

TURKEY-MALAYSIA RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY*

21. Yüzyılda Türkiye-Malezya İlişkileri

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Abstract

Although the connection between the Turks and Malays could be traced back to the 1500s, relations generally remained static until 2000. In the 21st century, relationships have started to develop in a multidimensional way in the political, economic and cultural spheres. The article concluded that the progress in Turkey-Malaysia relations in the 2000s is closely related to the changes in the foreign policy of the two countries. Another result of this work is that the actors do not put forth a strong political will to further develop relations in practice.

Keywords: Turkey, Malaysia, Political Relations, Economic Dimensions, Cultural Aspects.

Öz

Türkler ve Malaylar arasındaki bağlantı 1500'lere kadar gitse de ilişkiler genellikle 2000 yılına kadar durağan bir görünüm sergilemiştir. Söz konusu ilişkiler, 21. yüzyılda siyasal, ekonomik ve kültürel alanlarda çok boyutlu bir şekilde gelişmeye başlamıştır. Makale, 2000'li yıllarda Türkiye-Malezya ilişkilerinde kaydedilen ilerlemenin iki ülkenin dış politikasındaki değişikliklerle yakından ilgili olduğu sonucuna ulaşmıştır. Çalışmanın ulaştığı bir diğer sonuç ise aktörlerin ilişkileri geliştirmek için güçlü bir siyasi irade ortaya koymadıkları olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Malezya, Siyasi İlişkiler, Ekonomik Boyutlar, Kültürel Unsurlar.

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Introduction: The Content, Scope and Arguments of the Study

Even though modern Turkey-Malaysia relations began in the second half of the 1900s, historically the connection between the two countries could be traced back to the relationship between the Ottoman State and the Malay Sultanates.¹ The Malacca Sultanate asked for help from the Ottoman State against the Portuguese and relations began. The relationships, which continued until the 1900s, ended when the United Kingdom (UK) colonized Johor in 1914. After 1914, the Turkish influence in the Malaya peninsula continued but at a low level. In 1964, after 50 years, in the contemporary era, Turkey-Malaysia relations have been re-established.

Turkey and Malaysia are respectively essential actors in the Middle East-Europe and Southeast Asia. Both actors influence political and social events in their regions thanks to their geographic location and power capacities. Besides, both actors have been able to implement specific political values, have achieved significant economic benefits, and have become a cultural centre of attraction in their regions. Nonetheless, both actors have adopted and implemented different political, economic and cultural strategies in the process of modernization. This differentiation was not only related to the transformation process in the domestic political system but also foreign policy visions and priorities. In this context, the main argument of this study is that the characteristic of Turkey-Malaysia relations is closely linked to the actors' foreign policy perspectives. In other words, the study is based on the argument that the differences and similarities in the foreign policy approaches of both actors shape the nature of relations.

In foreign policy, until the 2000s, Turkey and Malaysia attached importance to their relations with their neighbours, considered security concerns and ignored alternative initiatives that would

1 In this study, the Malay Sultanates basically refer to Malacca and Johor.

benefit themselves.² This situation has caused Turkey-Malaysia relations not to develop too much. In the post-2000 period, a similarity was observed in the foreign policy approaches of the actors, and this has led to the development of political, economic and cultural relations. Today, it can be said that relationships develop around more than one topic, trade volume has grown, and cultural communication channels have increased. Despite the concrete developments in relations, there are some problems in practice. Based on this point, the second argument of this study is that the actors could not develop strong foreign policy behaviours to improve their relationship further. This situation also leads to the neglect of cooperation opportunities.

Turkey-Malaysia relations is one of the subjects that has not been studied much in theoretical and practical terms. It is very difficult to say that there is a study directly related to Turkey-Malaysia relations other than the works of Sabri Orman and Asmady Idris-Ömer Kurtbağ.³ Due to this, the primary objective of this study is to contribute to the literature by analysing the fundamental dynamics and practical appearance of Turkey-Malaysia relations. In this context, this work firstly forms a conceptual framework, and then, it is going to examine the relationship before the 21st century in two historical periods; from the first half of the 1500s to 1914 and between 1964-2000. In the first period, the relationship between the Ottoman State and the Malay Sultanates, which constitutes the historical background of Turkey-Malaysia relations, and its effects will be investigated. Between 1914-1964, the main reason why there was no relationship between the Turks and Malays was that the Malays were not an independent political actor until 1957.

2 Ümit Alperen, "Türkiye'nin Güneydoğu Asya Politikası 2013", Burhanettin Duran vd., ed., *Türk Dış Politikası Yılı 2013*, SETA Publishing, Ankara 2015, p. 452.

3 Sabri Orman, "Malaysia and Turkey: Comparative Experiences and Bilateral Relations", Abdul Razak Baginda. ed., *Malaysia and the Islamic World*, ASEAN Academic Press, London 2004. Orman's work mainly focused on comparative study of Turkey and Malaysia in the fields of geography, history, society, politics and economy, and his study did not analyse the bilateral relations in detail. This is an understandable case considering that the relations did not develop much until 2004 when Orman's article was published. Another significant study is Idris Asmady-Ömer Kurtbağ, "Malaysia-Turkey Relations in History and Today", *Middle East Institute*, <http://www.mei.edu/content/malaysia-turkey-relations-history-and-today>, (Date of Accession: 01.12.2017). Though Idris and Kurtbağ's work analysed the relations until recently, it is short because of designing as an internet article. Moreover, after the publication of this study in 2013, there have been significant developments in relations.

After Malaysia became an independent state in 1957, diplomatic relations between Turkey and Malaysia were established in 1964. In the second period between 1964 and 2000, this article investigates the cooperation efforts and their results in Turkey-Malaysia relations. After historical ties, this research will analyse the relationship in a multidimensional way in the post-2000 period, which is the main subject of the article. In conclusion, this paper critically evaluates relations between the two states.

