
Turkey's leadership: a model for Arab states in transition between 2011-2013

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to analyse the leadership of Turkey in the Arab Spring events and to determine whether it was an inspiration and a model for the Arab republics in transition. Turkey's model was brought to the attention in the context of the Arab Spring, with the possibility of it being implemented in the states of the region, which have undergone numerous transformations. In this regard, it is important to consider whether the Turkish model can be replicated in other states in the region, but also whether Turkey can export this model. Here, I followed the applicability of the Turkish model in the Arab states, the elements of neo-Ottomanism, but also the decisions taken by Turkey when the situation in the Middle East worsened, observing a transfer from a passive policy (zero problems with neighbours), to an active policy, in particular because of NATO membership. Also, the internal situation of Turkey was analysed, highlighting the paradoxes of the Turkish model, referring to the internal situation, which was in contradiction with the democracy promoted by Turkey on the external level.*

***Keywords:** Leadership, Turkey, Arab Spring, Neo-Ottomanism, Zero problems with neighbours, Middle East*

Turkey's leadership in the Arab Spring

TURKEY'S MODEL WAS BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION in the context of the Arab Spring, with the possibility of it being implemented in the states of the region, which have undergone numerous transformations. Aspiring to join the EU, Turkey has a close relationship with the West, but at the same time, there is an affinity in the relations between the Justice and

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Development Party (AKP- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and the Muslim Brotherhood (Lindenstraus 2012: 13). Turkey's model constitutes "a mixture of Islam, democracy and market economy", referring to the role of the army in maintaining the secularity of Turkish politics, later moving away from this model (Lindenstraus 2012: 13). The concept of the Turkish model, that is, the modern secular Muslim state, was seen by the West as an alternative to the radical Iranian model (Sajjad and Javaid 2016: 71), whose influence has grown in the region. Turkey was seen in the Arab world as a secular, westernized militant state, rejecting its Ottoman Islamic heritage under Kemalism, but since the coming of power A.K.P. (2002), one can observe an approximation to the Muslim identity, a process that has been encountered since the 1980s, under the influence of the Turkish President, Turgut Özal. It also changed its foreign policy, which focused on "zero problems" with its neighbours, according to Ahmet Davutoğlu (Erdoğan's former chief adviser between 2003 and 2009; Turkey's former prime minister between 2014 and 2016), who argued that Turkey is "a great power, which has neglected its historical ties and diplomatic, economic and political relations with the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans and Eurasia, dating from the Ottoman era" (Taşpınar 2011: 9). Until 2011, Turkey's leadership was geared towards mutual gain (economic relations and political alliances related to the Muslim Brotherhood), but subsequently, A.K.P. has changed its anti-Western and anti-secular stance (Sajjad and Javaid 2016: 75). Ziya Öniş (2012: 46), in *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest*, considered A.K.P. was not meant to promote democracy, but to respect the independence of nation states and the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states. Despite Turkey's economic policies, with the emergence of the Arab Spring, Turkey's increasingly pragmatic approach to the Middle East has already turned it into a model for Arab countries, because of the inefficiency of the financial system, high unemployment, and social injustice were the main reasons for the demonstrations. Thus, out of this desire to emancipate and acquire freedom, justice, equity, dignity and prosperity, the A.K.P. in Turkey has begun to symbolize the fulfilment of these requirements in many Islamic societies (Atasoy 2011).

The Arab Spring represented a process of profound political change in the Arab world (where authoritarianism persisted over time), which began in Tunisia, triggering a revolutionary wave of demonstrations in some countries in early 2011 in this area.* Called the Jasmine Revolution, it was the basis of the process known as the Arab Spring (Wagner 2012: 6). Due to mass demonstrations, authorities in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen were pressured to give up power. The transition stage of the revolution was represented by the

* Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen.

