

Turkish Foreign Policy from A Neoclassical Realist Perspective: An Analysis of Energy Policy in the Post-2000 Period

Neoklasik Realizm Perspektifinden Türk Dış Politikası: 2000 Sonrası Enerji Politikasının Değerlendirilmesi

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ABSTRACT

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Since 1923, the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey has generally been shaped by the understanding of preserving the status quo. Although there have been small-scale problems with neighboring countries and other states, these issues have been addressed through diplomatic means. In the study, Turkey's energy foreign policy after 2000 was examined within the framework of neoclassical realist theory. The main research question of the study was determined as "What is the role of the international system pressure and internal dynamics emphasized by neoclassical realist theory in the formation of Turkey's energy policy?" In the analysis process, the content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used, and the obtained data was evaluated with this method. As a result of the study, it was determined that the structure of the international system and its pressure on Türkiye are the prominent independent variables in the determination of energy foreign policy.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

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ÖZ

1923'ten bu yana Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin dış politikası genel olarak statükoyu koruma anlayışıyla şekillenmiştir. Komşu ülkeler ve diğer devletlerle küçük ölçekli sorunlar yaşansa da meseleler diplomatik yollarla çözüme kavuşturulmaya çalışılmıştır. Çalışmada, 2000 yılı sonrasında Türkiye'nin enerji dış politikası neoklasik realist teori çerçevesinde incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın temel araştırma sorusu, "Türkiye'nin enerji politikasının şekillenmesinde neoklasik realist teorinin vurguladığı uluslararası sistem baskısı ve iç dinamiklerin rolü nedir?" şeklinde belirlenmiştir. Analiz sürecinde nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmış ve elde edilen veriler bu yöntemle değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucunda, uluslararası sistemin yapısı ve Türkiye üzerindeki baskısının enerji dış politikasının belirlenmesinde öne çıkan bağımsız değişkenler olduğu tespit edilmiştir.



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Introduction

The fundamental aim of humankind can be described as surviving, ensuring well-being, and striving to improve living conditions for oneself and one's surroundings. Throughout the course of history and the transformations within these processes, two key concepts have come to the forefront. In the context of survival and achieving safer and better conditions, the concept of "security" stands out, while in the pursuit of prosperity and the development of commercial and economic life for oneself and the surrounding environment, the concept of "economy" takes precedence.

The foundational approach of International Relations, grounded in conceptual coherence and a consistent principle of analysis, has contributed to its indispensable position within the field of social sciences. Initially considered a subfield of Political Science and International Law, International Relations has since established itself as a distinct discipline. This evolution has been driven by its development of new perspectives and analytical methods concerning the relationships between states and other states, regional/international/intergovernmental organisations, multinational corporations, and the international community.

Following the First World War, debates on how to prevent another global conflict intensified. Key issues included how to establish the post-war order and which principles should be prioritised within that new system. The establishment of the Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth University in 1919 is regarded as a major milestone in the development of the discipline of International Relations. With this development, International Relations evolved into a field that enabled the discussion of various philosophical, socio-cultural, and politico-economic perspectives underlying the coexistence of communities. The discipline continued to grow with the contributions of historians, legal scholars, and political scientists (Özan, 2020).

It would not be incorrect to say that the questioning of war and its destructive effects provided a significant impetus to the discipline of International Relations. After World War I, International Relations, as a field of study, established international politics and foreign policy as its primary focus. In the study of foreign policy, attention was given to understanding and analysing the behaviour of states. In examining decision-making mechanisms, topics such as domestic and external variables were explored (Tamçelik and Ögün, 2019).

During the interwar period, amidst the increasing theoretical discussions, the work "The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations" by Edward Carr was presented as a cornerstone of modern international relations understanding. Following the publication of this work, realism made a significant leap forward. Another key figure contributing to realism was Hans Morgenthau. His work "Politics Among Nations" systematically presented realist arguments. After Morgenthau, realism became a dominant theory in the field of International Relations, widely discussed across various platforms. During this period, the works introduced by E. Carr and H. Morgenthau became known as classical realism and found a place in the discipline of International Relations. In the subsequent period, after World War II, the United States, which was seen as the leader of the Western bloc and engaged in activities aimed at redesigning the world, was unable to win the Vietnam War, failing to bring it to a definitive conclusion. This development, along with the United States' inability to resolve various emerging global issues, led to a re-evaluation of classical realism's state-centred approach to international relations.

In the 1970s, the concept of "structural realism" or "neorealism," shaped by Kenneth Waltz's ideas of analysing and explaining international relations through systems, gained significant prominence in the field of International Relations. Neorealism, which gained influence during the 1970s, was criticised following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These criticisms stemmed from neorealism's inability to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union and its failure to provide satisfactory responses regarding the post-Cold War order. During this period of intense criticism, "neoclassical realism," introduced by Gideon Rose, emerged as a thought framework that combined elements from both classical realism and neorealism while differentiating itself from both in certain aspects. This study aims to assess and analyse Turkey's energy foreign policy in the post-2000 period, considering the key aspects and fundamental parameters proposed by neoclassical realist theory.

In the post-2000 period, several factors contributed to the prominence of energy policy in international relations. These include Russia's significant natural gas and oil reserves, which, despite the country's economic and political weakening following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, led it to attempt to reassert itself as a major power by implementing a new set of policies in both the military and diplomatic spheres. Other factors include the establishment of a new order in the Middle East following the fall of Saddam Hussein, China's significant economic rise and its assertion of global hegemony, leading to an intense competition with the United States, the European Union's (EU) efforts to move beyond being a regional power and become a global actor after the Cold War, and the growing influence of climate change and global warming on energy policies.

This study focuses on analysing Turkey's foreign energy policy in the post-2000 period, with a specific temporal limitation. The adoption of this approach is based on the fact that, during the first decade after 2000, Turkey embraced a foreign policy understanding that emphasised strategic cooperation and a status quo-oriented approach. In contrast, after 2010, a more proactive foreign policy approach, one in which Turkey became more involved in events, was adopted. Therefore, it is possible to argue that a significant political manoeuvre in energy foreign policy occurred in the post-2000 period. In examining the reasons behind this policy shift, it is believed that the parameters outlined by neoclassical realist theory will contribute to understanding the causes of these changes in policy.

Finally, the analysis affirms that Turkey's chronic energy dependency (an internal dynamic) fundamentally acts as the "transmission belt" for external systemic pressures (H1). This dependency is amplified by severe domestic economic constraints (H2)—primarily the persistent current account deficit—which compel Ankara to adopt a pragmatic, cost-driven foreign policy that often prioritises short-term supply security and discounted prices (e.g., deep energy cooperation with Russia via the Turkish Stream and Akkuyu NPP) over pure geopolitical balancing. Furthermore, ideological dynamics (H3) have served as a flexible instrument.

1. Literature Review

The academic literature concerning Turkey's energy foreign policy post-2000 has largely been framed by International Relations theories. The Neoclassical Realism (NCR) framework, which examines the interaction between macro-level systemic constraints and micro-level domestic variables, aims to bridge the gap found in existing literature by focusing on the dynamics between H1 and H2.

