



**Enjoy Your New Region! The US Strategy of Shifting
Turkey's Caucus in the UN Security Council in 1953**

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Abstract: Where does Turkey geographically belong, the Middle East or Eastern Europe? This was a looming puzzle for the architects of the Cold War to solve in the early 1950s. This was so because Turkey's region would dramatically affect the composition of members in the UN Security Council. Although Turkey was elected to the Council from the Middle East region in 1950, it moved its region to Eastern Europe in 1953 to compete with Poland for the Council seat. However, the determination of where Turkey belonged was not an easy task and demanded very delicate calculations and political strategies. We argue that it was the Cold War strategies of the US that arbitrated where Turkey geographically belonged, exemplifying that regions are formed through discourse and are constantly mediated and renegotiated. This situation has created both opportunities and limitations for the Turkish policy-makers who joined the debate ex post facto, spoke either to legitimize the US decision or to displace counter arguments.

Introduction

Students of Turkish geopolitics presented the changing affiliation of Turkey to the UN Regional Groups from the Middle Eastern Group to Eastern European Group and finally the Western European and Others Group (WEOG) as an indicator of distance between Turkey and the Third World (Donelli and Gonzalez-Levaggi 2016, 101). This is so because it is assumed that WEOG members are culturally and politically similar despite being geographically distant. Therefore, Turkey's bid for the Council seat from the WEOG represents its long-time desire to become a part of Europe (Akçapar 2007, 36). Such an inference implicitly assumes that a state's perception of where it belongs determines its 'region' regardless of where it is geographically. This assumption, however, overlooks the relational character of geographical belongings (the perception of other actors in the system) and the strategic aspect of geographical status in world politics (political aspirations of great powers). Presenting Turkey's shifting place in UN regional groups as an outcome of its geopolitical imaginations is ill-suited to capture the global power struggles over the distribution of regional belongings. Therefore, this paper focuses on the role of great powers in constructing regions of smaller states. Closely investigating the shift of Turkey's place in UN caucuses from the Middle East to Eastern Europe during the 1953 elections of the UN Security Council non-permanent members, the paper aims to expose the role of great powers in shaping and reshaping regional identities of smaller states.

As a matter of fact, according to a critical understanding of geopolitics and a discursive constructivist approach, regions are formed through incessant political discourse (Goldthau, et al. 2020, 7). In the discursive constitution of regions, the narratives of some actors are more authoritative than that of others (Said 1979, 23). Even if a small state constantly repeats that it belongs to a region, the perceptions of the great powers about regional identities are much more determinant. But this does not mean that the great powers can arbitrarily build regions and regulate members of them only in discourse. Political narratives are always in interaction with "the world's existence or the significance of materiality" (Bialasiewicz et al. 2007, 406). Therefore, a region needs to correspond to geographic proximity as well as social, cultural, and religious homogeneity and political, economic and military interaction (Legrenzi and Harders 2008, 2). The narratives of the great powers are also constantly mediated and renegotiated by local and global actors that are involved. For example, a smaller state cannot be positioned in a region with the narratives of great power, contrary to its own will. Local intellectuals or elites

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3 should accept their country's new region and some other states in the system need to be
4 convinced about the new member of the region. Therefore, region-building is "characteristically
5 messy, problematic, and highly contested" and involves increasingly complex (intersubjective)
6 relations among political actors (Jones 2006, 416; Hettne and Söderbaum 2002).
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9 The change of Turkey's UN region from the Middle East to Eastern Europe in 1953 presents
10 an illustrative case to understand the discursive construction of regions, the role of great powers
11 in region-building, and its intersubjective character. To reduce the influence of the Soviet Union
12 in the Security Council, the US moved Turkey from the Middle East to the Eastern European
13 region so that it could defeat Poland, a Soviet ally. In this direction, the US spent much energy
14 persuading its European allies and challenged the Soviet objections. The narratives of the US
15 and other actors involved in this region-building activity are available in diplomatic archives.
16 Therefore, we delve into those archives to illustrate the discursive constitution of Turkey as a
17 country in Eastern Europe. Since negotiations among diplomats are mostly behind closed doors,
18 newspapers do not provide enough material to scrutinize the case. Unfortunately, the Turkish
19 diplomatic archive is not open to the public. Although some of the Turkish diplomatic
20 documents have been made public in recent years, documents on relations with the United
21 States and about UN activities are still closed. For this reason, this article mainly benefits from
22 US official diplomatic documents, which have been published under the title of 'Foreign
23 Relations of the United States' (FRUS). These extensive documents provide valuable
24 information about backstage diplomacy, the discourses of UN members, and the opinions of
25 US diplomats regarding candidates of the Security Council. Although the Turkish press gave
26 relatively little coverage of Turkey's candidacy to the Security Council, available reports and
27 commentaries are rich in understanding the Turkish elite's perception of the new regional
28 identity.
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33 Following a discourse analysis, this paper will scrutinize the narratives of American and
34 Turkish diplomats about Turkey in Eastern Europe. The 'regularity of statements' in speeches
35 of diplomatic actors is central in understanding the formation of regional identity regulated by
36 the US strategic interests. Since only the performative reiteration of identificatory assertions
37 and practices enacts a fixed identity into being for a region (Stavrakakis 1999, 34; Bialasiewicz
38 et al. 2007, 407), we methodologically focus on repetitive statements of the US diplomats and
39 their Turkish colleagues. The remainder of the paper is hence structured as follows: In the next
40 section, we will present our main theoretical assumptions about the discursive-constructivist
41 accounts of region-making but also the impact of the great powers on the creation of regions.
42 We will then present our case study in the following sections and present Turkey's endeavor in
43 the UN to place itself in a suitable region, and scrutinize the great power motivations behind
44 creating such regions and bestowing them to smaller nations. Here, we will also study Turkey's
45 positioning vis-à-vis such maneuvers. We will then conclude the article by recapitulating the
46 theoretical contributions of the paper and suggesting some related future studies.
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50 Region-making and remaking: A theoretical discussion