Factors Contributing to Turkey-Malaysia Relations

The nature of the international system determines the ability of Turkey and Malaysia to act in foreign policy. When there is a bipolar system in which two actors were influential, the ability of Turkey and Malaysia to act independently was limited as in the Cold War era. However, in the post-Cold War era, where there is a loose and multi-actor international system, Turkey and Malaysia have acted as they wish. The nature of the events in the international system impacted the shaping of foreign policy contents of Turkey and Malaysia. For example, Malaysia, which was subjected to pressure from global markets in the late 1990s, gave priority to the economic dimension in the context and orientation of its foreign policy. Similarly, Turkey, which faces significant challenges in the regional system, restricted its foreign policy to its close periphery. That is, the autonomy, which the international system recognizes for Turkey and Malaysia, determines the ability of Turkey and Malaysia to act in foreign policy. The intensity and importance of events in the regional system and the international system lead Turkey and Malaysia to define their foreign policy priorities. In this context, we can say that the characteristic of the regional and international system is a general factor shaping Turkey-Malaysia relations.⁴

In foreign policy, there is a purpose or interest that shapes a state's approach towards other states. As long as there are mutual interests between Turkey and Malaysia, they may come together on the basis of friendship or cooperation in their relations with each

⁴ Ertan Efeçil, *Dış Politika Analizi Ders Notları*, Nobel Publishing, İstanbul 2016, p. 203-217.

other. In other words, if the foreign policy perspectives of Turkey and Malaysia are similar, they may cooperate in regional and global platforms, or they may act together in practice. On the other hand, when Turkey and Malaysia have different aims and interests, they may not develop a strong relationship with each other, even if they have shared similar values. Moreover, Turkey and Malaysia cannot effectively use the organizations, which they have both joined under the framework of shared values, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In this framework, it is to note that the foreign policy perspective is the primary factor affecting the relations between the two actors.⁵

The general character of the foreign policy perspective also strongly influences other factors such as geography, economy, and culture which are the subjects of bilateral relations. For instance, when Turkey and Malaysia have a common goal in foreign policy, such as improving relations with each other, they try to overcome geographical challenges, even if they are in different regions. Similarly, Turkey and Malaysia can see abstract elements such as historical background, culture, and religion as factors that can lead to cooperation in relations. However, when Turkey and Malaysia do not have the vision of developing relations, factors such as geography, culture, and religion are ineffective in relations. So, what we mean here is that factors such as history, geography, and culture will be effective or ineffective in relations, depending on the positive or negative attitudes of the actors. With this characteristic, it can be said that these factors are secondary elements that affect relations.⁶

Even though Turkey and Malaysia have similar attitudes in foreign policy and positively consider factors like geography and culture, their behaviours in practice have a decisive influence. When Turkey and Malaysia develop concrete and powerful actions in implementation, they can get positive results, and this will lead

5 Faruk Sönmezoglu, *Uluslararası Politika ve Dış Politika Analizi*, Der Publishing, İstanbul 2012, p. 349-389.

6 Cengiz Erişen, "Devletin Dış Politika Yapımı", Murat Erdoğan, ed., *Dış Politika Analizi*, Anadolu Üniversitesi Publishing, Eskişehir 2013, p. 87-92.

to the development of relations in such a way as to reveal new opportunities. But, when states do not form strong cooperation on a subject in practice, this will cause the common stance to remain only a statement of goodwill, and the relations between actors will stay the same. Accordingly, the states' behaviours in practice is a crucial factor in shaping the advanced stage of relations.⁷

Figure 1: Key Determinant Factors Affecting Turkey-Malaysia Relations



Historical Periods of Turkey-Malaysia Relations: From 16th Century to 21st Century

A summary of Ottoman-Malay relations

Ottoman-Malay relations were based on the demand of the Malay Sultanates for military assistance from the Ottoman State against the Portuguese colonialists. As Sabri Orman stated, "following the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511, the Ottoman Sultan had

⁷ Elisabetta Brighi-Christopher Hill, "Implementation and Behaviour", Smith Steve et al., ed., *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases, Third Edition*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom 2016, p. 147-166.

'on several occasions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', sent aid to the Malays to help them in their efforts to recapture the city."⁸ Although the Malays recaptured the city of Malacca several times, the city failed to remain permanently in Malay hands. In the following period, this city was first exploited by the Dutch (1641-1798) and later by the British (1824-1957). Because the great powers colonized Malacca, the relations between the Ottoman State, and the Johor Sultanate, which was one of the independent sultanates in the region, became more critical. In the second half of the 19th century, Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II. wanted to increase the Ottoman influence in distant Muslim lands as a result of the Pan Islamist policy.⁹ In the same period, Johor Sultan Abu Bakar saw the Ottoman state as a protector against the colonial powers. As a reflection of this situation, the Sultan of Johor Abu Bakar visited Istanbul in 1879 and 1893.¹⁰ This visit led to an increase in the influence of the Ottoman caliph in the Malaya region. Indeed, during the First World War, the Ottoman caliph's call for jihad led to some actions against colonial powers in the Malay region. However, this call for jihad was not very effective due to the British influence in the region.¹¹ In the ongoing process, the political relations stopped because the Malay geography was completely colonized, and the Ottoman State entered the First World War.¹²

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the relations were not only limited to politics and military but also included other areas such as religion and culture. Islam was a substantial factor in the cultural relations between the Ottoman and the Malays. Özey Mehmet said that the Ottoman sultans and Turks played a role in the spread of Islamic values among the Malays.¹³ The significant point is that

8 Orman, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

9 Cezmi Eraslan, *II. Abdulhamid ve İslam Birliği*, Ötüken Publishing, İstanbul 1992.

10 Mohammad Redzuan Othman, "Pan-Islamic Appeal and Political Patronage: The Malay Perspective and the Ottoman Response", *Sejarah: Journal of the Department of History*, 4(4), November 2017, p. 98.

11 Ali Muhamad, *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaysia*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2016, p. 126.

12 Milton Osborne, *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*, Allen&Unwin, Australia 2013, p. 87.

13 Özey Mehmet, *Islamic Identity and Development: Studies of the Islamic Periphery*, Routledge, London 1990, p. 25.

the Malays students studied Islamic education in Cairo and Hijaz, which were under the influence of the Ottoman State. These students brought newspapers back home and indirectly led to the continuation of cultural interaction in Ottoman-Malay relations.¹⁴ Another indirect cultural interaction channel was that the Ottoman and the Malays got to know each other during Hajj and transferred information or developments about their country to each other. Moreover, Ottoman-Malay cultural relations became stronger with personal relationships. Two concubines named Khadijah Hanum and Rugayyah Hanum were gifted to the Sultan of Johor Abu Bakar by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II, and Rugayyah Hanum's grandchildren have taken significant roles in the political and academic life of modern Malaysia such as Malaysia's Third Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn and Sufi Scholar Syed Muhammed Naquib al-Attas.¹⁵

In the first quarter of the 20th century, although the abolition of the caliphate caused negative perceptions about the Turks at first, the emergence of modern Turkey had created a positive impact in the Malay world in the later period. Malay and Indonesian reformist leaders, such as Achmed Sukarno, took Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as an example in his policies and modernization processes. Besides, culturally, the Malay World has published various books and periodicals such as *Turki dan Mustapha Kemal Atatürk*, *Turki dan Tamadunnya*, *Kitab Mustafa Kemal*, and *Idaran Zaman dan Saudara* aimed at understanding the Kemalist revolution and modern Turkey.¹⁶

14 Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian & Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, University of Hawaii Press, Hawaii 2004.

