

EMERGING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM: EMERGING POWERS AND REGIONAL MULTIPOLARITY IN THE CASE OF TURKEY

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Abstract

This study proposes a new approach to understanding the post-Cold War world order by examining the changing structure of the international system through the conceptual framework of regional multipolarity. Drawing on systemic theories in international relations and the concept of multi-level institutional multipolarity, the article argues that emerging powers increasingly pursue their national interests through regional rather than global institutions. The analysis, taking Turkey as an example, shows that emerging powers are expanding their political, economic, and cultural influence by instrumentalising regional organisations while maintaining their relations with global institutions. The analysis defines four fundamental principles of regional multipolarity. Firstly, regional organisations encompass not only economic but also political, security, and cultural dimensions. Secondly, emerging powers strengthen their regional autonomy while maintaining their global membership. Thirdly, they establish and lead regional structures independently of superpowers, and lastly, they engage in strategic interaction within multiple regional blocs. The study argues that increasing regional organisations, spearheaded by emerging powers, signals that the global order is evolving into a multipolar international system based on regional organisations, defined as "regional multipolarity".

Keywords

International Systems, Emerging Powers, Regional Multipolarity, Turkey.

Resumo

Este estudo propõe uma nova abordagem para compreender a ordem mundial pós-Guerra Fria, examinando a estrutura em mudança do sistema internacional através do quadro conceptual da multipolaridade regional. Baseando-se em teorias sistémicas das relações internacionais e no conceito de multipolaridade institucional multinível, o artigo argumenta que as potências emergentes procuram cada vez mais os seus interesses nacionais através de instituições regionais, em vez de globais. A análise, tomando a Turquia como exemplo, mostra que as potências emergentes estão a expandir a sua influência política, económica e cultural, instrumentalizando as organizações regionais, mantendo as suas relações com as instituições globais. A análise define quatro princípios fundamentais da multipolaridade regional. Em primeiro lugar, as organizações regionais abrangem não só a dimensão económica, mas também a política, a segurança e a cultural. Em segundo lugar, as potências emergentes reforçam a sua autonomia regional, mantendo a sua adesão global. Em terceiro lugar, estabelecem e lideram estruturas regionais independentemente das superpotências e, por último, envolvem-se em interações estratégicas dentro de múltiplos blocos regionais. O



estudo argumenta que o aumento das organizações regionais, lideradas por potências emergentes, sugere que a ordem global está a evoluir para um sistema internacional multipolar baseado em organizações regionais, definido como "multipolaridade regional".

Palavras-chave

Sistemas Internacionais, Potências Emergentes, Multipolaridade Regional, Turquia.

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Introduction

The systemic approach to international relations is a sort of macro approach to the discipline. It requires making general assessments of power politics and determining the particular way foreign policy preferences of all states are shaped, mainly by the level of power. If there is a pattern, verbally or practically confirmed by all states, especially by dominant(s) or hegemon(s) or superpower states, then it is possible to make a judgment that there is an international system in operation. Historical perspective reveals that several eras have been dominated by certain states or empires claiming control over world politics (Degterev 2019).

Despite the logistical difficulties, the entire world's terrain was explored, and political control over these lands became a battlefield or conflict zone among powerful political entities. This process evolved together with the colonisation of the lands by the European great powers. The power disparity between Europe and the rest of the world led to world politics being discussed in European palaces and parliaments. In nature, the concert of Europe was a regional orientation of world politics, but it covered every inch of the world. Given that the colonising process was still underway worldwide and the power politics in Eastern Europe, a major war among great powers was quite possible. As stated by Richard Elrod, "Certain constraining and moderating forces operated that compelled or induced sovereign states to refrain from adventurous and aggressive foreign policies and from 1815 to 1854, European interstate relations clearly conformed to that pattern. No wars occurred between the great powers; a large measure of security and stability characterised the international system" (1976, p. 159). Once an international system is formed based on the balance of power among embedded great powers, it maintains that there are formal or informal rules that great powers abide by, and dependent small states or colonies are kept in line with these rules. For the first multipolar international system, in which more than two nations had power roughly equal to each other, a conference system was established that all great powers agreed to use to resolve issues. It meant that great powers first communicated with each other and decided together whether there was a conflictual disagreement, so that such an issue did not escalate into a war (Schenk 1947). Especially experiencing Napoleon's Wars in the European continent, "Statesmen who had finally recognised the necessity of cooperation in the last coalition against Napoleon continued to believe in the advantages of collaboration to maintain the postwar settlement" (Elrod 1976, p.162).