51 After the end of the Cold War, scholars such as Paasi (1991), Neumann (1994) and MacLeod
52 (1998) espoused the idea that regions are discursively constructed by asking by whom, why and
53 how a region is brought into existence. According to this critical constructivist turn, regions are
54 not products of ideational markers (language, religion, etc.) or natural geographies (mountains,
55 rivers, etc.). Rather, they are "imagined communities constructed in a deeply political process
56 in which discourses compete in the attempt to construct social meaning" (Browning 2003, 46;
57 Mansfield and Milner, 1999). Therefore, regions need their "builders" who can talk and write
58 them into existence (Tuathail and Agnew 1992, 192; Bialasiewicz et al. 2007, 410). In the
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3 literature, region-builders are either local or global. The first line of thought argues that regions
4 “are socially constructed by their members” through social, political, and economic interaction
5 (Buzan and Waever 2003, 48; Acharya 1992). The second group of scholars (Bialasiewicz et
6 al. 2007; Agnew 2003; Gregory 2004) accentuates the role of great powers in the construction
7 of regions. For example, Tuathail and Agnew (1992) underlined the hegemon’s capacity to
8 write the rules for particular world order and to produce one specific understanding of
9 geographical space in the process. Rather than local dynamics, they draw our attention to the
10 impact of hierarchical structure in the international system on creating geopolitical belongings,
11 suggesting the role of great powers in shaping and reshaping the geographical space. This great-
12 powers-as-region-builder approach ushered numerous studies, especially about the Middle East
13 (Bilgin 2000; Culcasi 2010). These studies revealed that the Middle East is a region built first
14 by the UK and then by the USA in the image of their interests. It was their interests that
15 determined which countries to be included in or excluded from the Middle East region.
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19 Since the 1990s, Turkey has been one of the most studied cases in this context. This is primarily
20 due to Turkey’s “torn” identity in terms of its civilizational belonging. While the Turkish elite
21 tried to become part of the West, the masses remained loyal to the Islamic civilization
22 (Mamadouh, 2003). Turkey’s membership process to the European Union (EU) and the coming
23 of Islam-friendly AKP to power in 2002 encouraged many scholars to interrogate how Turkey’s
24 civilizational belonging is constructed. On the one hand, some scholars argued that the EU
25 constructed Turkey as an outsider to define its own Christian, democratic and liberal identity
26 against Turkey (Neumann 1999; Morozov and Rumelili 2012). On the other, some scholars
27 focused on how Turkish political actors constructed Turkey’s civilizational identity either
28 within Europe or in the post-Ottoman space with Turkey in the center (Aydin 2003; Bilgin
29 2004; Akçalı and Perinçek 2009; Yanık 2011; Yeşiltaş 2013; Erşen 2013). This burgeoning
30 literature speaks of regional identity in terms of history, culture, and civilization but discounts
31 region-building as a strategy of great powers. Though relatively few in number, studies focusing
32 on the Cold War period underline the prevalence of ideological geopolitics as a facilitator in
33 positioning Turkey within the West. In this regard, Bilgin (2004, 278) argues that “as the Cold
34 War geopolitical imagination was centered around two alternative models of political-economic
35 organization... Turkey located itself in the West by virtue of its pro-Western orientation and
36 membership of European institutions”. However, the Cold War-related literature does not
37 sufficiently address the strategic interests of the great powers in locating Turkey either.
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42 To explain the creation of geopolitical imaginings and regional identities as the mere products
43 of local agents in line with discursive constructivism would offer a partial perspective. Within
44 the hierarchical international system, great powers are inclined to bestow certain geopolitical
45 positions to smaller states to gain a strategic advantage against rival powers. This is due to the
46 structural context of the international system and global capitalist economy which we can more
47 clearly observe today through ‘globalization’ (Akçalı 2011). This reading of geopolitical
48 identities does not suggest that ‘superior’ entities imagine the geography of others to normalize
49 their superior position (Doty 1996). Rather, it posits that strategic calculations of great powers
50 in their struggle with rivals can enable the construction of geopolitical identities for smaller
51 states. Building on Agnew’s idea that geopolitical imaginations are tools of Great Powers in
52 imposing “the political-economic agenda of others, defining appropriate standards of conduct
53 and providing the framing for interstate relations with which others must conform” (Agnew
54 2003, 10; Su 2020; Vangeli 2020), we argue that a change in great powers’ strategic imperatives
55 can lead to significant shifts in geopolitical belongings of small powers within the global
56 system. Great powers undertake a significant role not only in imposing this new geopolitical
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3 identity on the targeted small state but also in constructing the consent about this revision in
4 geopolitics among other countries within the system.
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6 We do not entirely reject the role of agency in building geopolitical affiliations,
7 notwithstanding. Once again, Thuathail and Agnew (1992) argue that “geopolitics is defined as
8 a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft ‘spatialize’ international politics and
9 represent it as a ‘world’ characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas.
10 Region-builders are not necessarily located outside the region. Their narratives can coincide
11 with that of local intellectuals of statecraft. Great powers’ choice of geographical attachments
12 to smaller states is negotiated and needs to be legitimized by local discursive practices. Smaller
13 states are thus involved. When the geographical belonging accorded by great powers coincides
14 with the preferred geopolitical location of the smaller state, this new belonging can easily turn
15 into an accepted identity for the smaller state. Therefore, as Newman (1998, 4) cogently
16 captures, the relative positioning of a state in the global system is “a function of the position
17 accorded it by other states within the system, as well as the imagined preferences of its own”
18 actors. The region constructed by these global and local builders together functions as a
19 particular order in which ‘distinctive role, capacities for action, and access to power’ are
20 assigned (Harvey 1990, 419). However, the region to be built or expanded with new members
21 is not a blank page. For this very reason, region-builders encounter and struggle with counter-
22 discourses imagining the region in question differently. The new region directly turns into the
23 object of struggles among states in the international system and counter-discourses swiftly
24 emerge. This is so because the new region denies some states from the access to power and
25 capacities of action (Campbell 1992, 65–669).
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30 In the context of our study, region-building manifests itself most clearly in the discussions of
31 which countries belonged to the Eastern European region during the early Cold War period. To
32 realize its strategic interests against the Soviet Union, the US rebuilt the Eastern European
33 region by including Turkey. However, the US had to negotiate the new membership definition
34 of this region with the candidate country (Turkey) itself in detail as well as with European
35 members of the Western bloc. Moreover, its region-building attempt brought about the counter-
36 struggle of the Soviets, whose strategic interests laid in the previous definition of the Eastern
37 European region. As the counter-discourse literature (Terdiman 1985; Laclau 1990) warns us,
38 it is impossible to close the region with a fixed identity/definition. All attempts to construct a
39 new region necessitate the production of “difference” through exclusionary practices, and
40 therefore the resulting region inevitably produces its enemies (Neumann 2001, 63). As a result,
41 the Eastern European region turned into a contested space between the US and the Soviet Union
42 during the early Cold War period. On the one hand, smaller countries within different regional
43 caucuses moved easily to the Eastern European region as a result of strategic calculations
44 aiming to pursue the voting margin in favor of the US and its allies. On the other, the Soviet
45 Union made great efforts to keep the Eastern European region a privileged area of its satellites
46 to balance the Western dominance in the Council. Therefore, Turkey’s new place in the Eastern
47 European region was generated through constitutive “antagonisms” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985,
48 144), and the hegemonic articulation of it was institutionalized in “favorable historical
49 conditions” (Smith 1998, 172).
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55 Why the US needed ‘Turkey in Europe’?