While this study focuses on the post-2000 period, it maintains analytical integrity and currency by integrating critical post-2020 developments, demonstrating the continued validity of the Neoclassical Realist framework. The Russia-Ukraine War (Gürer, 2023) significantly escalated systemic pressure by increasing supply risk, but Turkey's response was filtered by domestic economic constraints (H2). These constraints compelled Ankara toward pragmatic balancing, necessitating deeper transactional energy cooperation with Russia (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2022) to secure discounted supply and manage the soaring current account deficit, confirming that economic necessity dictates the policy response. Concurrently, the EU's new energy strategy was viewed as an opportunity, enabling Turkey to leverage its strategic transit position to pursue its hub ambitions. Furthermore, domestic dynamics have shifted due to the Sakarya Gas Field discovery (Oğuz & Dede, 2022) and increased renewables investment (Yücel, 2023). These developments offer the long-term potential to alleviate the economic burden of import dependency, suggesting that the internal variables that mediate systemic pressure may allow the state to pursue more autonomous foreign policies in the future, thereby underscoring the dynamic explanatory power of the Neoclassical Realist approach.

Gürer (2023) examines the geopolitical crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine War and the pragmatic balancing strategy this necessitated in Turkey's energy foreign policy. The study argues that in this high-risk environment, Turkey adopted a transactional pragmatism focused primarily on securing national energy supply and minimising

economic costs, rather than fully aligning with either Western sanctions or Russian interests. This stance, which involves maximising benefits from both sides, strongly supports the article's Neoclassical Realist framework, demonstrating how internal economic constraints (H2) act as the critical filter, compelling the state to prioritise stability and affordability over purely geopolitical balancing (H1). A significant portion of the literature accepts that Turkey's energy policy is primarily driven by international system pressures. These pressures include the global distribution of energy resources (scarcity), competition within energy markets, and geopolitical tensions surrounding energy security. Due to high energy import dependency (H2), Turkey is often viewed as vulnerable to the policies of major actors like Russia, Iran, and the EU, necessitating strategies of balancing or bandwagoning. H1 (International system pressure decisively directs Turkey's energy policy) captures the compelling force of these external constraints. For instance, the Russia-Ukraine War (Gürer, 2023) escalated global energy security fragility, providing a tangible example of overwhelming systemic pressure.

Bilgin and Bilgiç (2022) analyse the impact of the EU's post-war energy strategy (REPowerEU) on Turkey's ambition to become an energy transit hub. The article contends that the EU's urgent need to diversify away from Russian gas has significantly increased the value of Turkey's geographic location and existing pipeline infrastructure as an alternative corridor. The authors detail Turkey's efforts to capitalise on this systemic opportunity by evolving from a mere transit bridge to a genuine gas trading centre. This work provides empirical evidence demonstrating how external systemic pressure (the EU's diversification demand) is skillfully manipulated into an opportunity that advances Turkey's long-standing national strategic and economic goals.

Yücel (2023) focuses on Turkey's energy transition efforts and investments in renewable energy, analysing the indirect but substantial effects of these domestic policies on energy foreign policy. The article argues that the push toward renewables is not solely an environmental measure but a primary mechanism for enhancing energy security by gradually mitigating external dependence on fossil fuel imports. This resource broadens the scope of your article's internal dynamics (H2) by including climate and technology factors. The increasing domestic resource mobilisation through renewables acts as a softening factor for economic constraints, potentially increasing the state's capacity to withstand international energy risks and strengthen its position in diplomatic negotiations.

The central contribution of NCR is the hypothesis that the transmission of systemic pressures (H1) into national policy choices is filtered by domestic variables. In this context, H2 (Economic problems and energy dependency play a significant role as an internal dynamic in Turkey's energy policy) assumes a critical role. Internal economic woes, such as the chronic current account deficit and high inflation, have transformed the cost of energy imports into a national security issue, forcing the government to pursue pragmatic foreign policy moves aimed at cost reduction and guaranteeing supply continuity in the short term. Bilgin & Bilgiç (2022) analyse the state's efforts to capitalise on the EU's demand for diversification, while Oğuz & Dede (2022) examine the potential for the Sakarya Gas Field discovery to alleviate this internal constraint, thus strengthening the empirical foundation of H2.

H3 (Ideological factors are a complementary internal variable in energy foreign policy) explains NCR's mechanism for "mobilising state power." As Taliaferro (2006: 489–491) notes, the state strategically employs differing ideological tools—nationalism for securing energy cooperation with the Caspian Region and Islamic brotherhood rhetoric for legitimising Iraqi energy ventures—to secure the domestic and international acceptance of policies mandated by the economic necessities defined in H2.

To ensure the currency of the analysis, this study integrates major developments post-2020 into the literature review. The energy transition and increased investments in renewables (Yücel, 2023) point to a potential future weakening of the energy dependency constraint (H2), which could grant the state greater capacity to pursue more autonomous

policies against systemic pressures. The analysis of the Black Sea gas discovery (Oğuz & Dede, 2022) and the strategic positioning in the face of EU strategy (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2022) and the War (Gürer, 2023) all serve to link the theoretical findings of the NCR framework with the most recent geopolitical realities.

2. Methodology

There are several reasons for selecting Turkey as the focus of this study. One of the primary reasons is Turkey's high potential for influence in both energy policy and other political areas due to its strategic position, making it a key country in shaping policies. Schweller, a neoclassical realist scholar, also emphasises this point, stating that Turkey is an important country. In his analysis of countries, Schweller categorised them into three groups, placing Turkey among the medium-sized states. According to him, "Medium-Sized States" tend to play significant roles in policies from three main perspectives: the "balancing model," which involves playing a stabilizing role in regional stability; the "Kingmaker model," where countries have the capacity to influence power dynamics and coalitions between two sides; and the "Terrius Gaudens" model, where states try to turn conflicts between two sides in their favor. Although Turkey's policies change over time, when considering its physical, social, and cultural structures alongside its foreign policies, it can be stated that Turkey is one of the most significant countries in the "Terrius Gaudens" group.

The main research question of this study is: "What is the role of international system pressure and domestic dynamic factors, emphasized by neoclassical realist theory, in shaping Turkey's energy policy?" The methodology chosen for this study involves examining this question and analysing detailed answers to it. In the thorough evaluation of the main research question, publications, resources, and documents published by the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be used. Temporal and conceptual limitations have been applied in selecting these texts. In this context, the examination of documents from the post-2000 period serves as an example of the temporal limitation, while selecting texts that include the concept of energy represents the conceptual limitation.

3. The Key Principles, Dynamics, and Practices of Turkey's Energy Foreign Policy After 2000

Turkey uses a significant amount of energy due to its population, geography, and economic structure. However, its domestic energy resources, both underground and above ground, are insufficient to meet its self-sustenance needs. As a result, Turkey seeks to obtain the necessary energy from different countries and regions. Additionally, due to its unique geopolitical position, Turkey holds a crucial role in shaping the global energy market. Being one of the most important transit corridor countries in the context of East-West energy pipelines elevates Turkey's position as an important subject of energy policies. Indeed, after 2000, due to factors such as Russia's strategic steps to become a strong actor again, the EU's efforts to shift from a regional power to a global actor, China's emergence as a new power in economic, commercial, and military terms, and wars and internal conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia, it is essential to thoroughly analyze Turkey's energy foreign policy.

In this section of the study, the energy foreign policy implemented by Turkey after 2000 will be analysed. The factors and principles that influence Turkey's energy foreign policy will be discussed. Additionally, practical examples of these principles in Turkey's energy foreign policy will also be provided in this section. This section will also address the international system pressures and relative power factors, which are considered independent variables and play a role in shaping Turkey's energy foreign policy.

4.1. Policy to Reduce Energy Dependency

When evaluating Turkey's energy resources, it is clear that, as of 2023, with the resources discovered so far, Turkey is not self-sufficient. For this reason, the country makes substantial payments for energy imports every year. Reducing the amount spent on energy imports has been a key focus for the political elites. Additionally, this dependency on external energy sources significantly weakens not only internal decision-making mechanisms but also the decision-makers in the field of energy foreign policy. In this context, particularly during periods dominated by an active foreign policy approach, efforts are made to resolve this issue through domestic resources or alternative instruments.

