

THE *ARAB SPRING* IN SYRIA. IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKEY'S REGIONAL POLICY

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Summary. The events of the *Arab Spring* in Syria have led to the re-evaluation of Turkey's regional policy and forced it to make a choice: whether to, acting in compliance with the expectations of its Western allies, e.g. the United States, promote the rules of democracy in the Middle East and firmly react against any cases of human rights' violation, simultaneously showing the direction of necessary changes in the region, or to act in compliance with the definition of the international policy *Strategic Depth*: „no problems with neighbours”, which excludes any interference in the internal politics of other countries, to continue pragmatic co-operation with all political centres, including the authoritarian regimes.

The policy of the protection of democracy and human rights has been chosen. This decision, on the one hand, strengthens Turkey's relations with Western countries. On the other hand, it may lead to an open conflict with a direct neighbour, Syria, which constitutes a serious threat to Turkey's security and may result in negative consequences for its economic development, energy security, and economic relations with the Middle East partners.

Key words: Turkey, *The Arab Spring*, Syria, *Strategic Depth*, Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The events of the *Arab Spring* in Syria have led to the re-evaluation of the regional policy of the Republic of Turkey, which has had to make a choice: whether to, acting in compliance with the expectations of its Western allies, e.g. the United States, promote the rules of democracy in the Middle East and firmly react against any cases of human rights' violation, simultaneously showing the direction of necessary changes in the region, or to act in compliance with its policy of *Strategic Depth*, „no problems with neighbours”, which excludes any interference in the internal politics of other countries, to continue the pragmatic co-operation with all political centres, including the authoritarian regimes.

In the face of violent fights between the opposition and Al-Assad supporters, the policy of protecting democracy and human rights has been chosen. This decision, on the one hand, strengthens Turkey's relations with Western structures. On the other hand, it may lead to an open conflict with a direct neighbour, Syria, which constitutes a serious threat to Turkey's security and may result in

negative consequences for its economic development, energy security and economic relations with the Middle East partners.

The article analyzes the implications for the regional policy of Turkey resulting from the events of the *Arab Spring* in Syria. First, the objectives of the geopolitical strategy of the Republic of Turkey towards the Middle East will be characterized. Second, the realization of the country's foreign policy towards the region will be analyzed. Finally, the relationship between the outbreak of the *Arab Spring* in Syria and the re-evaluation of political actions of Turkey in the Middle East will be presented.

TURKEY'S GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST REGION

The establishment of a geopolitical strategy can be perceived as an adaptation process towards constantly changing parameters of the post-Cold War international system. It sets new priorities of external political actions of the country and the tools for their realization. The concept of Turkey's foreign policy has undergone a visible evolution after the coming to power of the *Justice and Development Party* (AKP) in 2002.

The *Strategic Depth* strategy is based on the assumption that the „strategic depth” of every country should be analyzed in two dimensions: historical and geographical. The „historical depth” is associated with a country's historical legacy, putting it in the centre of critical historical events and influencing its external policy¹. The „geographical depth” results from the geopolitical location of a country, which conditions its international actions².

The „historical depth” of the Republic of Turkey constitutes the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. As its inheritor, Turkey is responsible for the stabilization and development of the events on the post-empire area, which spreads over the Maghreb to Caucasus and from the Balkans up to the Indian Ocean³. The conditions that favour the co-operation of countries located on such a vast area should be: a common tradition, history, religion and culture⁴.

¹ A. Szymański, *Wpływ położenia geopolitycznego na politykę zagraniczną Turcji* (*The impact of Turkey's geopolitical location on its foreign policy*), „Stosunki Międzynarodowe” („International Relations”), 2011, no 3–4, p. 185.

² *Ibidem*.

³ A. Balcer, *W stronę strategicznego partnerstwa Unii Europejskiej i Turcji w polityce zagranicznej* (*Towards the strategic partnership of the European Union and Turkey in the domain of the foreign policy*), Warsaw 2010, p. 13.

⁴ J. Bocheńska, *Neoosmańska wizja polityki zagranicznej Turcji* (*Neo-Assurian vision of Turkey's foreign policy*), „Stosunki Międzynarodowe” („International Relations”), http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/artykul,963,Neoosmanska_wizja_polityki_zagranicznej_Turcji_, 22.07.2011.

The „geographical depth” is conditioned by a geostrategic location of Turkey between Europe and Asia, in the proximity of Africa and in the neighbourhood of critical regions of the world such as: the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and South Caucasus⁵. A specific location makes Turkey a „central country” possessing a „strategic depth” and constitutes a „bridge” between Christian and Islamic worlds.



Map 1. Turkey's geopolitical location

The concept of the *Strategic Depth* assumes the use of historical and geographical attributes in order to lead a „global and proactive policy within regional dimension”⁶. The main aim of political actions is the security of the regions, not particular countries. Therefore, it is also important for Turkey to present a balanced approach towards all regions and active political players⁷. In this way it is going to act as a regional empire⁸.

The tool enabling the realization of an active policy within regional dimension is *soft power*⁹, substituting physical force with dialogue, economic co-dependence

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ A. Murinson, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy*, „Middle Eastern Studies” 2006, vol. 42, no 6, pp. 951–953.

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ See: J. S. Nye jr., *Soft Power. Jak osiągnąć sukces w polityce światowej (Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics)*, Warsaw 2007.

and political, economic and social reforms. These changes have to have an evolutionary character¹⁰.

The regional policy should also opt for the 'zero problems with neighbours' rule, which excludes any intervention into internal affairs of other countries. Simultaneously to strengthening political relationship with neighbouring countries, Turkey should also develop its relations with the United States and the European Union and strive for an even closer co-operation with them¹¹.

The relations of the Republic of Turkey with other participants of the international system have to be based on the „maximum of mutual interests”¹². The term *other participants of the international system* has to be understood not only as the countries, but also as the so-called non-government subjects like international organizations. Such an approach means the shift from the „static” to „rhythmic” diplomacy, practiced equally in two-sided and multi-sided dimensions¹³.

