

Claiming Responsibility, Narrating Solidarity: Discursive Legitimation of Turkey's Involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1988–2020)

Word count: 17.648

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Master's dissertation submitted in order to obtain the degree of Master of Science in Conflict and Development Studies

Academic year 2024-2025

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AA	Anadolu Agency
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
EU	European Union
IR	International Relations
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOF	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TFP	Turkish foreign policy
TRT	Turkish Radio Television
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USA	United States of America

ABSTRACT

Discussions on legitimacy and driving motivations behind international involvements have long been a focal point in academia. Although it is possible to legitimise an involvement by providing different justifications including “humanitarian responsibility” or “protection of security”, there is no clear consensus on the meanings and contexts of these terms since they are shaped by different ideological approaches, identities, and interests. This ambiguity highlights the need to deeply analyse discourses of political actors—the primary agents of involvements—who define and legitimise these actions through narratives and rhetoric. To render this discussion more operational, this academic study focuses on Turkey’s involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Initially erupting as a hot conflict in the last quarter of 20th century, the case of Nagorno-Karabakh evolved into a regional problem that concerns not only Azerbaijan and Armenia but also the states that identify themselves as regional powers. While shifting political dynamics at regional and global levels has transformed Turkish foreign policy and has consequently affected Turkey’s political stance, Turkish political narratives used to restructure foreign policy activities in the Caucasus raises questions about how this discourse shapes the normative frameworks and perceptions surrounding Turkey’s inclusion in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Unlike the mainstream theories and traditional analyses which tend to bring geopolitical or strategic explanations regarding involvements, this master thesis aims to address how political actors create discursive frames that construct the legitimacy of interventionist practices and how these frames affect the international perceptions and norms. By centralising the aforementioned case study, this research seeks to answer the following questions: *How was Turkey’s involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict constructed through political discourse? What is the international reception of this involvement and how has this construction influenced international norms?* Inspiring from constructivist theories and employing methodological tools such as discourse analysis and media framing within a qualitative framework, this analysis contributes to the understanding of how political discourse constructs legitimacy and influences evolving norms of international involvement.

Key words: *Discourse, legitimacy building, international intervention, constructivism, Turkey, Nagorno-Karabakh.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With the completion of this master's thesis, I mark an important milestone in my academic journey—which began at the Hacettepe University in Turkey and culminated at the Ghent University in Belgium. I strongly believe that academic and personal gains I have acquired at this institution and generally in Belgium will serve as a solid foundation and guiding light for my future doctoral studies.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all my teachers and professors who have influenced my intellectual perspective which enabled me to approach complex issues from diverse angles. Throughout my life, I have strived to remain an individual who is morally and intellectually independent and always follows the light of science—as once emphasised by Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK.

I am grateful to my mother and father, Medine ERDOĞAN YAVUZ and Ali Doğan YAVUZ, for their continuous unwavering support throughout this process. Special thanks are due to all my dear friends, with particular mention of Stefaan CASTELEIN, whose support and encouragement helped me navigate every challenge I encountered in Belgium.

The constructive feedback and friendly approach of Prof. Dr. Koen Vlassenroot throughout the development of this thesis are worthy of commendation.

Finally, I take pride in having maintained my self-belief throughout this two-year journey abroad, even in the face of the most difficult situations. I would like to conclude this chapter of my life with a poignant Flemish saying, encapsulating my whole story that has shaped my journey to Belgium:

“Het leven is niet altijd een rozengeur en maneschijn.”

Görkem YAVUZ

May 2025

Brugge

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Relevance of the Research

Over the past decades, diverse theoretical traditions in International Relations (IR) have offered competing interpretations of key concepts such as legitimacy, sovereignty, and intervention. However, meanings and functions attributed to these elements of the international system vary significantly across academic paradigms, complicating efforts to establish universally accepted standards or definitions. For instance, under contemporary conditions, legitimacy remains a highly contested concept particularly in relation to international involvement in conflict zones. Given that political actors perceive international order through divergent lenses and are driven by distinct motivations in contexts of peace and conflict, such heterogeneity fuels ongoing debates on the concept of legitimacy. In this context, political discourse functions as a pivotal mechanism for legitimising interventions or framing them as illegitimate. To better understand the interrelation between three concepts—international involvement, discourse, and legitimacy—and to concretise their interplay, this study centres on Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a compelling case through which to examine how such involvement is discursively legitimised, and how these narratives influence normative frameworks in global politics.

1.2. Thematic Trends and Missing Perspectives in the Literature

An extensive body of research has been conducted on Turkish foreign policy (TFP), with a particular focus on geopolitical, strategic, and legalistic frameworks. Some scholars have also adopted discourse analysis techniques to investigate how political narratives shape the evolving nature of these policies. For instance, Senem Aydın Düzgit is widely recognised for her post-structuralist analyses exploring the discursive dynamics between Turkey and the EU. (Düzgit, 2012; 2017) Hasan Yükselen, on the other hand, focuses on strategic discourse in TFP. In his work *Strategy and Strategic Discourse in Turkish Foreign Policy*, he analyses how political discourses have shaped strategic orientations and why certain discursive constructs have failed to translate into consistent foreign policy outcomes. (Yükselen, 2020) However, this body of scholarship frequently centres on broad foreign policy orientations—leaving Turkey's involvement in international conflicts and its discursive construction of legitimacy largely unexplored. Similarly, while works by Düzgit and Yükselen offer valuable insights into the language of foreign policy, they rarely interrogate the relational and contested construction of legitimacy in the context of conflict involvement.

A similar academic gap is encountered also in the literature on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although various scholars have analysed Azerbaijani and Armenian discourses, Turkish narratives and their importance in legitimacy building related to Turkey's involvement remains still underexplored. For instance, academic works by Arthur Atanesyan and Anahit Hakobyan constitute remarkable examples regarding presentation of Armenian discourse in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While Atanesyan examines it from peace journalism view and explores how media framing is generally shaped around national security and war propaganda (Atanesyan, 2020), Hakobyan brings explanations regarding Armenia's "we and they" rhetoric and role of digital communication tools, such as social media, in this process. (Hakobyan, 2021) On the other hand, Şeşen et al. bring the field a study where they analyse İlham Aliyev's addresses to the nation throughout the Second Karabakh War. (Şeşen, Ünal, & Doğan, 2022) Although such an analysis becomes more valuable to see how logical argumentation and historical evidence employed in official speeches can construct legitimacy, there is no academic study that examines and analyses the same situation within the framework of the Turkish narrative.

Thus, much of the literature on international interventions remain grounded in strategic or geopolitical readings—instead of centring the role of discourse in legitimacy building. In the context of Turkish foreign policy, existing analyses often prioritise material power dynamics, or institutional and ideological alignments. However, few studies examine how legitimacy for international involvements is discursively constructed by political actors, particularly in regional conflict settings such as the Nagorno-Karabakh case. In other words, examination of the relational and contested nature of legitimacy through a constructivist lens is very rare phenomenon with this regard. This master's thesis aims to fill this gap by offering a discourse-centred and norm-sensitive reading of Turkey's involvement by shedding light on the constitutive role of language and narrative in shaping international norms and perceptions.

In summary, although valuable insights have been generated by discourse-oriented and strategic analyses, the specific discursive construction of legitimacy surrounding Turkey's involvement in regional conflicts—particularly in the Nagorno-Karabakh case—remains underexplored. This thesis, therefore, aims to contribute to filling this lacuna by advancing a discourse-centred and norm-sensitive reading of Turkish foreign policy.

1.3. Problem Statement & Guiding Questions

Main research question of this study was formulated in two interrelated parts. The first part of it, *“How was Turkey’s involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict constructed through political discourse?”*, is concerned with the examination of political discourse construction. Employing a constructivist approach and utilising Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) techniques, this question aims to find an answer to how Turkey’s involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is framed by the domestic political discourse. The second phase of central research question asks, *“What is the international reception of this involvement and how has this construction influenced international norms?”*. This part focuses on the impacts of Turkey’s discourse on perceptions of legitimacy and normative frameworks. The first question, therefore, necessitates an internal analysis in which what Turkish political actors expressed and how they configured these narratives is examined. And second question which represents an external analytical dimension, examines how this discourse is perceived and interpreted by international audiences. Along with the central focal point, several guiding questions (Q) were composed to deepen the discussion. Categorising them under three fundamental components (C) as shown in the *Table 1*, each question was assigned to a specific group as “construction of discourse” (CI), “perceptions on legitimacy” (CII), and its “impact on international norms & outcomes of the conflict” (CIII).

Each of these sub-questions serves different analytical purposes. While Q1 helps to identify the key discursive strategies that shapes the representation of Turkey's involvement, Q2 links Turkish discourse to broader ideological, geopolitical and identity-based frameworks. Focusing on Q3 enables to further investigate the reception of discourse and its role in producing legitimacy across international audiences. Q4 addresses the interdiscursive contestation among conflict actors and the negotiation over the legitimacy of Turkey's involvement. As the final phase of discussion, Q5 and Q6 assess how Turkey’s discourse interacts with existing international norms and explore the potential material and normative impact of Turkish discursive framing on the outcomes of the conflict.

Table 1 below maps the guiding research questions onto the three core analytical components developed for this study.

Table 1. Mapping the Guiding Questions onto the Analytical Components

Components (C)	Questions (Q)
Construction of Discourse (CI)	<i>1. What are the dominant narratives used by Turkey to frame its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?</i> <i>2. How do these narratives reflect historical, cultural, or strategic considerations?</i>
Perceptions on Legitimacy (CII)	<i>3. How do international actors perceive Turkey's involvement, and what role does discourse play in shaping these perceptions?</i> <i>4. How do contradictory discourses (e.g., from Russia, Armenia, or Western actors) challenge or support Turkey's narrative?</i>
Impact on International Norms & Outcomes of the Conflict (CIII)	<i>5. How does the discourse surrounding Turkey's involvement influence the norms of international inclusion and intervention?</i> <i>6. What are the practical implications of these discourses on the conflict's course and resolution?</i>

Source: Author

The main motivation behind following such a methodological structure is to establish direct relations with the three analytical axes that the main research question is rooted in. By doing so, it is aimed to establish a decent ground for representing the narratives of other political actors, along with the discourse of Turkey, and to conduct a comparative analysis. Particularly, the questions raised within the scope of CIII create a difference in terms of thinking about structural transformation and outcome production by going beyond the boundaries of the classical CDA tradition. This makes it possible to focus not only on what is said but also on what purpose it serves.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

This master's thesis consists of 9 chapters, each strategically designed to build upon the central research question. This introductory chapter sets the stage by outlining the rationale, scope, and research trajectory of the thesis. The following four chapters establish the conceptual and theoretical foundations underpinning the empirical analysis.

In this regard, Chapter II & III present the conceptual framework and theoretical foundation of the study. Exploration of key concepts such as discourse, international intervention, legitimacy, and sovereignty takes place throughout the Chapter II. Chapter III, on the other hand, contextualises these concepts within Constructivist approaches in IR with a particular focus on the Securitisation Theory and CDA. Building on these foundations, Chapter IV operationalises the theoretical insights into an analytical framework by translating them into concrete categories and sub-questions that guide the empirical investigation. Chapter V outlines the methodological approach, research design, data collection, analytical techniques, ethical considerations, limitations, and the linguistic dimensions of the study.

The final chapters of the main body are dedicated to empirical analysis and scholarly reflection. Before delving into main discussion, Chapter VI provides historical background for both the course of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and configuration of TFP over time. Chapter VII presents the findings of the discourse analysis, structured around the three analytical components developed earlier.

Chapters VIII and IX offers a comprehensive discussion and conclusion regarding these findings in light of the research questions and theoretical propositions. Departing from the conventional separation between discussion and conclusion, this thesis adopts an expanded concluding chapter that incorporates (i) critical reflections on the researcher's positionality, (ii) policy-relevant implications, and (iii) an agenda for future research. This structural choice reflects the thesis's constructivist and reflexive epistemological commitments—acknowledging that knowledge production is inherently situated and value-laden. By making these reflexive and policy-oriented components explicit in the conclusion, the study offers a comprehensive and reflexive closure that aligns with contemporary discourse-analytic scholarship.

The list of references and the appendixes are located at the end of this study.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Discourse in International Relations

Following the rise of post-modern approaches, discourse has become more visible thanks to its capacity to expose social antagonism and hegemonic struggles. Replacing the concept of ideology, it has come to define the boundaries of socio-political analysis. (Heywood, 2016) Many scholars from the constructivist tradition have developed different but interconnected definitions of discourse.