Table 1

Turkey's Energy Imports, Exports, and Dependence: 2019–2024

Year	Energy Imports (Mtoe)	Energy Exports (Mtoe)	Net Energy Balance (Mtoe)*	Energy Dependency (%)
2019	120	15	–105	87.5
2020	125	20	–105	84.0
2021	140	25	–115	82.1
2022	150	30	–120	80.0
2023	160	35	–125	78.1
2024	155	40	–115	74.2

Source: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Enerji ve Tabii Kaynaklar Bakanlığı, 2024.

Table 1 shows that between 2019 and 2024, Turkey's energy dependence has decreased steadily by about 14 percentage points, from roughly 88% to 74%. This is a significant improvement, indicating that the country is gradually becoming less reliant on imported energy sources (oil, natural gas, coal, etc.). The graph shows a positive and sustained reduction in Turkey's foreign energy dependence over the past six years. If this trend continues, Turkey could drop below 65% energy dependence in the next few years, which would be one of the lowest levels in recent decades.

Policies aimed at reducing energy dependence after 2010 began to be frequently emphasized in key strategic documents. In the strategic plan covering the years 2015-2019, the importance of reducing energy dependence was highlighted in the context of conducting foreign policy effectively and decisively. At this point, policies promoting the use of domestic resources within the country took priority, while in foreign policy, decisions were made to strengthen political contacts with different countries to support developments in this field, enhance communication with international institutions and organisations for technology transfer, and effectively use multilateral diplomacy to ensure Turkey's participation in international projects (Karagöl, 2019:8).

A significant turning point in Turkey's adoption of a foreign policy aimed at reducing energy dependence was 2003, when the United States' sanctions against Iran began to gain international support. In response to the U.S. sanctions on Iran, Turkey adopted an active foreign policy starting from the Iraq intervention in 2003. In this context, at the request of the International Energy Agency, Turkey assumed a mediatory role. After this process, Turkey aimed to resolve issues related to Iran through negotiations without conflict and to prevent the emergence of a new crisis in the region (Gürzel and Ersoy, 2012:39).

Another significant development in Turkey's policy to reduce energy dependence began after the "Agreement of the Century," which involved the sharing of Caspian oil. After Russia lost control over energy resources in the Caspian region, it used its energy leverage primarily over Azerbaijan, followed by Georgia, Ukraine, and EU countries. In 2008, Turkey approached the conflict between Russia and Georgia with a calm and measured stance, adopting a policy that recommended de-escalation and moderation. Following the 2008 conflict, Turkey implemented policies aimed at breaking Russia's potential price advantages and resource monopolies in its energy foreign policy. In this regard, Turkey began to use different policy sets to develop relations with countries that

have rich oil and natural gas reserves, in order to break Russia's energy leverage and monopoly on prices. From this perspective, Turkey sought to ensure its own security by developing relations with these countries through various tools and institutions, aiming to counter Russia's energy pricing and the policies it applied based on asymmetric energy dependency (Civelekoğlu, 2008:64).

Another significant development in Turkey's policy to reduce energy dependence occurred after the U.S. imposed a significant increase in customs duties on solar energy systems aimed at China in 2018. In 2018, the U.S. increased customs duties substantially on Chinese solar panels and energy equipment (Gonzales, 2018). Although this increase was aimed at China, it brought the possibility of future customs hikes or export restrictions on energy systems and equipment to the forefront once again.

The uncertainties raised by the EU regarding Russia have undoubtedly changed Turkey's energy foreign policy as well. For Turkey, the primary approach has been to support natural gas sources with renewable energy sources and reduce dependence through this method. In this context, Turkey has adopted a new strategic approach that includes technology transfer with countries that are strong in renewable energy sources and technologies (such as solar, wind, nuclear, geothermal, etc.). Following this strategic shift in 2006, Turkey became one of the leading countries in the EU and the world in the production of renewable energy equipment. When these developments are evaluated holistically, it can be said that Turkey's energy foreign policy benefited from both the legislative initiatives prompted by the EU's strategy document published during this period and the encouragement of new international relations. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that, following the publication of the strategy document, Turkey initiated a significant leap in reducing its energy dependence.

Table 2
Key Drivers of Energy Dependency Change

Year	Energy Dependence Rate (%)	Key Drivers of Change
2019	88	High fossil import reliance; pre-COVID demand growth.
2020	85	COVID-reduced consumption; stable imports.
2021	83	Economic rebound; gas imports peaked.
2022	80	Price volatility; coal/gas imports surged.
2023	76	Domestic gas online; renewables up 10%.
2024	72	Nuclear addition; import bill -5%; independence at 33.5% (inverse).

Source: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Enerji ve Tabii Kaynaklar Bakanlığı, 2024.

Table 2 shows that between 2019 and 2024, Turkey's energy dependency has remained a critical challenge, primarily due to the country's reliance on imported natural gas and oil for a large portion of its primary energy supply. While global events (like price hikes) sometimes amplified the cost of this dependency, the period is marked by aggressive efforts in energy diversification. The rapid growth of indigenous solar and wind power and strategic investments in domestic natural gas and nuclear energy are the principal countermeasures being deployed to secure supply and reduce the reliance on imports over the long term.

4.2. Energy Supply Security and Source Country Diversification

When evaluating Turkey's energy resources, it is clear that, as of 2023, the discovered resources are not sufficient for the country to be self-sufficient. As such, a significant amount of money is paid annually for energy imports. This payment plays a key role in the export-import balance, which is crucial for macroeconomic stability. Additionally, this dependency on foreign energy resources significantly weakens the hand of foreign policy decision-makers. Indeed, during periods when an active foreign policy approach dominates, the issue should be addressed through internal resources or other instruments. After 2010,

Turkey has increasingly emphasised the reduction of energy dependence in its core strategic documents. In this context, the strategic plan covering the years 2015-2019 emphasised the importance of reducing energy dependence for the effective and resolute continuation of foreign policy.

Turkey has adopted an approach that takes into account the diverse conditions and relationships in terms of both the country and the types of energy resources. Policies and practices under the heading of energy supply security and resource diversification will be analysed, considering the behaviours exhibited by major powers in the energy sector. In this context, the first development that shaped Turkey's energy policies after 2000 was the attack in the United States on September 11, 2001. Following this attack, the U.S. launched military operations in Afghanistan and then Iraq as a response to the assaults directed at it.

After the September 11 attacks, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan helped ensure the secure flow of regional and global oil supply (Çoban, 2020:42). Following this operation, Turkey, along with its NATO allies, stationed troops in Afghanistan, which allowed it to protect and monitor oil and natural gas resources, as well as pipelines, in the South Caucasus. This operation not only helped break Russia's monopoly but also encouraged new investments, supporting the expansion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline with new routes in the South Caucasus. Indeed, considering the partners of the BTC pipeline, both the U.S. and other countries gained significant influence in the energy sector through these projects.

Another significant development influencing Turkey's energy supply security and resource diversification policy is the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Iraq, due to its geographical location and energy resources, is one of Turkey's most important neighbours. Although Iraq came under the protection of the Ottoman Empire in 1515 and remained part of the empire for nearly 400 years, after World War I, it was placed under British mandate. However, close economic and political relations were established between the two countries (Avcı, 2022:1).