15 Khadijah Hanum with married Sultan Abu Bakar, and Ruqayyah Hanum with married three times, firstly, Engku Abdul Majid, secondly, Dato Jaafar Muhammad (who was the first chief minister of Johor), and lastly, Syed Abdullah al-Attas (who was a trader) for more information see: Abd Jalil Borham, "Pengaruh Khilafah Othmaniyyah Turki Dalam Pentadbiran Kerajaan Johor Bagi Memartabatkan Sebuah Negara Islam Merdeka di Asia Tenggara", *Simposium Isu-Isu Sejarah dan Tamadun Islam* (SISTI 2011) Peringkat Kebangsaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 8-10 April 2011, Bangi, http://umpir.ump.edu.my/id/eprint/3355/1/JOHOR_TURKI.pdf, (Date of Accession: 24.12.2017); In addition, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas told this situation to a group of academics, which including Ferhat Durmaz, "Meeting with, Syed Muhammed Naquib al-Attas", *Turkish Embassy Residence*, 17.10.2018.

16 Mehmet, *op.cit.*, p. 27-28.

Based on all these points we analysed, we can say that: (1) Relations have created a common historical memory based on positive elements for both actors, which include the rulers and the people in the region, who have remembered the help of the Ottoman State until recently with gratitude. (2) Early period relations have established a cultural basis among both actors for later years. Islam, which is the essence of this cultural structure, would often be a value that brings together the two actors.

Cooperation initiatives in Turkey-Malaysia relations (1964-2000)

First, it should be noted that the nature of the regional and international system in the 20th century and its results for the actors were similar. Within the framework of the bipolar structure of the Cold War, Turkey and Malaysia were not able to act freely in foreign policy, and they had structured their foreign policy in the context of events in the regional system. Indeed, in the 20th century, Turkey and Malaysia's foreign policy orientations were different from each other. After the establishment of the Republic, Turkey, which was a newly independent country, followed a policy of protecting the status quo. During the Cold War, Turkey, depending on the perceived threat from the Soviet Union, had given importance to relations with Western countries. In the 1990s, Turkish politicians had continued the status quo and Westernization foreign policy principles in the face of revisionist events such as the Kurdish question.¹⁷ On the other hand, during the post-Independence period, Malaysia adopted a foreign policy perspective aimed at eliminating the communist threat, resolving border disputes, and preventing great powers from interfering to the region.¹⁸ Then, in the early years of Mahathir Mohamad's rule, Malaysia's relations with Japan and South Korea became more significant especially with the adoption of the "Look East" policy.¹⁹ Even more important

17 Baskın Oran, ed., *Türk Dış Politikası, Cilt 1: 1919-1980 and 1980-2001*, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul 2001.

18 Ishtiaq Hossain, "Foreign Policy", Rashid Moten, ed., *Government and Politics in Malaysia*, Cengage Learning, Malaysia 2013, p. 421-423.

19 Johan Saravanamuttu, *Malaysia's Foreign Policy: Alignment, Neutralism and Islamism*, SIRD-ISEAS, Singapore-Malaysia 2010, p. 187.

is that, depending on the importance of Islam in political and social life, being active in the Muslim world and prioritizing relations with Islamic countries has been one of the crucial foreign policy points pursued by Malaysia after 1980.²⁰ In short, until the end of the 20th century, while Turkey pursued a Westernized foreign policy, Malaysia followed an Islamist foreign policy. Based on different values and interests, Turkey and Malaysia formulated their foreign policy vision for different regions and various issues. Therefore, although Turkey and Malaysia mostly shared the same values such as Islamic values, they ignored each other regarding foreign policy. Both actors did not have the will to develop relations with each other in foreign policy. This case had led to secondary factors such as the common historical memory and cultural elements to not play an essential role in their relations.

Concerning political and diplomatic relations, it can be said that Turkey-Malaysia relations were at a low level in the 20th century. During visits between leaders of the two actors in the early years of relations, the main issue was cooperation on education and technical issues. For example, during Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn's visits to Turkey in February 1977 and 1983, agreements were signed on the structure of the airline network, the establishment of the Islamic University, and the exchange of academic staff.²¹ As mentioned earlier, Tun Hussein is one of the grandchildren of Rugayyah Hanum, who was given to the Johor Sultan by the Ottoman State. Thus, Tun Hussein's visit to Turkey showed that he intended to reflect his personal heritage to foreign policy and wanted to improve relations.²² However, during this period, as a foreign policy action, it was not possible for actors to diversify these treaties and make them stronger in terms of content. This status was closely related to the fact that the Cold War began to take on a new character in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this period, the Iranian revolution, the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and Vietnam's occupation in Cambodia could be seen as a reflection of the struggle between

20 Shanti Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London 1997.

21 Idris-Kurtbağ, *loc. cit.*

22 Hossain, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

the Eastern and Western blocks. In such a case, regarding foreign policy perspectives and practices, while Turkey tried to obstruct the negative consequences of the Iranian Revolution, Malaysia attempted to restore the Southeast Asian power balance in the face of the invasion of Vietnam. Besides, Malaysia wanted to prevent the influence of communist movements. With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, Turkey and Malaysia's priority was to protect their national interests in the face of changing regional system. In this context, while Turkey's foreign policy focused on developments in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, the events in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) framework became more critical for Malaysia.

There had been a paradigm shift in Turkey's foreign policy in the mid-1990s. This situation was closely related to the views of the leaders. According to Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the Welfare Party, which was one of the main partners of the government, (i) Turkey should give priority to the development of relations with Islamic countries in foreign policy, (ii) it should ensure that Islamic countries come together on the basis of defence, common market and cultural cooperation, and (iii) it should play a central role in such initiatives.²³ Erbakan was very interested in Malaysia, and he thought that this country should be included in the cooperation formations.²⁴ Erbakan visited Malaysia in 1996 on this framework. In the same period, Malaysia approached Turkey's initiative positively. Through D-8, Malaysia and Turkey wanted to achieve some foreign policy objectives, such as developing strong political relations and making collaboration in the Middle East and Southeast Asia regions.²⁵ However, it was not possible to develop bilateral political relations and to cooperate in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. There are some reasons behind this. First, as a result of the coup in Turkey on February 28, 1997, the new government replacing Erbakan's administration attached

23 Ruşen Çakır, "Erbakan'ın 5 Rüyası!", *Vatan*, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/erbakan-in-5-ruyasi--362549-gundem/>, (Date of Accession: 02.12.2017).