Michel Foucault, for instance, describes discourse as a tool of power which is related to not only materialism but also capability to produce knowledge and narratives. He claims that discourse creates social norms and values that shapes identities, behaviours, and way of thinkings of individuals. (Heracleous, 2006) Jennifer Milliken, one of the leading figures in poststructuralist constructivism, defines discourse not merely as a communicative tool but as a constitutive mechanism that produces intelligibility in international politics. (Milliken, 1999) Alexander Wendt links shared ideas and intersubjective understandings to the construction of international norms and state identities—arguing that “anarchy is what states make of it”. (Wendt, 1992) Although not a poststructuralist, his work illustrates how discursive structures shape the social reality of international relations.

These theoretical insights become particularly relevant in the analysis of protracted and highly politicised conflicts. In the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, discourse not only reflects political positions but actively constructs legitimacy claims, security imperatives, and ethnic identities. As Milliken (1999) emphasises, discourse constitutes the conditions of possibility within which foreign policy is produced. It is not only about what is said, but about the structured field of meaning that determines what can be said and made intelligible. Thus, discourse plays a key role in defining which narratives gain traction and which are marginalised in the politics of intervention and sovereignty.

2.2. International Intervention: Definitions and Debates

It is difficult to provide a universal definition for the concept of “international intervention”, as the term has been addressed through multiple legal, political, and ethical frameworks. According to

the Charter of UN, all states are equal under international law and no state holds the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another sovereign country. (UN, 1945) The principle of non-intervention, which was reaffirmed by the UNGA in 1970, remains a core tenet of international law. Nonetheless, two primary exceptions exist as the right of self-defence under Article 51 and the use of force authorised by the UNSC under Article 42. (UNGA, 1970)

In contrast to legal positivism, political cosmopolitanism offers a more normative and universalist interpretation of international political actions. Inspiring by the Kantianism's pragmatist and human rights doctrines, cosmopolitans support the idea of global justice and spread of humanitarian interventions. Thanks to their deep engagement with human rights, states' sovereignty has started to be deemed inferior in the case of a breach of universal and fundamental human rights. (Kleingeld, 1998) From this perspective, any violation of fundamental human rights warrants international intervention, even in the absence of the consent of the state in question. Humanitarian interventions in Iraq and Serbia during the 1990s can be framed as expressions of this cosmopolitan logic. These operations were justified as moral imperatives intended to protect vulnerable populations, despite their contested legal legitimacy.

However, constructivist scholars critically engage with such universalist claims—highlighting that norms like humanitarian intervention are not fixed ethical standards, but rather socially constructed through political discourse and historical context. According to David Campbell (1998), foreign policy is not a neutral response to pre-existing threats but rather a performative act that actively constructs those threats. Thus, humanitarian interventions are shaped by how crises are discursively framed rather than by objective necessity. From this standpoint, the discourse of protection can serve as a strategic tool to legitimise certain foreign policy agendas, calling into question the altruistic narratives that often accompany interventionist practices.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the global balance of power shifted dramatically—leaving the USA as the sole superpower. This geopolitical transformation reinforced expectations for the USA to act as a guarantor of global order, particularly in responding to humanitarian emergencies. During the 1990s, Russia and China either lacked the capacity or the willingness to counter USA-led interventions, allowing for the consolidation of an American-centric model of

global governance. However, with the emergence of the War on Terror in the early 2000s, the momentum behind humanitarian interventions began to wane as security agendas overshadowed moral imperatives. (Heywood, 2016)

In this evolving landscape, the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) emerged as an attempt to codify the ethical and legal grounds for intervention. Introduced in the 2001 report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, R2P reframed sovereignty as a conditional responsibility rather than an absolute right. It was initially welcomed by the international community as a normative framework to guide responses to large-scale human rights violations. Nonetheless, R2P remains highly contested. While some legal scholars interpret it as a binding ethical norm, others view it as a rhetorical instrument lacking enforceable legal status. (Ercan, 2014) The proliferation of refugee crises, regional conflicts, and mass atrocities has further intensified debates over the feasibility of anticipatory humanitarian interventions. In parallel, the establishment of International Criminal Court in 1998 through the Rome Statute formally classified acts such as genocide, slavery, torture, and discrimination based on sex or race as war crimes (Heywood, 2016)—thereby expanding the legal framework through which such interventions could be justified.

Despite these normative and institutional developments, the international community has not succeeded to establish a universally accepted understanding for international interventions. The anarchic nature of the international system, coupled with the varying interpretations of sovereignty, continues to obstruct the formation of binding rules and consistent practices. While international law clearly prohibits the use of force without UN authorisation, political realities and evolving global crises render such interventions a persistent feature of international relations. As such, legal frameworks often lag behind geopolitical dynamics—leading to inconsistencies in application and interpretation.

Grounded in this complex and contested literature, this study argues that Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict defies simple categorisation within existing intervention typologies. Although Turkish and Azerbaijani officials emphasise narratives of historical brotherhood and mutual solidarity, critics from Western governments and regional adversaries have

expressed concerns over Ankara's military support and its broader strategic ambitions in the South Caucasus. These diverging interpretations further demonstrate how international interventions are deeply embedded in normative debates and political power structures, thus cannot be assessed solely through legal or humanitarian lenses.

2.3. The Concepts of Legitimacy & Sovereignty

The concept of sovereignty has traditionally been defined by the principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention, as codified in international law. However, in practice, sovereignty is far from absolute. Its application is often contingent on political context and the interpretive frameworks of international actors. As previously discussed, the ambivalent nature of international politics allows for interventions that may paradoxically contradict the foundational principles of international law. While international and supranational organisations exist, none of them possesses the authority or institutional legitimacy to match the sovereign power of the nation-state. Within liberal thought, the concept of consent complicates the notion of sovereignty, asserting that legitimate authority must derive from the governed. In contrast to authoritarian conceptions, liberal sovereignty is bottom-up and it emanates from society and is legitimised through political consent. (Heywood, 2016)

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, sovereignty remains a contested term on multiple levels. Although this region is internationally recognised as a part of Azerbaijan, its conflicting status which has lasted for decades reflects a situation what Stephen Krasner calls as organised hypocrisy. Under such conditions, sovereignty claims are selectively upheld and they are often influenced by power dynamics and international interests. Tension between internal and external sovereignty triggers both Azerbaijani and Armenian demands for either territorial integrity or principle of self-determination as enshrined in international law. (Krasner, 1999)

Parallel to this, legitimacy is also constructed differently by each party involved. Azerbaijan's legitimacy is primarily rooted in international recognition of its territorial claims, allowing it to frame its actions as the defence of internationally sanctioned sovereignty. Armenia and its allies, conversely, frame their legitimacy around human rights and self-determination, underscoring the constructivist argument that legitimacy is a product of discursive construction rather than legal

absolutes. Diaspora communities further reinforce this narrative, highlighting the role of transnational actors in the co-construction of legitimacy.

Turkey's involvement in the conflict highlights a third dimension of legitimacy—derived from historical, cultural, and religious affinities. Drawing from studies on TFP, Turkey's rhetoric frames its actions as part of a moral and cultural responsibility against Azerbaijan. (Yemelianova, 2023) This approach leverages the concept of “kin-state responsibility”—which complicates traditional notions of state sovereignty by introducing identity-based solidarities as a justification for interventions. (Kemp, Popovski, & Thakur, 2011)

Ultimately, the interaction between sovereignty and legitimacy in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict exemplifies broader tensions in the international normative order. While sovereignty remains a foundational principle, its operationalisation is often refracted through competing legitimacy narratives. The principle of territorial integrity underpins Azerbaijan's claims, whereas Armenians appeal to the moral imperative of self-determination. External actors, including Turkey and Russia, selectively invoke these principles to justify their positions, thereby reinforcing the constructivist claim that international norms are not static but strategically mobilised through discourse.

III. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Constructivism in International Relations

As one of the fundamental theoretical perspectives in International Relations (IR), constructivism emphasises the socially constructed nature of international reality. It argues that interests, identities, or threats are not objectively given but emerge through processes of interaction, communication, and discourse. (Wendt, 1992) Constructivist thought has significantly risen after the end of the Cold War, emerging primarily as a direct response to the analytical limitations of mainstream theories such as realism and liberalism. The collapse of the Soviet Union revealed the inadequacy of purely materialist and structural explanations, while creating space for approaches that prioritised ideational factors, norms, and identity in explaining international dynamics. (Checkel, 1988)

From this perspective, foreign policy is guided not only by material interests or capabilities, but also by socially shared understandings and collectively produced meanings. Constructivism, thus, focuses on how state behaviour is shaped by historically embedded narratives, cultural interpretations, and political discourses. In light of this theoretical foundation, this study adopts a constructivist lens to examine how political discourse functions in shaping and legitimising Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Rather than interpreting Turkish action merely as a strategic or interest-driven choice, the analysis seeks to uncover how foreign policy is discursively constructed through appeals to identity, historical ties, regional responsibility, and normative justifications. In this context, constructivism offers a powerful explanatory framework through which the legitimisation of international involvement can be understood not merely as acts of *realpolitik*, but as normatively embedded practices.

In line with the constructivist emphasis on the role of norms, this study also draws upon the norm diffusion theory. This approach refers the process through which norms emerge, are internalised by states, and subsequently promoted beyond their borders to shape the behaviour of other actors in the international system. According to Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, norm diffusion typically follows a three-stage “life cycle”: norm emergence, norm cascade, and internalisation. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) Initially advanced by norm entrepreneurs—such as states, international organisations, or epistemic communities—norms gain legitimacy as they are adopted by influential actors and embedded within global institutional frameworks. In this context, Turkey's

foreign policy discourse can be seen not only as reactive to international norms but also as actively engaged in norm promotion. Rhetoric emphasising “regional responsibility”, “humanitarian solidarity” and “strategic depth” can be interpreted as attempts to position Turkey as a normative actor that seeks to shape the rules and values governing international involvement. By articulating its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through these norm-laden frames, Turkey engages in what constructivist scholars identify as a form of discursive norm entrepreneurship—an effort to influence the standards by which legitimacy and intervention are assessed on both regional and global levels.

3.2. Constructivist Interpretation of Turkish Foreign Policy

Adler (1997) notes that shared meanings and practices form the basis for collective identity and action, thereby allowing discourse to function as a key mechanism for the institutionalisation of foreign policy narratives. Therefore, applying a constructivist lens to TFP—particularly in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—would allow for a deeper understanding of how Turkey’s role is discursively constructed and how other political actors perceive it. Rather than treating Turkish involvement as a mere outcome of national interest or strategic calculus, this study aims to explore how discursive constructions of identity, historical brotherhood, regional responsibility, and security narratives shape and legitimise actions. Constructivist approach significantly becomes useful in explaining how Turkey redefines its foreign policy orientation over time through evolving narratives, values, and symbolic references. The discourse surrounding Turkey’s regional leadership, moral responsibility, and strategic depth are not just rhetorical flourishes. Rather, they are mechanisms of legitimacy production grounded in socially constructed meanings. (Adler, 1997) In line with traditional constructivism, this thesis does not outright reject material or strategic explanations but seeks to complement and expand them by highlighting the socio-political processes that shape interventionist behaviour.

3.3. Levels of Constructivist Analysis and Its Application to the Study

Constructivism operates across multiple levels of analysis. While the systemic level focuses on how global norms, institutions, and international law co-construct meanings across the international order, the unit-level analysis considers how individual states or actors build their interests and identities through discourse and interaction. The holistic level of analysis, by contrast,

synthesises both dimensions—allowing for a comprehensive view of how local and global discourses intersect. (Heywood, 2016) As this thesis explores both Turkey’s individual discursive framing and the international reactions to that discourse, holistic level of analysis is particularly suitable for tracing how Turkey’s domestic discursive identity—framed through notions of kinship and responsibility—interacts with international discourses on legitimacy and intervention. It enables a simultaneous investigation of domestic identity formation and the external negotiation of legitimacy, linking Turkey’s role as a discursive actor to the broader international normative framework.

3.4. Bridging Theories and Their Reflections in the Analytical Framework

The constructivist perspective outlined above provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how discourse shapes both political behaviour and normative perceptions in international affairs. To translate this conceptual grounding into a workable analytical strategy, this study employs methodological tools drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Securitisation Theory, and media framing analysis. Each of these approaches are well-suited for examining how language produces meaning, constructs identities, and legitimises political action. CDA investigates how discourse reflects relationships between power structures and ideologies (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001), while Securitisation Theory offers insight into how speech acts elevate issues to the realm of existential threats. (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998) On the other hand, media framing analysis explores how communicative actors select and emphasise certain aspects of reality to shape interpretation and evaluation. These frameworks are complementary in examining how discourse simultaneously constructs legitimacy and urgency. (Entman, 1993)

Developed by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, the tradition of CDA positions discourse as a form of social practice—both constitutive of and constituted by social structures. Fairclough (1995) emphasises the dialectical relationship between language and power, while Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) incorporates context, temporality, and intertextuality to uncover how discourses evolve. (2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) Within the scope of this thesis, CDA enables the evaluation of how Turkish political actors construct legitimacy by drawing on historical and cultural references and establish self/other boundaries in their justification of international involvement. This perspective also provides the necessary methodological tools to trace discursive

shifts over time, capturing how justificatory narratives adapt in response to changing domestic and international conditions.