56 Given that elevating more allies to the UN Security Council would create more legitimacy for
57 both the US and the Soviet Union in Cold War politics, especially the Eastern European region
58 turned into contested space. Until the 1965 expansion, the Security Council, the most important
59 UN body responsible for the maintenance of peace and security across the world, had 11
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3 members, of which five were permanent. As the five permanent members (P5) had then, as
4 now, veto power over all resolutions of the Council, the six non-permanent seats were
5 somewhat symbolic. However, votes of non-permanent members were important, especially in
6 procedural matters and Council agendas on which P5 had no veto power. More importantly,
7 each vote has the power to increase or decrease the legitimacy of the resolution proposed by
8 the great powers. Even if a draft resolution fails through veto of rival great power, the high
9 number of affirmative votes can legitimize the standing of proposers in international politics
10 (Claude 1966; Hurd 2008). Put differently, all votes in the Security Council were crucial in the
11 war of prestige and legitimacy between the US and the Soviet Union in the Cold War rivalry
12 (Getchell 2017, 5). Therefore, the US diplomats spent much energy to deny the Soviet satellite
13 Poland from the Council seat and elect Turkey instead. To elect Turkey to the Security Council
14 instead of Poland, the most pressing puzzle to solve for the US diplomats was whether Turkey
15 belonged to Eastern Europe or the Middle East. Because Turkey had been elected to the Council
16 from the Middle East region in the 1950 elections, the US had to convince other UN members
17 to elect Turkey to the Council from the Eastern European region only three years later.

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22 In a meeting in the Bureau of United Nations Affairs on June 26, 1953, US diplomats decided
23 to “oppose a Soviet satellite” for the East European seat and “to wage an active campaign for a
24 non-Soviet candidate”. Thomas J. Cory, one of the US diplomats in this meeting, predicted “a
25 real fight on this election” and therefore suggested starting the campaign earlier. Possible non-
26 Soviet candidates were The Philippines, Thailand, Turkey and Ethiopia in the mind of US
27 diplomats. According to their calculations, “Turkey would probably have the greatest chance
28 of success” although Thailand and Ethiopia also had a grain of chance (FRUS 1953, UNP files,
29 lot 59 D 237). In the 1949 and 1951 elections, US efforts to prevent the election of a Soviet
30 satellite to the Council gave the fruit and the Eastern Europe region was represented by
31 Yugoslavia and Greece, respectively. Assuming that “the election of a Soviet candidate would
32 seriously increase Soviet obstructive capabilities in the Security Council”, US diplomats
33 pursued an active role in the election campaigns of both Yugoslavia and Greece. However,
34 elevating Greece to the Council seat in the 1951 elections was quite difficult for US diplomats
35 and it was only on the nineteenth ballot that Greece was finally elected. This was due to “many
36 countries outside the Soviet bloc, including the UK and France, opposed” the US position on
37 the ground that it violated the informal understanding reached in London in 1945 among great
38 powers about the election of non-permanent members (FRUS 1953, UNP files, lot 59 D 237).