24 Barış Doster, "Erbakan'ın Dış Politika Felsefesi ve Uygulamaları", Haydar Çakmak, ed., *Liderlerin Dış Politika Felsefesi ve Uygulamaları*, Doğu Publishing, İstanbul 2013, p. 107.

25 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Küre Publishing, İstanbul 2001, p. 282.

importance to relations with Western countries and ignored relations with Malaysia. Second, after the establishment of D-8, there was no considerable improvement in the D-8's cooperation capacity. Third, Malaysia prioritized economic issues due to the Asian crisis. Because of all these factors, Turkey-Malaysia relations had not developed. At the same time, all these issues led to low commercial indicators in Turkey-Malaysia relations until the 2000s.²⁶

Turkey and Malaysia in the post-2000 Period: The Emergence of Multidimensional Relations

Structural changes were observed in Turkey and Malaysia's foreign policy in the 2000s. This status was closely related to the change in leadership in both countries. In the post-2000 period, Turkey's foreign policy has been formulated by the Justice and Development Party in two contexts: (i) playing an active role between different regions in the context of 'leading role' and 'centre state' and (ii) establishing cooperation, which include positive elements such as free trade agreements and collaboration council, with African, Latin American and Asian countries. In the post-Mahathir era, with Abdullah Badawi, Malaysia aimed to pursue an active foreign policy in organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the OIC, and ASEAN within the framework of the modern and moderate Islamic concepts.²⁷ After Badawi, within the framework of Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak's 'multidimensional relations' approach, the basic principle of Malaysian foreign policy was to establish strong relations with great powers like the USA and India, and Muslim countries such Turkey. Najib's approach included the following two points: to make Malaysia more effective in international relations through relations with great powers and Muslim countries and to provide economic benefits through elements such as the free trade agreement, and bilateral relations.²⁸ Based upon these points, we can say that the common themes of both actors' foreign policy were:

26 Orman, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

27 Saravanamuttu, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

28 Hossain, *op. cit.*, p. 444-450.

1. Becoming a more influential actor in regional and international relations
2. Establishing strong ties with states in different regions
3. Through these two methods, obtaining national interests, such as achieving economic benefits

Significant changes in the foreign policy of Turkey and Malaysia and the common themes have led them to give importance to their relations with each other. Accordingly, there has been some progress at varying levels in the relations. When compared to the past, historical and cultural values have become an agenda item in the relations, and in practice, foreign policy behaviours of the actors have been more significant.

Positive transformation in political relations

Concerning political and diplomatic relations, it can be said that Turkey-Malaysia relations have been relatively stable in the 2000s. Visits that are directly related to bilateral relations and have led to significant results can be stated as follows: the visits of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2003, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak in 2011, Erdoğan in January 2014, Najib in April 2014, and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in 2015.²⁹ Thanks to these visits, political relations have shown a tendency to get stronger in general.

On the other hand, in 2008, Anwar Ibrahim, the opposition leader, was accused of corruption and sexual perversion. Anwar Ibrahim took refuge in the Turkish Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. This situation has been a significant development in political relations. However, this did not cause a major crisis in political relations between the two countries. The most important reason for this is

²⁹ In Abdullah Badawi period (2003-2009), there was no visit at the level of heads of state between Turkey and Malaysia. However, Erdogan and Badawi exchanged ideas during the UN meetings in 2007.

that Anwar Ibrahim left the Embassy without a diplomatic request for him to do so. Some experts claim that the Anwar Ibrahim incident caused the deterioration of political relations during the 2008-2014 period.³⁰ However, we believe it is not an accurate assessment that the Anwar Ibrahim incident has caused a decline in political relations due to two important reasons. Initially, the first visit after the Anwar Ibrahim incident was made by Malaysia and this took place after a long time. This incident showed that Malaysia continued to give importance to the development of political relations with Turkey. Secondly, as can be seen in the case of Anwar Ibrahim, misunderstandings and adverse events in the political relationships can be resolved through mutual exchange of views and compromise.³¹

In 2011, the visits by the Prime Minister of Malaysia Najib, to Turkey was considered significant because a prime minister of Malaysia had come to Turkey after 28 years. During this visit, the actors did not take concrete steps to improve political relations. However, this visit showed that the actors have a strong will to develop bilateral political relations. Erdogan's visit to Malaysia three years later in January 2014 reflects this context. During Erdogan's visit to Malaysia in January 2014, a "Strategic Cooperation Action Plan", which form the framework of Turkey-Malaysia relations, was signed. This action plan focused more on the economy, energy, and the process of removing visas.³² Moreover, it was pointed out that Turkey and Malaysia should be a role model in the transition process of Muslim countries to democracy.³³ In theory and practice, there is no comprehensive plan on how to transfer this idea into practice.

30 Altay Atlı, "Malezya", İsmail Ermağan, ed., *Dünya Siyasetinde Doğu Asya*, Nobel Yayınları, Ankara 2016, p. 196.

31 "No: 117-30 June 2008, Press Release Regarding the Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim", *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_117---30-june-2008_-press-release-regarding-the-former-deputy-prime-minister-of-malaysia-anwar-ibrahim.en.mfa, (Date of Accession: 03.12.2017).

32 "Malezya ile '5'i Bir Yerde Anlaşma", *Milliyet*, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/malezya-ile-5-i-bir-yerde-anlasma/ekonomi/detay/1820259/default.htm>, (Date of Accession: 14.12.2017).

33 Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "Türkiye-Malezya İlişkilerinde Yeni Bir Sayfa", <http://scolakoglu.blogspot.my/2014/01/turkiye-malezya-iliskilerinde-yeni-bir.html>, (Date of Accession: 03.12.2017).