The realization of the *Strategic Depth* aims to make Turkey an important political subject and an active regional „player”, which will guarantee the stabilization of critical regions of the world and will act as a mediator in international disputes¹⁴. In this context, one should pay attention to the following attributes of the *Strategic Depth*: a broad group of decision makers (the increase of the role of government and non-government civil subjects), a pro-action attitude, a flexible approach towards the national security rule, the readiness to compromise, aiming at the stabilization of the neighbouring regions, a balanced approach towards the sides of a conflict and participating in the development of its solution, using diplomatic and peaceful means and a mutual win or loss¹⁵. The country should be a model of economic development and the promoter of democratic changes, being an important power in the region¹⁶.

Increasingly independent, multi-vector and proactive external actions conducted by the government of the *Justice and Development Party* has led to the estab-

¹⁰ A. Davutoğlu, *Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007*, „Insight Turkey” January 2008, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7057/is_1_10/ai_n28514730/pg_2/?tag=content;col1,01.05.2012.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² A. Djavadi, *Turkey's Kissinger Leads Foreign Policy Balancing Act*, December 12 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkeys-Kissinger_Leads_ForeignPolicy_Balancing_Act/1865343.html, 22.07.2011.

¹³ See: B. Duran, *JDP and Foreign Policy as an Agent of Transformation*, in: M.H. Yavuz (ed.), *The emergence of a New Turkey. Democracy and the AK Parti*, Salt Lake City 2006, pp. 290–294, cited: A. Szymański, *Działania Turcji w regionie czarnomorsko-kaspijskim a realizacja nowej polityki zagranicznej (Turkey's operations in the region of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and the realisation of a new foreign policy)*, in: B. Bojarczyk, T. Kapuśniak (ed.), *Obszar czarnomorsko-kaspijski w stosunkach międzynarodowych (The region of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in the international relations)*, Lublin 2011, pp. 90–91.

¹⁴ A. Davutoğlu, *op. cit.*; see: Z. Meral, J. Paris, *Decoding Turkish Foreign Policy Hyperactivity*, „The Washington Quarterly”, October 2010, p. 75.

¹⁵ Z. Öniz, *Turkey and the Middle East after September 11*, „Turkish Policy Quarterly” 2003, no 4, pp. 84–85.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

lishment of the concept of energy policy. The energy policy priorities of Turkey for years 2010–2014, developed by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (ETKB) are the following: the assurance of sufficient, certain and profitable supplies of energy for own use, the assurance of the security of energy deliveries and taking into account the influence of the energy sector on the natural environment¹⁷.

Turkey is not to act as a transitory country, only guaranteeing an untroubled and economically profitable transit of energy raw materials from the Caspian Sea region, the Middle East and North Africa to the members of the European Union. The country is also going to become an integral part of energy system in Europe in the regulatory and infrastructure dimensions and is going to shape energy relations.

The realization of this plan is¹⁸ first of all going to enable Turkey to have an active role in the distribution and sales of carbohydrates. Secondly, it is going to turn the transit and sales of raw materials into an important source of income as well as a means of building the country's position in the region and in Europe. Thirdly, it will ensure the energy security; moreover, it will enable Turkey and other countries to become an important subject shaping the European Union's policy of energy.

According to the concept of Turkey's energy policy, it has an infrastructure which enables the transit of energy raw materials from the East to Europe, especially to European Union countries. The East is understood in this concept as:

– The Middle East – Iran, Egypt (gas), Iraq (petroleum); the transit is to be held through the territory of Turkey, with the decrease and ultimately the liquidation of petroleum's transit through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits.

– Post-Soviet area – the Caspian Sea region has key importance in this area, together with the projects concerning this region in which Turkey actively participates.

An important element of energy policy of the Republic of Turkey is a skillful usage of energy-related issues in the contacts with all important actors on the international energy market: the European Union, the United States and Iran¹⁸. The country is also adapting to the changes that are taking place in the energy sector. According to these changes, Turkey avoids antagonizing present and prospective suppliers of energy raw materials and simultaneously supports many energy projects, even competitive ones¹⁹. It aims to ensure that the country will have many alternative paths of energy policy development in the future.

¹⁷ See: The Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources Strategic Plan (2010–2014), http://www.enerji.gov.tr/yayinlar_raporlar_EN/ETKB_2010_2014_Stratejik_Planı_EN.pdf, 02.11.2012.

¹⁸ E. Wyciszkievicz, *Polityka energetyczna Turcji. Implikacje dla Unii Europejskiej (Turkey's energy policy. Implications for the European Union)*, in: A. Szymański (ed.), *Turcja i Europa. Wyzwania i szanse (Turkey and Europe. Challenges and chances)*, Warsaw 2011, p. 273.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.



Map 2. The structure of pipelines in Turkey and in the Near East

The assumptions of the foreign policy developed by the *Justice and Development Party* (AKP) government relate equally to all neighbouring areas. The strategy of energy policy is however seen as especially important in the case of the Middle East. Due to a critical nature of that area, the aims of Turkey's external policy remain unchanged since the end of the Cold War. As in the 1990s, lasting peace and stabilization of this area remain the priorities²⁰. The following factors are going to facilitate their achievement: acting as a mediator in regional conflicts as well as promoting democratic changes and the rules of liberal economics in the Middle East. The latter assumption constitutes a reference to the so-called liberal functionalist theory on regional co-operation, promoted by Turgut Özal, Turkish president in the 1990s²¹. According to this theory, economic development and economic links will put an end to the conflicts on this area.

²⁰ Turkey's Relations with the Arab Countries, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-the-middle-east.en.mfa, 24.05.2012.