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42 The 1946 London Agreement, although it was never officially published, was the main
43 reference of the Soviet delegation in the UN to defend a seat for Slavic countries in the Council.
44 When India run against the Soviet candidate in the 1947 elections, the Soviet representative
45 objected by implicitly referring to this agreement. For the Soviet delegation, Poland would “not
46 be replaced by anybody” in case India was elevated to the seat (UNGA 1947, A_PV-94-EN,
47 332). Although US diplomats often claimed that agreement was applicable to the first election
48 only, some US allies in Western Europe took a stand in favor of the Soviets in this debate.
49 Therefore, a candidate from different regions such as Africa and the Pacific would make it more
50 difficult for the US to convince its allies, especially in Latin America. According to a diplomatic
51 dispatch dated on June 29, 1953, US diplomats had a concern about the fact that Latin American
52 countries “might fear that the election of a country from an area far removed from Eastern
53 Europe would upset the geographic pattern which has generally been followed for the Security
54 Council”. For this reason, the dispatch continues, Latin American countries “might be more
55 willing to vote for Turkey than for a candidate from the Far East or Africa even though these
56 areas are more entitled to a non-permanent seat” (FRUS 1953, UNP files, lot 59 D 237).
57 Moreover, the tough contest in the 1951 elections was quite instructive about the fact that a
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3 weak country from the Eastern Europe region such as Greece would not secure the support of
4 countries in Asia and especially in the Middle East.
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7 In his letter to the US Representative at the United Nations, John Foster Dulles, the then
8 Secretary of State, instructed not to support “any country which can be expected to support the
9 seating of the Chinese Communists” (FRUS 1953, 320/7-953). Keeping the People’s Republic
10 of China out of the Security Council had been one of the top priorities of the US since 1949.
11 After the Communists took control in Beijing on 1 October 1949, they demanded the transfer
12 of the Chinese seat in UN platforms from the Nationalist Chinese Government to the People’s
13 Republic of China. While the US recognized the Nationalist Chinese Government exile in
14 Taiwan as the legitimate representative of the Chinese people, the Soviets suggested many
15 proposals aiming to oust the representative of Nationalist China from UN platforms. The first
16 such proposal was rejected by six votes (China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, France, and United
17 States) to three (India, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union), with two abstentions (Norway and
18 United Kingdom), in the Security Council on 13 January 1950. To prevent the Chinese
19 Communists from seating in the Council, the US needed to persist its voting margin advantage
20 in the Council. This concern was central to strategic calculations of US diplomats about the
21 best candidate. Although US diplomats agreed that the election of a Soviet “satellite would
22 probably not jeopardize” their voting margin on the Chinese representation issue as long as the
23 UK agrees to support” the US position, they were not so sure about the position the UK would
24 take in future Soviet proposals (FRUS 1953, UNP files, lot 59 D 237).
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29 It is worth quoting the calculation of US diplomats at length: “If the UK changes its position
30 on Chinese representation and if other Members on the Council should also switch, the election
31 of a satellite could make it possible for the Soviet Union to muster seven votes in favor of a
32 motion to exclude the present Chinese National Government representative and seat a Chinese
33 Communist”. Although the US had a veto right on draft proposals, even this attempt, for US
34 diplomats, “might fail if the same seven Members which supported the Soviet motion also took
35 the position that the veto was not applicable”. Moreover, US diplomats underlined that “if the
36 Chinese National Government should designate a new representative, it might be difficult in
37 any case for us to muster the necessary seven votes needed to approve his credentials” (FRUS
38 1953, UNP files, lot 59 D 237). Since adopting the agenda required seven affirmative votes
39 without a right to veto for permanent members, controlling six rotating members was a
40 significant tool for any great power in setting the agenda of the Council. For example, if the
41 Council President proposes to place the item on the provisional agenda of a meeting, members
42 who disagree have the right to request a procedural vote (Binder, and Golub 2020, 421). In
43 practice, it meant that the US with more proxies in the Council could incapacitate pro-Soviet
44 Council presidents. Therefore, elevating a loyal ally to the Council seat was crucial for the US.
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49 Opposition to the membership of the Chinese Communists, however, was not the only criterion
50 that would make a candidate the best choice. Washington also had to convince its allies which
51 regarded compliance with the London Agreement as a priority. Therefore, Dulles, in his same
52 letter, suggested Turkey as the best candidate who “would probably have the best chance of
53 effectively opposing the satellite candidate”. For Dulles, Turkey’s “proximity to the Eastern
54 European area” would help to convince “other key governments, particularly the United
55 Kingdom, France and the Latin American states” (FRUS 1953, 320/7-953). Given the high
56 number of Latin American members in the General Assembly (one-third in 1953), they could
57 play a significant role in the election of a non-Soviet candidate to the Council. Therefore, US
58 diplomats had to pay special attention to their “devotion to the geographic representation
59 principle” (FRUS 1953, 320/7-953). The underrepresentation of Southeast Asia in the Council
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3 might be a reasonable justification for Washington in convincing allies to vote for the
4 Philippines or Thailand. For example, Ruth E. Bacon, the then Special Assistant to the Assistant
5 Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, suggested the Philippines on the ground that “a
6 country from the Far East had never had a non-permanent seat” (FRUS 1953, UNP files, lot 59
7 D 237). However, this option was not easy to implement. Although the UK was sympathetic to
8 claim that Asia was underrepresented”, it was not favored to a *de facto* revision in the
9 established geographical equation (FRUS 1953, 30/7-1353: Telegram). Also, many Asian
10 countries considered the Philippines “a US stooge”, and therefore might eschew from voting
11 for this country (FRUS 1953, UNP files, lot 59 D 237, ‘Slates’).
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14 Persuading Turkey for Candidacy