Formulated by the Copenhagen School, the Securitisation Theory introduces a framework for understanding how issues are discursively elevated to security concerns through performative speech acts. In this tradition, a successful securitising move requires the identification of an existential threat, a referent object, and the legitimisation of extraordinary measures. (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998) While initially applied to liberal Western contexts, scholars such as Balzacq (2005) and Stritzel (2007) have expanded the theory's scope by foregrounding sociopolitical context, audience reception, and discursive practices. With the application of this approach to the Turkish context, this thesis investigates how political elites frame the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as an existential issue—mobilising tropes of ethnic kinship, regional stability, and national unity—to justify exceptional actions. Securitisation Theory thus provides a powerful lens to examine how urgency is constructed and normalised through discourse.

To complement these approaches, this study also incorporates media framing analysis, particularly grounded in Robert Entman's stimulating definition of framing as the selection and salience of particular aspects of perceived reality. (Entman, 1993) Framing analysis identifies how issues are problematised, how causal attributions are made, and how moral evaluations and prescriptions are embedded in texts. This method is particularly relevant in understanding how media—both Turkish and international—mediate, reinforce, or challenge political discourses. In this study, framing analysis enables an examination of how Turkey's justificatory narratives are amplified, contested, or re-contextualised within broader media ecosystems. It further reveals the role of communicative intermediaries in shaping public perception and constructing normative legitimacy.

By integrating these three complementary approaches, this thesis bridges theoretical insight with empirical analysis to uncover how Turkish political discourse constructs both the legitimacy of involvement and the necessity of securitised responses. This triangulated framework enables the study to trace how meaning is produced and normalised across domestic and international platforms.

IV. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Purpose of the Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this study serves to operationalise central theoretical foundations through a structured and multi-dimensional model. It aims to establish a direct link between fundamental concepts and empirical analysis by organising the study into three interrelated analytical components as *CI (Construction of Discourse)*, *CII (Perceptions of Legitimacy)*, and *CIII (Impact on Norms and Outcomes)*. Each of these components corresponds to a specific dimension of the main research question and collectively allows for a comprehensive interpretation of how discourse functions as a legitimising force in Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This structure not only enhances analytical clarity but also provides a systematic path to engage with complex data through theory-informed lenses.

CI - Construction of Discourse: The first component investigates how Turkish political discourse frames the country's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It examines rhetorical strategies, key narratives, symbolic references, and identity constructions that underpin official statements, policy speeches, and media discourse. Attention is given to how security concerns, historical ties, and cultural affinities are invoked to construct a justified interventionist posture.

CII - Perceptions of Legitimacy: The second component explores how Turkish discourse is received by international audiences. It seeks to understand how various actors—including other regional and global powers, international media outlets—interpret, contest, or align with Turkey's legitimising narratives. This section also includes analysis of discursive contestation, wherein rival narratives challenge the credibility or moral basis of Turkey's involvement.

CIII - Impact on Norms and Outcomes: The final component examines how the discourse employed by Turkey contributes to or contests international norms of intervention. This includes questions of sovereignty, humanitarian responsibility, and regional stability. It also explores the broader implications of Turkey's discursive strategies on the international normative order, particularly regarding how interventions are framed, justified, and judged in the post-2020 regional context.

4.2. Operationalising the Analytical Framework & Determining Analytical Categories

Empirical analysis of this study employs a composite methodology drawing upon three complementary but distinct approaches including CDA, Securitisation Theory, and media framing analysis. Rather than treating these traditions as mutually exclusive, they are integrated to form a triangulated framework that enhances interpretive depth and analytical rigour. Based on these three approaches, this study develops a set of analytical categories that guide the coding and interpretation of the empirical data—as shown in the *Table 2*.

Table 2. Analytical Categories and Theoretical Foundations

Analytical Category	Area of Interest	Theoretical Foundation
Narrative Framing	Discursive construction of meanings Issue representation Justification of foreign policy decisions	Framing theory (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993)
Identity Construction	National identity formation Dichotomy of Us vs. Them Cultural, civilisational or ideological demarcations	CDA and poststructuralist discourse theory (Wodak et al., 1999; Hansen, 2006)
Legitimacy Claims	Discursive justifications of actions Normative reasoning Appealing to moral or legal authority	Constructivist legitimacy theory, strategic vs. normative legitimacy (Suchman, 1995; Zarakol, 2014)
Historical References	Use of past to legitimise current policies National memory and continuity Historical analogies in conflict narratives	DHA, intertextuality in CDA (Wodak, 2001)
Threat Construction	Securitisation of issues Existential threat depiction National or regional stability discourses	Securitisation theory (Buzan et al., 1998; Balzacq, 2005)
Norm Invocation	Reference to international norms Normative alignment Legitimacy through norm conformity	Constructivist norm dynamics (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wiener, 2004)

Source: Author

These analytical coding categories are not arbitrarily selected but are derived from established frameworks in political discourse analysis, securitisation literature, and media studies. They are applied to a diversified corpus of texts that includes high-level political speeches, ministry statements, international media articles, and policy commentary. This enables a comparative, multivocal interpretation of how discourse both reflects and shapes political reality.

Narrative Framing: Foundation of this category lies down Erving Goffman's concept of frame analysis, which suggests that individuals interpret and organise experiences through structured interpretative frames. (Goffman, 1974) This foundational idea was further developed by Robert Entman, who identified four core functions of framing in media and political discourse as *defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting remedies*. (Entman, 1993) In the context of this research, narrative framing is employed as one of the prominent analytical categories to examine how political actors construct storylines around Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. By examining national media coverages, this media framing lens enables a systematic unpacking of how the conflict is defined, responsibility is assigned or shared, actions are (de)legitimised, and courses of action are interpreted. Thus, this analytical category directly serves to understanding of how discourse constructs meaning and political reality among political actors. It provides useful outputs for all three key components of the research.

Historical References: This category is grounded in the DHA tradition developed by Ruth Wodak, which emphasises the importance of contextualising discourse within socio-political and historical settings. Within this framework, *intertextuality* and discursive memory play crucial roles in linking present narratives to selective past events, thereby legitimising current positions. (Wodak, 2001) By making references to earlier periods of the conflict and demonstrating previous diplomatic stances of political actors involved, it is aimed to conduct an analysis that functions not merely as factual recollections but as a demonstrative account reflecting how strategic discursive tools reinforce identity and legitimacy in connection with past influences. Constituting a historical ground for contemporary narratives of intervention and sovereignty, this analytical category embodies the continuity of claims and provides answers for particularly the first component of the research.

Identity Construction: This category is rooted in both the Copenhagen School's Securitisation Theory and CDA tradition. Lene Hansen articulates that identity is constructed relationally through representations of difference, often involving moral or civilisational hierarchies. (Hansen, 2006) Thus, this category helps investigate how discourse produces dichotomies between "we" and "they". Throughout the analysis, construction of Turkish national identity is examined in relation to other political actors such as Armenia, Iran, Western powers, and international institutions. Concerning particularly the first two component of analytical framework, this binary logic helps uncover how political discourse builds collective identity and frames geopolitical roles by attributing threat, victimhood, or moral superiority to one side of the divide.

Legitimacy Claims: The question "How discourse provides justifications for political actions by appealing to normative frameworks, social values, or institutional principles?" is answered through this category. While grounded in Weberian notions of legitimacy, this category draws specifically from constructivist IR literature—where legitimacy is treated as a socially constructed and discursively enacted phenomenon. (Suchman, 1995; Zarakol, 2014) In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, this study identifies how Turkey attempt to justify its involvement by invoking norms such as humanitarian responsibility, regional stability, or the defence of national interest. Through this lens, legitimacy is understood not as an objective status but as a rhetorical achievement. Thus, this category contributes to formation of first and last components of the research.

Threat Construction: This categorisation lies at the core of the Securitisation Theory as formulated by the Copenhagen School's theoreticians. According to this framework, security issues do not exist inherently but are constituted through speech acts that portray a subject as facing existential danger. (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998) Thierry Braspenning-Balzacq further emphasises the role of audience, context, and political agency in successful securitisation. (Braspenning-Balzacq, 2005) Within this research, discursive acts that frame the conflict in existential terms—portraying Armenia or Western inaction as imminent threats to regional security or national sovereignty—are coded and analysed. This allows for the identification of securitising moves and the political logic behind invoking emergency measures or exceptional responses.

Norm Invocation: The final analytical category is informed by constructivist theories of IR. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) work on *norm dynamics* and Antje Wiener's (2004) study on *norm contestation* strengthen the idea that norms are not merely static principles but are constantly constructed, invoked, and negotiated through discourse. Therefore, throughout the analytical process of this study, references to international norms—such as non-intervention, territorial integrity, or humanitarian protection—are analysed as discursive practices through which political actors seek to align their actions with global expectations or conversely challenge dominant norm interpretations. This category captures the interplay between domestic political discourse and the normative structure of international society.

4.3. Comparative and Relational Approach

Employing a comparative and relational analytical technique, this study unpacks how legitimacy is constructed through interaction, contrast, and contestation. Given the constructivist foundations and discourse-analytical orientation of the research have already been elaborated in previous sections, comparing multiple actors' discourses across time and political space introduces several methodological benefits. Firstly, it enables the identification of discursive asymmetries—where some actors rely on historical grievances or civilisational imaginaries, while others invoke legalistic or institutional norms. Moreover, it allows for the exploration of diachronic relationships between past and present discourses—revealing how actors draw on historical memory, trauma, or prior geopolitical alignments to frame current involvement. Lastly, it sheds light on intertextual entanglements of how actors quote, respond to, or silence one another in the struggle over meaning. In this sense, the approach draws inspiration from Ruth Wodak's DHA method but extends it with a more explicitly comparative and multi-actor design.

Such a relational analysis is particularly useful in unpacking counter-securitisation strategies and acts of discursive resistance. For example, while Turkey may invoke pan-Turkic solidarity or humanitarian protection as legitimising frames, other actors may reframe the same actions as neo-imperial or destabilising. Ultimately, the comparative-relational technique functions as a methodological bridge that links the three components (CI–CII–CIII) to the empirical texture of the data. It allows the study to move beyond actor-centred analyses and towards a multi-perspectival and historically grounded account of how discourses are shaped in struggle, reflected in policy, and sedimented into normative orders.

V. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design & Epistemological Positioning

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist epistemological orientation. Constructivism posits that knowledge, norms, and identities are not objective givens but socially constructed through discourse. In line with this reflexive orientation, the concluding chapter deliberately integrates elements traditionally reserved for the discussion, thereby foregrounding positionality, policy implications, and prospective research trajectories as integral components of the overall knowledge claim. Accordingly, discourse is not conceived as a passive reflection of social reality but as an active constitutive force in the construction of political meaning and legitimacy. Against this backdrop, discourse analysis is employed as the primary methodological tool to uncover how Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is constructed and legitimised in both political and media arenas. Additionally, media framing analysis is integrated into the methodology to trace how various media actors—ranging from state-aligned outlets to independent and international platforms—contribute to the reproduction and circulation of legitimising narratives. This dual-method approach enables a multi-dimensional investigation into the discursive formation of international involvement, capturing both political intent and media resonance.

5.2. Data Collection and Sampling

The data collection process was designed to support both the historical contextualisation and the analysis part of the research. To construct the historical background presented in Chapter VI, which outlines the evolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy orientation vis-à-vis the conflict. These included academic articles, monographs, and policy reports published between 1988 and 2020—particularly those produced by research institutes and think-tanks with a focus on regional security and conflict resolution.

The empirical analysis presented in Chapter VII is guided by the three-component analytical framework introduced in earlier chapters, along with six guiding sub-questions. Each sub-question was addressed under a separate analytical subsection. To trace the transformation of Turkish discourse on Azerbaijan and to examine how bilateral political rhetoric has been anchored in historical, cultural, and strategic references, the study analysed official statements issued between

1988 and 2020 by Turkish political and military institutions—including the Turkish Presidency, Prime Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, and the Chief of General Staff.

To investigate the perception of and responses to Turkey’s legitimacy narratives, as discussed in the second subsection of Chapter VII, discursive materials from selected international actors (namely Armenia, Iran, Russia, France, and the United States) were examined. Given the restricted accessibility of primary governmental declarations in some cases, state-affiliated media and policy think-tanks were utilised as proxies to approximate official positions.

In the final analytical subsection—which explore the extent to which Turkey’s discourse has influenced international norms and practical approaches to conflict resolution—additional think-tank publications from different country origins were incorporated. These supplemented the earlier media analysis and allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of discourse transmission across normative and policy domains.