²¹ See: R. Gozen, *Turgut Ozal and Turkish Foreign Policy: Style and Vision*, „Foreign Policy” 1996, no 20, p. 3–4.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the scope of the regional security includes international terrorism (including activities of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Islamic fundamentalists), an unstable political situation in Iraq and the problem of that country's territorial integrity after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's rule, Israel's conflicts with Palestine and Syria, and the increasingly „tense” relations of Israel and Iran. The rule of Al-Assad in Syria and the violent fights with opposition supporters has also been perceived as problematic since the beginning of 2012.

In its energy policy, the Turkish government should undertake to strengthen energy relations with virtually all neighbours and regional „players”, according to the rule: „threats' minimalisation by strengthening the co-dependence.”²² Within the regional dimension, Turkey's co-operation with Iran, Iraq and Arab countries are especially important.

THE REALISATION OF TURKEY'S GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST REGION

The Middle East possesses particular importance for the preservation of the international order's parameters due to the presence in the region of so-called asymmetric threats such as the international terrorism, religious fundamentalism, organized crime, unstable political systems, long-term armed conflicts, and rule by authoritarian regimes.

Its geostrategic location is also conditioned by considerable reserves of energy raw materials. It is estimated that 63 per cent of world's reserves of petroleum and 37 per cent of world's reserves of natural gas are located in the Middle East and in the North Africa.²³ Twenty-two per cent of world's reserves of petroleum are on the territory of Saudi Arabia, alone²⁴. Iran is second only to the Russian Federation when it comes to reserves of natural gas (14,9 per cent of the global total). Because the region has the world's largest reserves of non-renewable resources world powers and non-government actors are interested in the stabilization of the regional situation and in broadening their influence there.

Taking into consideration the critical nature of the Middle East and its important role on the energy raw materials' market, Turkey undertakes a range of actions aiming at regional stabilization. It has actively participated in the fight against the international terrorism and has explicitly supported the United States in the „war against terrorism” announced by the administration of George W. Bush.

²² E. Wyciszkievicz, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

²³ K. Górak-Sosnowska, *Surowce energetyczne i dywersyfikacja gospodarcza, (Energy raw materials and the economic diversification)*. http://www.sgh.waw.pl/katedry/kaso/download/atom-page.2009-03-14.6525683929/siga-rab_ropagaz.pdf, 27.02.2011.

²⁴ BP Statistical Review of World Energy, London 2006.

It has participated in, among others, *Operation Infinite Justice – Operation Enduring Freedom*, directed against the Taliban in Afghanistan²⁵. Since June 2002, Turkey has taken the lead of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan²⁶. It has sent 90 soldiers from special units²⁷ to Afghanistan and has provided the Americans with intelligence support. It has also authorised the United States to use the military base in Incirlik.

Taking into consideration the multi-dimensional phenomenon of security²⁸, the Republic of Turkey prioritizes the treaties on non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons²⁹. It tries not to allow any terrorist groups to obtain them. It also postulates the necessity of international community control of nuclear programmes conducted by authoritarian governments.

Despite Turkey's and NATO's common aim of fighting against all terrorist acts in the Middle East, Turkey pursues an independent policy towards Iraq and the members of the *Kurdistan Workers' Party* (PKK) operating on its territory. The first indication of independent action was its objection to sharing its territory for air stacks against Iraq or for the creation of the northern front on Turkey's territory during *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Turkish society has been against Turkey's engagement in the conflict.

Participation in the war constituted a serious threat to the country's security and was also related to high financial outlays. Similar to the first war in the Persian Gulf, it may have also resulted in serious economic losses. Turkish leaders have feared that the American attack on Iraq would reduce Turkey's access to Iraqi oil reserves³⁰.

Due to the 2003 intervention in Iraq, the infrastructure facilitating the inflow of energy raw materials, for instance the Kirkuk-Ceyhan drain among others, has been damaged³¹. There was also a risk that the Iran Pipeline would be de-

²⁵ O.G. Isyar, *An Analysis of Turkish – American Relations from 1945 to 2004: Initiatives and Reactions in Turkish Foreign Policy*, „Alternatives”, 2005, vol. 4, no 3, p. 37.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ See: M. Pietraś, *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe (International Security)*, in: M. Pietraś (ed.), *Międzynarodowe stosunki polityczne (International political relations)*, Lublin 2006, pp. 323–349.

²⁹ M. Kibaroglu, *Turkey's Threat Perception from the East: A Roadblock in its March Toward the West?*, in: A.L. Karaosmanoglu, S. Tashan (ed.), *The Europeanization of Turkey's Security Policy: Prospects and Pitfalls*, Ankara 2004, p. 63

³⁰ S. Cagaptay, *Where goes the U. S. – Turkish Relationship?*, „Middle East Quarterly”, Fall 2004, pp. 43–52.

³¹ Years ago, the drain constituted the main route of petroleum delivery from Iraq to Turkey. The drain has two parallel connections, going from the part of Kurdistan located in Iraq to the Ceyhan terminal in Turkey. The capacity of both „lines” amounts to 70 million tons per year. Due to an unstable situation on this area, the drain does not exceed petroleum mining of 25 million tons.

stroyed during the operation; it had been initiated in 2002 and sends blue petroleum from Tabriz to the knot in Erzurum³².

For a long time the authorities of Turkey remained reserved about U.S. idea of changing Iraq into a federation. The *Justice and Development Party* (AKP) government has accepted its federal structure in 2005³³. The members of Erdoğan's cabinet are still against the inclusion of Kirkuk into Kurdistan. They argue that this action may increase the independence of Kurdistan from Turkey and Iraq, which may result in the long-term instability of this area.

Despite the negative opinion of its Western allies, Turkey practices armed interventions in Iraq as a part of the fight against the separatists of *Kurdistan Workers' Party* (PKK). For example, in 2008 about 300 soldiers entered Iraq and Turkish planes have bombarded the terrorist bases in its northern Iraq³⁴. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has supported Turkey logistically³⁵. However, fearing a further escalation of the conflict, the United States were persuaded Erdoğan's government to finish any military operations in this area as soon as possible. However the initial has did not bring any results. In the Autumn of 2011 the Prime Minister of Turkey again sent land forces to Iraq.