15 In the 1953 elections, Turkey was the perfect candidate addressing two important priorities of
16 US diplomats. But there was a problem. Ankara was unaware of any plans regarding Turkey’s
17 candidacy and did not have any intention of being a candidate. Therefore, Dulles instructed the
18 US delegation to approach “the Turks first” to encourage them “to take the lead in developing
19 their candidacy”. Dulles was not so sure about convincing Turkish diplomats about candidacy.
20 Therefore, he, in his letter to the US delegation, wrote that “If the Turkish candidacy should not
21 prosper, I believe that our preferred alternative candidates should be the Philippines and
22 Ethiopia” (FRUS 1953, 320/7-953). His suspicion was based on two important facts. First,
23 Turkey had previously competed for the Council seat reserved for the Middle East region two
24 times, in 1948 and 1950 respectively. While it was lost against Egypt in the first competition,
25 Turkey won the Council seat against Lebanon in the 1950 elections. These two races branded
26 Turkey as a member of the Middle East region. Second, Turkey’s service in the Council ended
27 only a year ago, in 1952. According to a turn-taking norm among UN members, a country that
28 appeared on the Council a short while ago might not get much support in the General Assembly
29 (Vreeland and Dreher 2014, 133).
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34 In the 1948 and 1950 elections, US diplomats tried to convince their allies to vote for Turkey
35 by resorting to the argument that the Middle East seat was not reserved for the Arab League
36 countries. For example, the US Foreign Secretary Acheson, in his telegram to diplomatic
37 missions in the American Republics, advised US diplomats “to point out that support for
38 Turkey’s candidacy is in line with the general UN understanding that one SC seat should be
39 held by a Near or Middle Eastern state, and that the US does not believe that this seat should
40 always go to an Arab state” (FRUS 1950, 330/9-250: Circularairgram). For US diplomats, non-
41 Arab states such as Turkey and Iran were part of the Middle East region, and they should have
42 had a chance to be represented on the Security Council. But now, US diplomats had to convince
43 American allies that Turkey is a part of the East European region. Before this, the US Under
44 Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith instructed the US Mission at the UN to “approach
45 Turkish Delegation soonest regarding Turkish candidacy” on August 6, 1953 (FRUS 1953,
46 330/S-653: Telegram). Four days later, Smith sent a telegram to the US embassy in Turkey and
47 instructed US diplomats to approach the Turkish Foreign Ministry. In order to convince Turkey
48 to run, the US embassy would rise three points (FRUS 1953, 320/8-1053: Telegram). First,
49 Soviet satellites were elected to the East European seat until 1949, but the General Assembly
50 chose Yugoslavia in 1949 and Greece in 1951 rather than pro-Soviet candidates. The return of
51 a Soviet satellite to the Council “would be politically undesirable”. Second, the election of
52 Soviet satellite would enable USSR to further obstruct the “work of the Council and give it
53 additional vote in favor seating Chinese” Communists. Third, the “US would give Turkey firm
54 support if it decides to run”.
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3 We know the reaction of Turkish statesmen from the telegram sent by the US Embassy in
4 Turkey to the US Department of State on August 13, 1953 (FRUS 1953, 320/8-1353:
5 Telegram). According to this telegram, Selim Sarper had already informed Turkish foreign staff
6 about the US proposal. For this reason, the then Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign
7 Affairs Cevat Açıkalın shared the ministry's instruction to Sarper with the US embassy. In this
8 instruction, the Turkish Foreign Office underlined the concern that "Turks have only recently
9 retired from SC's seat, and new candidacy this early might present special difficulties in
10 obtaining wide support. Turks believe that announcement by themselves of their candidacy and
11 failure to become elected would be embarrassing to Turkish Government, and adversely affect
12 national prestige". Therefore, Ankara had an important condition to run. This prerequisite was
13 formulated in the instruction as follows: "if preliminary inquiries by Turks, working in
14 conjunction with [the] US, indicate success reasonably assured, Turkish Government would be
15 prepared to run". Walter Bedell Smith took this condition seriously and instructed the US
16 Mission in the UN to approach other UN delegations especially those of the UK and France in
17 order to secure their support for Turkey (FRUS 1953, 330/3-1753: Telegram). Smith also
18 advised working "closely with" the Turkish delegation in those consultations to give the latter
19 the impression of strong support.
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24 In the first days of consultations, the Turkish delegation was not convinced that Turkish
25 candidacy would be successful and therefore remained "reluctant" to declare candidacy "until
26 and unless it obtains reasonable assurances of success" (FRUS 1953, 330 /8-2553: Telegram).
27 Therefore, Sarper urged that the US "should take initiative in sounding out NATO and Latin
28 American countries on degree of their support should Turkey's candidacy be announced"
29 (FRUS 1953, 330 /8-2553: Telegram). The UK was the key actor not only because it had a
30 significant influence on Commonwealth countries in the General Assembly but also because it
31 was a strong defender of the 1946 London Agreement. During the consultation between the UK
32 and the US delegations on August 31, 1953, it appeared clear that the UK was determined to
33 act in line with the Agreement (FRUS 1953, 330/S-3153: Telegram). Not wanting to relive the
34 long deadlock and difficulties experienced during the 1951 Greek campaign, American
35 diplomats were determined to persuade Britain to support Turkey (FRUS 1953, 330/9-153:
36 Telegram). However, Turkey had to announce its candidacy without spending much time, even
37 if the UK's support was unclear. This was so because UN members might promise their votes
38 to other candidates. Since Selim Sarper steadfastly asked for a guarantee of success, John Foster
39 Dulles instructed the US Embassy in Turkey to approach again Turkish Foreign Ministry with
40 a hope that the latter would instruct "Turkish delegation sound out others concerning its
41 possible candidacy soonest working closely with US delegation" (FRUS 1953, 330/9-153:
42 Telegram).
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47 In the summary of preliminary reactions to Turkey's candidacy, it appeared that while most
48 European countries were favored a Soviet satellite, Asian countries were dispersed about
49 Turkey and Latin American states were with the US on the matter (FRUS 1953, 330/9-253:
50 Telegram). That meant the US "would do more than simply vote for Turkey" (FRUS 1953,
51 330/9-353: Telegram). The response from the Turkish Foreign Ministry was not promising
52 either. As the Turkish side told William M. Rountree, the then Deputy Chief of Mission in
53 Ankara, an "unsuccessful overt effort" to win the Council seat "would be embarrassing to
54 government particularly in view early elections" in Turkey (FRUS 1953, 330/9-353: Telegram).
55 Moreover, the Turkish Foreign Ministry instructed Sarper to be cautious "in approaching other
56 delegations" and consult the US delegation to ascertain Turkey's "changes of success". As
57 Rountree reported, the Turkish Foreign Ministry would authorize Sarper to "work in
58 conjunction with US in making preliminary soundings other delegations" only after the US
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3 delegation signaled “potentially strong support” to Turkey among allies (FRUS 1953, 330/9-
4 353: Telegram). When Sarper inquired from the US delegate regarding Turkey’s chances for
5 the Council election, he was told that “outlook was still somewhat confused”. Therefore, he
6 “reiterated Turkish position of unwillingness to become candidate unless reasonably sure of
7 election” (FRUS 1953, 330/9-858: Telegram).
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10 The Election of Turkey to the Eastern European Seat