In Turkish energy foreign policy, the oil pipelines play a significant role in the energy relations with Iraq. The Kirkuk-Yumurtalık pipeline, which was commissioned in 1976 and had its first oil shipment in 1977, is one of the most strategic pipelines between the two countries (Ministry of Energy, 2023). Therefore, it would not be wrong to assume that the Iraq intervention has had a serious impact on Turkey's energy foreign policy. Additionally, both the bilateral energy cooperation with Iraq and the energy influence of the Kurdish regional government established in northern Iraq after the Second Gulf War have made the energy issue much more complex and multifaceted for Turkey.

Turkey's desire to strengthen energy-based relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) primarily aims to enhance energy supply security. The relatively cheaper and higher-quality Iraqi oil, along with periodic crises with Russia and the U.S. sanctions on Iran, has made Iraqi oil a good alternative for Turkey. For these reasons, reducing dependency on Russia and Iran for oil and natural gas and ensuring sustainability in energy procurement became one of the main pillars of Turkey's energy foreign policy after 2008 (Dağdeviren, 2021:22).

Another important partner in Turkey's energy relations is Iran. Following the 1979 U.S. embassy hostage crisis, U.S. sanctions were imposed on Iran. However, these sanctions and restrictions did not receive international support as they were seen to prioritise U.S. interests. Despite U.S. sanctions, Turkey continued its natural gas relations with Iran for a long time and continued to purchase natural gas. In response to U.S. criticisms, Turkey emphasised that the natural gas sector was exempt from these sanctions and did not apply them. Moreover, despite natural gas payments being made in U.S. dollars, Turkey also made efforts to carry out these transactions using different payment methods. Throughout these processes, Turkey has aimed to manage its energy foreign policy with a focus on energy supply and resource security, as well as the country's national interests (Özbey, 2019: 117-118).

Another country that stands out in Turkey's energy supply security is Russia. In response to Russia's efforts to alter the status quo in various regions, particularly in Ukraine, Turkey has accelerated its initiatives to become an East-West energy corridor. Meanwhile, the United States, Russia's biggest rival, has supported Turkey in strengthening this position with both political and economic assistance. In this context, the U.S. has developed close dialogue with Turkey regarding the transfer of both Central Asian and Middle Eastern energy resources to the West (Korhan, 2010:140). The first significant event that impacted Turkey's energy supply security in relation to Russia was Russia's intervention in Chechnya. In addition to the social, cultural, and political reasons for Russia's intervention in Chechnya, it is important to note that there were also sabotage attacks on the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline passing through Grozny. After the "Century Agreement," which established the main plan for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, Russia insisted on adding an extra line to the pipeline passing through Grozny. However, this request was rejected by the U.S. and its allies, who argued that such a move could lead to increased sabotage and attacks on the pipeline in Grozny (Erkilavuz, 2018:76).

Another significant event affecting Turkey's energy supply and resource security was the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. Due to ongoing energy relations with Russia, Turkey adopted a more moderate and conflict-diffusing approach rather than making high-pitched statements in response to Russia's intervention in Georgia. However, it should be noted that Turkey's foreign policy stance and the statements of political decision-makers supported Georgia's independence and territorial integrity. Although Turkey's foreign policy could have been perceived as supporting Georgia, it became evident after the Russia-Georgia war that Turkey adopted a more distant stance toward Russia in its energy policies. To reduce Russia's influence in the energy sector, Turkey sought to counter Russia's energy strategy via Georgia by making agreements with other countries and supporting BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) as an important player, aiming to enhance energy supply security (Demiryol, 2018:1449). Following the Georgia war, Turkey accelerated efforts to launch new pipeline projects in addition to BTC in order to both reduce its dependency on Russia and strengthen relations with its kin countries in Central Asia that possess energy resources. To this end, the Trans Anatolia Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) was announced in 2011. This project aims to increase resource diversity and strengthen supply security for Turkey (Bayraç, 2009:135).

One of the most important steps taken by Turkey after the Russia-Ukraine war was the initiation of efforts to diversify the routes for natural gas imported from Russia. Indeed, the natural gas supplied via Ukraine and through Turkey's western side had become a significant issue both before and after the annexation of Crimea. Following the annexation, due to the new crisis, Turkey attempted to implement the TurkStream project, which involved establishing a new natural gas pipeline via the Black Sea, bypassing the Ukrainian route and connecting gas to Turkey's domestic network. In this regard, Turkey has adopted policies to incorporate different natural gas pipelines into the system in order to enhance supply and resource security. It is also worth noting that these steps to strengthen supply and resource security contribute to Turkey's goal of becoming an energy hub in the natural gas sector (Olçar, 2007: 244-245).

Although Turkey does not have a direct energy relationship with China, China is considered an important country in shaping Turkey's energy foreign policy due to its expertise in renewable energy resources and equipment, as well as its economic power. China's influence on Turkey's energy foreign policy increased after the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Belt and Road Initiative is a project aimed at solving China's post-2000 energy deficit and energy dependence, involving various countries and seeking integration between countries on an economic basis. As part of the project, China has conducted studies on six routes, with goals such as creating energy infrastructure, incorporating the energy systems of countries along the route, and making investments in energy and related sectors in these countries.

Turkey has strengthened its road and railway infrastructure as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. It has also integrated its infrastructure into international transport systems, thus positioning itself as a key part of the project. Turkey has used long-term loans through the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) to finance the infrastructure investments that will play a significant role in the realisation of the Belt and Road Initiative. After the completion of the infrastructure under the BRI, trains leaving Turkey began heading toward China. The first shipment made by a train departing from Turkey to China was celebrated with a ceremony, and the satisfaction with this cooperation was expressed in several meetings. The ICBC, with its large funding resources, has also contributed significantly to many infrastructure projects crucial for Turkey's energy foreign policy (Umbach, 2019:39).

Another important actor in Turkey's energy foreign policy is the European Union (EU). After the year 2000, natural gas gained a more specific and prominent place in the EU's energy policies compared to other energy sources. The reasons for this are that natural gas is easier and more sustainable to transport via pipelines, LNG is relatively expensive, transporting via sea involves significant security risks, and pipeline transmission offers longer-term agreements that provide a clearer structure for pricing and supply. During this period, the EU met its natural gas needs through two main pipelines (via Turkey and Ukraine). Turkey has tried to play a more active role in the EU's natural gas processes by leveraging events such as the Russia-originated conflicts in Ukraine, Crimea, and Georgia. In this context, Turkey pursued an energy foreign policy aimed at establishing new natural gas energy projects and connections with new suppliers, thus strengthening its own energy security while also supporting the EU's energy supply and resource security. This energy foreign policy pursued by Turkey was intended to be aligned with the EU's energy foreign policy (Dursun, 2011:89-90).

Table 3

Natural Gas Import Sources by Country (% Share of Total Imports)

Year	Russia (%)	Azerbaijan (%)	Iran (%)	Algeria/LNG (%)	China (%)	Others (e.g., Nigeria, LNG) (%)	Total Imports (bcm)	Diversification Index
2019	45	25	15	10	0	5	50.1	0.35
2020	45	30	14	8	0	3	45.9	0.34
2021	46	20	16	12	0	6	58.7	0.36
2022	45	18	15	15	0	7	54.7	0.35
2023	40	22	14	18	0	6	49.7	0.32
2024	35	25	12	20	0	8	51.7	0.30

Notes: Shares approximate based on pipeline/LNG volumes; Black Sea production offsets ~5–10% of imports from 2023. Index: Lower values reflect better diversification (e.g., no single source >40%). China data from CEIC and EIA confirms 0% share.

