU*" (Strasser, 2008:193).

regional role. The excerpt employs the topos of regional power in exaggerating Turkey's strength.

Eurocynicism is largely present mainly among the civil society leaders supportive of the AKP policies. The full corpus displays a strong intertextuality with the strategic depth thesis of the Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and with the so-called Neo-Ottomanism of the AKP. As stated above there is an additional historical layer to the Eurocynic discourse composed of an overconfidence and scepticism towards Europe, namely Vienna siege and conquest of Constantinople. The overconfidence topos misperceives the subjective probabilities in utilising heuristics that are mental shortcuts, where focusing on one particular aspect of a phenomenon or process may lead to wrong decisions. A strong cognitive bias may lead to incorrect judgment and perceptual distortion. In the interview data there are a great deal of confirmation biases, meaning the inclination to search for information that confirms one's preconceptions and leaving contrary information outside the analysis. Nevertheless, a categorisation of Europe and the EU into their essential nature in spite of variations—essentialism—is less present.

Another important point is the high expectations from the EU process based on wishes and estimates. Nevertheless, when the expectations are not met, disappointment arises. Moreover, Eurocynicism goes hand in hand with an illusion of control, meaning the inclination to overestimate one's influence over the EU. In an interesting excerpt, a conservative civil society leader links the power of Turkey to Ottoman Empire (Büyükbay, 2015:108). He maintains that Turkey had to give up its regional and global claims in the latest period of the Ottoman Empire and the first period of the Republic and had to deal with three main diplomatic problems which are Aegean crisis, Cyprus question, and problems with Russia. According to his argumentation, the regional and global goals of Turkey threaten Europe and America. Hence, AKP has assured political and economic stability, provided progress and strengthened Turkey in socio-political aspects. Consequently, the European Union has then pulled back its support for Turkey (Büyükbay, 2015:110).

Such discursive constructs become all more notable in the discourse of conservative civil society leaders. The excerpt above constructs Turkey that moves beyond a focus on its domestic politics towards a more global and regional role.³ The regional role that Turkey is supposed to play is discussed at more length and with a referential strategy to Ottoman Empire and its founders. The AKP attributes to the positively predicated Turkey a global/regional role within which it needs to assert itself over the EU and United States. Turkey is constructed in a certain manner regarding its role in the international system through references to the EU accession process. According to the conviction of a conservative CSO leader, Turkey has an empire background and had been involved in war with European countries which resulted in mistrust within the integration process with Europe. He reports that a country with an imperial spirit has to be handled with great care (Büyükbay, 2015:114). The metaphor of "imperial spirit" is used as a referential strategy to the Ottoman past and compared Turkey with China, Iran and the USA. The discourse predicates Turkey as an imperial power in the international scene, implicitly warning Europe to be more careful and mindful in the relations with Turkey. Reference to "imperial spirit" also implies the role of Turkey as a regional power. It has so far been argued that in the discursive site of the civil society leaders close to the AKP, Europe has been constructed as dependent to Turkey to overcome its crisis.

As noted earlier, we observe a level of over-confidence in regards to Turkey's strength and economic success. The necessity of the EU for Turkey and vice versa is compared and stated in an exaggerated sense and transformed into a sort "Turkey needs the EU far less than the EU needs Turkey" mentality. Along these lines, the necessity of Turkey for Europe is stressed as

³ Reiter mentions that opponents to Turkey's accession stress that the membership may lead to security risks and proponents of the EU membership finds it strategically important to establish a greater influence for the EU in the Middle East and to enable the EU become a global player (Reiter et al., 2006).

Turkey has assumed to hold too much power at the international playing field. The utterances construct the EU as an organisation dependent on Turkey for its economy and to overcome the crisis. Furthermore, it is connected quite often with the so-called double standards of the EU leaders and their use of Turkey's accession process as a rhetorical tool in local elections. In this way, the justification of overconfidence is somehow guaranteed. A binary opposition between the honesty of the AKP and untrustworthy Europe is constructed. The linkage of the issue to the international real politics seems to serve rhetorically to strengthen the value of Turkey in relations with the EU. Europe's predication as an untrustworthy partner establishes a dominant discursive nodal point. The use of the term "strategic depth" is particularly significant in this context, as it refers to Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's book. While stressing the strategic depth thesis, the EU is considered as one among many alternatives for Turkey.⁴ Moreover, it can be argued that the referential strategy of double standard signifying the cases of Sarkozy and Merkel is quite often used as a legitimizing and shadowing mechanism of the AKP's unwillingness in implementing further reforms and lack of confidence in the EU (Büyükbay, 2015:118,124).