The core reason behind such an international system could be that none of the great powers would want to go to war with another great power, which might alter the existing balance of power in favour of the victorious one. In this sense, a war could trigger a chain reaction, altering the balance of power and potentially encouraging one of the great powers to subsume all others one by one if they felt powerful enough and desired to do so. That was the lesson taken from the Napoleonic Wars and paved the way for prioritising a diplomatic solution before, or during, a conflict to halt it. Preventing a major war or maintaining the peace in a certain way of doing international politics has been a driving force behind the international system. It is because systemic thoughts can restrain all great or lesser powers from going to war before trying to prevent it. To achieve this, either to avoid a possible war through coordination or to go to war by forming an alliance, international institutions or regimes have played a crucial role. In other words, "...all efforts at international cooperation take place within an institutional context of some kind, which may or may not facilitate cooperative endeavours. To better understand cooperation and discord, we need to investigate the sources and nature of international institutions, as well as how institutional change occurs (Keohane 1988, p. 380). While it may sound strange to trace systemic changes through institutions, new and successive systems designed in line with the balance of power can often be read in terms of institutions led by leading states.

Emergence and Formation of International Systems

Since the establishment of the Concert of Europe, several shifts in the balance of power have led to variations in the international system. Current diplomacy has been shaped by these experiences and evolved into the formation of permanent international institutions, rather than occasional diplomatic conferences. In this line, the literature on the systemic approach and international systems surfaced. Cumulative literature on the international system or world order has been classified into three main international systems (Multipolarity, Bi-polarity and Uni-polarity) relying on historical experiences in world politics (Chirot and Hall 1982; Shannon 2018; Buzan and Little 2000). In the literature, it is widely acknowledged that the First and Second World Wars are the primary reasons for systemic change, resulting from dramatic shifts in the balance of power. While the time period between the two world wars is generally considered to be a multipolar era, the post-Second World War period until the dissolution of the Soviet Socialist Republics in 1990 is regarded as a bipolar era. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Republics, a brief period from the 1990s to the early 21st century is viewed as a unipolar era led by American supremacy, but it never represented a well-established systemic aspect (Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994). Since then, systemic analysis of multipolarity has become prevalent in the IR literature, seeking an explanation of the new international system or world order (Buzan and Little 1994; Knorr and Verba 2019).

In parallel with the history of international systems, the Concert of Europe, a practice of international conferences among great powers, created an international regime intended to maintain the balance of power. The continuous multipolarity led by Great Britain in the post-World War I period was associated with the League of Nations. Once a new balance of power emerged in the post-WWII period, the United Nations (UN) took the lead among



nations, under the prominent figures of the US and the Soviets (Balci, 2023), characterised by bipolarity. The Soviet Union was dissolved, and therefore, there were no longer two superpowers; the US took the lead as the hegemonic power until its power status was shaken by subsequent military, political, and economic crises. There was no newly established international institution symbolising the US hegemony or any other emerging great power, and that is why a decade-long unipolarity could not survive or evolve into a well-embedded international system. Since the early years of the 21st century, it may be more accurate to include the so-called unipolarity period between 1990 and 2001. During this time, well-established international institutions have been losing influence, while regional institutions led by emerging powers have been gaining space in world politics. Whether international (global) or regional, the institutions' functions are significant in order to "benefit from transaction costs" and "to facilitate the negotiation, monitoring, and enforcement" (Keohane 1988, p. 387; Martin 1992, p. 789), allowing states to maintain their national interests. In this sense, the loss of influence and effectiveness of international (global) institutions, as well as the increasing effectiveness of regional institutions, has been a significant part of international system studies (Neuvonen, 2019, p. 230).