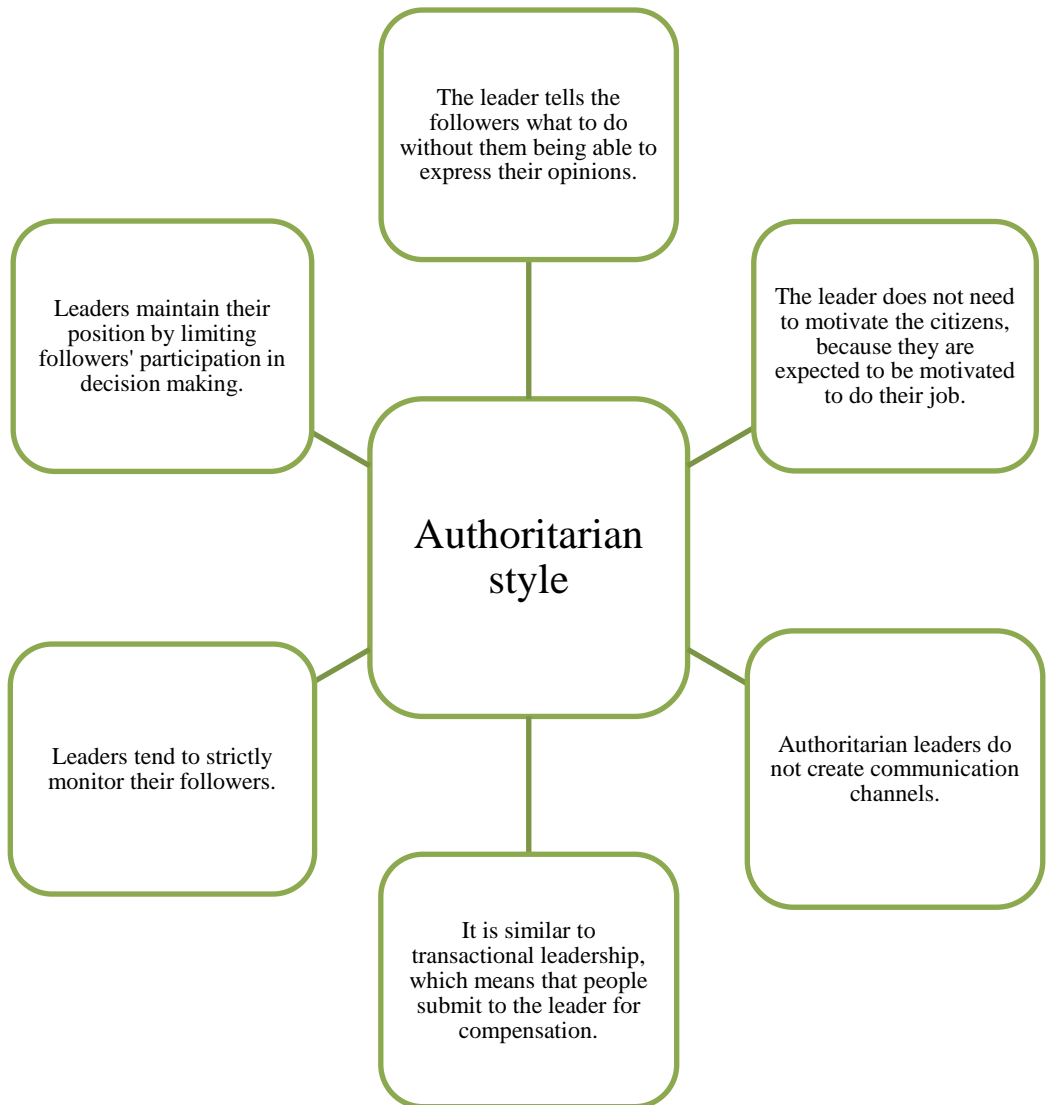
following political elections, to bring about political and socio-economic changes, Tunisia being the only state that succeeded in this respect, instead the situation of Libya, Yemen and Syria, degenerating into civil wars ([Amour 2018: 210](#)). The following table shows the authoritarian leaders of the Arab states, who, following the riots and the pressure of the population, were removed from power after a long period of time in which these regimes resisted ([Chalcraft 2015: 7](#)).

Table 1: Longevity of authoritarian regimes

<i>Authoritarian Arab states, in which leaders were removed</i>	<i>Leaders of authoritarian regimes</i>	<i>The period of resistance of these regimes</i>
Tunisia	Bin Ali	24 year
Egypt	Hosni Mubarak	30 years
Libya	Muamar Gadhafi	42 years
Yemen	Ali Abdullah Saleh	21 years

The leadership of the Middle East, in the last decades, has been dominated by the authoritarian or autocratic style, which allows the rapid decision making, because one person decides for the whole group ([Alnassan and Sharma 2016: 22](#)). The following figure shows some characteristics of the authoritarian style, as mentioned in the work *Authoritarian Leadership VS. Participative Leadership In organizations*.