Being an „advocate” of democratic changes in the region, Turkey has supported the *Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative* (BMENAI) project initiated by the United States in June 2004. It aims to achieve economic and social changes and the democratization of Muslim countries from Morocco to Pakistan³⁶. By engaging in the project, Turkey has argued that it could³⁷ act as a „mediator” between the United States on one side and Syria and Iran on the other. Moreover, according to Turkey, it could have a similar role in the conflict between Israel and Palestine and also have its own input into the stimulation of democratic processes in the BMENAI area.

³² In 2008, Turkey and Iran have signed an agreement on the development of two new gas mains, complementing the existing connection with Tabriz. The capacity of the gas main currently amounts to 10 million m³. In the case of regulating political relations with the United States and the further presence of the gas main on the European Union market, in 2020 the capacity of the gas main will amount to 30–40 m³.

³³ R. Sadowski, *Chłodny sojusz – turecko-amerykańskie relacje polityczne po 2003 roku (A cold alliance – Turkish- American political relations after 2003)*, in: A. Balcer, R. Sadowski, W. Paczyński (ed.), *Turcja po rozpoczęciu negocjacji z Unią Europejską – relacje zagraniczne i sytuacja wewnętrzna (Turkey after the start of the negotiations with the European Union – foreign relations and internal situation)*, Warsaw 2006, p. 58.

³⁴ J. Misiągiewicz, *Polityka zagraniczna Turcji po zimnej wojnie (Turkey's foreign policy after the Cold War period)*, Toruń 2009, p. 166.

³⁵ P.W. Turek, *Region Kurdystanu Irackiego w relacji Irak – Unia Europejska – NATO – Turcja (The region of Uranian Kurdistan in the Iraq – European Union – NATO – Turkey relation)*, in: A. Abbas, P. Siwiec (ed.), *Kurdowie i Kurdystan Iracki na przełomie XX i XXI wieku (The Kurds and Kurdistan on the verge of XX and XXI century)*, Poznań 2009, pp. 193–194.

³⁶ R. Sadowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–65.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

Apart from supporting the *Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative* project, Turkey has initiated a number of stabilizing actions and acted as an „intermediary” in many talks. It has participated, among others, in the so-called stabilizing mission in Iraq. Supplies for the U.S. army delivered through the republic’s territory. It has also been the initiator of *Iraq’s Neighbors Initiative*, and then enlarging it into the *Enlarged Ministerial Meeting of Iraq’s Neighbors*³⁸. After the Iraqi election of March 2010, Turkey participated in the talks on the creation of a coalition government in Baghdad³⁹.

Thanks to the rule ‘zero problems with neighbors’, which conditions good or proper relations between Turkey and all Middle East countries, it can effectively act as the „mediator” in many peace negotiations⁴⁰. In 2007 it gained the release of Iranian diplomats arrested in Iraq who had been arrested by the United States; two years later, it has arranged for release of British diplomats arrested in Iran. In 2008, thanks to the mediation of the Republic of Turkey the governing side and the opposition in Lebanon reached an agreement. Turkey has also participated in the tripolar mechanism for solving conflicts between Iraq and Syria. It is unlikely that peace talks between Fatah and Hamas or between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq would have been concluded successfully without the participation of Turkey⁴¹. In 2010 Turkey negotiated visa-free traffic between Syria, Lebanon and Jordan⁴².

Not all solutions proposed by Turkey have met with an approval by warring parties or been successful. Its participation in the peace process between Israel and Palestine has been unsuccessful⁴³. It has demanded that Israel moderate the blockade of Quita Ghazzah. It has also mediated in the talks between Syria and Israel until the invasion on Quita Ghazzah at the end of 2008 – with the same result. Iran has rejected a December 2009 Turkish government proposition for mediation with Western countries on its nuclear program⁴⁴.

Mediation and the end of conflict are the first steps in the stabilisation process of a critical region. Taking into account the complexity of this process, Turkey participates in the building of civil society and joins humanitarian actions operating in the Middle East. It has engaged in the rebuilding of Israel and

³⁸ A. Balcer, *op. cit.* p. 33.

³⁹ I. Krastew, M. Leonard, *Widmo Europy wielobiegunowej (The vision of a multi-dimensional Europe)*, London – Warsaw 2011, p. 65.

⁴⁰ A. Balcer, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² I. Krastew, M. Leonard, *op. cit.*

⁴³ K. Smoleń, *Soft w polityce zagranicznej Turcji wobec regionu Bliskiego Wschodu (Soft in Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Middle East region)*, „Annales UMCS, Section K: Politologia (Politics)”, 2011, vol. 18,1, p. 82.

⁴⁴ A. Balcer, *op. cit.*

Palestine after war damages. It has also committed itself to support Palestine by donating \$150 million⁴⁵.

The Turkish non-governmental sector has also participated in the stabilisation of the Middle East. Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) is the originator of the *Industry for Peace Initiative* project that aims to rebuild Middle Eastern countries that have been destroyed due to the long-term conflicts. Turkey would like the project to involve the whole territory of the Middle East⁴⁶.

According to the objectives of the *Strategic Depth* concept, the leaders of the Republic of Turkey are open towards the co-operation with all countries, including non-democratic ones. At the same time, they exclude any interference into their internal affairs. The first approach of Erdoğan's government to the leaders of Syria and Iran took place in 2003. These countries had a negative stand on the operation of the U.S. in Iraq. Syria and Iran as well as Turkey have been fighting with the members of *Kurdistan Workers' Party* and feared that the attack on Iraq would lead to its destabilization and the formation of the independent Kurdistan⁴⁷. The further strengthening of relations between the three countries has resulted from their common actions against the separatists of the *Kurdistan Workers' Party*. A couple of actions coordinated by Turkey and Iran took place in 2011; these actions have been directed against the members of the *Party of Free Life of Kurdistan* in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan⁴⁸. Syria's withdrawal from its territorial claim towards the Hatay province belonging to the Republic of Turkey has strengthened relations between Turkey and Syria⁴⁹.