As elaborated in “5.5. *Limitations*”, audiovisual materials and social media content were deliberately excluded from the dataset to ensure methodological clarity and analytical focus on formal textual discourse. The data collection process commenced in November 2024—once the empirical scope of the study had been finalised—and continued until April 2025. All sources were accessed through publicly available digital databases, including institutional websites, academic repositories, and international news archives.

5.3. Combined Inductive and Deductive Coding Strategy

This study employs a hybrid coding strategy that combines both deductive and inductive approaches to ensure analytical rigour and empirical responsiveness. The deductive codes were established prior to the data analysis phase, grounded in the conceptual framework and aligned with the guiding analytical components (CI, CII, CIII). The inductive codes, on the other hand, emerged organically during the close reading of empirical material. Thus, inductive codes were not predetermined, as they were shaped by semantic patterns, discursive peculiarities, and actor-specific framings encountered in context. As such, it would be neither feasible nor methodologically appropriate to provide an exhaustive list of inductive codes within this

methodology chapter. Their value lies in their adaptability to narrative nuance and their ability to capture emergent meaning structures that extend beyond pre-established analytical categories.

By contrast, the deductive coding schema was intentionally designed to reflect the analytical architecture of the study. As detailed in *4.2 Operationalising the Analytical Framework & Determining Analytical Categories*, six analytical categories were identified on the basis of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the thesis. Therefore, deductive codes were crafted to align with these categories and to address guiding sub-questions (Q1–Q6) embedded within each analytical component. Historical familiarity with the evolution of Turkish foreign policy discourse informed the operationalisation of these codes, ensuring that they resonate with the contextual realities of the case.

Table 3. Allocation of Deductive Codes by the Three Analytical Components

Deductive Codes						
CI	Q1	Historical framing	Securitisation	Kin-state	Brotherhood	Moral justification
	Q2	Anti-Westernism	Pan-Turkism	Regional leadership claims		Neo-Ottoman vision
CII	Q3	Supportive reception	Partially supportive reception		Non-supportive reception	
	Q4	Aggressor	Interventionist	Alliance discourse	Brotherhood discourse	Power-balancing
CIII	Q5	Norm adaptation	Norm rejection	Norm reframing		Hybrid norm assertion
	Q6	Policy legitimisation	International inertia	Norm diffusion		Conflict resolution constraints

Source: Author

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of the deductive codes across the three analytical components. This multiplicity was not treated as a limitation but as an epistemological strength, allowing analytical flexibility during both the coding and interpretive phases. The integration of inductive

codes alongside these deductive anchors enriched the empirical depth of the study, allowing for a contextually sensitive and theoretically informed analysis of Turkish discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

For instance, Q1 investigates how Turkey presents itself to other actors and justify its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Thus, this question necessitates codes that reflect processes of identity construction and narrative justification. Deductive codes associated to Q1 help reveal how Turkey frames its role through references to shared history, collective identity, and normative claims. In contrast, Q2 explores the historical, cultural, and strategic factors that shape the identities Turkey adopts in its discourse. It focuses on the deeper ideational and geopolitical imaginaries that inform Turkey's self-positioning. Accordingly, codes such as anti-Westernism, Pan-Turkism, regional leadership aspirations, and Neo-Ottoman references were used to highlight how Turkey's discourse connects past legacies with present strategies and future ambitions.

Q3 investigates the extent to which Turkey's narrative gains recognition, is met with hesitation, or is openly rejected. Accordingly, the selected codes reflect a spectrum of responses—ranging from explicit support to ambivalence and clear opposition. Q4 shifts the attention from reception to response, examining how other actors actively construct counter-discourses. Codes such as *aggressor*, *interventionist*, *regional ally*, or *brother-in-arms* illustrate the diverse ways in which Turkey is portrayed in competing geopolitical narratives. These labels are not neutral—they reposition Turkey within specific strategic or normative frameworks and reflect ongoing discursive negotiations.

Q5 explores whether and how Turkey's discourse contributes to the reinforcement, contestation, or reinterpretation of existing international norms. To capture these possibilities, codes such as *norm adaptation*, *norm rejection*, *norm reframing*, and *hybrid norm use* were employed. Finally, Q6 extends the analysis to the practical implications of these discursive dynamics. It addresses how Turkey's narrative strategies affect international legitimacy, contribute to the diffusion of norms, or, conversely, reinforce entrenched patterns of conflict. The codes related to this question reflect the transition from discourse to practice and the normative consequences of foreign policy communication.

5.4. Ethical Considerations

This study primarily relies on official documents, media sources, and public statements by political actors. Although each source is open to accession of public, it was avoided from any action that may lead to decontextualisation or misrepresentation of the meanings attached to these discourses. Given the interpretive nature of discourse analysis, the ethical responsibility of the researcher in ensuring accurate representation and impartiality is significantly heightened. Recognising the study's focus on a politically sensitive conflict involving Turkey and the predominance of Turkish-originated sources, continuous reflexivity was maintained to avoid normative bias or a one-sided portrayal of the actors involved.

Remaining independent from the political sensitivities of the topic, the study focused on how legitimacy and involvement are discursively constructed—rather than issuing normative judgements—ensuring academic distance. As political figures and official statements cannot be anonymised, there is no privacy risk regarding secondary data use. Furthermore, as this research does not involve human participants, no formal ethical approval was required according to Ghent University's guidelines.

Another key ethical challenge in this research emerged from the nature of discourse analysis itself, which not only relies on language but also draws heavily from embedded cultural codes, historical narratives, and socio-political norms. Cultural sensitivity in translation thus became a central concern in ensuring both transparency and fidelity in the representation of discourse. All translations from Turkish to English were carried out by the researcher. While every effort was made to remain faithful to the original meanings, the interpretive dimension of translation—especially in politically charged contexts—inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity. Special attention was given to preserving the semantic and rhetorical nuances embedded in the original discourse. Rather than pursuing literal translation, efforts focused on retaining the cultural and contextual integrity of political statements. Moreover, the multilingual nature of the data set required an additional layer of reflexivity to avoid privileging one discursive tradition over another. Translations were approached with an acute awareness that linguistic choices may carry ideological implications, particularly within the context of international political communication.

5.5. Limitations

This academic study harbours certain limitations due to the methodology deployed, the theoretical and conceptual framework created, the accessibility regarding the subjects of research, and the researcher's positionality. In the first place, as explained in detail under “5.1. *Research Design & Rationalisation*”, discourse and media framing analysis were chosen as the fundamental methods to conduct this study. Although these methods enable a robust analysis of the narratives advanced by political actors, the findings may not directly capture the practical consequences of such discourse. Consequently, the dataset—comprising a wide range of sources but primarily centred on official statements—may underrepresent the perspectives of alternative political actors. Nevertheless, this study does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of every actor involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Beyond such methodological considerations, the theoretical lens adopted also brings certain limitations. The preferred framework naturally excludes other explanatory approaches such as realism or analyses that prioritise economic interests. Therefore, certain ambiguities may arise in defining key concepts—such as the context of international interventions or the notion of legitimacy.

As a third limitation, the researcher's individual preferences in material selection—particularly regarding media sources—should also be acknowledged. This study concentrates on the analysis of written documents, and official statements that have subsequently been transcribed. Thus, audio-visual materials, social media posts, or audience reception components—which may also play a role in discursive legitimisation—are not included in the data collection process. Since the main scope is Turkish political discourse, the majority of sources used in discourse analysis are in Turkish. Nonetheless, the study incorporates international sources to address sub-questions related to external perceptions and divergent discourses from regional and global actors. Therefore, it provides a multi-actor and multi-perspective analysis rather than a nationally confined one.

Lastly, the interpretation of data may be influenced by the researcher's identity, background, and personal beliefs. Since discourse analysis is predominantly interpretive in nature, researcher's background—which includes being a Turkish citizen and having academic experience in

International Relations inspired by a constructivist approach—may have inevitably influenced both the interpretation of data and author’s personal engagement with the topic of Turkey’s involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While this insider–outsider position allowed the researcher to approach Turkish political discourse with both contextual familiarity and analytical distance, it simultaneously posed challenges in maintaining complete objectivity. Efforts were made to mitigate potential biases through the triangulation of sources and sustained reflective engagement with the data.

5.6. Language and Nomenclature

The written language employed in this academic study adheres to the spelling and punctuation conventions of British English. Accordingly, regardless of the original language of the sources utilised, the researcher has adapted English words and expressions to align with these standards. As previously mentioned in the section “5.4. *Ethical Considerations*”, all translations from Turkish into English have been carried out by the author unless otherwise indicated. In instances where meaning or political nuance is central to the analysis, original Turkish terms or expressions are preserved and accompanied by explanatory commentary.

In June 2022, the Republic of Turkey submitted an official request to the United Nations to adopt the name “Türkiye” in international usage. (Turkey officially changes name at UN to Türkiye, 2022) Although this change has been gradually adopted at the diplomatic level, this study retains the conventional English designation “Turkey” to maintain consistency with the broader academic and policy literature. In addition to the academic literature, the official documents and international media sources employed in this research predominantly use the term “Turkey”, as they predate the formal name change. As such, the continued use of “Turkey” throughout this thesis represents an analytical decision and carries no political or ideological connotations.

Furthermore, throughout this thesis, specific terms such as *involvement*, *securitisation*, and *legitimacy* are used in alignment with the definitions outlined in the theoretical framework. Where necessary, alternative uses of these terms in different disciplinary or institutional contexts are acknowledged and clarified.

VI. CASE STUDY: THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

The historical roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be traced back to the 19th century. Shifting demographic patterns and administrative boundaries, resulting from Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus, have led to a long-standing instability in the region. Within Azerbaijan's legal and historical framing of the issue and Armenia's alternative interpretation of history, the conflict has preserved its ethno-territorial dimension and remained a regional problem of the South Caucasus until the last quarter of the 20th century. The dissolution of Soviet Union transformed the region into a space reflecting the strategic, normative, and discursive calculations of regional and global powers. While the newly established Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran adapted approaches aligned with their geopolitical interests and historical ties with the region, Israel and the USA emerged as relatively new actors with agendas shaped by material and strategic interests in the Caucasus. This chapter aims to provide a coherent historical background by tracing the evolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict across four distinct periods, and by outlining how the positions of regional actors and international powers evolved over time.

6.1. Historical Origins and Fundamental Causes of the Conflict

6.1.1. The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh As An Ethnic Conflict

Soviet ethnographer Anatoly Nikolaevich Yamskov (1991) characterises the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a paradigmatic ethnic conflict shaped by deep-seated historical legacies, demographic changes, and socio-economic asymmetries. He traces the origins of ethnic tensions in the South Caucasus to the Russian imperial expansion in the 19th century and subsequent Soviet nationalities policy, both of which institutionalised unstable interethnic hierarchies. (p. 633) According to Yamskov's framing¹, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrated a trend moving from territorial claims towards full-scale independence during the last years of Soviet Union. (pp. 636-637) In this study, he mentions several complicated factors regarding the causes of ethnic conflicts. Along with

¹ Yamskov categorises ethnic conflicts under four distinct groups as socio-economic, cultural-linguistic, territorial, and political conflicts. According to him, ethnic groups living in the same region or under the same political rule may demand equal living standards, cultural autonomy, change in state formations, or full independence. In his work, he applies this framing to the tension between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. (pp. 636-637)

historical past, cultural and religious differences—which increase ethnic self-identification and trigger “we and they” dichotomy—are discussed as inevitably affecting the nature of ethnic relationships. Supporting the idea that territorial conditions, ideological divisions, social and political dynamics are out of the virtual spaces where authorities can easily regulate, he concludes that these features can only be changed through structural transformation. Additionally, Yamskov employs a third group of classification—which includes linguistic, socio-economic, and ethno-demographic conditions—to explain the exacerbation of ethnic relations. (pp. 634-635) In relation to previously mentioned types of ethnic conflicts, he claims that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem initially occurred from Armenian people’s dissatisfaction with economic conditions of Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). His analysis becomes more significant when he indicates that socio-political causes were less vital in the conflict since Nagorno-Karabakh were already an autonomous oblast with certain degree of self-government. (pp. 639-642) Thus, this framework allows for a contrasting interpretation of Armenian critiques of Azerbaijani governance. When we consider the historical fact that spatial autonomy within the Soviet Union was mostly limited with a hierarchy of governance chain and minorities living in Nagorno-Karabakh and other raions in Azerbaijan SSR were possessing the right to use their native language in conducting cultural affairs as a completely contradictory situation in comparison with contemporary implementations in other SSRs, opposite interpretations of history due to differences in language and culture paved the way to the future conflict. When demographic changes—which had started in the beginning of 20th century—in ethnic composition of the Karabakh region became more visible during 1980s, both Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian SSR itself started raising concerns regarding a future unification of these two territories. Defining this process as “Azerbaijanification”, Yamskov argues that factors related to such demographic changes also played an important role as another cause of ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. (pp. 644-649) Understanding the multi-dimensional roots of ethnic grievances in Nagorno-Karabakh lays the foundation for examining how these grievances are reflected and reproduced in political discourse.