11 The UK had a firm belief that Turkey was a part of the Middle East region. During the
12 consultation meeting between the UK and US delegations on September 8, 1953, the British
13 side informed US diplomats that Foreign Office had moved closer to the US position “as regards
14 opposing Soviet satellite candidate” (FRUS 1953, 330/9-853: Telegram). But the UK
15 delegation, in the same meeting, raised some hesitations about Turkey. First, “Middle East
16 would be overrepresented on Security Council if Turkey were to serve simultaneously with
17 Lebanon”. Second, “Turkey left Security Council only at the end of 1952”. Because of these
18 two disadvantages to Turkish candidacy, the UK delegate suggested supporting a Far Eastern
19 country for the seat and overtly stated that “it would be much easier for UK to support Thailand
20 than Turkey”. For US foreign affairs, Turkey’s proximity to Eastern Europe was very crucial
21 in convincing Latin American countries not to vote for a Soviet satellite. Therefore, the then
22 US Secretary of State Dulles turned down the British offer, Thailand, and instructed the US
23 Mission at the UN that “it has been our estimate Turkey might have best chance election in
24 view its proximity Eastern Europe... we would of course give consideration other suitable non-
25 Soviet candidate if Turkey decides not run or appears unable obtain sufficient support”. In the
26 same telegram, Dulles also instructed US diplomats to “urge Sarper not give up on” the Council
27 election because the situation was “now more encouraging in view present UK attitude and
28 probable effect UK position on Commonwealth and Western European members” (FRUS 1953,
29 330/9-853: Telegram).
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34 In mid-September, the Turkish press began to write about the possibility of Turkey’s candidacy
35 (Cumhuriyet 1953, 3). However, news about Britain’s policy shift in favor of Turkey boosted
36 optimism in the Turkish press regarding the chance of Turkey’s success (Milliyet 1953, 3; Ulus,
37 1953, 3). After intensive lobbying efforts, US diplomats prepared another report about potential
38 votes for Turkish candidacy on September 23 and 24, 1953. According to this new report,
39 Turkey would secure almost all Latin American votes and the majority of Western European
40 votes, although Arab votes were dispersed. Since Turkey had already been a member of the
41 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), another important body of the UN, some countries
42 such as Argentina and Pakistan gave conditional support to the Turkish candidacy to the
43 Council seat. As a result, Sarper informed the US delegate that he had cabled “Ankara asking
44 authority to announce at appropriate time that Turkey will resign its ECOSOC seat if elected”
45 to Security Council (FRUS 1953, 320/9-2453: Telegram). The US delegate prepared its final
46 report regarding possible votes for Turkey two days later and calculated 35 certain and four
47 probable votes in favor of Turkey. Given that candidates needed two-thirds of the votes from
48 present and voting member states to win, 39 votes would be enough in a 60-member General
49 Assembly. However, another US ally, the Philippines, was the candidate for the same seat, and
50 this would prevent Turkey’s election in the first ballot. If the Philippines failed to secure enough
51 votes to run in the second ballot, Turkey’s probability of winning against Poland would
52 increase.
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57 The UN General Assembly was held in New York, on October 5, 1953, to elect three non-
58 permanent members of the Security Council for the period of 1954-1955. In his speech before
59 the voting session, the Soviet representative Andrey Vyshinsky pointed out the 1946 London
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3 Agreement and the violation of this agreement both in the 1949 and 1951 elections (UNGA
4 1953, 218). For him, the London agreement had been “faithfully observed with respect to every
5 region except Eastern Europe” and the support of certain delegations to Turkey for East
6 European seat in the 1953 elections would represent another “flagrant violation” of the
7 Agreement. Moreover, Vyshinsky stated that “These delegations... are not even embarrassed
8 by the fact that Turkey, the country they are proposing for the seat assigned to the Eastern
9 European countries, in 1951 occupied the seat in the Security Council assigned to the Middle
10 East after its vacation by Egypt” (UNGA 1953, 219). Despite Soviet objections at the last
11 minute, Turkey received 32 votes while Poland and the Philippines received 18 and 17,
12 respectively, on the first ballot. Since the voting on the second ballot was restricted to the two
13 candidates obtaining the highest number of votes for the East European seat, Turkey secured
14 38 votes pushing Poland to 28. The number of valid votes was 58 and Turkey’s total vote was
15 one short of the necessary majority. On the eighth ballot in which the Philippines was out of
16 the contest, Turkey obtained the required two-thirds majority and was elected to the Council
17 seat from the Eastern European region.
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22 Debating Turkey’s New Region