The strengthening of the security sphere has enabled these countries to sign a number of agreements. Turkey's agreements with Syria have defined, among other things, their joint army maneuvers⁵⁰. Turkey's 'mediating' role between Syria and Israel has played an important role in the relations between both sides⁵¹. Turkey and Syria have also signed the visa-free traffic agreement and free trade agreements, expanding previous bilateral agreements⁵². For example, Turkey's exports to Syria has increased from \$1,1 billion in 2008 to \$1,4 billion in 2009⁵³. Turkey and Syria's common political, security-related and economic

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, s. 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ R. Kujawa, *Turecja wobec kryzysu w Syrii (Turkey towards the crisis in Syria)*, „Biuletyn PISM”, 2011, nr 81 (830), p. 2506.

⁴⁸ M.A. Piotrowski, *Kontekst regionalny stosunków Turcji z Iranem po zimnej wojnie (A regional context of Turkey's relations with Iran after the Cold War)*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe” („International Affairs”) 2011, no 4, p. 41.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ I. Krastew, M. Leonard, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 65–66.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

interests have caused Turkey to object to the sanctions imposed on Syria and to the threats to use force; it therefore has acted against the stand of the United States and other representatives of the international community. Turkey has preferred dialogue to a policy of pressure and called on Syria's leaders to observe the rules of democracy, the withdrawal of its army from Lebanon and to co-operate with the United Nations⁵⁴.

Independently from the stand of the Western representatives, Turkey is still strengthening its relations with Iran. During an official visit in Iran in 2009, the Prime Minister has referred to the President of Iran the „President of Turkey”⁵⁵. The countries have signed a memorandum on co-operation in the security sphere in 2008. It relates to acting against the fighting groups of the *Kurdistan Workers' Party* (PKK)⁵⁶. Their cooperation in the energy sector is also important. They accept Turkey's energy policy, assuming the country's role as an energy link, ensuring an undisturbed and economically profitable transit of energy raw materials from the Caspian region, the Middle East and North Africa to the European Union.

Due to its lack of considerable energy reserves, Turkey signed a number of agreements in the 1990s to satisfy increasing internal consumption and diversify the sources of delivery of natural gas. Iran has become one of blue petroleum suppliers on Turkey's market, agreeing to supply 10 billion m³ from 2001–2025. According to the memorandum signed by Turkey and Iraq in 2007, Turkey is going to receive 30 billion m³ of gas every year, with 20 billion m³ to be sent to Europe⁵⁷. The agreement has also included a concession given to the Turkish kerosene company TPAS for the development of gas reserve the South Pars in Iran⁵⁸. The Iran Pipeline opened in 2002 is an enterprise shared by Turkey and Iraq⁵⁹. It sends the blue petroleum from Tabriz in Iraq to the centre in Erzurum, Turkey. In 2008, Turkey and Iran signed an agreement on the development of

⁵⁴ R. Sadowski, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵⁵ A. Balcer, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁵⁶ J. Spyder, *Turcja – Iran: wzajemne przeciwności, wspólne interesy* (*Turkey – Iran: mutual differences, mutual interests*), „Stosunki Międzynarodowe” („International Relations”), http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/artukul,1108,Turcja-Iran_wzajemne_przeciwnosci_wspolne_interesy, 17.07.2012.

⁵⁷ E. Wyciszkiewicz, (ed.), *Geopolityka rurociągów. Współzależność energetyczna stosunki międzypaństwowe na obszarze postsowieckim* (*The geopolitics of gas mains. The energetic co-dependence and international relations on the postsoviet area*), Warsaw 2008, p. 275.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ M.A. Piotrowski, *Turcja jako pomost energetyczny między Wschodem i Zachodem* (*Turkey as an energy bridge between the East and the West*), in: A. Balcer, J. Rohoziński, W. Konończuk, W. Tworowski, R. Sadowski, M. Menkiszak, M.A. Piotrowski (ed.), *Turcja po rozpoczęciu negocjacji z Unią Europejską – relacje zagraniczne i sytuacja wewnętrzna* (*Turkey after the start of the negotiations with the European Union – foreign relations and internal situation*), Warsaw 2008, p. 101.

two new pipelines supplementing the existing Tabriz-Ankara connection⁶⁰. The capacity of the gas main currently amounts to 10 billion m³. In 2020 the capacity of the gas main is going to amount to 30–40 billion m³. The realization of new projects will probably guarantee the durability of the deliveries. These cannot be ensured by the Korpezhe-Kurt Kui gas main joining Turkmenistan to Europe through the territories of Iran and Turkey, due to attacks by the *Kurdistan Workers' Party* separatists⁶¹.

Given their common interests with Iran, Turkey and Brazil presented an initiative to enrich Iranian uranium abroad. Turkey wants to have the role of a 'mediator' between the Western countries and Iran regarding its controversial nuclear programme⁶². Taking into account its good relations with Iran, Turkey objected in 2010 to the fourth resolution of United Nations Security Council imposing sanctions on Iran due to the realization of this programme⁶³.

Turkey perceives Iran's possession of the weapon of mass destruction as a challenge for its security. However, according to the objectives of the *Strategic Depth* it proposes to solve this problem by diplomatic negotiations⁶⁴. Turkey argues that it is necessary to finish Iran's isolation by P5+1 countries as well as by United Nations in order to ensure any success of the negotiations⁶⁵.