Referential strategies are realised through the double standard expressions in different issues combined with the topos of untrustable EU. The necessity of the EU for Turkey is naturalised and justified via the nominalisation of the international real politic. In a similar vein, real politic is presented as a powerful process in relation to which Europe needs to position itself. Nominalisation, by ignoring the agency of an act, constructs the act as natural. Altan stresses that the EU needs new synergies beyond its own power in order to come to the foreground as a regional and global power within the political system again and Turkey is for the EU the sole alternative without a counter alternative (Büyükbay, 2015:140). Hence, the result of increasing overconfidence is that Turkey is seen as the sole synergy for the EU without an alternative. The discourse suggests that the EU needs Turkey in order to become a global power, otherwise it will lose diplomatic honour and will not be able to compete with US. Hence, Turkey's geopolitical significance is stressed for the EU as the only alternative. The excerpt above also invokes Turkey's contribution to the European defence identity by employing the topos of history in reference to Turkey's role in the Cold War as part of the Western bloc and as a loyal partner with a strong army (see also Düzgit, 2013). The discourse establishes a clear binary divide between the positively predicated young and dynamic Turkey and the negatively predicated old and unstable Europe. The inequality in this binary dichotomy weighs in favour of Turkey. Hence, the implicit assumption behind this binary classification is to increase the importance of Turkey and to make it the sole alternative for the EU. This assumption is connected with the construction of Turkey as an enabler distinguished from the EU by its geo-strategic location, economic resources and young population.

While Turkey is predicated positively, this construction itself reproduces the strategic depth thesis through the topos of overconfidence, treating Turkey more powerful than actually it is. The way in which Turkey will overcome the crisis of the EU is an issue that is untouched.

Referential strategies that are realised through metaphorical expressions such as "global player" and "regional player" and combined with the topos of the overconfidence help construct a Turkey more powerful than it actually is (Büyükbay, 2015:153). This is strengthened

⁴ Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stressed that Turkey is seriously considering seeking membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an alternative at a time when the EU's future looks increasingly grim. *"The fact is that we have not yet given up on the EU process."* Erdoğan said, noting the government's continued interest in the EU despite the pessimistic atmosphere surrounding the country's EU bid. *"If we get into the SCO, we will say good-bye to the European Union. The Shanghai Five is better—much more powerful. Pakistan wants in. India wants in as well. If the SCO wants us, all of us will become members of this organization."* When asked to clarify whether the Shanghai Five is an alternative to the EU, he said, *"The Shanghai Five is better and more powerful, and we have common values with them"* (China.org, 2013).

by the threat topos and implies an important degree of power. It is notable that a discursive equivalence is formulated between EU and USA by constructing Turkey as a threat for them.

Another example of the Eurocynicism can be observed in the following excerpt from a conservative civil society leader: He employs the metaphor of "Turkey as a bite for the EU" (Büyükbay, 2015:154) which implicitly refers to the argumentation that the attitude of the EU towards Turkey has worsened because of the strengthening of Turkey economically and politically. The dominant conservative discourse suggests that Turkey is a "big game", "a gulp" for Europe and so the EU finds the solution in implementing double standards (Büyükbay, 2015:158).

"Fearless Turkey" is a common metaphor among the conservative and Islamic civil society leaders. According to this opinion, a strong government and the increase of Turkey's gross national income are factors that slowed down the EU accession process. This logic presupposes that the stronger Turkey gets, the more concerned is the EU about Turkey's strength. Turkey is the only country in the region with a history as an empire, and this imperialism has a disconcerting structure. A national income at a particular level means a controllable Turkey, and that above this means an uncontrollable Turkey, which is why it causes concerns in some people's minds (see Büyükbay, 2015:122).

Political psychology of overconfidence

"(...) [O]ver-confidence is a mere feeling without much to back up, and is often a result of over-projecting one's past experiences and believing oneself to be the cause and reason for the results" (Chandra 2012). It neglects the need for evidence, rather, it is just a gut feeling of one's abilities. Many times overconfidence is a result of overestimating one's competencies and underestimating situations, environments and other people's competencies; as such, overconfidence fosters arrogance and pomp. It often creates a path to failure (Chandra, 2012).

According to system justification theory which is one of the emerging theories in social and political psychology literature (Jost and Hunyady, 2005), the class-structured system survives all anti-capitalist movements by a set of ideological devices to maintain the status quo. The application of system justification theory into the area of international relations is virtually non-existent. However, the theory is relevant for IR research with a strange twist. The rhetoric of pro-AKP interviewees' focus on an overconfident Turkey at international arena can be considered as a tool of system justification at the level of domestic politics. If Turkey became a world leader with AKP, if it turned out to return to the glorious era of Ottoman sultanate etc. of course it would be this government that would deserve to govern Turkey, unlike the previous government which did not 'think big'. Thus, the overconfidence rhetoric can be interpreted from a functional point of view as a tool to justify government party's policies, without taking into consideration the problems in regards to the adherence to liberal democratic values during this era.