23 After the mid-nineteenth century, the educated Turkish elite was the vanguard of westernizing
24 cultural change in the Ottoman Empire (Findley 1989, 13). Unlike the Ottoman time when the
25 rival political culture had limited the power of the pro-Western elite in promoting and
26 prioritizing the West, the new republic promoted those elite into higher ranks and provided
27 them a strong institutional shield against rival thoughts. This was so because the rulers of the
28 new Republic saw Turkey as part of Europe, not in the Middle East. For example, Tevfik Rüştü
29 Aras, known as Atatürk’s foreign minister, told the US Ambassador Joseph Grew (1952, 753):
30 “The frontier of the Near East has changed; it no longer embraces Persia. The Near East
31 includes the Balkans and Turkey and its frontier is the eastern frontier of Turkey. Persia, Russia,
32 Iraq, and Afghanistan compose the Middle East, and everything east of that is the Far East”.
33 However, Western states long dismissed Turkey’s self-representation of its geographical
34 belonging. Even in the late 1940s, Britain objected to Ankara’s application to NATO on the
35 grounds that Turkey is in the Middle East and suggested a key position to Turkey in the Middle
36 East Command against the Soviet threat. “To be part of a Middle East collective defense
37 arrangement”, as Karaosmanoğlu (2011, 43) commented, “would have imposed upon Turkey a
38 Middle Eastern identity, something which Ankara wanted to avoid”. Despite this uneasiness
39 about the Western perception of Turkey’s geopolitical location, Ankara represented the Middle
40 East region in the UN Security Council for the period between 1951 and 1952.
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45 When the US branded Turkey as an East European country, there was a political culture in
46 Turkey ready to buy and defend it. Therefore, all objections and criticisms against Turkey’s
47 representation of Eastern Europe in the Security Council were condemned harshly. For
48 example, *The Times* (1953, 9), an English newspaper, published a commentary about the
49 Security Council elections on September 6, 1953. Titled as “A Bad Habit”, the commentary
50 basically argued that “it is becoming a habit for the Assembly to turn down the Soviet choice
51 for this east European place. It is a bad habit”. More importantly, the commentary questioned
52 Turkey’s geographical location with the following words: “a glance at the map will show that
53 she does in fact have a place both in eastern Europe and in the Middle East. But is not the
54 manoeuvre (not by Turkey, but by her sponsors) a little too adroit?”. *The Times’* commentary
55 did not accuse Turkey of exploiting the map but rather stated that “it is the great powers who
56 are to blame”. *Zafer* (1953, 1 and 3), a daily close to the ruling party in Turkey, reacted severely
57 to those geography-related comments. It printed full translation of *The Times’* commentary with
58 a reproachful title, “A shocking article from *The Times*”, and accused the British newspaper of
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3 advocating the iron curtain against Turkey, the ally of Britain. *Zafer*'s chief columnist, Mümtaz
4 Faik Fenik (1953, 1 and 3), went further and questioned Britain's Europeanness. His comment
5 is worth quoting at some length: "Even if the geographical distribution method is accepted for
6 a moment, does the Eastern European candidate necessarily have to be a Soviet satellite?
7 Turkey is both a Middle Eastern and East European country. No speculation can be made on
8 this matter. Otherwise, we would argue against *The Times* newspaper that the islands of Great
9 Britain are not at all connected with the European continent and the notion of Europeanness.
10 And we can prove that Turkey with its Istanbul and Thrace is more European than islands off
11 the English Channel and the North Sea".