Fearing an armed confrontation and the destabilisation of the neighbouring regions, Erdoğan's government does not accept a potential intervention by the United States in Iran⁶⁶. In order to avoid the deterioration of its relations with Iran and the country's potential retaliation, Turkey for some time opted not to participate in the EPAA (*European Phased Adaptive Approach*) system. It argued that the portable radio detector AN/TPY-2, which provides information for the SM-3 capturing missile, did not include its South-East areas⁶⁷. Turkey has demanded some agreement on the control over it as well as a prohibition on sharing information obtained by the radio detector with Israel⁶⁸. In the end the

⁶⁰ E. Wyciszkievicz, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ J. Potulski, *Surowce energetyczne i linie przesyłowe jako przedmiot geopolityki Morza Kaspijskiego*, (*Energy raw materials and industrial lines as the objects of the Caspian Sea geopolitics*), in: B. Bojarczyk, T. Kapuśniak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁶² A. Dzisiów-Szuszczykiewicz, *Sukcesy i porażki „anatolijskiego tygrysa” – wyzwania dla polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa Turcji* (*Successes and failures of the „Anatolian tiger” – challenges for Turkey's foreign policy and security*), „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” („International Security”) 2012, no 21, p. 75.

⁶³ J. Spyer, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ A. Dzisiów-Szuszczykiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ R. Sadowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61.

⁶⁷ A. Dzisiów-Szuszczykiewicz, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ S. Flanagan, *Turkey's Approach to Euro-Atlantic Security*, Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, August 19 2011, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/19/turkey-s-approach-to-euro-atlantic-security>, 19.08.2012.

Turkish leaders have made the decision to install the radio detector in the country's territory⁶⁹.

Turkey's participation in the EPAA programme and its competition with Iran for influence in Iraq and Lebanon, where it tries to constitute a counterweight against Iran's support for Shiite groups, have negatively influenced the relations between the countries⁷⁰. Turkey is however still keeping pragmatic relations with Iranian government.

Turkey's negative rhetoric towards Israel's regional political actions makes it more popular among Arab countries in the Middle East. On the other hand, Turkey's initiation of closer relations with Muslim countries negatively influences its relations with Israel. These are also complicated by its negative evaluation of Israel's Policy towards Palestine. Turkey demands an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Qita Ghazzah. It defines the operations towards Palestine as homicide⁷¹. It also presents a negative approach towards Israel's intervention in Lebanon and in Qita Ghazzah. It also condemns the Operation Cast Lead, conducted at the turn of the year 2008–2009. The lack of trust has also been heightened by the information about Israel's intelligence training for Kurdish units of Kurds in Iraq⁷². Israel on the other hand negatively evaluates pragmatic relations between Turkey and Iran, which officially aims for Israel's destruction and negates the Holocaust.

The biggest crisis between the countries has been caused by the attacks of Israeli commandos on the „Mavi Mara” ship in 2010. After this incident, the government of Turkey demanded that Israel apologise, pay compensation to the families of the victims, and end the blockade of Qita Ghazzah. Turkish leaders have seen the normalization of the relations with Israel as possible only after these conditions have been fulfilled. The lack of any response on Israel's side has met with a strict response from Turkey. At the beginning of September 2011 Turkey suspended military co-operation with Israel and has expelled its ambassador. It also announced the reduction of its diplomatic representation in Israel down to the range of the second secretary.

Another point of disagreement between Turkey and Israel is Israel's co-operation with Cyprus concerning the exploitation of petroleum deposits under

⁶⁹ See: *Turkey agrees to host early warning radar as part of NATO missile shield*, „Sunday's Zaman” September 2 2011, http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&newsId=255529&link=255529, 19.08.2012.

⁷⁰ Ö. Taşpınar, *Turkish-Iranian Solidarity in the Middle East?*, „Sunday's Zaman” January 8 2012, <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-268009-turkish-iranian-solidarity-in-the-middle-east.html>, 19.08.2012.

⁷¹ G.A. Burris, *Turkey and Israel: Speed Bumps*, „Middle East Quarterly”, Fall 2003 p. 78, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1026038/posts>, 18.07.2012.

⁷² S.M. Hersh, *Plan B, as June 30th approaches, Israel looks to the Kurds*, „The New Yorker”, June 28 2004, cited: R. Sadowski, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

the Mediterranean Sea⁷³. However, despite these disagreements, Turkey has not voted against Israel's accession to OECD and the agreement on the co-operation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation⁷⁴.

A 'tense' relation of formal allies is not without significance for the widely understood security within the region. A mutual lack of trust and conflicting interests disable both sides from cooperating in such crucial issues as the events of the *Arab Spring* in Syria and Egypt, the stabilization of the situation in Iraq, solving the Palestinian problem, control of Iran's nuclear programme, the war against Jihad terrorists in Sinai and along the Turkey – Syria border⁷⁵. Also the co-operation of both countries in the energy sector should be postponed in the nearest future, for example the co-operation related to the development of undersea connections for the transport of petroleum, natural gas, drinking water and electricity to Haifa⁷⁶.

THE IMPACT OF THE *ARAB SPRING* ON THE TURKEY'S REGIONAL POLICY

The outburst of protests and social unrest in Syria was conditioned, as in other countries of North Africa and the Middle East, by political, economic and social factors⁷⁷, and constitutes a serious challenge for the security of the Middle East. Several regional „players” are indirectly and directly engaged in the course and solution of the conflict: Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as Iran. These countries have been competing for years to gain some influence in Syria. The events of the *Arab Spring* have both a regional and international dimension. The West, represented mainly by the United States, Russia and China, has also joined the international discussion concerning the development of an effective method of ending the dispute and the future of the country currently facing the civil war.

Given the extent of relations concerning Russia, China and Iran with Syria on the one hand and the United States and Europe as well as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar towards the Middle East on the other, it can be concluded that Syria currently constitutes a subject around which convergent interests of two

⁷³ A. Dziśiów-Szuszczkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁷⁴ I. Krastew, M. Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁷⁵ A. Dziśiów-Szuszczkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁷⁶ M.A. Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁷⁷ See: A. Dziśiów-Szuszczkiewicz, „*Arabska Wiosna*” – przyczyny, przebieg i prognozy (*The Arab Spring – causes, course and the prognosis*) „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” („National Security”) 2011, no 18, pp. 42–46.