Three months after Erdogan's visit, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib revisited Turkey in April 2014. The free trade agreement and other economic issues were more prominent than political issues during this visit. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib, who was aware of this situation, said that "We might act together in many areas of interest and profit... It is important to mention this in the context of strategic partnership and globalizing Asia."³⁴

Malaysia's reaction to the military coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016, showed the political harmony in Turkey-Malaysia relations. First, the Malaysian government strongly supported Turkey verbally. In the face of attempts to eliminate democracy and the ruling party, Prime Minister of Malaysia Najib stated that Malaysia was on the side of Erdoğan. Also, Najib noted that such attempts against democracy would not be approved whatever the method is. Furthermore, Najib said that there are similarities between Turkey and Malaysia and that democracy in both countries is the most valuable factor for freedom and prosperity.³⁵ Najib's positive comments clearly showed Malaysia's support for Turkey. Malaysia, which had significant achievements in the democratization process, did not want the political life of Turkey to turn bad. A possible negative transformation in Turkey could be a negative example for the whole Muslim world, including Malaysia. Second, in addition to the Malaysian government, non-governmental organizations in Malaysia denounced the coup attempt, and like the Malaysian government, non-governmental organizations in Malaysia supported Turkey.³⁶ This case led to a strong rapprochement between the two countries' societies about

34 "Conference: Malaysia-Turkey: Strategic Partnership in Globalized Asia", *SETA Foundation*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUgBFqscVHs>, (Date of Accession: 01.12.2017); "Malezya-Türkiye: Küreselleşen Asya'da Stratejik Ortaklık", *SETA*, <https://www.setav.org/etkinlikler/malezya-turkiye-kuresellesen-asyada-stratejik-ortaklik/>, (Date of Accession: 01.12.2017).

35 "July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey and People's Victory", *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey* 2016, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/assets/dosya/15Temmuz/15temmuz_en.pdf, (Date of Accession: 03.12.2017).

36 "Fetö'nün Darbe Girişimine Dünyadan Tepkiler", *Haberler.com*, <https://www.haberler.com/feto-nun-darbe-girisimine-dunyadan-tepkiler-8640934-haberi/>, (Date of Accession: 03.12.2017).

the political perspective. This situation has expanded to include politicians and political parties. For example, on September 1 to 4, 2016, the Asian Political Parties Conference was held in Kuala Lumpur, and the July 15 coup attempt was an issue that was rejected by all political parties in Asia.³⁷ Hence, the political cooperation between Turkey and Malaysia in the context of July 15 has extended to the cooperation between Asia-Malaysia-Turkey. Third, after July 15, Malaysia and Turkey's political actors have come together around a robust political harmony. Thanks to this strong harmony in political relations, Malaysia has put into practice its support for Turkey. In this context, Malaysia extradited three members of the Fethullah Gulen Terrorist Organization (FETO) to Turkey.³⁸ Given that many countries around the world are reluctant to deport FETO members, this case becomes a remarkable example in terms of understanding the positive level in relations between Turkey and Malaysia.

As of today, there is no problem in Turkey-Malaysia political relations, and there is a certain consensus between the actors related to bilateral political relations. Additionally, on some issues related to regional policy, the actors support each other except when national interests may take precedence over regional interest. For example, both countries opposed the US invasion of Iraq, and Malaysia supported Turkey after the Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis between Turkey and Israel.³⁹ However, during the Arab Uprising in 2011, Turkey actively supported the protesters in the Middle East, but Malaysia had pursued a more cautious stance.⁴⁰ This situation is due to Turkey and Malaysia adopted different perceptions and attitudes about the Muslim Brotherhood during the revolution in Egypt. While Turkey saw the Muslim Brotherhood's power as a

37 Sibel Eraslan, "Asya Ülkeleri '15 Temmuz' Hakkında Ne Düşünüyor?", *Star*, <http://www.star.com.tr/yazar/asya-ulkeleri-15-temmuz-hakkinda-ne-dusunuyor-yazi-1140090/>, (Date of Accession: 03.12.2017).

38 "Malezya, 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimiyle Bağlantıları Nedeniyle Üç Türk'ü İade Etti", *Sabah*, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2017/05/12/malezya-15-temmuz-darbe-girisimiyle-baglantilari-nedeniyle-uc-turku-iade-etti>, (Date of Accession: 03.12.2017).

39 Idris-Kurtbağ, *loc. cit.*

40 Bülent Aras-Sinan Ekim, *Malaysia and the Arab Spring*, POMEAS, İstanbul 2005, p. 7.

reflection of the will of the people in the political sphere, Malaysia stated that the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the political life of Egypt would harm the democratization process.⁴¹ Another issue was that the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Cavusoglu and Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman discussed the situation of Arakan Muslims in a telephone conversation dated September 2017.⁴² Based upon these points, we can make the following determinations about the position of regional and global issues in Turkey-Malaysia relations: (1) As long as there are shared values or similar foreign policy interests, Turkey and Malaysia have adopted a common point of view as in the case of Mavi Marmara, and (2) Turkey and Malaysia have not identified their interest areas, and they have not created common policies about regional and global issues. For instance, Turkey and Malaysia have not effectively used the OIC, and in the context of the OIC, they have not taken any practical step until today. There are two reasons for this case. First, although Turkey and Malaysia sometimes had a common view on some issues related to regional and global politics, they do not possess the strong will to develop action plans about the problems in the Muslim world such as the Arakan and Palestinian issues. Second, the two countries have evaluated bilateral relations independently of their positive potential in many areas such as democracy, political participation, and pluralism that could be considered positive for the Muslim world.

We can propose the following points on issues that might create cooperation potential between the two countries. Turkey, which decided to develop institutional relations with ASEAN in 1999, became a party to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (ASEAN/TAC) in 2010. In this process, a 'sectoral dialogue partnership' was established between Turkey and ASEAN on the

41 "Turkey and Malaysia Held up as Beacons of Hope", *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/77a2a2c6-3f7e-11e0-a1ba-00144feabdc0>, (Date of Accession: 14.12.2017).

42 "Çavuşođlu, Malezyyalı Mevkidaşıyla Telefonda Görüşti", *Anadolu Agency*, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/-cavusoglu-malezyalı-mevkidasiyla-telefonda-gorustu/901223>, (Date of Accession: 20.12.2017).

50th anniversary of the ASEAN establishment.⁴³ An important point to note is that Turkey's goal towards ASEAN is the "dialogue partnership".⁴⁴ However, ASEAN has suspended the status of 'dialogue partnership' with a moratorium. Turkey which has been in contact with the member states to reactivate the process of 'dialogue partnership', can take the support of Malaysia, one of the founding and important countries of ASEAN in this process. In other words, it can conduct lobbying activities in ASEAN states through cooperation or rational relations to be developed with Malaysia. In doing so, the advantages of the partnership to be established with Turkey can be expressed effectively both for Malaysia and for other members. Besides that, Turkey and Malaysia can develop their political relations more strongly to solve the problems of the Arakan Muslims and to increase their effectiveness in the Southeast Asian Regional system. Considering that Malaysia is one of the countries reaching Myanmar's government, Ankara and Kuala Lumpur need to develop multidimensional cooperation.⁴⁵ Institutionalization of this cooperation will provide an alternative perspective not only on a current crisis but also on all political issues.