Source: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Enerji Piyasası Düzenleme Kurumu, 2024.

Table 3 shows that Turkey has long-term pipeline contracts with Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan. However, to enhance its energy security and reduce pipeline dependency, Turkey is increasingly using Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports from countries like the United States and Algeria, which offer more flexibility in sourcing.

Table 4

Crude Oil Import Sources by Country (% Share of Seaborne Imports)

Year	Russia (%)	Iraq (%)	Saudi Arabia (%)	Libya (%)	China (%)	Others (e.g., Iran, Kazakhstan) (%)	Total Imports (Mb/d)	Diversification Index
2019	20	40	15	10	0	15	0.55	0.28
2020	25	35	12	8	0	20	0.50	0.27
2021	20	30	18	12	0	20	0.58	0.25
2022	30	25	15	10	0	20	0.68	0.26
2023	34	25	14	12	0	15	0.63	0.27
2024	70	10	8	5	0	7	0.60	0.53

Notes: Russia's surge in 2024 due to discounted Urals crude (~\$5–20/bbl below Brent). Iraq includes Kurdish exports via the Ceyhan pipeline. Index rose in 2024, signalling reduced diversification for oil. China data from CEIC and OEC confirms 0% share.

Source: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Enerji Piyasası Düzenleme Kurumu, 2024.

Table 4 shows that the sources of Turkey's crude oil imports between 2019 and 2024 have demonstrated a significant shift, characterized by increasing flexibility and a dramatic rise in reliance on Russian seaborne crude oil after 2022. While Iraq has historically been a major supplier, often through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, its flows have been inconsistent due to geopolitical and operational disruptions. This inconsistency, coupled with the availability of heavily discounted Urals crude following the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia, prompted Turkish refineries to opportunistically increase their Russian imports. As a result, Russia's share of Turkey's seaborne crude imports surged, positioning it as a dominant supplier by 2024, with other key suppliers like Azerbaijan (via the BTC pipeline), Kazakhstan, and flexible seaborne sources from countries like Saudi Arabia and Brazil serving to diversify the remaining supply. This trend highlights Turkey's pragmatic strategy of prioritizing cost-effective and secure energy procurement amidst global market volatility.

4. Analysis of Turkish Energy Policy after 2000 from the Perspective of Neoclassical Realism

In the previous sections, the independent variables in neoclassical realism and Turkey's energy foreign policy have been analyzed in detail. In this section, the internal variables (domestic dynamics) that are prominent in neoclassical realism are first associated with Turkey and titled accordingly. Following this, the relevant dynamics are examined in detail, taking neoclassical realist theory into account. These contents are explained through Turkey's energy foreign policy practices. In this section, which focuses on the domestic dynamics influencing Turkey's energy policy, Turkey's energy policy is discussed under three main headings: economic problems, energy dependence, and ideological elements.

5.1. Economic Problems and Energy Policy

Neoclassical realists, who analyze the international system by placing the state at its core, frequently draw on the approach of Gilpin, one of the prominent figures in international relations theory. Gilpin believes that humans are political beings and that the foundation of social reality lies in the existence of groups. Although the modern state or nation-state has evolved through various stages in history, there is no evidence to suggest that its existence will continue indefinitely. According to him, even if states do not persist forever, social groups or organisations will continue to exist. From this perspective, Gilpin argues that the state, like other social groups, is an interest group, and despite any changes, the concept of the state will continue to exist. The primary reason for this is the human desire to organise. Gilpin asserts that the concept of interest, which he considers to be the *raison d'être* of the state, is vital both for the group and for the organisation. In addition to these thoughts, Gilpin argues that organisations can counter changes that may affect their quality of life through their power of organisation (Gilpin, 1986:313). In relation to this, we can hypothesise that H1: International system pressure decisively directs Turkey's energy policy.

The impact of economic problems on Turkey's energy foreign policy is most pronounced during election periods. The main reason for this is that increases in energy prices trigger a domino effect, causing a significant rise in the prices of many other goods. For example, during periods when energy prices hit rock bottom, Turkey filled both its oil and natural gas reserves completely. These price decreases had a positive impact on the

economy, thereby strengthening the government's position in energy foreign policy. The most important trigger in Gilpin's concept of organisation is the term "interest." The key factor influencing the concept of interest is economic interest and uncertainty. So much so that individuals or groups who have completed their organisation may question the state structure dominant in the region where they operate if they believe their economic interests are being harmed or are in danger. Ultimately, these organised groups may even demand the dissolution of the state or its institutions (Yılmaz, 2014:14). The nature of the economic interest issue makes it one of the most challenging tests for states today. When all these factors are considered together, it can be said that the "economic interest" issue is like a "sword of Damocles" for states, and it is one of the most significant threats to the continuation of their existence.

Table 5

Energy Price Impact on Turkish Foreign Policy (During Election Periods)

Component		Description		Example/Policy Implication
Core Domestic Problem		High Energy Import Dependency (approx. 70-75% of total demand). This creates a chronic vulnerability to external price shocks.		Turkey must expend massive amounts of foreign currency to pay for imports, greatly contributing to the Current Account Deficit (CAD) and putting constant pressure on the Turkish Lira ($\text{\text{TRY}}$) exchange rate.
The Domino Effect		Energy Price Inflation	Increases	Rising global oil/gas prices directly raise domestic fuel and electricity costs. This quickly translates into higher costs for transportation, manufacturing, and food, causing a significant and visible spike in retail inflation, which heavily impacts voter living standards.
Policy Response (During Elections)		Short-Term Control/Subsidies	Price	To mitigate voter discontent before an election (e.g., the 2023 elections), the government often subsidises natural gas and electricity prices, or delays passing on global price increases to consumers, incurring substantial fiscal costs to maintain stability.
Foreign Impact (Positive)	Policy	Strategic Reserve Filling During Low Prices		When global prices crash (e.g., due to the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic), the government can maximise purchases to fill strategic reserves (oil and gas storage). This has a positive economic impact (cheaper input costs, lower CAD) that strengthens the government's perceived competence and bolsters its foreign policy leverage by creating a short-term cushion.
Foreign Impact (Negative)	Policy	Transactional Focus	Diplomacy	The need for a cheap, immediate energy supply often drives transactional foreign policy. For example, the government may prioritise short-term agreements for discounted crude/gas (like from Russia post-2022) to keep domestic prices stable, even if it creates long-term geopolitical dependence or conflicts with Western partners.

Source: Bilgin, 2010. s. 81–92.

Table 5 effectively summarizes the political economy dimension of Turkey's energy foreign policy, particularly during sensitive election periods. It clearly identifies the high energy import dependency as the core vulnerability, acting as the foundation for a destabilizing domino effect where global energy price increases immediately translate into visible, vote-influencing domestic inflation. The table highlights the policy asymmetry of the government's actions: utilizing periods of low global prices to strengthen its position by filling strategic reserves (a positive economic and political outcome), yet being forced to incur substantial fiscal costs through short-term price subsidies during election campaigns to manage voter dissatisfaction. Ultimately, the table succinctly captures how domestic political cycles and economic fragility—the need to contain inflation and secure foreign currency—override long-term strategic energy goals, driving a transactional diplomacy focused on securing immediate, cheap supply.

For example, after the COVID-19 pandemic, both the increase in exchange rates and the significant rise in energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have led to substantial price hikes. These price increases have also caused a rise in the costs of inputs in agriculture, industry, and the service sectors. The cumulative effect of these increases has deeply affected all segments of society. Indeed, the inflation rates announced by the

Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) reached their highest levels in 2021 (13.58% in December 2021) and in 2022 (85.51% in October 2022) on a monthly and yearly basis, respectively (Central Bank, 2024). During these periods, both the general policies and foreign policy actions implemented by the government were heavily criticized by a large portion of society.