„coalitions” are colliding⁷⁸. The geopolitical leadership in the region is the ‘prize’ for winning the competition⁷⁹.

The engagement of regional and international „players” in the events of the *Arab Spring* in Syria, as well as the conflict itself have become a kind of a test for the regional policy of Turkey. They considerably limit the possibility of Turkey’s realizing its political and economic interests in the Middle East. They also constitute a threat to its national security and may also have negative effects on Turkey’s relations with political and economic partners in the region.

According to the rules of its most recent foreign policy concept, „zero problems with neighbors” and „not intervening into their foreign affairs”, the *Justice and Development Party* government has officially opted for the maintenance of Syria’s territorial integrity, the prevention of a civil war and religious conflict which may spread over the whole region, and a gradual democratization of the country⁸⁰.

The first reaction of the Prime Minister to the violent suppression of protests by supporters of Al-Assad has only been an appeal to conduct democratic reforms and avoid of further escalation⁸¹. Turkish authorities expected a quick end of the conflict, as its escalation would result in serious implications for the country’s policy in the region, for example in an uncontrollable inflow of refugees into its territory, the loss of an important economic and political partner for fighting against the PKK, the activation of separatist aspirations among the Kurds (the outbreak of so-called *Kurd Spring*), transfer of the conflict into the neighbouring countries, and conflict with a direct neighbour.

A risk for Turkey’s policy toward Syria is the probability of worsening political and economic relations with Iran (gas deliveries), which perceives Syria as a key Arab ally and partner in the Middle East⁸². Moreover, it will result limit economic exchanges between Turkey and the countries of the region, in which Syria has had the role of a transitory point. The difficulties of accessing the petroleum reserves from the countries of the Persian Gulf should be also considered as probable⁸³. The presence of these dangers considerably weakens Turkey’s geo-political and geo-economic position in the region.

Despite the risk negative consequences, the Syrian government’s continued pacification of the opposition, its harsh criticism of the Western international community and the risk of losing good relations with Arab countries have caused Turkey to use a more decisive rhetoric. Erdoğan has personally called on Al-Assad to stop the violence towards civilians and described the actions of the

⁷⁸ *Idem*, *Regionalna rywalizacja o Syrię (Regional competition for Syria)*, „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe”(„National Security”), 2012, no 22, p. 91.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² See: *ibidem*, pp. 92–97.

⁸³ *Idem*, *Sukcesy i porażki... (Successes and failures...)*, p. 71.

military forces as inhuman. Another step was to introduce the policy of isolation towards Syria. A firm stand by the Turkish government towards the Assad regime has led to a visible increase of the „tension” between the two countries.

The relations have become hostile after more incidents: the assassination of several Syrians who had obtained shelter in the territory of Turkey⁸⁴ and shooting down of a Turkish fighter plane F4-Phantom in June 2012. In response, Turkish authorities have demanded a consultative meeting of the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Due to the intensification of the situation, NATO has confirmed its defensive warranties towards Turkey⁸⁵.

Soon after the decision of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Turkey further intensified its policy towards Syria. The government has increased the number of armed forces at the border with Syria⁸⁶. It has also started talks with the rebels. According to unofficial information, Turkish leaders have given members of the Free Syrian Army access to the country’s territory⁸⁷. They have also given the shelter to Syrian refugees and hosted the representatives of the opposition. The authorities’ engagement in the organisation of the meetings of „the group of friends” of Syria constitutes important support⁸⁸. In June 2012 the minister of foreign affairs in Erdoğan’s government, Davutoğlu, participated in a meeting of representatives of the Syrian opposition organized by the League of Arab States in Cairo⁸⁹.

Turkey has also taken actions aiming at achieving independence from the economic co-operation with Syria, seeking alternative economic contacts in the Middle East⁹⁰. The *Justice and Development Party* (AKP) supported the proposal of the League of Arab States and Western countries to impose economic sanctions on Syria. Turkey itself has decided to impose a 30 per cent tax on Syrian goods⁹¹.

A critical stand towards the events in Syria, despite their many negative political and economic implications for its regional policy, has strengthened Turkey’s position among Arab states. This can be seen in the annual Arab Pub-

⁸⁴ E. Dumanli, *PM: Turkey may invoke NATO’s Article 5 over Syrian border fire*, „Today’s Zaman”, April 12 2012, <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-277185-.html>, 30.01.2013.

⁸⁵ *Syria – wojna domowa czy już konflikt międzynarodowy? (Syria – a civil war or already an international conflict?)*, Wiadomości24.pl, http://www.wiadomosci24.pl/artukul/syria_wojna_domowa_czy_juz_konflikt_miedzynarodowy_236134.html, 17.07.2012.

⁸⁶ A. Dżisiów-Szuszczkiewicz, *Regionalna...., (Regional...)* p. 99.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Turkey, Arab League urge Syrian opposition to unite*, „Today’s Zaman”, July 2 2012, <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-285278-turkey-arab-league-urge-syrian-opposition-to-unite.html>, 30.01.2013.

⁹⁰ F. Özerkan, *Turkish PM warns of civil war in Syria*, „The Daily Star Lebanon”, January 9 2012, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jan-09/159284-turkish-pm-warns-of-civil-war-in-syria.ashx#axzz246QoVubB>, 20.08.2012.

⁹¹ A. Dżisiów-Szuszczkiewicz, *Sukcesy i porażki... (Successes and failures...)*, p. 71.

lic Opinion Poll conducted in 2011. As many as 50% of the respondents in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates identified Turkey as the state which has played the most constructive role during social demonstrations in North Africa and in the Middle East⁹². 30 per cent of the respondents voted for France and 25 per cent – for the United States⁹³. Moreover, 45 per cent of Egyptians have declared that they would like their new political system to be based on the Turkish model⁹⁴.