This study intersects with the literature on global governance and its ongoing debates, arguing that rising global powers pursue their interests through regional institutionalisation rather than through their own institutions (Tüfekçi and Dag 2022). This paper is an initial part of a larger academic effort to explain the emerging international system. As claimed by Barry Buzan, right after the end of bipolarity, "a multipolar centre will be more complex and more fluid, and may well allow for the development of militarily hesitant great powers (Buzan 1991, p. 435). Many studies argue that an emerging international system and even a form of multipolarity are developing. However, as current world politics do not fully align with this multipolarity, the international relations literature seeks to determine the type of multipolarity we are currently experiencing. Some started to seek to grasp a new kind of multipolarity in 2001 when 9/11 occurred, since it was the first time the USA was hit in its own land after WWII. Others began to think about a new version of multipolarity right after the 2008 economic crisis, which had a significant global impact. However, the core point leading to the search for understanding the new international system seems to be the dissolution of the USSR, as Buzan perfectly substitutes his argument as follows;

"At the same time, the shift from two superpowers to several great powers should mean both a reduction in the intensity of global political concerns and a reduction in the resources available for sustained intervention. This, in turn, points to the rise of regional politics. Because the great powers are spread across several regions and do not include a dominating ideological or power rivalry within their ranks, they will project their own conflicts into the periphery much less forcefully and systematically than under the zero-sum regime of the Cold War. Because regions are less constrained by the impact of their conflicts on the global scorecard of two rival superpowers, local rivalries and antagonisms will probably have more autonomy. Local great powers such as India, China, and perhaps Brazil should also find their regional influence increased" (Buzan 1991, p. 435).



Additionally, universal membership based on multilateralism, such as the UN, IMF, WHO and WB, were discussed through the prism of realism and neoliberalism due to the great powers' instinctive desire to follow national interests and "the apparent inefficiencies of such a cumbersome system of rule creation and governance", respectively (Kahler 1992, p. 682). Kahler, even from an economic perspective, suggested that "both minilateral great power" collaboration within multilateral institutions (to reduce the barriers to cooperation raised by large numbers) and bilateral and regional derogations from multilateralism (as the great powers exerted their bargaining power). Given that economic regionalism had already begun by the last decade of the Cold War (Taylor 1993; Hurrell 1995), IR academics had just experienced the dissolution of the Soviets, and the number of great powers in the early 1990s was relatively low, his insightful criticism of universal-level multilateralism or international (global) institutions is quite significant. Current emerging powers may not become fully-fledged great powers, but the establishment of regional organizations¹ that they lead might indicate a path towards what Kahler called "regional derogations from multilateralism".

In this regard, Dag (2026) proposes a new concept of "multi-level institutional multipolarity," arguing that all international systems have their own specific institutions to substantiate certain relations among states. That might be, from a realist perspective, formed according to a hierarchy, based on military, economic, political, and normative capabilities (Acharya 2005) —that is, power. His main argument is that the power disparity between middle (emerging) powers that have levelled up from being lesser powers and great powers that have levelled down from being superpowers has been closing, leading to an increase in the number of regional institutions focusing on specific issues. In this perspective, he suggests emerging great powers do not see international (global) institutions as a platform where they can protect their national interests best, and so they prefer to work with neighbouring states to solve the issues within a regional circle by establishing multilateral and bilateral agreements, which is systematically called "multi-level institutional multipolarity" (Dag 2026). This paper can be considered a case study of his theoretical contribution to international systems studies.