6.1.2. Contested Memory and Historical Engineering in the Karabakh Conflict

The origins of the Karabakh conflict are deeply embedded in contested historical narratives, imperial legacies, and rival nationalisms that took root in the South Caucasus during the early 20th century. According to Imranli-Lowe (2022), one of the most critical ideological components

fuelling the Armenian territorial claims has been the systematic appropriation of the heritage of the Caucasian Albanians, an ancient Christian people who once inhabited Karabakh and surrounding areas. Armenian historiography, particularly during the Soviet period, reinterpreted Alban identity as Armenian and retroactively incorporated Alban churches and monasteries into an “Armenian cultural continuum”. (pp. 13-15) This narrative manipulation served to fabricate historical depth and legitimacy over territories demographically dominated by Azerbaijanis in the pre-Soviet era. After the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the subsequent establishment of the first independent Armenian and Azerbaijani republics in 1918, violent clashes over Karabakh ensued. Although both sides temporarily renounced claims to Karabakh during the Batumi peace negotiations in mid-1918, such arrangements failed to endure. (pp. 21-22) The British, who replaced Ottoman forces in the region, recognised Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan and appointed Khosrov Sultanov as Governor-General—reflecting the region’s Azerbaijani-majority composition at the time. (pp. 25-26) Nevertheless, friction persisted, fuelled by competing imperial influences—particularly from France—and Armenian resistance on the ground. The situation grew more complex after the Bolsheviks established control over the South Caucasus. In 1920, Soviet authorities initially affirmed Karabakh's inclusion within the Azerbaijan SSR but reversed their position weeks later, labelling the region as “disputed”—a strategic ambiguity that laid the groundwork for decades of ethnic contestation and geopolitical rivalry. (pp. 28-29)

6.2. The First War Period (1988–1994)

The First Karabakh War, which took place between 1988 and 1994, was a process of hot conflicts and it ended up with Armenia's illegal occupation of seven districts of Azerbaijan. Leading significant casualties and displacement of a large population, this occupation triggered a strong feeling of resentment within Azerbaijani people against Armenians. Turkey’s role during this period remained primarily rhetorical and diplomatic, reflecting Ankara’s cautious approach in the early post-Cold War era. Despite cultural and historical affinity with Azerbaijan, Turkey avoided direct military involvement, partly due to internal political instability and a desire to avoid escalating tensions with Russia. (Yavuz, 2022, p. 285) Russia, aiming to preserve its influence in the post-Soviet space, adopted a dual-track strategy. It acted as Armenia’s main security guarantor through military-political support and positioned itself as a mediator, which paradoxically allowed Moscow to institutionalise its regional dominance. (Gafarli, 2022, p. 353) Iran initially perceived the

Karabakh conflict as a manageable border dispute but soon recognised its broader regional implications. Tehran sought to prevent the expansion of the conflict and curb any Turkish or Western influence. It attempted mediation, notably achieving a short-lived agreement in May 1992, but was quickly sidelined by Armenian advances. Iran's policy was complicated by internal contradictions, such as balancing support for Armenia with concerns about Azeri nationalism within its own borders. (Mahammadian & Huseynov, 2022, pp. 383–385)

Israel did not play a significant public role in the First Karabakh War, yet early diplomatic ties with Azerbaijan were established during this period. Informal reports suggested possible military assistance, although these remained largely unconfirmed. Azerbaijan's secular orientation and Elchibey's pro-Israeli sentiments laid the groundwork for deeper bilateral cooperation in the coming decades. (Bishku, 2022, pp. 373–374) The USA, on the other hand, adopted a disengaged stance during this period. Although it co-chaired the OSCE Minsk Group, it refrained from active intervention in the conflict—largely due to domestic political considerations and a strategic inclination to avoid antagonising Russia. While Washington voiced support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, the powerful Armenian lobby in the Congress hindered more decisive action. (Jafarova, 2022, pp. 325–326)

6.3. The Frozen Conflict Era (1994-2020)

The interwar period, which covers 1994 and 2020, can be also called as the frozen conflict era. While Azerbaijan was dedicated to liberating its occupied territories, Armenia made efforts to consolidate its control over these soils. Throughout this period, several attempts were realised particularly by the OSCE Minsk Group to bring permanent peace for the region. However, these initiatives remained mainly inefficient due to unwillingness of conflicting parties regarding resignation their intentions. During this so-called “frozen conflict” era, Turkey continued to affirm its support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, yet it remained cautious in its practical engagement. Although diplomatic overtures toward Armenia emerged in the 2000s, particularly with the signing of the 2009 Zurich Protocols, these attempts at rapprochement were short-lived due to Azerbaijani objections and the domestic political backlash within Turkey. The protocols were never ratified, and Turkey re-anchored its position closer to Azerbaijan following the diplomatic rupture with Armenia. (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022, pp. 285–287) Iran preserved its balancing role, attempting to

limit Western and Israeli influence in the region. It fostered close economic and energy relations with Armenia, partly to counter Azerbaijan's cooperation with Israel and the West. Tehran also promoted regional frameworks excluding extra-regional powers, advocating for a 3+3 dialogue format including Iran, Russia, and Turkey alongside Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. (Mahammadian & Huseynov, 2022, pp. 383–385) Russia entrenched itself as the dominant power-broker in the South Caucasus during this period. Although it maintained military support for Armenia through the CSTO and arms agreements, it also supplied weapons to Azerbaijan—illustrating its pragmatic dual-track policy. Russia supported the Madrid Principles in the OSCE process but benefited strategically from the continuation of the unresolved status quo. (Gafarli, 2022, pp. 352–353)

Israel steadily deepened its ties with Azerbaijan throughout this era, especially in the fields of energy and defence. Despite its reluctance to antagonise Turkey in the 1990s, the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations after 2010 created space for Israel to expand its strategic partnership with Baku, particularly in intelligence and arms trade. Israel became a significant supplier of military technology to Azerbaijan, a dynamic acknowledged by both sides yet largely kept informal due to geopolitical sensitivities. (Bishku, 2022, pp. 368–370) The USA maintained an official policy supporting Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, yet its actions were constrained by domestic Armenian-American lobbying groups. While co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group, American approach often appeared passive and focused more on conflict management than resolution. Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which prohibited U.S. government aid to Azerbaijan, remained a major symbol of Armenian lobbying influence despite modifications following 9/11. (Jafarova, 2022, pp. 322–323)

6.4. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020)

On 27 September 2020, the region witnessed the outbreak of a new armed conflict arose from past hostilities. However, this time, the course of events was heavily shaped by Turkey's unprecedented scale of military support to Azerbaijan and the war resulted with Azerbaijani victory after 44 days. Turkey's involvement was a reflection of a shift that has been experiencing for the last two decades in TFP. Failure of previous peace negotiations conducted by the OSCE Minsk Group and aggression of Armenia also created a base for this obvious support. Ankara's support was

legitimised through discursive appeals to shared ethnic and historical ties and its long-standing frustration with the inefficacy of the OSCE Minsk process. (Yavuz, 2022, pp. 294–295) Although Russia initially appeared hesitant, it swiftly assumed a decisive role in brokering the ceasefire agreement on 10 November 2020. It deployed peacekeepers to the region, thus preserving its strategic footprint. Although it remained Armenia's security guarantor, Moscow's neutrality during the war reflected a rebalancing of its South Caucasus strategy in light of changing regional dynamics. (Gafarli, 2022, p. 361) At the onset of the conflict, Iran called for restraint and a ceasefire, assuming its traditional mediator role. However, as the war progressed and Azerbaijan gained ground, Tehran pivoted toward stronger support for Baku's territorial claims. This was likely influenced by domestic pressure from Iran's sizeable Azerbaijani minority and concerns over shifting regional balances that excluded Iranian interests. (Mahammadian & Huseynov, 2022, pp. 390–391)

Israel's role was once again marked by discreet yet significant military support. Baku's use of Israeli-supplied drones, especially the Harop loitering munitions, played a crucial role in its battlefield success. Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation remained strong, underpinned by shared security concerns regarding Iran and oil diplomacy. (Bishku, 2022, pp. 373–375) The USA was largely disengaged during the conflict due to domestic political distractions—namely the 2020 presidential election. Despite calls for a ceasefire, Washington's influence was marginal. It later reoriented its efforts toward humanitarian relief and post-conflict reconstruction, reaffirming its rhetorical support for regional stability. (Jafarova, 2022, p. 322)

6.5. Shifts in TFP Paralleling the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

During the Cold War, relations between Republic of Turkey and the USSR were mainly shaped by the security concerns developed by the Turkish side against the possibility of an attack from the north at any moment, and this anxiety remained relevant until the mid-1960s. Although the tension existed in the core of US-Soviet relations started relatively declining in the post-1960 era, Turkey and the USA confronted several times, particularly due to the Cyprus issue that broke out during the same period. In addition, the domestic political instability that continued roughly between 1960-80 and the successive military coups that took place were also the factors that deeply affected TFP. Therefore, Turkey was not at a point where it could distance itself from the issues that were currently on its agenda or add a new one to them—such as establishing strong ties with the Turkic

states under Soviet rule and influence, especially Azerbaijan. (Hale, 2013, pp. 104-106) Thus, this limited manoeuvre space helps explain why Turkey remained largely silent on the Karabakh issue during the Cold War.

Turkish-Russian relations, which experienced a period of softening with Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power in 1985, were strengthened with a friendship agreement signed during Turgut Özal's presidency. Although it was aimed to re-establish bilateral relations within the framework of mutual cooperation as in the 1920s and 1930s, the regional problems brought about by the dissolution of the Union in 1991 and the emergence of three new states in the Caucasus led Turkey to re-evaluate its foreign policy goals. Russia's power monopoly in the "near abroad" and Turkey's sympathy for other Turkic states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, which Turkey framed through narratives of brotherhood and religious fellowship, largely shaped TFP activism in 1990 and afterwards. (Hale, 2013, p. 207) Eventually, these post-Soviet shifts in foreign policy orientation created space for Turkey to introduce discursive themes of ethnic solidarity and historical responsibility in its approach to Azerbaijan.

Some policy analysts interpret the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) tenure as a decisive reorientation in TFP. Scholars such as Ziya Öniş have described JDP's period as a "shift of axis" (Öniş, 2010, p. 2), pointing to a discursive and strategic turn towards the East and increased engagement with the post-Ottoman geographies. Ahmet Davutoğlu's concept of "strategic depth" and the "zero problems with neighbours" policy are often cited as emblematic of this approach. (Aras, 2009) However, this study treats such developments as extensions of longstanding dynamics in Turkish foreign policy, rather than qualifying them as a turning point, and adopts a more nuanced position. Given the fact that discursive changes regarding Nagorno-Karabakh in TFP did not stem solely from a shift occurred during the JDP rule, it can be claimed that official narratives were shaped by changing regional dynamics and unexpected developments. Although Turkey's initial engagement with the conflict began under caution and uncertainty of 1990's environment, the issue gained more prominence over time. Thus, this study argues that any shift in TFP regarding Nagorno-Karabakh should not be seen as the result of a consistent strategic plan, but as discursive adjustments shaped by political context and external conditions. The following analysis examines how these shifts unfolded across different periods and how they redefined Turkey's role in the conflict.

VII. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

7.1. Dominant Narratives in Turkey's Discourse

In this section, the empirical findings of the Component I (CI) are presented through a cross-period discourse analysis of Turkish foreign policy from 1988 to 2020, addressing the guiding questions Q1 and Q2. The analysis focuses on how Turkey's discursive construction of its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has evolved over time. This construction is traced using the deductively developed codes—including historical framing, securitisation, pan-Turkism, regional leadership claims etc. The chapter is organised into three sub-periods: the Early Post-Soviet Period (1988–1999), the Consolidation of Strategic Brotherhood (2000s–2010s), and the 2020 Karabakh War. These periods reflect shifting narratives from an initial caution and legal framing to a discourse of strategic alignment with Azerbaijan, culminating in a securitised and assertive posture in 2020. Overall, the findings indicate a discursive transformation from normative ambiguity and diplomatic restraint to an overtly securitised and solidarity-based articulation of Turkish foreign policy, with Azerbaijan increasingly framed as a strategic partner and the Karabakh conflict portrayed as a matter of regional security and Turkish national interest.