Turkey's condemnation of Al-Assad's regime and its participation in the support for opposition will probably strengthen relations between Turkey and the United States and other members of NATO. These have been put to a serious test several times due to an independent and pragmatic foreign policy of Erdoğan's government. For example, the Turkish government did not support the American intervention in Iraq, it has co-operated with the regimes of Syria and Iran and has chosen a „firm” stand towards Israel.

The criticism of Al – Assad's policy, especially its violent actions toward civilians, has positively influenced Turkey's image among Western states that had been reserved towards Turkey due to the cases of human rights' violation and the violation of democratic rules by its military forces. Their increasingly incidental character and the attitude of Erdoğan's government allow Turkey to be perceived as the state which is decreasingly suffering from the shortage of democracy.

The crisis in Syria also contributes to the changing relations among regional „players”. It has contributed to the strengthening of Turkish co-operation with Saudi Arabia. This may result in a bigger a bigger petroleum supply from Saudi Arabia to Turkey. On the other hand, the deterioration of Turkey's relations with Iran, caused by a negative stand of the *Justice and Development Party* (AKP) towards the fighting in Syria will probably affect its pragmatic relations with Israel, because it has remained an enemy of both Syria and Iran. Those countries support Hamas and Hezbollah, which Israel perceives as terrorist organizations. The common aim of Turkey and Israel is, however, preventing a further strengthening of Iran's position in the Middle East. Its results include a total loss of control over its nuclear programme, a serious challenge for the national security of Israel and the threat to Turkey's interests in the region⁹⁵.

A political and military-defensive co-operation between Turkey and Israel constitutes an optimal scenario, due to the unpredictable regime policy in Iran, an unresolved conflict in Syria and a complicated geopolitical situation on the

⁹² S. Telhami, Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey, November 21 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/11/21-arab-public-opinion-telhami>, 30.01.2013.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ E. Toledano, *Is Israel „Trembling” and „on its Knees” or is Ankara Dreaming?*, „Hurriyet Daily News” January 5 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/is-israel-trembling-and-on-its-knees-or-is-ankara-dreaming.aspx?pageID=238&nID=10738&NewsCatID=396>, 31.01.2013.

critical Middle East, a political and military-defensive co-operation of Turkey and Israel constitutes an optimal scenario. An informal alliance of both countries, supported by the United States and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, may prevent further escalation of instability in the region. It however is probable that if Israel intervenes militarily in Syria, Turkey and the United States will also be forced to become militarily engaged in the conflict as its allies.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's priority towards the events of the *Arab Spring* in Syria is its national security. Its relations with Middle Eastern states are also important, as well as the possibility of the realization of its particular interests in the region. Given these priorities, it is not very likely that Turkey will amend its policy towards Syria; the policy aims at the maintenance of its territorial integrity of the state, its gradual democratization, limiting/finishing the conflict through peaceful negotiations, and coordination of the international support for the political actions against Al-Assad's regime.

At the current stage of the conflict, taking into consideration the geopolitical situation in the Middle East, the Turkish government perceives the development of a no-fly zone over Northern Syria as an optimal precaution. This step aims at strengthening the security at the border and ensuring shelter for the rebels⁹⁶. It also opts for the development of refugee camps on Syrian territory or on the Turkish-Syrian border⁹⁷. Some politicians propose the creation of a „liberated zone” on the North of Syria.

There are two circumstances in which Turkey might become engaged in a military intervention. Firstly, in the situation of the necessity of protecting its people and its territory. Secondly, in the moment of the conflict's escalation or its spread over Syria's borders. Turkey's engagement is also probable when Turkey's NATO allies led by the United States or Israel (being Turkey's partner in the security dimension in the Middle East) will decide to start some military operations in Syria.

⁹⁶ A. Dzisiów-Szuszczykiewicz, *Regionalna...*, (*Regional...*) p. 98.

⁹⁷ Ika, *Rosja radzi: NATO ma się trzymać się z dala od Syrii*, (*Russia says: NATO should stay away from Syria*) „Rzeczpospolita” 02.10.2012, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/938599.html>, 31.01.2013.

ARABSKA WIOSNA W SYRII.
KONSEKWENCJE W POLITYCE REGIONALNEJ TURCJI

Streszczenie. Wydarzenia *arabskiej wiosny* w Syrii przyczyniły się do przewartościowania polityki regionalnej Republiki Turcji. Państwo to zmuszone zostało do dokonania wyboru. Czy zgodnie z oczekiwaniami zachodnich sojuszników, w tym m.in. Stanów Zjednoczonych, promować na obszarze Bliskiego Wschodu zasady demokracji i zdecydowanie reagować na przypadki łamania praw człowieka, wskazując tym samym kierunek niezbędnych przemian w regionie. Czy nawiązując do zawartej w koncepcji polityki zagranicznej *strategiczna głębia* zasady: „zero problemów z sąsiadami”, która wyklucza ingerencję w politykę wewnętrzną innych państw, kontynuować pragmatyczną współpracę ze wszystkimi ośrodkami politycznymi, w tym z reżimami autorytarnymi.

Zwyciężyła polityka ochrony demokracji i praw człowieka. Decyzja ta z jednej strony zacieśnia relacji Turcji ze strukturami zachodnimi, z drugiej, naraża na otwarty konflikt z bezpośrednim sąsiadem – Syrią. Konflikt ten poważnie zagraża jej bezpieczeństwu oraz ma negatywne konsekwencje dla jej rozwoju ekonomicznego, bezpieczeństwa energetycznego, a także powiązań gospodarczych z partnerami z Bliskiego Wschodu.

Słowa kluczowe: Turcja, *arabska wiosna*, Syria, *strategiczna głębia*, Bliski Wschód