In the currently growing multipolarity discussions, emerging powers play a vital role. Distinct from bipolarity and unipolarity, they are not entirely dependent on superpowers. In other words, they do not just bandwagon superpowers in international politics, especially in regional conflicts that have great influence (Balci 2019). They have gradually realised that their best interests may differ slightly or significantly from those of others. In these cases, how they act determines their emerging power status. The initial point of this conditionality can be found in the Balkan Wars, in which European states expected the US to intervene and resolve the conflict, but the US initially showed little inclination to do so. In this, European great powers' perceptions of possible dissemination of conflict in Europe were not received by the US at the same level and as a threat to its national interest, especially in terms of economic, political, and military costs. This case may mark

¹ Before a regional organization is established, some argue that a regional community or identity commonality at regional level is required. It is a valid and common argument in the IR literature but the context of the paper refrain to delve into this discussion as it requires much more space than a paper. For more details, please see, (Clark 1966; Neuvonen 2019). Additionally, it might not be possible to have a commonly accepted definition of what regional organization is and what makes them different from international (global) organization. Piero Pennetta provides a comprehensive elaboration on these questions (Pennetta 2015).



the initial shift in status and power of emerging powers, and subsequently, international politics will witness more examples from the early 1990s to the present. The list can be extended with others but no space for extensive analysis in this paper, such as Russia's resentments on NATO's enlargement policy toward eastern Europe, Latin American states' eagerness for economic and political independence from the US, South Asian states' efforts to look for alternative regional economic structure, individually opposing states against "global war on terror", regional great powers' involvement on regional issues as they want to be more effective role in their imminent regionality and also international politics, the most recently diplomatic frustration against Israel's genocide in Gaza (Dag 2025) and so on.

In general, the more economic, political and military power they get, the more emerging powers go away from the footsteps of superpower(s) (alternatively dominant or hegemonic powers). Instead, they seek to draw a new path that they see as more appropriate to their national interests. Taking their own national interests at the core, emerging powers have been seeking platforms where they can apply or at least have their voice and preferences heard. Unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral agreements are possible options for individuals to participate in an issue that interests them. What is meant by "multi-level institutional multipolarity" actually corresponds with all these ways, and emerging powers have been employing and trying to institutionalise them. In this paper, not multi-level agreements but regional institutions, as a multilateral action, will be considered as a case study of a new conceptualisation, the "regional multipolarity".

Instrumentalising regional organisations by emerging (regional) powers

The concept of regionalisation as a subsystem is not a new idea. It has been discussed in the literature since the late 1990s to analyse new economic regional organisations following the end of bipolarity (Thompson 1973; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Katzenstein 2005; Goertz and Powers 2014; Özdemir 2015; Levaggi 2019). What makes it different from the previous conceptualisation is that this is not just about economic integration at the regional level but can be extended to every realm of international politics (Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012, p. 4-6). As another distinctive feature of this conceptualisation endeavour, in its regionalisation of world politics, each emerging power attempts to become a leading power in a regional organisation while also maintaining relations with other regional organisations. This feature is not just valid for the leading state but also for the rest of the regional Organisation. In other words, all leading states in regional organisations and member states continue to be full members of international (global) organisations. Their commitments to them might be getting loose, but emerging powers do not cut their full membership status in these international (global) organisations. In general, emerging powers that become leading powers in a regional organisation instrumentalise regional and international organisations to protect their national interests. In this way, international (global) organisations will lose their effectiveness in international politics. However, they will still address the needs of emerging powers to raise their voice against dominant or hegemonic powers.

Thirdly, theoretically, in the regional multipolar system as a new international system, there is no direct involvement of previous superpowers. Even currently hegemonic or



great powers seek to extend their sphere of influence through regional organisations, as they have been acting as leading powers within them. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization led by China, US' membership in the Latin American regional organisations and Russia's initiative to form regional organisations with newly independent states from the Soviet Union, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, in 1991), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO, in 2002) and Eurasian Economic Community in 2015 (Tüfekçi and Aksu 2024). The fourth and final principle in regional multipolarity concerns the interaction between emerging powers and other regional organisations led by emerging powers. This type of interaction keeps emerging powers connected and cooperating when the issue requires more international support.