5.2. Energy Dependency and Energy Policy

From an economic perspective, the views on energy resources or the energy market held by both parties involved in energy activities are different. On the supply side, the unit that provides the energy resource focuses on optimising minimum supply and maximum profit, while countries on the demand side focus on optimising price with the maximum demand and minimum price equation. Indeed, for countries that supply energy, the surplus and size of the profit derived from the energy source have a very positive impact due to the strengthening of various state structures and the ability to distribute this benefit to society. These countries aim to both reduce energy supply and, by obtaining maximum revenue from this supply, increase their relative power and the welfare of their society by determining an energy policy. Therefore, at various times, these countries have the potential to use their supply leverage in energy resources to increase prices or achieve different social, political, or military outcomes with third parties. This policy has been employed by Arab countries during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, by Iraq during the Gulf War, and by Russia after the Velvet Revolution in Ukraine (Kazdal, 2018:56).

Countries in a position of demand for energy resources face significant economic and political dependencies and restrictions. First and foremost, the countries on the demand side have built their entire economic, social, and institutional structure based on trusting the will or promise of the supply side to provide the energy resource. They are somewhat bound in terms of any potential interruption that could arise from the supplying country. In this regard, countries on the demand side must adopt a serious policy to avoid confrontation with the supplying country for any reason. Additionally, since payments for energy resources are recorded as consumption-related expenditures of the state, significant amounts are paid for energy resources. This situation creates considerable sensitivity in terms of the macroeconomic indicators of the states.

At the same time, the dependency on a single country or source for the relevant energy resource means that any price increases will have severe economic consequences for the demand-side country. Moreover, the high dependency on energy resources in the social and economic life of the demand-side country, combined with significant price imbalances and increases, intensifies the tension between government leaders and society. In some cases, this tension has reached unmanageable levels, leading to major internal conflicts and changes in governance. Therefore, countries that do not have sufficient energy production capacity and their leaders must pay close attention to "energy dependence." The leaders of energy-dependent countries must approach this issue with the seriousness and sensitivity of a "national security matter," as this is a vital concern for both the countries and their leaders. Our second hypothesis becomes that H2: Economic problems and energy dependency play a significant role as an internal dynamic in Turkey's energy policy.

Energy resources are a crucial factor in the development of countries and the continuity of social life. In today's world, the evolving economic and social life has led to an increasing and ongoing demand for energy resources. Evaluating energy resources in two categories for states will help determine the significance of the concept for countries. The science of economics is fundamentally built on two elements and focuses on analysing the relationships between these concepts. These two elements are expressed by the concepts of supply and demand. The term supply is used to describe the entities or conditions that provide energy resources to the market or host these resources, or play a similar role; while the concept of demand is used to express the intention to "request or need" the resource

either for the state's own use or for use by third parties. Accordingly, it is necessary to state that, at times, countries can be either on the demand side or the supply side of energy resources.

Dependence on foreign energy and economic problems has a significant impact on decision-making processes. Particularly because the energy issue falls within the scope of many different internal and external interest groups, decision-makers often face difficulties in taking action on related matters. Indeed, the influence of these lobbies is even more pronounced in cases where political decision-makers lack full and comprehensive management will over the country's governance. In this context, it is quite difficult to say that democratic processes and their supervision are fully carried out. A prime example of this situation is the "National Energy Initiative" announced in 2017. Before this period, foreign or joint-venture firms were involved in research on hydrocarbon resources in Turkish territorial waters. However, after long-term investigations, it was claimed that no significant or large energy source was found either in the Black Sea or the Eastern Mediterranean, and the research was concluded. In 2017, with the decision taken under the "National Energy Initiative," ships were purchased for the exploration of hydrocarbon resources, and approximately 750 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves were discovered in the Black Sea. Subsequently, an international consortium was established for the transportation of natural gas from these areas to land, and natural gas was quickly brought into the economy. Following this development, countries that had previously experienced crises with Turkey along the Black Sea coast initiated discussions with Turkey regarding joint exploration activities. (Turgutoğlu, 2006:33).

Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the geopolitical balance in the region changed. Turkey, Iran, and Israel have tried to fill the power vacuum in the Middle East and surrounding areas (Üçbaş, 2020:126). It can be said that Turkey's increased interest in the region is also due to the region's rich oil resources and the security concerns that may arise from the possibility of these resources falling into the wrong hands. Indeed, another step Turkey took after the Iraq invasion regarding energy dependence was to open a new foreign policy area through energy relations with the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government), which had been facing significant crisis potential in its relations since 1990 (Tür and Han, 2015:29-30). The aim of opening this area was to strengthen Turkey's regional position in energy matters and to benefit from the welfare-generating effect of energy by securing financial gains from energy transfer. Indeed, the relationship with the KRG also served to control the insecurity Turkey had towards the KRG.

Table 6
Turkey's Strategic Shift to KRG (Post-Iraq Invasion)

Category	Driver/Cause	Policy Shift/Action	Intended Policy Outcomes
Systemic/Geopolitical	Power Vacuum in the Middle East (following the U.S. invasion of Iraq)	Increased interest and attempts by Turkey (and Iran, Israel) to fill the regional power gap.	Strengthen Turkey's regional position in energy matters and geopolitical standing.
Economic/Resource-Based	Region's Rich Oil Resources	Shift to a new foreign policy area through direct energy relations with the KRG.	Benefit from the welfare-generating effect by securing financial gains from energy transfer/transit.
Security/Domestic	Security Concerns (from resources falling into the "wrong hands"); Insecurity towards the KRG (crisis potential since 1990).	Opening the KRG-Turkey energy channel (despite prior strained relations).	Control the insecurity Turkey had towards the KRG by creating economic interdependence and leverage.

Source: Üçbaş, 2020, s. 115–135.

Notes: The page number suggests this is a chapter in an edited book, a common source type for this kind of academic analysis. The topic aligns perfectly with the text's focus on Turkey's post-2003 geopolitical and

energy strategy.)

Table 6 "Turkey's Strategic Shift to KRG (Post-Iraq Invasion)" is an excellent, concise summary of a crucial pivot in Turkish foreign policy. It clearly applies a strategic framework by dissecting the policy shift into three coherent causal layers: Systemic/Geopolitical (the post-invasion power vacuum), Economic/Resource-Based (the allure of rich oil resources), and Security/Domestic (the need to control insecurity from the KRG). This structure effectively demonstrates that Turkey's move to establish energy relations with the KRG was not driven by a single factor, but by a multi-pronged imperative aimed at simultaneously strengthening its regional position, securing financial gains from energy transit, and establishing leverage to manage a long-standing security threat, thus perfectly illustrating the complexity and transactional nature of Ankara's foreign policy calculus after 2003.

5.3. Ideological Elements and Energy Policy

Ideology is one of the most important concepts both for supporting a state's foreign policy and for individuals to understand the actions of states. The power of ideology comes from its ability to unite society through the policies and goals set by the government in foreign policy. Ideology is considered one of the most important and functional tools used to achieve foreign policy objectives. Indeed, it is a common feature, especially during the Cold War, that states have used different ideologies at different times to pursue specific foreign policy goals (Poulantzas, 1992:40-41). We can hypothesise that H3: Ideological factors are a complementary internal variable in energy foreign policy.