The successful transformation of Malaysia and Turkey can be an example for the Middle East and the African States involved in the process of change. Furthermore, for the Muslim world, Malaysia and Turkey can develop a common view and a strategy. In this context, Turkey and Malaysia can actively use the OIC, in which they are both members but have not yet developed a common point of view until nowadays. That is, Ankara-Kuala Lumpur relations should be evaluated not only in diplomatic terms but also from a multidimensional perspective concerning the values, positions, and roles of Malaysia and Turkey in the regional and global system.

43 "Turkey Becomes Sectoral Dialogue Partner with ASEAN", *Daily Sabah*, <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/08/08/turkey-becomes-sectoral-dialogue-partner-with-asean>, (Date of Accession: 04.12.2017).

44 "ASEAN", *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/guneydogu-asya-ulkeleri-birligi.tr.mfa>, (Date of Accession: 05.12.2017).

45 "Malezya'dan Arakanlı Müslümanlara Yardım", *Euronews*, <https://tr.euronews.com/2017/02/09/malezya-dan-arakanli-muslumanlara-yardim>, (Date of Accession: 04.12.2017).

Common interests and problems in economic relations

Although Turkey and Malaysia have pursued different development strategies, both countries attach great importance to the development of economic relations. This situation is closely related to two basic dynamics. First, both actors want to increase the welfare of their people and to be among the world's most important economies. For this to happen, the two actors have tried to adopt a robust approach in foreign economic relations and to provide economic diversity. With these methods, they want to increase their trade indicators positively. Second, as stated by the leaders of both countries during their visits, from a commercial point of view, Turkey sees Malaysia as an important country to access commercial markets in Southeast Asia, and similarly, Malaysia wants to reach the business areas in Europe through Turkey.⁴⁶ Therefore, both Turkey and Malaysia are aware that the positive results of developing economic relations will be multidimensional. For example, Malaysia, one of the world's largest palm oil manufacturers, opened an office in Istanbul to reach countries in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and organized seminars and various trade fairs on this subject.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, in addition to these two basic theoretical dynamics, in practice, economic relations have been closely related to the industrial products and capacities of the actors.

Orman stated that based on the small size of the trade volume, the performance in the bilateral trade and business relations was low in the early 2000s.⁴⁸ However, since 2009, Turkey-Malaysia economic relations had increased in general, except for the small-scale declines during periods of financial crisis.

46 Orman, *op. cit.*, p. 150-151; "Conference: Malaysia-Turkey...", *loc. cit.*

47 "Malezya, Palm Yađını Avrupa'ya Pazarlamak için İstanbul'da Ofis Açtı", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/malezya-palm-yagini-avrupa-ya-pazarlamak-icin-istanbul-da-ofis-acti-12206474>, (Date of Accession: 13.12.2017).

48 Orman, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

Table-1: Turkey’s Trade with Malaysia (U.S. Dollars)

Years	Exports	Imports	Volume of Trade	Balance
2000	39,359	268,640	307,999	-229,281
2001	35,281	239,370	274,651	-204,089
2002	152,3	244,6	396,9	-92,3
2003	227,3	390,7	617,9	-163,4
2007	82,8	1.253,0	1.335,8	-1.170,2
2008	98,2	1.512,4	1.610,6	-1.414,1
2009	140,0	959,8	1.099,7	-819,8
2010	225,1	1.124,0	1.349,1	-899,0
2011	182,6	1.567,5	1.750,1	-1.384,9
2012	165,6	1.278,3	1.443,8	-1.112,7
2013	272,1	1.230,8	1.502,9	-958,7
2014	315,0	1.161,0	1.476,0	-846,0
2015	357,1	1.339,2	1.696,4	-982,0
2016	321,5	1.996,9	2.318,4	-1.675,3
2017	286,2	3.138,5	3.424,7	-2.852,2

As shown in the table, trade volume which was 307.999 million dollars in 2000 increased to 3.424,7 billion dollars in 2017. These figures showed that there was more than a tenfold increase in trade volume. Regarding trade, Turkey’s exports to Malaysia amounted to 286,2 million dollars in 2017, while imports in the same year were at 3.138,5 billion dollars. There is a foreign trade deficit for Turkey; this shows that Turkey is in a very disadvantaged position in the economy, which is one of the main topics of bilateral relations. This situation is a serious agenda item in interstate relations and since 2010 various negotiations and initiatives are carried out to reduce the trade deficit. In this context, the “Double Taxation Avoidance” agreement signed between Turkey and Malaysia on September 27, 1994, was rearranged on February 17, 2010, to solve the tax problems, to remove potential barriers to information exchange

and to establish administrative assistance mechanisms.⁴⁹ In this axis, Turkey-Malaysia Business Council Chairman Mirzan Mahathir emphasized the importance of the continuity of the agreements to overcome the trade deficit imbalances.⁵⁰

The turning point in economic relations is the free trade agreement signed by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak during his visit to Turkey in 2014. This agreement entered into force in August 2015. The agreement aims to increase trade volume from \$ 1.5 billion to \$ 5 billion. Besides that, in agreement, one of the most important goals is that the existing customs duties should not be raised, and new customs duties must not be introduced. It intends to remove customs duties for some products and to reduce customs duties on important goods such as palm oil. In addition to goods trade, it aims to increase service trade and mutual investments.⁵¹ Through the free trade agreement, Turkey aims to benefit from Malaysia's export potential and the variety of sectors in this country because Malaysia is considered among the "priority countries" by the Ministry of the Economy of the Republic of Turkey.⁵² Moreover, Turkey wants to balance or reduce the trade deficit, which is approximately \$ 1 billion. On the other hand, Malaysia aims to benefit from Turkey's economic transformation positively.

Another dimension of economic relations is the mutual investments of businesses of both countries. For instance, in 2014, Malaysia Airports Holding decided to acquire the entire stake in Sabiha Gökçen Airport, where it had previously bought 60

49 "Türkiye-Malezya Çifte Vergilendirmeyi Önleme Anlaşması..", *Milliyet*, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-malezya-cifte-vergilendirmeyi-onleme-anlasmasi--ekonomi-1200299/>, (Date of Accession: 14.12.2017).

50 Kadir Temiz, "Türkiye'nin Güneydoğu Asya Politikası 2011", Burhanettin Duran et al., ed., *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2011*, SETA Publishing, Ankara, 2012, p. 630.

