

# **Between Imagination and Effectiveness: Mediterranean Dimensions of European History**

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Since the founding of the republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean have played a special role in Turkish politics. The geopolitical significance of the two seas thus cannot be overstated. In the context of the Cold War, Turkish control over the straits into the Black Sea or from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean was important for Ankara not only as a regional actor but also in terms of its alliance with the capitalist west: the United States and the NATO. An important narrative that was readily embraced by all Turkish governments during the Cold War was that Turkey provides security for its Western allies at "the borders" of the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War and rapidly changing geopolitical challenges led Turkey to develop a new relationship with the Mediterranean region. In particular, the "muhafazakar Demokratlar" (conservative democrats) of President Erdoğan and his AKP have used different narratives to stake their claim to the Mediterranean region from 2002 to the present. Former AKP member Ahmet Davutoğlu put the importance of the region on the daily political agenda using the following words:

“The last century (the period of the Republic) was only a parenthesis for us. We will close that parenthesis. We will do so without going to war, or calling anyone an enemy, without being disrespectful to any border, we will again tie Sarajevo to Damascus, Benghazi to Erzurum to Batumi. This is the core of our power. These may look like different countries to you, but Yemen and Skopje were part of the same country a hundred and ten years ago, as were Erzurum and Benghazi”

Certain cities mentioned by Davutoğlu are directly located at the Mediterranean Sea or can be reached quickly via the Mediterranean Sea. However, the quote emphasizes, that Davutoğlu, as well as the AKP or President Erdoğan, see the region through the lens of Turkish geopolitical interests or "neo-Ottomanism," and thus want to underpin their geopolitical claim religiously.

The aim of the lecture is to take a look at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP regime in relation to Damascus and Benghazi, as well as to critically present the ideas of space and the religious aspect of the relationship between neo-Ottoman stories and geopolitics.