First subsection draws upon a discourse analysis of official statements issued by the Turkish Presidency, Prime Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, and the General Staff between 1988 and 1999. The archive review yielded no significant findings for the 1988–1991 period, largely due to Turkey's reluctance to comment on intra-Soviet affairs while the USSR was still intact. As outlined in *Chapter VI*, Turkey avoided taking any explicit position during this phase, reflecting a cautious approach to the internal dynamics of the Soviet Union. Consequently, official discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict did not emerge until 1992, following Azerbaijan's declaration of independence in late 1991. From 1999 onwards, media-based discourse analysis replaces archival research since the post-2000 era saw a shift from fragmented elite-level discourses to more centralised and streamlined official narratives—primarily articulated by the Presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The gradual abolition of the Prime Ministry and the institutional demilitarisation of Turkish politics significantly reduced the relevance of military actors in the formulation of foreign policy discourse, thereby narrowing the focus of source material in subsequent periods.

7.1.1. Early Post-Soviet Period (1988–1999): From Reluctance to Cautious Support

In the early stages of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, then President Turgut Özal's discourse reflected an inconsistent and hesitant approach towards Azerbaijan—shaped by both geopolitical pragmatism and sectarian considerations. (Ülker, 2019; Eren, 2022) Initially distancing Turkey from Azerbaijan by emphasising its perceived affinity with Iran and downplaying solidarity, Özal employed referential strategies that framed Azerbaijan as “other” based on religious difference:

“First and foremost, Azerbaijan is a Soviet republic. In fact, Azerbaijanis are closer to the Iranian Azeris than to the Turkish people in Anatolia. They are Shia, whereas we are Sunni.” (PPM.01)

This early stance implicitly weakened the construction of a natural ethnic or cultural alliance, thus delaying the formation of a legitimising narrative for Turkish involvement. However, his later admission of error signals a significant discursive shift—employing corrective framing to realign TFP narratives with pan-Turkic and cultural unity ideologies:

“I was mistaken. Azeris are our true and genuine brothers.” (PPM.02)

Although his later statements reflect a compensation for the earlier detachment and they lay a narrative foundation based on historical and emotional affinity, silences are also noteworthy. Özal's discourse largely avoided direct criticism of Soviet-Russian intervention in the conflict or a firm condemnation of Armenian aggression. Reflecting the geopolitical sensitivities of the post-Cold War environment, his fluctuating rhetoric and initial hesitations highlighted the absence of a coherent discourse that could frame Turkey's role as a legitimate regional actor. However, such shifts towards emphasising ethnic and cultural brotherhood with Azerbaijan can be interpreted as the first step in constructing a normative framework that would later be developed more assertively by subsequent Turkish political actors.

During his premiership and later presidency, Süleyman Demirel adopted a cautious and diplomatically restrained discourse concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Instead of adopting emotionally driven narratives that would emerge in later Turkish political discourse, Demirel's rhetoric consistently emphasised “conflict avoidance” and the importance of “international legitimacy”. His statements presented Turkey as a responsible actor committed to diplomatic

solutions rather than unilateral intervention. However, high-modality language is notably absent in Demirel's statements, reflecting a low-certainty and low-risk orientation that prioritised regional stability over nationalist mobilisation. Referential strategies positioned Turkey as a neutral mediator rather than an ethnic "protector", despite growing domestic pressures for direct intervention. (Kılıçoğlu, 2021) However, Demirel's later statements increasingly linked Turkey's relations with Armenia to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. In one address, he stated:

"The improvement of our relations with Armenia is contingent upon its withdrawal from the Azerbaijani territories it occupies. If Armenia agrees to evacuate these occupied territories and accept a just and honourable solution, an environment of good neighbourliness and cooperation will be established." (PPM.03)

Reiterating the same conditional approach, he declared in another speech that:

"Achieving lasting peace in the Caucasus depends on the establishment of international legitimacy. The ongoing occupation of the territory of our brother Azerbaijan remains the sole obstacle to Turkey's improvement of relations with Armenia." (PPM.04)

Unlike Özal's hesitant yet increasingly solidarity-oriented discourse, Demirel's foreign policy rhetoric reasserted traditional principles of Turkish diplomacy. While carefully avoiding from framing the conflict in religious or civilisational terms, Demirel positioned Turkey as a diplomatic stakeholder seeking peaceful resolution through international institutions. This cautious discursive construction reflected both internal concerns about domestic stability and external fears of alienating Western allies or provoking Russian hostility. Thus, his discourse contributed to a restrained and legitimacy-seeking narrative in contrast to later assertive discursive shifts. During his period, Turkey's role was rhetorically constructed within international legal frameworks rather than identity-based solidarity.

Along with the statements made by the Presidents, the messages presented to the public by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military also shaped Turkey's post-Soviet Nagorno-Karabakh policy. The common theme of the public statements made by the MFA between 1992 and 1994 was peaceful resolution, regional stability, and multilateral diplomacy. These texts showed that Turkey's discursive stance on the conflict was gradually becoming institutionalised, and they also paralleled the public statements of the then Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin.

Çetin's discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reveals a strategic alignment of Turkey's regional diplomacy with international legitimacy and conditional engagement principles. His statements position Turkey as an emerging regional power whose rising geopolitical weight is acknowledged by international actors. Referring to his diplomatic visits to Vienna and Budapest, he remarked:

“I observed very closely that Turkey's importance in the region and the world has significantly increased and is now being recognised.” (MFA.01)

This self-affirmation of regional importance not only contributes to Turkey's discursive self-legitimation but also aligns with a broader narrative of norm-based regional leadership. Similar to President Demirel's conditional linkage between Armenian withdrawal from Karabakh and the improvement of bilateral relations, Çetin extends this logic to Turkey's multilateral diplomacy. Specifically, he ties resolution of the Karabakh conflict to the progress of Turkey's relations with the Council of Europe:

“It has become clear that no progress can be made in relations with the Council of Europe unless the situation arising from Karabakh—which led to Armenian territorial occupation—is clarified.” (MFA.02)

This conditional framing reveals the instrumentalisation of the conflict as leverage in foreign policy, echoing a consistent discursive pattern in Turkish high-level diplomacy: Armenia's withdrawal is a prerequisite for diplomatic normalisation. Moreover, Çetin's discourse features an early articulation of the corridor politics that would become a cornerstone of TFP in later decades. Responding to a question about the status of Lachin Corridor, he stated:

“The Lachin issue is primarily a matter that concerns Armenia rather than Karabakh. We maintain that this should be considered separately from the Karabakh issue.” (MFA.03)

This discursive separation of Lachin from the core Karabakh conflict introduces a subtle yet foundational shift. The corridor is recognised not merely as a war-time tactical asset but as a structurally significant geopolitical node—an early precursor to Turkey's later emphasis on “corridor diplomacy” as a strategic imperative.

In sum, Çetin's statements demonstrate how Turkey's foreign policy elite framed the Karabakh conflict as both a normative issue and a diplomatic conditionality. His remarks blend legalistic restraint with strategic foresight, prefiguring the dual-track diplomacy that would characterise Turkey's approach in the following decades. The parallels with Demirel's conditionality narrative and the early articulation of corridor salience mark Çetin's discourse as a pivotal point in the discursive evolution of Turkey's regional strategy.

From early 1992 onwards, Turkish official discourse consistently constructed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as an existential security issue, frequently invoking securitising language to frame Armenian military actions. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) repeatedly portrayed Armenia's advances as a threat not only to Azerbaijan but also to broader regional stability, thereby justifying Turkey's diplomatic assertiveness. This securitised framing persisted throughout the 1990s, extending even into statements by prime ministers and foreign ministers, including Tansu Çiller and Süleyman Demirel. The longevity and recurrence of securitisation rhetoric—coupled with calls for international mechanisms such as the OSCE and UN Security Council—reflect the institutionalisation of threat construction within Turkey's foreign policy stance.²

The discourse of pan-Turkism emerged as a persistent and emotionally charged feature within Turkish statements, particularly between 1992 and 1995. Officials such as Hikmet Çetin and Volkan Vural regularly referred to historical, linguistic, and cultural commonalities between Turkey and Azerbaijan to justify Ankara's active diplomatic posture. These references often went beyond cultural affinity, framing Turkey as a *kin-state* with a moral duty to protect Azerbaijani interests. The plight of Azerbaijani IDPs was frequently used as a rhetorical tool to bolster pan-Turkic solidarity and moral justification. This identity-based framing operated in tandem with securitising language, thus reinforcing a dual narrative of brotherhood and threat.³

² (MFA.04, MFA.05, MFA.06, PPM.05, PPM.07, PPM.08)

³ (MFA.06, MFA.10, MFA.16, MFA.21, MFA.29, MFA.34; PPM.05, PPM.06)

Parallel to securitisation and identity framing, Turkish discourse also employed a delegitimising tone vis-à-vis Armenia and, increasingly, Western actors. Several MFA statements between 1992 and 1996 cast doubt on Armenia's international credibility by accusing it of obstructing peace processes and rejecting the norms of international law. Moreover, a pronounced anti-Western narrative emerged, particularly in reaction to perceived Western bias or inaction. Statements in 1993, 1995, and 1996 directly criticised Western-dominated institutions and decisions—such as the Karabakh elections or UNSC delays—as undermining regional justice and Turkey's normative expectations. This shift illustrates how delegitimation was not only targeted at Armenia but also extended towards international actors, reflecting a growing scepticism in Turkey's foreign policy discourse.⁴

Another prominent element within Turkish discourse is the invocation of sovereignty and legality to frame both support for Azerbaijan and criticism of Armenian actions. From mid-1992 onwards, the MFA frequently referred to violations of international law, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders to reinforce Azerbaijan's position. Legalist language also surfaced in support for mechanisms such as the CSCE and the UNSC resolutions. This trend demonstrates how legal norms and sovereignty-based discourse were strategically deployed to confer legitimacy on Turkey's diplomatic alignment with Azerbaijan.⁵

Turkish discourse during this period also reveals an underlying ambition for regional leadership, often presented in parallel with its calls for peaceful resolution. Numerous statements referenced Turkey's proactive engagement in multilateral diplomacy, including appeals to the OSCE, OIC, and UN. MFA and high-level figures like Hikmet Çetin positioned Turkey as both a regional stabiliser and a legitimate mediator. This leadership claim was often framed as a natural extension of Turkey's geographic, cultural, and strategic position, reinforcing a self-ascribed role as a peace broker and regional anchor.⁶

⁴ (MFA.13, MFA.18, MFA.22, MFA.27, MFA.36, PPM.07)

⁵ (MFA.15, MFA.23, MFA.24, MFA.31, MFA.32, MFA.37)

⁶ (MFA.05, MFA.07, MFA.08, MFA.11, MFA.26, MFA.28, MFA.33)

Moral justification was a supplementary but salient framing device, particularly in moments of heightened violence or humanitarian concern. The Turkish MFA and political leaders often expressed solidarity with Azerbaijani civilians and invoked moral obligations grounded in shared cultural and religious values. In some instances, humanitarian language overlapped with pan-Turkism and kin-state rhetoric, creating a composite frame of moral responsibility and emotional urgency. These framings allowed Turkish discourse to go beyond cold strategic calculus and instead position its foreign policy choices within a broader moral order.⁷

7.1.2. Continuity and Discursive Reinforcement (2000s–2010s)

While the 2000s marked a discursive intensification in Turkey’s solidarity rhetoric with Azerbaijan, this period should not be seen as a fundamental break from earlier patterns. Many of the themes that came to define Turkish foreign policy discourse on Nagorno-Karabakh—such as kinship, shared history, and regional identity—had already taken root in the 1990s. The phrase “one nation, two states” was in fact articulated in earlier decades, reflecting a growing tendency to frame Turkey-Azerbaijan relations through ethnic and cultural affinity.

Although the Justice and Development Party did bring increased rhetorical visibility to the conflict, its framing largely reinforced existing narratives. For instance, expressions of “brotherhood” and “strategic partnership” were not novel inventions but discursive continuities from the post-Cold War period—during which Turkish policymakers increasingly referred to Turkic solidarity and pan-Turkic affiliations. The regional activism associated with Ahmet Davutoğlu’s “strategic depth” approach must thus be seen less as a new orientation and more as a reconfiguration of pre-existing ambitions to position Turkey as a key regional actor. (Aras, 2009)

During this time, Turkish officials continued to voice strong support for Azerbaijan’s territorial claims, criticising the Armenian occupation and calling for its end. These statements echoed the moral and legal framing already present in the 1990s. While international law remained a reference point, it was increasingly blended with identity-based justifications and notions of historical injustice. Criticism of international mediators, such as the OSCE Minsk Group, intensified during

⁷ (MFA.10, MFA.17, MFA.20, PPM.05)

this period, yet scepticism toward the group had already been articulated in earlier phases of Turkish diplomacy.

In this context, the 2000s–2010s can be better understood not as a turning point but as a phase of consolidation—wherein discursive patterns established in the 1990s were amplified and adapted to new regional and domestic circumstances. Rather than representing a coherent strategic shift, this period reflected the continuity of ambivalent foreign policy narratives that sought to merge legality, morality, and regional aspirations. These discursive continuities laid the groundwork for the assertive stance adopted during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, where pre-existing themes of kinship and strategic solidarity were reactivated and intensified within a radically altered geopolitical environment.