Figure 1: Characteristics of authoritarian leadership



(Zylfijaj, et.al., 2014:4-5)

The applicability of the Turkish model in the Arab states in transition

The applicability of the Turkish model in the Arab states in transition has been debated from the pros and cons, as shown in the following table:

Table 2: Perceptions of the Turkish model in the Arab states

Pro arguments	Against arguments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reducing the role of the army in the political sphere, the mix of Islam and democracy, the economic development (Nafaa 2011: 39). - democracy is possible in a majority Muslim state, and conservative Muslims could become promoters of democratic values and economic growth. - economic growth through the middle class (Dede 2011: 27-29). - the capitalist economic system. - a strong economic, liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam (Kaya 2012: 27). - Multiparty and the development of civil-military relations (Dala and Erşena 2014: 269). - A.K.P. had a moderate and pragmatic agenda, not an Islamist militant one (Taşpınar 2011: 12-14). - It is not an attempt to Islamize the state, but to liberalize it. - the compatibility of Islam with democracy is not rejected (Dede 2011: 27-29). - through elaborated strategies it can be integrated globally, but it can have an independent position, opposing the West (Öniş 2012: 55). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the deficiencies in promoting the rights of women, minorities and free expression, contradict the struggle for the acquisition of these rights in the Arab countries. (Sajjad and Javaid 2016: 80). - the evolution of moderate Islam in Turkey has been achieved over a long period of time, through “conflicting forces, including military guardianship of secularism” (Sajjad and Javaid 2016: 80). - the unique historical context and different from that of the Arab states. - secularism is deeply rooted in the history of Turkey (Sajjad and Javaid 2016: 80). - Turkey's external relations with the West and Israel. - Turkey has never been colonized, so it lacks the post-colonial syndrome, which the Arab countries have. - Turkey's reform process began during the first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, since the first half of the 20th century, and the Arab states have undergone a rapid process of change (Kaya 2012: 28).

Zero policy dilemma problems with neighbouring states

If up to the time of the Arab Spring uprisings Turkey's leadership in the region was operating under the Zero problems policy, then a contradiction in its behaviour can be observed. In this regard, with the outbreak of riots in Egypt, Tayyip Erdoğan, demanded the resignation of Hosni Mubarak (in a televised speech on al-Jazeera), being the first Western leader to take this position. He also supported democracy in Egypt and Tunisia, and in Libya opposed NATO's intervention to impose a no-fly zone. However, he participated in this intervention due to his obligations under NATO membership. Moreover, he made diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire between Muammar Gaddafi and the rebels (Taşpınar 2011: 11-12). It is important to note that Turkey took into account Turkish investments from Libya (worth \$ 15 billion) and Turkish citizens to be repatriated (Kaya 2012: 30). On the other hand, in the case of Syria, Turkey had a pro-status quo-wait-and-see approach, due to the sectarian uprisings in Syria, especially with regard to the Kurdish issue, so the reaction to Syria was a timid one, related to the reaction to Egypt or Libya. However, relations between them deteriorated after Bashar al-Assad refused to implement real reforms on society, which prompted Erdogan to demand his resignation. (Lindenstraus 2012: 15)

The following table will present the leadership of Turkey in Egypt, Libya and Syria, by revealing the initial reactions and the manner of influence.

Table 3: Turkey's Leadership in Egypt, Libya and Syria

	Initial reactions	Mode of influence
Egypt	Turkey has supported reforms in Egypt (active reaction)	Turkey promoted secularism and respect for free elections, however, avoiding confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood.
Libya	Turkey did not face the Gaddafi regime at the beginning of the riots. (passive reaction)	After Gadaffi's ousting, Turkey supported the reform, but was not actively involved in rebuilding the regime.
Syria	Turkey did not want to change the regime, but to reform the existing political system. (active reaction-passive)	"Gaining recognition that the pressure for reform on the Assad regime has worked; confrontation of the regime and registration of

		human rights; the implementation of sanctions in the last stage of the regime's construction.”
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(Öniş, 2012: 54-55)