51 "Turkey-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement Comprehensive Assessment Note", *The Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Turkey*, <https://www.ekonomi.gov.tr/portal/content/conn/UCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/web/D%C4%B1%C5%9F%20%C4%B0li%C5%9Fkiler/Serbest%20Ticaret%20Anla%C5%9Fmalar%C4%B1/Y%C3%BCr%C3%BCrl%C3%BCkte%20Bulunan%20STAlar/ekler/Malezya%20STA%20Analiz.pdf?lve>, (Date of Accession: 12.12.2017), p. 2.

52 *Ibid.*

percent.⁵³ Another remarkable investment is that the Malaysian Investment Company Khazanah purchased 75 percent of Acibadem hospitals.⁵⁴ Similarly, the Turkish government and businesses carry out significant sales and investments in Malaysia. To illustrate, in February 2011, Turkey made its biggest export contract with Malaysia in the defence industry, and with this agreement, Turkey will produce 257 pars armoured correspondents for the Malaysian army for \$ 600 million.⁵⁵ Evyap Holding, which has a corporate tax exemption for ten years from the Malaysian government, makes an investment of \$ 130 million in Malaysia to build the world's largest oleo chemistry and soap facility.⁵⁶

Despite the free trade agreement and increasing investments, there is no significant decline in Turkey's foreign trade deficit. Moreover, there is no remarkable development in the economic relations between the two countries. We can say that there are three reasons for this situation. (1) Economic relations are carried out with a classical economic perspective rather than common concrete goals and cooperation projects. Although the free trade agreement has diversified the contents of import and export products, this has not resulted in significant outcomes in economic relations. The high market value of the products imported by Turkey is the main reason why the foreign trade deficit does not decrease.⁵⁷ (2) The fact that actors do not know the quality of each other's products and do not advertise to domestic markets are essential problems in bilateral economic relations.⁵⁸ The Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), which is aware of this problem, organized a seminar on "Malaysia Investment and Business Opportunities" in Ankara on 22 February 2017, and it started to make informative

53 "Sabiha Gökçen'in Tamamı Malezyalıların Oldu!", *Milliyet*, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/sabiha-gokcen-in-tamami/ekonomi/detay/1959056/default.htm>, (Date of Accession: 14.12.2017).

54 "Malezyalı Acibadem", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/malezyal-acibadem-24419197>, (Date of Accession: 14.12.2017).

55 "Tek Kalemde 600 Milyon Dolarlık Satış", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/tek-kalemde-600-milyon-dolarlik-satis-17088507>, (Date of Accession: 14.12.2017).

56 Vahap Munyar, "350 Milyon Dolarlık Üretime Soyundu", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/350-milyon-dolarlik-uretime-soyundu-21646437>, (Date of Accession: 15.12.2017).

57 "Turkey-Malaysia Free...", *op. cit.*, p. 17.

58 "Malezya Ülke Raporu", *Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu*, 2014, p. 33.

meetings on the provincial basis. (3) As Mahathir Mohamad points out, the distance between the two countries and the absence of a convenient transportation system between them are important factors that negatively affect economic relations.⁵⁹ Mahathir gives the following example in this context: Europe can make a profitable trade with Malaysia due to its advanced transportation system. The lack of an advanced transportation system causes medium-sized investors to be less effective in economic relations. To implement the free trade agreement efficiently, all these technical and commercial barriers that affect relationships must eliminate.

Positive Perceptions and Cultural Relations

In the 2000s, Turkey-Malaysia cultural relations developed remarkably well. In the formation of this relationship, positive perceptions of the parties towards each other have been extremely useful. As analysed before, the Ottoman State helped the Malacca Sultanate in the face of the Portuguese, and prominent cultural connections were established between the Ottomans and the Malays. In historical context, we can say that the Malays have a positive perception towards the Turks. In the modern age, the Malays have favourable opinions about Turks due to the transformation of Turkey peacefully and effectively under the Justice and Development Party. Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey expresses regret over the injustices in Palestine, openly articulates contradictions in the behaviour of global actors such as the United States and calls for a more equitable world order with statements such as “the world is bigger than five”.⁶⁰ According to the Malays, these policies are likely to improve the social and political status of the Muslim ummah. This situation has also created a great sense of trust towards Turkish leaders and people.⁶¹ From the perspective of the Malays,

59 “Malezya Başbakanı: Batı, Bize Yapma Dedliğini Kendisi Yapıyor”, *T24*, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/malezya-basbakani-bati-bize-yapma-dedigini-kendisi-yapiyor,206869>, (Date of Accession: 17.12.2017).

60 “Erdoğan: Dünya 5’ten Büyüktür”, *Al Jazeera Turk*, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/erdogan-dunya-5ten-buyuktur>, (Date of Accession: 21.12.2017).

61 “Conference: Malaysia-Turkey: Strategic Partnership in Globalized Asia”, *SETA Foundation*.

Turkey, which tries to be with the oppressed, and represents the Muslim world, does not act with unilateral interest or with a sense of exploitation.⁶² On the other hand, the foreign press has misrepresented Turkey's political, economic and social outlook in recent years. For this reason, some of the Malays look at Turkey with suspicion and behave in this context. To demonstrate, when Malay students want to go to university in Turkey, their families, who follow the foreign press, sometimes do not allow them.⁶³ To counter this, the Kuala Lumpur Yunus Emre Institute organizes programs for Malaysian families which describes the social life and developments in Turkey.⁶⁴

To Turks, Malaysia was a reliable port for people who suffered from the February 28 post-modern coup. In particular, students who were deprived of university education in Turkey due to their headscarf and score distribution, preferred Malaysia to get their university education.⁶⁵ Therefore, the graduates of religious vocational high school and the people, who were deprived of their freedom had to live in Malaysia. These people shared their favourable experiences with society when they returned to Turkey, and this enabled a positive perspective towards Malaysia. After a certain period, Malaysia became an important place for people who are interested in Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, some people in Turkey still have negative ideas about Malaysia. Specifically, secular people and academics who do not have detailed knowledge related to Malaysia. They define Malaysia as an undeveloped country in terms of cultural, democratic and political rights.⁶⁶ In the context

62 Ömer Altun, The Director of Yunus Emre Institute; interviewed by author 17 December 2018.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 After the February 28, 1997 coup, when Religious Vocational High School (Imam Hatip in Turkish Language) graduates in Turkey wanted to study at the University, their school scores were less calculated than normal high school students. This situation continued until 2010.