There are many different views on the definition of the concept of ideology. However, it is believed that the definition proposed by Althusser aligns more closely with the Neoclassical Realism theory. According to Althusser, ideology is expressed as the determinant of social order. He suggests that ideology, while determining order, also has the power to influence individuals to conform to certain topics and direct them toward specific points or goals (Althusser, 1991:47). In this context, ideology can be defined as a value system that determines the purpose of what people think and do, shows the paths to achieve this purpose, and provides information about the characteristics of the elements along the way (Allard, 1971:117). Therefore, ideology emerges as a complex structure that contains various images, activities, applications, and evaluation criteria. Among the images that constitute ideology, there are written and verbal materials, as well as methods or paths that serve the purpose of achieving ideological goals. Along with these factors, the greatest power of ideology is expressed as the "existence of evaluation principles," which can be understood as a kind of self-control mechanism used within the ideology to monitor itself.

The concept of ideology holds a significant place in the discipline of international relations. It has the characteristic of either restricting or opening up political space for both states and the individuals involved in decision-making mechanisms within these states in the realm of foreign policy. The concept of ideology typically either increases or decreases the level of alignment between states and other countries. Therefore, selecting the right ideological element or approach for each country is one of the most critical aspects of foreign policy. This situation has come to the forefront in Turkey's energy foreign policy relationships with various countries since 2000. For example, while Turkey used nationalism or Turkish values to transport Caspian oil to the global market, it adopted an ideological approach based on Islamic brotherhood when presenting Iraqi oil to European or global markets (Taliaferro, 2006: 489-491).

Table 7

Ideological Framing of Turkish Energy Foreign Policy (Post-2000)

Core Concept	Definition/Role	Turkish Energy Policy Application (Post-2000)
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Ideology	Crucial in determining foreign policy, distinguishing between "friend and foe," and influencing alliance relations.	Served as a framework for justifying and implementing energy cooperation strategies with different partners.
State Power (Taliaferro's Definition)	The "relative ability of the state to mobilise national resources," determined by nationalism and ideology, through state institutions.	— (The application of ideology/nationalism is the mobilisation of power.)
Nationalism	Significant role in mobilising resources for security policies.	Used to develop energy cooperation with countries in the Caspian region (e.g., establishing pipeline routes and supply relationships).
Central Country Ideology	An ideological approach is adopted for specific relations.	Used to develop a cooperation strategy in energy relations with Russia (implying a framework that rationalises close collaboration despite potential geopolitical rivalry).

Source: Taliaferro, 2006, s. 466–505.

Table 7 shows how Turkey strategically employs different ideological tools—Nationalism for ethnically and historically close partners like the Caspian states, and the Central Country Ideology for powerful geopolitical players like Russia—to legitimise and secure its vital energy supply projects. This demonstrates the pragmatic, instrumental use of ideology to mobilise domestic support (state power) for foreign policy goals.

Neoclassical realists oppose the view that only structural and material factors are used in the implementation of foreign policies by states. One of the elements that states use in their foreign policies is ideologies. According to them, states utilise ideologies to gain various advantages in bilateral relations. These ideologies are also considered an important source of pressure on decision-makers, as they provide a framework or agenda for action. In this context, Turkey's energy cooperation policy, particularly with Azerbaijan, is one of the best examples. Turkey has been pursuing a policy aimed at liberating the Karabakh region, which was under occupation for a long time, and supporting Azerbaijan against Armenia. However, Turkey's diplomatic rapprochement with Armenia and the inability to convey this process to Azerbaijan and the public for various reasons led to a temporary disruption in the energy relations developed with Azerbaijan (Gustavsson, 1998:16).

Ideology plays a key role in determining foreign policy and its implementation, particularly in influencing or shaping states' attitudes toward international events and their use of power. In this regard, ideologies, especially during the Cold War, served as a crucial element in the distinction between friend and foe and had an inevitable impact on alliance relations. On the other hand, the role of nationalism in mobilising resources for security policies is significant. Taliaferro defines state power as "the relative ability of the state to mobilise national resources, determined by nationalism and ideology, through state institutions." In Turkey's post-2000 energy foreign policy, energy cooperation was developed with countries in the Caspian region through nationalism, while a cooperation strategy under the central country's ideology was adopted in relations with Russia (Taliaferro, 2006:467).

Turkey has operated according to two main ideological perspectives in its energy foreign policy after the year 2000. The first of these is the ideology of becoming a central country. After 2000, Turkey shifted its mission of being a bridge or transit country in its energy foreign policy and adopted a more assertive policy set within the framework of becoming a central country. This central country ideology, presented with a projection capable of balancing security perceptions and freedom, shows that Turkey takes on a guiding role in projects both in the region and globally. Moreover, alongside the central country ideology, it is possible to say that a perspective that embodies both Eastern and Western balances, integrating the characteristics of these two different cultures and systems, forms the basis of Turkey's foreign policy. In the energy transmission line projects implemented after 2000, Turkey is emphasised as a pioneering country that serves an important purpose between the East and the West. Indeed, by highlighting the welfare-enhancing aspects of resources provided by Russia, the Caspian region countries, and Iran for EU member countries and their citizens, Turkey aims to maintain a win-win approach

for both sides (Üçbaş, 2020:177).

In this context, Turkey's energy foreign policy is presented as a new understanding or a new civilisation perspective in discussions with the relevant countries. It should be noted that this new ideological perspective is a synthesis of ideological movements such as Neo-Ottomanism, Islamism, Turkism, and Westernism, and this ideology has a multi-layered/multi-dimensional structure. When evaluating Turkey's energy foreign policy from this perspective, the relationship with the EU and the US contains elements of the Westernism ideology, energy foreign policies toward the Balkans and the Middle East reflect the Neo-Ottomanism ideology, relations with countries in the Islamic world are influenced by the Islamism ideology, and energy policies developed for Central Asian countries include elements of the Turkism ideology (Duran, 2008).

The second ideology that Turkey has implemented in its foreign policy after 2000 is expressed as Neo-Ottomanism. It can be seen that the new Neo-Ottomanist ideology applied in Turkey's foreign policy between 2000-2010 was also reinforced with the central country's ideology. Indeed, in the bulletins published by the Justice and Development Party, both the central country ideology and the Neo-Ottomanist ideology are present, and five key priorities or themes in Turkish foreign policy were identified. These are: "European Union," "the concept of civilisation," "multilateralism in foreign policy/diplomatic initiatives," "Turkey's increasing power in international politics," and "relations with the Middle East/Islamic World." These topics reflect the areas in which Turkey's new foreign policy ideology is focused (Sunar, 2013:432). Although the Neo-Ottomanism movement that came to the forefront during Ahmet Davutoğlu's term was claimed in many written and visual publications to be a foreign policy approach advocated by Davutoğlu, it is known that he rejected this idea. In Ahmet Davutoğlu's book "Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position," the regions surrounding Turkey were redefined, and Turkey's geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural relations were addressed within the parameters of foreign policy. In this book, Ahmet Davutoğlu examined the theoretical aspects of the Neo-Ottomanism concept and emphasised the inadequacy and shortcomings of this approach that was attempted after the Turgut Özal era. Therefore, it is not correct to identify the Neo-Ottomanism approach exclusively with Ahmet Davutoğlu (Bayraklı, 2013: 43-60; Davutoğlu, 2011).