Among the most common system-justifying ideologies, political conservatism matches the content of the interviews which can be summarized by the following statement: "*Traditional institutions in society should be preserved; social and economic inequality is acceptable and natural*" (Jost and Hunyady, 2005:261). Although this statement might be considered a reasonable close-up of what is meant by 'political conservatism,' it doesn't seem of any value when we move to more practical matters. The main question is "which traditions to preserve?" Although AKP is considered to be a champion of neo-Ottomanism, which era to revive is still a moot issue (Gezgin, 2015). The rise of the Ottoman Empire had halted by 17th century which even predates French revolution. This neo-Ottoman romanticism ignores the fact that Turkish War of Liberation which narrowly preceded the declaration of republican government by 1923 was a response to the decline of the Ottoman Empire which had no longer had any opportunity

to survive, forget about getting revived. This overconfidence based on the glory of the good old Ottoman days missed the grim reality that the world and its politics were no longer frozen in their 17th century form.

If that is the case, i.e. if they are extremely unrealistic to propose a *casus and pax ottomana*, how could this romantic ideology with its feet on top could persist? That is because human beings are not rational. They are slaves of their emotions and subconscious with invisible fetters. Political psychological studies find that system-justifying ideologies are an arch booster of self-esteem and subjective well-being (Jost and Hunyady, 2005:263). In other words, from a classical behavioristic perspective, it is emotionally and psychologically rewarding to believe in and endorse system-justifying ideologies such as political conservatism and the 'the world leader' rhetoric. This reward flowchart feeds forward a set of pro-government attitudes and behaviors which help sustain and strengthen the system further and onwards.

Turkish pro-government sentiments can be compared with the Feuillants of French parliament of 1789 who due to the seating arrangements were called as right-wing. Just like Feuillants, Turkish pro-government supporters are in favor of the 'ancient regime' where the King reigned supreme. This royalist fault line finds its expression in revival of not only the Ottoman glory but also the sultanate and caliphate which appears to be the ultimate goal of the current proposals for installment of the presidential system in post-election Turkish politics of 2015. However, unlike the various versions of conservatism of the Western world in general, the state and its supporters are not assigned a simply passive role of preserving the past, but reviving it which assumes political agency, active participation and social engineering.

From a different research stream, Kennedy, Anderson and Moore (2013) find that overconfidence has status-enhancement function. In other words, it is not completely a cognitive bias as mainstream psychological research would prefer to conclude nor could be completely characterized by the Marxist conceptualization of false consciousness. The problem is not a cognitive one but a functional one. As long as ideological overconfidence would serve psychological functions, it would sustain its continuity. On the other hand, the imperial ambitions discussed in this article are more fragile and dangerous than expected, as they do and will lead to preferences for confrontational, violent and even militant form of international relations which might threaten world peace efforts.

Conclusion

Crawford (2000:128) focuses on the social learning theory claiming emotions are not 'natural' but learned and reinforced through social interactions. In our case, overconfidence is socially constructed. The overconfidence rhetoric of the AKP leaders diffuses to the pro-AKP segments of the society. In this way, overconfidence is institutionalized by pro-AKP segments of the society as a means of resolving the foreign policy dilemmas and justifying the system. In the context of the sociocultural constitution of emotions, Claire Armon-Jones (1986:33-34) stresses that emotions are shared expectations set by social groups to serve sociocultural functions. In our case, overconfidence has a high salience within the pro-AKP groups and serves as a system-justifying factor.

The analysis has identified two major representations of Europe that construct Turkey as a powerful country. The inconsistent EU that has led to a decreased level of trust and overconfidence is highly prevalent among the conservative CSO leaders. The representations are based upon the history of the Ottoman Empire and reproduce Ahmet Davutoğlu's strategic depth thesis. The most common referential strategy is the powerful image of Ottoman Empire. In formulating these representations, discursive strategies of Euroscepticism are coupled to denote a stable, progressive and economically powerful Turkey and a Europe in economic crisis

that needs Turkey. Hence, the analysis reveals two dominant representations that lead to this discourse topic: The representation of the EU as unstable, inefficient and economically weak in the context of Eurozone crisis and an imagined powerful Turkey. To sum up, the analysis reveals that Eurocynicism mostly has its roots in the reaction to the discriminatory and down-looking rhetoric and policies of some European leaders and the double standards topos as well as the economic success of Turkey and its Ottoman past.

National self-glorification is embodied through a discourse that gives positive references to the Ottoman myths, Ottoman culture and Turkey's ambitions to be a regional power, and a strong interdiscursivity with the official position of Turkey is observable. Accordingly, it needs to be underlined that often the beginning of the AKP era and the current situation are compared together in order to demonstrate how Turkey has become more powerful in economics and international politics. The referential strategy used here is Erdoğan's *éclat* in Davos in 2009. Hence, this event has a strong symbolic value in the eyes of Islamic and conservative civil society leaders and is one of the most important sources of overconfidence, which is interpreted as a sign of power.

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