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15 Leading Turkish dailies rushed to criticize *The Times* and prove that Turkey is a part of Europe
16 (*Milliyet* 1953a, 3). *Cumhuriyet* (1953a, 3) reported to its readers that *The Times* had previously
17 questioned Turkey's joining to the European Council and NATO by referring to some so-called
18 realities of geography. It attributed *The Times*' stubborn opposition to Turkey to a habitual old
19 desire to see the Turks chased out of Europe. In his column in *Hürriyet* daily, Şükrü Kaya
20 (1953, 3), Atatürk's loyal Interior Minister in 1924-25 and 1927-38, presented Turkey's
21 election to the Council seat in 1953 as another confirmation of Turkey's Europeanness. After
22 criticizing the argument that Turkey is a Middle Eastern country, he wrote that "Turkey is a
23 European country with its geography, culture, political relations, and state institutions".
24 Portraying Turkey as an Asian and Middle Eastern country through the reduction of its whole
25 territory to Anatolia is a wrong geographical label. Moreover, Kaya continues, "Turkey's
26 admission to NATO has confirmed this fact". For him, the election result in the General
27 Assembly was another confirmation of the fact that Turkey is both European and Asian.
28 Therefore, Russia's representation of Turkey as a Middle Eastern country was not a fact but
29 rather a politically motivated act to elevate its satellite to the Council.

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33 Within such vacillating identity and soul-searching formation years during the early Cold War
34 period, it would hence be unimaginable for the young Turkish Republic to stay utterly passive
35 to the great powers' efforts to locate Turkey in a particular region. We argue that, on the
36 contrary, Turkey experienced this situation as an opportunity for its own identity creation,
37 consolidation, and geopolitical imagining. However, as we have tried to depict in this article,
38 identity shifts are decisively affected by the resources available to actors (Todd 2005, 452-453),
39 and the structural environment within which they operate. Therefore, such strong advocacy of
40 the US's region-building activities in Turkish political culture cannot be explained solely by
41 Ankara's strategic calculations or its alliance relations with the US. Redesigning the Eastern
42 Europe region and including Turkey here corresponded to the long desired geopolitical identity
43 among the Turkish political elite. Therefore, the new region of Turkey, presented on the gold
44 platter by the US, was immediately accepted and the Turkish elite condemned all objections to
45 this new regional identity. Aiming to show how Turkey branded itself as a country in the West,
46 Turkish scholars paid much attention to Turkey's membership in the Council of Europe in 1950
47 and NATO in 1952. However, they unnoticed the importance of Turkey's candidacy to the UN
48 Security Council in 1953 to represent the Eastern European region. The 1953 case officially
49 transferred Turkey from the Middle East to Eastern Europe and therefore deserves greater
50 attention in studies about Turkey's geopolitical identity.

51 52 53 54 55 Conclusion

56 Turkey's 1953 transfer from the Middle East Region to the Eastern European Region was the
57 result of a process where agential discursive strategies and great power interests worked
58 together. US diplomats spent enormous efforts to convince their allies that Turkey is a European
59 country. In this discursive effort, Turkey's 'geographical location' has shifted and Turkey's
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3 small piece of land in Europe played a significant role in convincing US allies to vote for
4 Turkey. However, this new geographical belonging was not something imposed solely by the
5 US interests. The Cold War calculations of the US coincided with Turkey's soul-searching
6 efforts and geopolitical interests at the time and created a perfect opportunity for the Turkish
7 political elite to realize the aspiration of being recognized by the West as a European country.
8 This new geographical belonging of Turkey would be consolidated in the 1959 elections in
9 which Turkey and Poland competed for the Eastern European seat once again. Turkey's
10 candidacy for the Eastern European region did not cause a dispute among the countries of the
11 Western bloc as in the previous election. Although it does not receive enough attention in
12 academic studies, Turkey's 'geographical' shift in 1953 is important as much as Turkey's
13 membership in NATO in 1952 in terms of Turkey's geopolitical imagination. In these two
14 cases, Turkey was recognized and branded as a European/Western country by the lead state in
15 the West, the US.
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19 Theoretically, our study demonstrates that the geographical identities of smaller states are
20 deeply embedded in great power interests. However, the great powers cannot construct a
21 regional identity completely independent of the smaller countries' geopolitical imaginations
22 about their region. Although our study demonstrates that this theoretical understanding well
23 explains the 1953 Turkish case, region-building in the elections of non-permanent members of
24 the Security Council was not peculiar to Turkey. During the early Cold War, the nominations
25 of Yugoslavia in 1949 and Greece in 1951 were disputed by the Soviet Union on the grounds
26 that both countries did not belong to the Eastern European region. For the Soviets, Eastern
27 Europe was not a geographical region but a political one hosting pro-Soviet Communist
28 countries. For the Western bloc countries, Greece and Yugoslavia were geographically part of
29 the Eastern European region and therefore had the right to represent the region on the Security
30 Council. Reshuffling the members of the UN regions continued even after the end of the Cold
31 War. Despite its geographic location, Israel was not admitted to the Asia-Pacific Group and
32 therefore moved into WEOG in 2000.
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