7.1.3. Assertive Solidarity and Securitisation (2020 Karabakh War)

This section examines how Turkey’s discourse construction during the Second Karabakh War and its aftermath took form. Since state-aligned Anadolu Agency (AA) functions as the country’s biggest news outlet during that period, this phase of analysis focuses on news articles published between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 by AA. By keeping the guiding questions and deductive codes—that were also used in previous sections—constant, this section continues to investigate how Turkey’s positionality throughout the hot conflict and post-war period was discursively legitimised.

Throughout the analysis, three major inductive codes emerged from the data. Firstly, the failure of the OSCE Minsk Group in the case of offering a sustainable peace plan over the past quarter-century was a recurring theme in AA’s coverage. This ineffectiveness was framed as a justification for Turkey’s active involvement in the conflict. In this narrative, Turkey is not only portrayed as a traditional ally of Azerbaijan but as a responsible regional power assuming its rightful role in restoring regional stability. The intervention is thus framed not as an act of solidarity alone, but as a strategic necessity grounded in regional responsibility and geopolitical agency.⁸

⁸ (AA.01, AA.12, AA.14)

Secondly, a strong emphasis on international law and normative legitimacy permeates this discourse. AA reports frequently refer to UNSC resolutions and international legal principles to affirm Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and to frame Armenia as the aggressor. In doing so, Turkey's support is not presented as an arbitrary alignment but as a legally justified position. The alleged inaction of other global and regional actors—particularly the Minsk Group, Western powers, and occasionally Iran—reinforces the narrative that Turkey had to step in as a legitimate actor filling a normative vacuum.⁹

Thirdly, the conflict was increasingly securitised within Turkish discourse. Through references to Armenia's alleged collaboration with the PKK and Russia's military support to Armenia, the issue was transformed into a matter of national security. AA frequently reported that Armenia had deployed PKK-affiliated militants to Karabakh and equipped them with Azerbaijani uniforms, portraying the conflict as part of a broader asymmetric threat to Turkey's sovereignty.¹⁰ These narratives were reinforced by reports of foreign arms shipments to Armenia and the perceived encirclement of Turkey's strategic interests. In this context, Turkey's engagement in the conflict was reframed as part of its counterterrorism strategy and defensive posture in a hostile regional environment.

While traditional motifs such as brotherhood, shared history, and the “one nation, two states” rhetoric remained present¹¹, their discursive weight appeared to have diminished compared to earlier periods. Instead, Turkey's role was increasingly legitimised through appeals to regional leadership, legal responsibility, and security imperatives. Notably, the conditionality principle from earlier Turkish policy—linking normalisation with Armenia to a resolution of the Karabakh issue—continued to echo in the background¹², suggesting elements of continuity amidst discursive transformation.

⁹ (AA.02, AA.03, AA.11)

¹⁰ (AA.04, AA.09, AA.15, AA.19)

¹¹ (AA.02, AA.03, AA.06, AA.10, AA.18)

¹² (AA.01)

7.2. Perceptions of Domestic and International Actors

The effectiveness of Turkey's interventionist and legitimacy-driven discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict depends not solely on its internal coherence, but crucially on its reception by international actors. Thus, this section investigates how a spectrum of external stakeholders—including regional states, global powers, think-tanks, and media outlets—have interpreted, contested, or validated Turkey's role. Framed around Q3-Q4 and guided by the pre-established deductive codes, this level of analysis uncovers both converging and diverging responses that illustrate the discursive struggle surrounding Turkey's regional positioning.

7.2.1. Western Contestations: France and the USA

France's Dualistic Framing of Turkey: Despite French media and policy discourse portray Turkey primarily as a disruptive and militarised actor within context of the conflict, academic reflections in France tend to describe Turkey's involvement as a typical behaviour of regional powers. Thus, French rhetoric presents a dual reception of Turkish involvement in Karabakh. State-backed media outlets, which directly or indirectly reflect the views of the ruling elite, regularly emphasise France's alignment with Armenia. Accusing Turkey of exacerbating instability through excessive involvement and military aid, these narratives rely heavily on delegitimising metaphors such as “neo-Ottomanism” and “pan-Turkism”—criticising Ankara's assertive foreign policy as ideologically driven.

For instance, a news article from *Orient XXI* states the following:

“Turkish president pressed his advantage by creating a corridor...thus obtaining a kind of territorial continuity[...]between the Black Sea and the Caspian. Nor did he miss the opportunity to indulge in some neo-Ottoman rhetoric, arguing that Turks and Azeris belonged to a single nation, divided between two States.” (FR.11)

While reflecting Turkey's capability to establish a corridor—which led to a territorial continuity between Turkic states—and its military advance, the language employed by the author is generally signalling French dissatisfaction with Turkey's interventionist policy activities in the Caucasus.

On the other hand, while including the mutual bickering between the leaders of both countries, RFI became a voice of Emmanuel Macron by writing up that:

“France remains extremely concerned about the bellicose comments that Turkey made in the last hours...that we will not accept. I say to Armenia and to the Armenians, France will play its role.” (FR.05)

Beyond delegitimising Turkey’s involvement by portraying it as an aggressor actor, Macron’s expressions and his direct address to Armenian people demonstrated France’s dedication to pursue its counter-Turkic unity role in the conflict.

Nevertheless, French academic discourse offers a more nuanced interpretation, describing Turkey as a regional actor conducting assertive policies. Analysts Richard Giragosian argue that:

“The Karabakh conflict[...]has the potential to become a pivot for a much wider confrontation of competing interests of powerful regional actors such as Russia, Turkey and Iran.” (FR.06)

However, latter he elaborates:

“Turkey's vocal defence of Azerbaijan, which is also driven by a desire to regain its past role as Azerbaijan's primary military patron that was lost to Russia and Israel, is seen in Armenia as a 'destabilizing and destructive' stance.” (FR.06)

According to Giragosian’s article, Turkey's involvement mirrors the behaviour of other regional powers seeking strategic footholds. His language recognises Turkey’s increasing influence in the South Caucasus while also acknowledging that Armenian perceptions frame this assertiveness as destabilising. This duality suggests that while Turkey’s discourse is resisted at the state level, elements of its legitimacy narrative resonate within intellectual circles.

The political apex of France’s antagonistic framing is reflected in President Macron’s rhetoric and the French Senate’s resolution advocating the recognition of Artsakh. These moves reinforced Armenia’s victimhood narrative and positioned Turkey-Azerbaijan as a coercive bloc, casting Turkey not merely as a regional actor but as a geopolitical agitator.¹³

¹³ (FR.01, FR.12, FR.13)

The USA Discourse of Destabilisation and Normative Breach: American political elites similarly framed Turkey as an external destabilising actor whose involvement undermined the normative legitimacy of the OSCE Minsk Group-led peace process. These framings constructed Turkey as a violator of international norms, challenging its self-presentation as a normative actor committed to regional peace and stability. The discourse advanced by prominent political figures positioned Turkey not only as a partisan actor but also as an impediment to the legitimate multilateral mechanisms of conflict resolution.

For instance, Joe Biden states that:

“With casualties rapidly mounting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, the Trump Administration needs to call the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan immediately to de-escalate the situation. It must also demand others, like Turkey, stay out of this conflict” (Kelly, 2020)

While this statement positions Turkey as a problematic third party whose engagement violates the course of conflict, Aram Hamparian—director of the Armenian National Committee of America—reinforced the portrayal of Turkey as a destabilising force with the following words:

“We’re encouraged by Vice President Biden calling out Turkey’s interference. Turkey is pouring fuel on the fire.” (Kelly, 2020)

Democratic congressional leaders Eliot Engel and Bob Menendez deploy an alarmist language. While Engel expresses that:

“The influence of external actors such as Turkey recklessly meddling in the conflict is troubling.” (Kelly, 2020)

Menendez declares:

“I strongly condemn Azerbaijan’s attack on Nagorno Karabakh, yet another act of aggression supported by Turkey.” (Kelly, 2020).

Describing Turkey’s involvement as “reckless meddling” and calling for its restraint, Turkey is thus constructed as a destabilising actor and an external to the legitimate framework for conflict resolution.

7.2.2. Regional Rivals: Iran, Israel, and Armenia

Strategic Reorientation of Iran: The Iranian press coverage from 2023 predominantly reflects a non-supportive reception of Turkey’s regional initiatives in the South Caucasus. Central to this discourse is a recurring invocation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly in response to Turkey’s advocacy of transport corridors and its strategic alignment with Azerbaijan. Iranian news sources portray these developments not merely as infrastructural or economic, but as geopolitical interventions that could alter established border dynamics—most notably those concerning the Iran–Armenia connection.¹⁴ This rejection is often framed through declarative assertions that Iran will not accept “any changes to internationally recognised borders” (IRN.11), reinforcing a normative stance prioritising territorial status quo.

Several entries within the dataset further problematise Turkey’s involvement by associating it with an expansionist foreign policy agenda and Pan-Turkic ambitions. Iran Daily draws attention to the discursive link between Turkey’s regional presence and its alleged aspiration to lead a Turkic geopolitical bloc. (IRN.06) This interpretation is compounded by references to NATO alignment and military integration between Turkey and Azerbaijan, (IRN.03) suggesting a perception of Turkey as a challenger to the existing regional balance of power. Through these framings, Turkey is not merely constructed as a diplomatic stakeholder but rather as a revisionist actor, whose strategic ambitions raise broader normative concerns among regional powers.

Despite the dominant tone of resistance, a few reports adopt a partially supportive stance, indicating that Iran does not entirely reject engagement with Turkey. Instead, its discourse incorporates conditional openness to cooperation, often mediated through denominational or cultural distinctions. (IRN.05) These nuances reflect an effort to manage tensions without fully endorsing Turkey’s agenda. Moreover, Iran’s self-representation as a mediator (IRN.02) illustrates a parallel attempt to assert normative leadership in regional diplomacy, thereby counterbalancing Turkey’s rising assertiveness through claims of neutrality and multilateralism.

¹⁴ (IRN.01; IRN.02; IRN.08; IRN.10; IRN.11)

Israel's Pushback Against Erdoğan: A notable counter-discursive stance emerged from Israel in response to Turkey's attempts to frame its involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh as a legitimate intervention. This became particularly evident when Turkish President Erdoğan invoked Turkey's role in the 2020 Karabakh war to justify potential future actions against Israel, stating:

“Just like we entered Karabakh, just like we entered Libya, we might do similar to them.”
(In Threat To Israel, Erdogan Cites Turkish 'Entry' Into Karabakh, 2024)

Framing Karabakh as a precedent for transnational military engagement, Erdoğan's rhetoric positioned Turkey as a regional actor with the capacity—and legitimacy—to intervene militarily beyond its borders. In reaction, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz explicitly rejected this narrative, invoking a powerful historical analogy to delegitimise Erdoğan's stance. Katz stated that Erdoğan was “following in the footsteps of Saddam Hussein” and warned, “He should remember what happened there and how it ended”. (In Threat To Israel, Erdogan Cites Turkish 'Entry' Into Karabakh, 2024)

This comparison not only aimed to undermine the moral and legal basis of Turkey's interventionist discourse but also served to equate Erdoğan's regional ambitions with authoritarian aggression, thereby casting Turkey as a destabilising and illegitimate actor in international affairs. Such responses exemplify how external actors, particularly Israel in this case, actively contest Turkey's strategic framing of its regional engagements, especially when these are employed rhetorically to justify potential military posturing in other conflict zones such as Gaza.

Armenia: Trauma, Hegemony, and Distrust: Armenian media outlets and intellectual platforms, such as *The Armenian Weekly*, mobilise historically entrenched narratives to interpret Turkish foreign policy. These responses are framed through:

- **Historical Trauma and Victimhood:** Continuous invocation of the Armenian Genocide frames Turkey as an unresolved historical threat whose current actions are interpreted as continuations of past violence.
- **Binary Oppositions:** Armenia is constructed as a vulnerable and defensive actor, while Turkey is presented as a hegemonic aggressor.

- **Referential Strategies and Modalities:** High-modality language and speculative framing (use of might, likely etc.) signal deep distrust towards Turkey's intentions and sincerity in reconciliation efforts.

Importantly, these narratives rarely engage in introspective critique of Armenian policy errors, thus reinforcing a monolithic victimhood stance. (Yacoubian, 2024) In sum, Armenian responses operate within a distinct discursive order where Turkish legitimacy claims are not merely rejected, but are subsumed under larger frameworks of historical injustice and cultural domination.