66 "Türkiye, İtalya mı Malezya mı Olacak?", *Gazete Vatan*, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/turkiye--italya-mi-malezya-mi-olacak--156223-siyaset/>, (Date of Accession: 20.12.2017); "Harvard Profesörü Dani Rodrik: Türkiye'nin Demokrasiye Geri Dönebileceğinden Umudu Kestim", *T24*, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/harvard-profesoru-dani-rodrik-turkiyenin-demokrasiye-geri-donebileceginden-umudu-kestim,352804>, (Date of Accession: 20.12.2017); Kerem Kılıçdaroğlu, "Türkiye Malezya Olur mu?", *Cumhuriyet*, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/727411/Turkiye_Malezya_olur_mu_.html, (Date of Accession: 20.12.2017).

of political positions, they regard the similarities between the two countries as objectionable, and therefore, they have a negative viewpoint on Malaysia. However, since this perspective contains extraordinary artificial and ideological dimensions, it does not have a capacity that will adversely affect relations and positive cultural perceptions.⁶⁷

The most crucial dimension of Turkey-Malaysia cultural relations is the Yunus Emre Institute in Kuala Lumpur, which started education activities in February 2017.⁶⁸ It is possible to examine the role of this institution in cultural relations in two points. (i) Education activities: Under the “My Choice is Turkish” project; agreements have been signed between the Institute and some schools in Malaysia to teach Turkish as a second foreign language or as an elective course. In this context, the Yunus Emre Institute and Kuala Lumpur Kolej Teknologi Darulnaim signed the agreement to teach Turkish as an elective course.⁶⁹ Turkish courses at the University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) are another example of this. (ii) Social and cultural activities: The Yunus Emre Institute organizes Ottoman language courses, archery activities, film shows, commemoration programs, and academic conferences. Most of these activities are carried out in cooperation with the Turkish-Malay partnership, and they include the cultural values of both countries. For example, a Malay person, who receives oud musical training in Turkey, gives oud courses. The institute also tries to introduce the Malay language as an elective course in at least one school in Turkey, and it works for the mutual translation of relevant studies.⁷⁰ Through mutual cultural interaction, people from both countries learn different cultural values belonging to each other.

67 Ruřen Çakır, “Türkiye Malezya Olur mu?”, <http://rusencakir.com/TURKIYE-MALEZYA-OLUR-MU1/827>, (Date of Accession: 24.12.2017).

68 Ömer Altun, The Director of Yunus Emre Institute; interviewed by author 17 December 2018.

69 “Malezya’da Türkçe Okul Müfredatı”, *Sabah*, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2018/04/20/malezya-turkce-okul-mufredati>, (Date of Accession, 20.05.2018).

70 Ömer Altun, The Director of Yunus Emre Institute; interviewed by author 17 December 2018.

Another channel of cultural relations is the cooperation activities between educational institutions. In this framework, “Centre for Malay World and Ottoman Studies”, which was set up in cooperation with the International Islamic University of Malaysia and the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University, is a notable example. The main aim of this centre is to provide opportunities for the emergence of knowledge on Ottoman-Malay relations, to create a knowledge base about the region and to play an instrumental role in cultural cooperation.⁷¹ This centre can ensure that cultural interaction in Turkey-Malaysia relations is multidimensional and mutual rather than one dimensional.⁷² Nevertheless, because newly established centre needs a robust infrastructure and financial source, its effectiveness decreases in academic. Another example is the institutional cooperation between the Albukhary International University (Malaysia) and the Ibn Haldun University (Turkey). The officials of both universities argued that this partnership would improve cultural and social relations.⁷³ However, this partnership has ended in a way that we do not know why.

In connection with educational institutions, another dimension of cultural relations between the two countries consists of students studying in the framework of exchange or scholarship programs. In recent years, the number of these students has increased significantly.⁷⁴ These students introduce the culture and history of their country and therefore serve as a cultural ambassador. Nonetheless, this area of cultural cooperation faces capacity and coordination problems.

71 “About”, The Center for Ottoman-Malay World Studies, *Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University*, <http://osmanlimalay.fsm.edu.tr/Osmanli-Malay-Dunyasi-Calismalari-Uygulama-ve-Arastirma-Merkezi-HAKKIMIZDA--Faaliyet-Alanlari>, (Date of Accession: 28.12.2017).

72 Özyay Mehmet, “Malay Dünyası ve Osmanlı Çalışmaları Merkezi’ne Doğru (I)” *Güneydoğu Asya Çalışmaları*, <http://guneydoguasyacalismalari.com/2015/10/28/malay-dunyasi-ve-osmanli-calismalari-merkezine-dogru-i-towards-the-center-for-malay-world-and-ottoman-studies/>, (Date of Accession: 27.12.2017).

73 “Turkey’s Ibn Haldun, Malaysia’s International Al Bukhary Universities Partner Up”, *Daily Sabah*, <https://www.dailysabah.com/education/2017/05/07/turkeys-ibn-haldun-malaysias-international-al-bukhary-universities-partner-up>, (Date of Accession: 28.12.2017).

74 “Information Management System”, *The Higher Education Council*, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, (Date of Accession: 25.12.2017).

Conclusion

This paper has traced the development of relations between Turkey and Malaysia from as way back as the 1500s. However, the focal point is on the relationship between these two countries in the first two decades of the 21st century. Using the framework on Turkey-Malaysia relations based on the concepts of foreign policy perspectives, the nature of regional and international systems, foreign policy behaviours and secondary factors, we have shown that the importance of the relationship between these two countries fluctuates. Nevertheless, the paper has also revealed that the relationship has never plunged into conflict. The primary determinant for the increase in bilateral ties between Turkey and Malaysia is the change in the foreign policy perspective of actors at the beginning of the 21st century. Turkey witnessed the success of the AKP at the first election it competed in 2003 and with it came a reconfiguration of Turkey's foreign policy from the West towards Muslim countries such as Malaysia. Accordingly, when Abdullah Badawi replaced Mahathir Mohamad as Malaysia's prime minister, the country's policy became one of Islamization from Mahathir's more economic-centric Look East Policy. These developments have brought Turkey and Malaysia into each other's orbit even though they are a continent apart.

Unfortunately, while there have been close political, economic and cultural ties, they have not always been without fault. Politically, while Malaysia has been a supporter of Erdogan's administration, it disagreed with Erdogan's approval of the Muslim Brotherhood's active involvement in the Arab uprising. Regarding trade, while there has been an upsurge in trade volume, it was insufficient to solve Turkey's trade deficit due to the weak infrastructure connecting the two countries. Finally, while there have been attempts for educational and cultural exchanges, we also saw some of these initiatives abandoned in recent years.

In conclusion, there is immense potential for these two countries to develop a steady relationship. However, it is an indisputable fact that much political will is needed to create a more fertile

environment in bilateral and multilateral relations. Thanks to a stable and extensive political will, the close ties between Turkey and Malaysia can go further than just two Muslim democratic countries that envision to be the leaders of the Muslim world.

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