To prove the applicability of this new conceptualisation, regional multipolarity and regional organisations led by emerging powers should be individually considered, at least some of which have been mostly regarded as emerging powers, such as Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey (Godehardt and Nabers 2011). There is no space to cover all of them and explore the regional organisations they initiated, as well as how to act in regional and international (global) organisations. In this paper, this new conceptualisation will be verified in the case of Turkey, which, as the case study of this paper, has been mainly evaluated as a middle power or regional power. Since it does not fully follow the footsteps of the foreign policies of super or great powers in regional and global issues, it might be because there are no more superpowers in world politics that other states could entirely depend on, or most of the states are no longer lesser powers and want to prioritise their own national interests (Garzón Pereira 2014). In either of these, Turkey has pursued an active foreign policy since the early 21st century, becoming involved in regional and global issues through bilateral relations, the establishment of regional organisations, and engagement with other regional organisations.

The Case of Turkey

The emerging powers, along with membership in international (global) organisations, take the initiative to form a regional organisation with which they share similar interests on a specific issue. Thanks to that, they can interact with various international and regional actors and issues. To solidify the main argument of the paper, it is beneficial to examine the organisations with which Turkey is affiliated, including full member, observer, participant, and founding member status. It can be generalised for all emerging powers, specifically for Turkey, when the power balance and political strains of the Cold War disappeared from world politics. Most emerging powers then found a political vacuum in which they could make manoeuvres. It meant they no longer needed a security guarantee from one superpower against another. In this case, most of them focused on their economic, political, and military development by enriching their interactions with others. To do that, they have been addressing the issues that they could not raise under bipolar world politics. This paper seeks to demonstrate these initiatives by forming regional organisations for better communication, reducing transaction costs, addressing previously untouched foreign issues, and fostering ideational/normative commonality through regulations and transformations (Acharya 2005, p. 97), without the direct involvement of previously superpowers.



It is pretty difficult to instantly break all inherited embedded relations with the super or great powers, but in an enduring process, gradual independence from those inherited economic, military, and political relations seems to make it possible for emerging powers in an alternative platform (regional organisations) cooperating with adjacent neighbour states. "Such regional (emerging) powers possess the opportunity to pursue their own national interests in an effective manner with neighbouring states, due to their advantage in relative power" (Stewart-Ingwersen and Frazier 2012, p. 6). Here is a chronologically listed list of international (global) and regional organisations with which Turkey has been affiliated. The status of membership in these organisations is quite indicative of emerging powers, in this case, Turkey, in terms of taking the initiative to address regional issues or regional interactions. The list is compiled from the website of the Foreign Ministry of Turkey, which provides detailed information on the context of the organisations and Turkey's status within them (International Organisations / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Several multilateral agreements might also be included in the list, but the list provided on the official website is limited to those that adequately offer a number of regional and international organisations to examine the main argument of the paper.

Providing brief information on the various statuses would be more explanatory in terms of Turkey's positions in the regional organisations listed above. Founding member status mostly means being among the states that drive the main doctrine behind the establishment of a regional organisation. It also means a full membership status, but leading one in terms of normative, military or economic dynamics (Destradi 2008, p. 21). In this context, it refers to full rights and obligations under the Organisation's founding treaty or charter. This status grants the state the authority to participate in the Organisation's decision-making processes, to vote, to be represented, and to be subject to the Organisation's obligations. Full members have the power to shape the Organisation's agenda, but they are also subject to normative pressures within the Organisation (Abbott and Snidal, 1998).

On the other hand, associate membership allows states or regions to participate in the Organisation's activities to a limited extent; they typically do not have voting rights but may attend meetings as observers. In this type of membership, Turkey may not have the full right to vote or participate in the decision-making process. Still, this status certainly makes Turkey involved in regional and international issues within the context of that regional Organisation.