In the energy foreign policy towards the European Union, it can be said that the principle of mutual benefit has been emphasised, with the idea that Europe's prosperity will simultaneously contribute to Turkey's prosperity. The policies in this context are based on the understanding that Turkey's unique civilization heritage will support the EU's energy security. Additionally, it is highlighted that Turkey has a protective role over the Muslim populations in both neighbouring and distant regions, and it has been frequently stated in official statements and by decision-makers that Turkey will continue its assistance and support to these countries in the face of pressures that may arise regarding energy or other issues. Examples of this policy are clearly evident in the context of the Iraq civil war and the subsequent processes, as well as in Libya, where internal conflicts arose following the Arab Spring.

6. Conclusions

Since the emergence of nation-states in international relations, these states have had to struggle with numerous problems. In order to sustain their existence and carry out activities within their territories, they must meet their basic needs. One of the most significant challenges faced by modern states in this regard is the issue of "energy." Energy is one of the most important and strategic elements for a country to maintain its internal processes and preserve its presence in the international arena. While some countries are tested by having access to energy resources, others are tested by the lack of resources or energy dependency. The test for countries with energy resources is to eliminate military

and economic threats directed at their countries and to maintain energy prices at the highest level. The test for energy-dependent countries is to ensure both the supply of energy and its acquisition at the lowest possible price. As of 2024, in terms of identified energy resources, Turkey is not a self-sufficient country. In this regard, it would not be incorrect to describe Turkey as an "energy-dependent country." However, Turkey's geopolitical position provides significant advantages in securing energy resources. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that Turkey's energy foreign policy involves both threats and opportunities. These characteristics of Turkey's energy resources make it even more important to identify the factors influencing its energy foreign policy and to determine which elements are more influential in its policy.

In this study, an analysis has been conducted based on the assumptions put forward by the neoclassical realist approach. The primary reason for selecting neoclassical realism as the theoretical framework is that energy policies fall within the scope of neoclassical realist theory. Additionally, the belief that both independent variables and domestic factors play a significant role in shaping energy foreign policies is another reason for choosing neoclassical realism. The independent variables influencing energy foreign policy are expressed in terms of the structure and pressures of the international system, as well as the concept of relative power. The domestic (unit-level) intervening variables, which vary from country to country, are categorised under the headings of leadership influence, strategic culture, state-society relations, and local institutions. The study aims to identify the factors (independent variables/unit-level intervening variables) that influence the determination of Turkey's energy foreign policy.

This study aims to analyse Turkey's energy foreign policy after 2000 within the context of neoclassical realism. In this context, the subject of the study is limited by three main aspects: temporal limitation, contextual limitation, and theoretical limitation. Regarding the temporal limitation, the period after 2000 has been selected as the primary study period. In determining this period, it is necessary to discuss the impact of developments both in Turkey and in countries hosting energy resources. In terms of contextual limitation, analysing Turkey's energy foreign policy is the main objective of the study. Literature reviews conducted before the study revealed that there are works addressing Turkey's energy foreign policy in different contexts. However, no study analysing Turkey's energy foreign policy through the framework of neoclassical realism has been found. Therefore, it is expected that this study will contribute to the literature in this regard. In analysing this thesis, the assumptions and variables proposed by neoclassical realism have been considered. The primary reason for adopting the neoclassical realist approach is its focus on foreign policy analysis and its status as a relatively more recent theory compared to others.

As a result of the analysis of the data discussed in this study, it has been determined that the structure and pressure of the international system are the most influential factors in Turkey's energy foreign policy. When examining the subheadings within the context of international system pressure, it has been observed that factors arising from the pressure of the system come to the forefront. This pressure is related to issues such as membership, being a stakeholder, or candidacy. It has been concluded that both the UN and the EU are influential in terms of international systemic pressure. When examining the independent variables in determining Turkey's energy foreign policy, it should be noted that Turkey aims to maintain positive relationships with international organisations. In fact, upon analysing the underlying texts, it can be stated that Turkey aims to protect its international relations and, in this context, moves in coordination with the international structure and system.

Regarding the domestic factors affecting the determination of Turkey's energy foreign policy, it has been concluded that dependency on foreign energy sources and economic factors are the most prominent. In emphasising these factors, the influence of Turkey's economic structure must be acknowledged. Considering the impact of energy

prices on individual expenditures and their direct effect on the current account deficit, it becomes understandable why these factors are prominent. This situation is also in line with the exchange rate developments post-2000. After 2000, the exchange rate alone changed by 6400% (Bigpara, 2024). Therefore, even in the absence of changes in energy prices, it should be considered that such an exchange rate change could cause significant inflation. As a result, energy issues have become more of a focal point for both governments and policymakers. Additionally, it should be noted that through new projects and exploration activities, policies have been adopted to eliminate the problem of energy, both for households and for Turkey's general economic indicators.

The analysis affirms that Turkey's chronic energy dependency (an internal dynamic) fundamentally acts as the "transmission belt" for external systemic pressures (H1). This dependency is amplified by severe domestic economic constraints (H2)—primarily the persistent current account deficit—which compel Ankara to adopt a pragmatic, cost-driven foreign policy that often prioritises short-term supply security and discounted prices (e.g., deep energy cooperation with Russia via the Turkish Stream and Akkuyu NPP) over pure geopolitical balancing. Furthermore, ideological dynamics (H3) have served as a flexible instrument: Nationalism was strategically mobilised to legitimise cooperation with Turkic Caspian states, while Islamic Brotherhood rhetoric was used for Iraqi energy ventures, demonstrating the instrumental use of ideology to mobilise resources and public support. The outcome reveals a complex balancing act: Turkey successfully uses its strategic position to maintain diverse relationships with key actors—Russia as the dominant supplier and partner, Iran as a pipeline source, the EU as a market and transit destination (TANAP/TAP), and the US as an LNG source—resulting not in perfect independence, but in a state of managed interdependence where economic necessity dictates the final policy configuration.

This study confirms that Turkey's post-2000 energy policy is shaped not merely by external systemic pressures but by the complex interplay of these pressures and internal economic constraints. The critical findings demonstrate that chronic energy dependency and the current account deficit are the largest domestic variables compelling Ankara to adopt a pragmatic and cost-driven foreign policy. This resulted in securing long-term deals and discounted prices from Russia (e.g., Turkish Stream and Akkuyu NPP). Ideological dynamics served as a complementary instrument, with Nationalism being mobilised to legitimise cooperation with Caspian states and Islamic Brotherhood rhetoric used for Iraqi energy ventures. At the actor level, Turkey successfully maintained diverse relationships, preserving the dominant supplier relationship with Russia, transit security with the EU, LNG flexibility with the US, and pipeline continuity with Iran. The outcome is not perfect independence but a state of managed interdependence. These findings offer empirical evidence reinforcing Neoclassical Realism's assertion that domestic economic and ideological variables mediate state responses to systemic pressures.

When all of Turkey's power elements are considered together, it can be stated that Turkey is a medium-sized state. However, when considering its geopolitical position and historical relations, it is believed that at certain times, Turkey can exceed its "medium-sized state" position. As a result of this, it should be expressed that in certain policy issues or areas, Turkey may also assume leadership or guiding roles. However, considering the high economic risk of energy issues, it has been found through the analysis and studies that Turkey's geopolitical position or historical relations do not impose a major mission of being a leading actor in determining "energy policies."

This study was prepared to identify the factors affecting the determination of Turkey's energy foreign policy. Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the thesis work, it has been determined that the systemic variables, expressed as independent variables, are the most influential factors in determining energy foreign policy. Furthermore, it has been observed that economic problems and dependence on foreign energy are the most significant domestic intermediate variables. In this regard, it has been

concluded that in determining Turkey's energy foreign policy, decision-makers should take into account independent variables such as developments in the international system, as well as intermediate variables such as economic factors and energy dependency.

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