Neo-Ottomanism

Turkey's foreign and domestic policy was defined by a new concept, Neo-Ottomanism, and this paradigm shift has transformed Turkey into an attractive model for Arab reformers, through the trends shown in the following table:

Table 4: Turkey's neo-Ottoman tendencies

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding of Ottoman and Muslim heritage.• There are no claims for the creation of Turkish imperialism.• An Islamic legal system is not desired.• Moderate version of secularism.• Multiculturalism, to the detriment of ethnicity.• Great feeling about the role of Turkey in the world.• Active foreign policy in mediating conflicts in the region.• Soft power, political, economic, diplomatic and cultural influence, in the former Ottoman territories, as well as in other regions of strategic interest.• Turkey is seen as a regional superpower.• Capitalizing on multiple Muslim and multinational identities.• Orientation towards the West, equal to the Muslim world.
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(Taşpınar 2011:9-10).

The paradoxes of the Turkish model

Although the Turkish model is considered a positive example, for Arab Spring states, it failed to promote democracy internally, although measures were initially taken to improve democratic rights and freedoms, as violations of freedom of expression, repression the opposition by force and the problems of corruption at the highest level came in contradiction with the efforts to accredit the Turkish model (Sajjad and Javaid 2016: 83). Taşpınar (2014) argues that Erdoğan was a case in which “the leader is nominated after the electoral vote but is not concerned with respecting civil rights and freedoms, but considers democracy as a simple election win”, turning the system into a “tyranny of the majority”. Thus, the borders of Turkey in the region are constituted by the nature of the regime, which is increasingly moving away from the ideas of democracy. This became visible with the arrest of the regime's opponents, such as journalists, intellectuals and students, who were accused of terrorist-related crimes. Moreover, the problem of the Kurdish minority persists, and the process of writing a new democratic constitution has been blocked (Dala and Erşena 2014: 271).

Final Remarks

The Turkish model represents an important achievement in the Middle East region, dominated only by authoritarian regimes, thus becoming an inspiration for Arab countries. With the outbreak of Arab Spring protests and their worsening, there was the dilemma of Turkey's policy, zero problems with its neighbours, because, although initially it had a passive attitude towards the situation in Libya and Syria, establishing good relations with authoritarian governments, later to adopt a firm position, supporting the resignation of the dictators, from Hosni Mubarak to Bashar al-Assad.

Following the debates on the applicability of Turkey's model of states in transition after 2011, we concluded that during the period analysed, the Turkish model proved relevant to Arab states in transition, where some progress was made in the democratic plan, asserting itself. opinion polls, which argued that authoritarian regimes in the Arab world were impossible to adapt to the social,

economic and political demands of the population. Thus, the Turkish model in the region, played an important role in triggering the Arab Spring, and Turkish leadership was an inspiration for Arab reformers.

However, it is difficult for the Arab states to follow the Turkish model, which is a unique country, which has not been colonized and has undergone a long evolutionary process, while in the countries of the Arab Spring there have been rapid changes, radical. Also, Turkey is not an oil-holding country, so it needs real economic growth, being the most capitalist country in the Islamic world. The European Union market and the agreement with the EU, in the Turkish customs field, allow the Turkish capital to prosper and to impose an open society (Kaya 2012: 28-29), elements that we do not find in the case of the Arab Spring countries. In the analysis of the leadership of this country, the external influence of N.A.T.O., U.S.A. must also be taken into account. and the U.E. (which most states in the region do not benefit from), a perspective from which Turkish leadership should be considered a success. Turkey has created a link between the West and the East, with no need to export its leadership model to the Arab states in the region, which would otherwise be impossible as previously argued, but should be tailored to the historical, political and economic context of for each state, to successfully carry out economic and democratic reforms.

The paradox of the Turkish model is that the government has presented, on an external level, an attitude that supports democratization, but, internally, the attempt to apply democratic principles has failed. Taksim Gezi Park protests have weakened Turkey's model, its leadership has worsened, and President Erdoğan, initially perceived as a reformer, has created an authoritarian image, the electoral autocracy he has encouraged by acting in favour of liberalism and pluralism, not permitting. freedom of expression and separation of powers.

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