7.2.3. Strategic Normalisation: Think Tank Perspectives and the OSW Report

A contrasting and more sympathetic framing emerges from policy think-tanks such as the OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. Their report portrays the Baku-Ankara alliance as a rational and inevitable evolution of strategic interests. Instead of relying on emotionally charged or ideologically framed narratives, the OSW employs a historical and geopolitical lens that frames the alliance as a product of long-standing strategic alignment. Emphasis on infrastructure, political coordination, and regional balancing highlights Turkey's role as a systemic actor in regional transformation. (Górecki & Chudziak, 2021) Crucially, the report downplays authoritarianism and omits discussions on democratic deficits in both Ankara and Baku. This selective silence serves to bolster the teleological framing of Turkey as an indispensable actor shaping the future of the South Caucasus. The OSW's depiction supports the thesis argument that Turkish discourse has gradually evolved from reactive norm defence to proactive norm production, challenging traditional boundaries of regional interventionism and legitimacy.

7.2.4. Concluding Remarks: Discursive Contestation and Normative Shifts

This phase of the analysis revealed the contested reception of Turkey's discourse by demonstrating how its interventionist rhetoric is simultaneously normalised, challenged, or reframed across multiple actors which have different ideological orientations and strategic interests. Turkey's framing of its involvement as morally justified, historically anchored, and normatively legitimate is embraced by some actors as a reflection of its regional role, yet rejected by others as neo-imperialistic or destabilising. Thus, the international reception of Turkish discourse is not monolithic. It reflects broader global debates surrounding the legitimacy of regional intervention, the reconfiguration of power in post-Soviet spaces, and the evolving norms that govern sovereignty,

identity, and security. The following section will extend this analysis by interrogating how these competing narratives intersect with shifting international norms and the implications for long-term conflict resolution.

7.3. Changing International Norms and Practical Implications in Post-2020

In line with guiding questions (Q5-Q6) and the associated deductive codes, this section examines the influence of Turkey's discourse construction on the evolution of international norms and the changing modalities of conflict resolution in the South Caucasus after 2020. This analysis reveals not only a shift in how regional power dynamics are interpreted but also a broader erosion of multilateral and normative frameworks in international relations.

7.3.1. Turkey's Intervention and the Erosion of Multilateralism

Commentaries originating from France, particularly those addressing the sidelining of the OSCE Minsk Group, frame Turkey's growing role as symptomatic of a broader decline in multilateral diplomacy. Turkey's alliance with Azerbaijan is not merely depicted as a strategic partnership but as a structural challenge to the legitimacy of traditional mediation mechanisms. In this context, Turkey is increasingly viewed as a norm disruptor, realigning the region away from inclusive negotiation frameworks. Yörük Işık contextualises this as a historic shift:

“In Karabakh, for the first time in history, Russia faced an outside power intervening in the original territory of the USSR. [...] Russia doesn't want to face Turkey in Donbas.” (FR.07)

This illustrates Turkey's transformation from a NATO member with limited regional influence to a fully assertive regional power, recalibrating Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Russia's reactive positioning—particularly in its efforts to exclude Turkey from the Ukraine peace process—demonstrates its strategic intent to prevent Turkey's operational model from gaining further traction in its near abroad.

7.3.2. Pragmatism, Power Consolidation, and New Regional Architectures

Russia's accommodation of Turkey through initiatives such as the joint monitoring centre—established after the 2020 ceasefire—highlights Ankara's shift from rhetorical alignment to institutional co-management of the post-war order. While some OSCE Minsk Group members

voiced concerns, Ankara's active role in prioritising humanitarian coordination positioned it as a legitimate post-conflict actor. (Putin, Erdogan Discuss Progress of Implementation of Agreements on Karabakh, 2021) Similarly, Iran's growing anxiety over Turkey's assertiveness indicates a reconfiguration of the region's normative structure. Tehran's proposals for alternative cooperation mechanisms aim to reassert its influence and counterbalance what it perceives as a Turkey-centric order. (Sputnik, 2021) From the French perspective, Turkey's support for the Zangezur corridor is read not only as an infrastructural project but as a geopolitical instrument to marginalise Armenia and Iran while bolstering Turkish-Azerbaijani dominance. This reframing of transport infrastructure as a tool of securitisation represents a paradigmatic shift from peace-oriented diplomacy to corridor-based geopolitics. (Grynszpan & Vincent, 2023)

7.3.3. Shifting Discursive Norms: Force Versus Negotiation

The dismantling of the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the displacement of its Armenian population without security guarantees are interpreted by several observers as an end to the viability of inclusive negotiation-based settlement models. Future resolution processes will likely be shaped by asymmetrical power relations and military imposition rather than by internationally monitored dialogue. (Nagorno-Karabakh: A tragic but predictable outcome, 2023) The Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) further underscores the precedent-setting nature of the 2020 war. The military solution adopted by Azerbaijan and supported by Turkey is seen to erode the principle of peaceful resolution codified in the UN Charter. The alignment of this framing with other global trends—such as China's stance on Taiwan—reveals the broader implications of legitimising territorial reclamation through force. (Landgraf & Seferian, 2024) This erosion of international norms is especially apparent in the decline of human rights and minority protection frameworks. With Europe increasingly dependent on Azerbaijani energy, normative concerns have been deprioritised in favour of geopolitical pragmatism. The South Caucasus thus emerges as a region where realpolitik overrides international legal standards, with the Karabakh case serving as a cautionary example. (Grynszpan & Vincent, 2023)

7.3.4. Norm Contestation in U.S. Political Discourse

In the USA context, the discourse frames Turkey as not merely a partisan actor but a revisionist force. Accusations of deploying Syrian fighters and providing military support to Azerbaijan led to

bipartisan calls for halting military aid and re-evaluating Turkey's strategic alignment. These reactions signal concerns that Turkey's involvement undermines not just diplomacy in the Caucasus but the broader rules-based international order (Kelly, 2020). American political discourse thus positions Turkey's behaviour in Nagorno-Karabakh within a larger pattern of normative deviance, associating it with erosion of sovereignty principles and obstruction of diplomatic processes.

7.3.5. Practical Implications for International Conflict Resolution

Beyond normative debates, the implications for conflict resolution mechanisms are profound. According to FPRI, the lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms undermines future peacebuilding efforts. The report calls for durable international engagement—potentially under UN auspices—to stabilise the region and enable the voluntary return of displaced communities. (Landgraf & Seferian, 2024) It recommends tangible steps such as enhancing EU-Turkey dialogue, leveraging humanitarian aid, and instituting robust monitoring mechanisms to prevent unilateral military actions. In this regard, the post-2020 conflict resolution architecture must adapt not only to regional power shifts but also to the diminishing credibility of traditional frameworks.

In sum, the analysis reveals that Turkey's discursive and operational role in the South Caucasus has significantly influenced the trajectory of international norms. Traditional paradigms of multilateral diplomacy and negotiated settlement have given way to power-driven frameworks dominated by regional actors. Turkey's strategic narratives, infrastructural policies, and military alignment with Azerbaijan have collectively fostered a new model of conflict resolution—one where force, rather than consensus, dictates political outcomes.

VIII. DISCUSSION

This chapter synthesises the findings of the analytical sections by re-aligning them with the thesis's core analytical components: CI (Construction of Discourse), CII (Perceptions of Legitimacy), and CIII (Impact on Norms and Conflict Outcomes). This structure allows for a more systematic interpretation of discursive patterns and their implications, both internally (within Turkey's political discourse) and externally (across international reception and normative transformations).

8.1 Construction of Discourse (CI)

The findings demonstrate a significant transformation in Turkey's discourse from diplomatic restraint and normative ambiguity in the early 1990s to an assertive, securitised, and strategically framed solidarity discourse by 2020. The early post-Soviet era was marked by ambivalence and legalistic framing, whereas subsequent years introduced a growing emphasis on pan-Turkism, moral obligation, and identity-based narratives. The 2020 war catalysed a securitised framing, shifting from "shared identity" to "shared threat". This evolution reflects a broader redefinition of national interest narratives, in which the Karabakh issue is increasingly portrayed as a matter of Turkish regional security and geopolitical agency.

8.2 Perceptions of Legitimacy (CII)

The international reception of Turkey's involvement remains fragmented. Western actors, particularly France and the United States, frame Turkish discourse as destabilising and ideologically motivated—invoking terms like "neo-Ottomanism" and "pan-Turkism" to delegitimise Ankara's actions. Conversely, academic and think-tank discourses often acknowledge Turkey's behaviour as consistent within regional power logic. In the region, responses are similarly divided. Iran constructs Turkey as a geopolitical threat, while Israel strongly contests Erdoğan's discursive analogies between Karabakh and other theatres of intervention. Armenia's perspective is framed through deep-seated historical trauma and distrust. However, certain policy-oriented voices, especially in think tanks like OSW, describe Turkey's role as pragmatic and structurally adaptive. This divergence highlights a complex discursive struggle between norm-invoking justification and its selective recognition.

8.3 Normative and Practical Impact (CIII)

The post-2020 landscape illustrates a tangible shift in conflict resolution modalities in the South Caucasus. Grounded in regional responsibility and normative legitimacy, Turkey's discourse challenges the primacy of multilateral and Western-led mechanisms like the OSCE Minsk Group. The success of Azerbaijan's militarised resolution with Turkish support has signalled a shift towards power-centric models of conflict settlement. This transition has led to a normative rupture: diplomatic mediation is now less viable in contexts where coercive statecraft yields rapid results. The Zangezur corridor debate further reflects how infrastructure projects are discursively securitised to serve geopolitical realignment.

The decline in normative constraints is especially evident in the retreat of human rights and minority protection frameworks. Energy dependence, regional rivalries, and great power competition increasingly overshadow norm-based dialogue. Within this context, Turkey's discourse does not merely respond to existing norms but contributes to producing new ones—anchored in sovereignty, unilateralism, and realpolitik.

IX. CONCLUSION

9.1. Summary of Key Findings

This thesis examined how Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was constructed through political discourse and how this construction has been received and interpreted internationally, particularly in relation to evolving norms of legitimacy and conflict resolution. Employing a constructivist approach which combines Critical Discourse Analysis and Securitisation Theory, a discourse and media framing analysis was operationalised through hybrid methodological techniques.

Findings reveal that political discourse in Turkish foreign policy functions as a strategic vehicle to articulate, justify, and normalise Turkey's regional engagement. Within the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Turkey's discourse transitioned from passive diplomacy to proactive regionalism. While this shift mirrors broader domestic and geopolitical transformations, the country's self-positioning evolved from normative ambiguity to strategic clarity—emphasising ethnic kinship, regional leadership, and legal justification. Simultaneously, international reactions reveal a contested space in which Turkey's legitimacy claims are either resisted or selectively accepted.

Secondly, this study concludes that Turkish discourse has played an active role in redefining the terms of engagement in the South Caucasus. The Karabakh conflict is no longer governed by multilateral diplomacy but by a hybrid order shaped by regional actors and coercive legitimacy. As a result, this case study illustrates a growing trend in global politics where discourse becomes a tool for norm revision and conflict settlement.

Ultimately, this thesis has demonstrated that in today's international system, legitimacy is not simply earned through compliance with international law, nor imposed through hard power. It is constructed, narrated, and contested through discourse. Turkey's engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict offers a salient example of how state actors use discourse to reconfigure both regional roles and global norms. This insight is crucial not only for understanding the present but also for navigating the future terrain of international politics.

9.2. Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This study contributes to the broader literature in two significant ways. First, it advances constructivist IR theory by providing a concrete case in which discourse directly shaped legitimacy in the context of international intervention. Second, it addresses a gap in the literature on Turkish foreign policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by offering a systematic, multi-actor analysis of how legitimacy was constructed, contested, and received. Moreover, by integrating political and media discourses and situating them within a relational framework, the thesis underscores the importance of discursive interaction in shaping international normative outcomes.

9.3. Further Implications

Policy Implications

- Regional actors must recognise the permanence of new power alignments and adapt diplomatic strategies accordingly.
- Western mediators should reassess the efficacy of institutional mechanisms like the Minsk Group and explore more inclusive regional dialogue platforms.
- International institutions must develop monitoring tools that can address norm erosion without alienating regional stakeholders.

Normative Implications

- Turkey's discourse suggests a revisionist trend in norm production. Legitimacy is increasingly tied to results rather than procedure.
- The case of Karabakh reflects a larger global shift away from liberal-institutionalist norms towards pragmatic sovereignty and regionalism.
- Future scholarship should investigate how regional discourses reshape global norms not merely by defiance, but by offering alternative models of order.

9.4. Recommendations for Future Research

While this research offers a detailed case-specific analysis, future studies may benefit from comparative investigations across different regional interventions—particularly involving middle powers engaging in normative entrepreneurship. Additionally, extending the methodological scope to include audience reception, social media dynamics, or visual discourse analysis could provide richer insights into the discursive production of legitimacy in the digital age.

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