Observer Status is a form of membership that grants states or international organisations the right to attend the Organisation's meetings and obtain information, but does not grant them the right to participate in the decision-making processes. This status strikes a balance between political recognition and avoiding legal obligations (Kerwin, 1981). In international relations, observer status typically indicates that a country seeks to develop closer ties with the Organisation or supports its principles, and is often considered a preliminary step towards full membership (Claude 1966). Partnership or dialogue status enables states to collaborate with an international or regional organisation at a thematic level. Such relationships are typically conducted in specific areas such as security, economy, environment, or technology. Unlike membership, this status offers flexibility and voluntary participation to the parties involved. For example, NATO's Partnership for



Peace program or ASEAN's Dialogue Partner mechanism enable strategic cooperation without the obligations of full membership (Schimmelfennig 2003).

Regarding the first principle of "regional multipolarity", since the end of the bipolarity (Cold War), given the regional organisations' characteristics in Table 2, they do not solemnly depend on economic development, but continental, geographic, and ethnic commonality played a crucial role in the core idea of establishing a regional organisation. As an emerging power, Turkey has led the establishment of diplomatic relations to create the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), aiming to define the borders of exclusive economic zones in the Black Sea, which has both geographic and economic origins (Bayram and Tüfekçi 2018). It formed TÜRKSOY to enhance economic, political, and cultural cooperation among Turkic states, which subsequently led to the establishment of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS). This sort of de-centralization of Western orientation has also attracted the attention of academics in the case of Turkey (Öniş 2010; Kutlay and Öniş 2021).

In terms of the second principle of regional multipolarity, these tables, especially the first one, clearly indicate that Turkey, as one of the emerging powers, does not cut its relations or halt its membership status in international (global) organisations while seeking to establish a regional organisation that Turkey leads and encourages. In this regard, there are no international (global) organisations that Turkey has withdrawn from. Even with a prolonged relationship with the EU, which is literally a regional organisation despite its global influence, Turkey has not ceased its applications to the EU (Öniş 2010). On the contrary, if not a founding member, Turkey has gradually become a full member of international organisations after the Second World War. The first feature of the newly conceptualised international system, in Regional Multipolarity, is that emerging powers, in this case, Turkey, do not substitute regional organisations with international ones. Even if they believe that international (global) organisations do not serve their best national interests, it is essential to remain part of the international community by maintaining full membership (Dag 2026).

Table 1. The Organisations of which Turkey is a Full Member

Organisation (Full Name)	Start Date	Turkey's Membership Status	Full Members	Leading State	Notes
United Nations (UN)	1945	Full Member	193 states	United States	Universal organization
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank - IBRD)	1947	Full Member	189 states	United States	Global development
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	1947	Full Member	190 states	United States	Financial cooperation
Council of Europe (CoE)	1949	Full Member	46 states	France / Germany	Human rights
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)	1952	Full Member	32 states	United States	Military alliance
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	1957	Full Member	178 states	United States	Nuclear energy oversight



Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA)	1957	Full Member	34 states	United States	Nuclear safety & policy
World Food Programme (WFP)	1961	Full Member	120+ states	United States	UN food assistance
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	1961	Full Member	38 states	United States	Developed economies
Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)	1969	Full Member	57 states	Saudi Arabia	Islamic countries
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	1975	Full Member	57 states	United States / Russia	Security cooperation
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	1977	Full Member	177 states	Italy	UN agricultural agency
International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) / CGIAR	1977	Full Member	Global	United States	Agricultural research
Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO)	1985	Full Member	10 states	Iran	Central Asia & Middle East
Australia Group	1985	Full Member	43 states	Australia	Chemical and biological export controls
Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)	1987	Full Member	35 states	United States	Missile export controls
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	1991	Full Member	73 states	United Kingdom / France	Development finance
Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)	1992	Full Member	13 states	Turkey	Black Sea region
World Customs Organisation (WCO)	1992	Full Member	184 members	Belgium	Customs cooperation
International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY)	1993	Full Member	14 states	Turkey	Turkic cultural cooperation
Wassenaar Arrangement	1994	Full Member	42 states	United States	Arms export controls
World Trade Organisation (WTO)	1995	Full Member	164 states	United States / European Union	Trade organization
Developing Eight Organisations for Econ. Cooperation (D-8)	1997	Full Member	8 states	Turkey	Muslim eco. cooperation
Group of Twenty (G-20)	1999	Full Member	20 members	United States	Major economies
Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR)	2001	Full Member	6 states	Turkey	Black Sea naval
Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)	2002	Full Member	28 states	Kazakhstan	Asian security dialogue
Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD)	2002	Full Member	35 states	Thailand (coordinator)	Asia-wide cooperation



Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)	2008	Full Member	43 states	European Union	Euro-Mediterranean region
Organisation of Turkic States (OTS)	2009	Full Member	6 states	Turkey	Turkic world
International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)	2009	Full Member	169 states	United Arab Emirates	Renewable energy
The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC)	2010	Full Member	37 states	Turkey	Islamic standards
MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, Australia)	2013	Full Member	5 members	—	Middle powers group

Table 2. The Organisations of which Turkey is an Observer / Dialogue Partner / Participant Member

Organisation (Full Name)	Turkey's Member Status	Status Granted Year	Start Date	Full Member s	Leading State	Notes
Organisation of American States (OAS)	Observer	1998	1948	35 states	United States	Americas
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)	Dialogue Partner	2012	1985	8 states	India	South Asia
Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)	Dialogue Partner	2010	1991	4 full members	Brazil	South America
South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP)	Participant	1996	1996	11 states	Romania / Bulgaria	Southeast Europe
Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (RACVIAC)	Participant	2000	2000	16 states	Croatia	Arms control in Southeast Europe
Association of Caribbean States (ACS)	Observer	2000	2000	35 states	Cuba / Mexico	Caribbean basin
European Union (EU)	Candidate	1999	1993	27 states	Germany / France	European States
African Union (AU)	Observer	2005	2002	55 states	Nigeria / South Africa	African continent
League of Arab States (Arab League)	Turkish-Arab Cooperation Forum	2008	1945	22 states	Egypt	Arab world
Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)	Participant	2008	2008	10 states	European Union	Southeast Europe
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	Strategic Dialogue	2008	2008	6 States	Saudi Arabia	Gulf Arab states
Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)	Participant	2013	2011	33 states	Brazil / Mexico	Latin America
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)	Dialogue Partner	2012	1996	9 states	China / Russia	Eurasian security & economy



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Sectoral Dialogue Partner	2017	1967	10 states	Indonesia	Southeast Asia
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Table 3. The Organisations of which Turkey is a Signatory / Associate / Other Status Member

Organisation (Full Name)	Status	Turkey's Membership Status	Leading State	Notes
Western European Union (WEU)	Associate Member (defunct)	Signatory / Associate / Other Status	France / United Kingdom	1992-2011
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO)	Signatory	Signatory / Associate / Other Status	United States	Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
International Criminal Court (ICC)	Signatory no-ratified	Signatory /	The Netherlands	International Court

Thirdly, the tables above indicate that Turkey has initiated several regional organisations with specific commonality, whether driven by national interests or national identities. It might not have been possible to begin a regional organisation with the Soviet Union under the political, economic, systemic conditions before the 1990s, but it has been possible after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and then Turkey launched diplomatic relations to deal with a fair share of maritime issues with all the states that have shore in the Black Sea, including Russia. Again, in association with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey sought to engage with post-Soviet Eurasian politics through ethnic commonalities in Central Asia. Leading an organisation with newly independent Turkic states clearly demonstrates the regionalisation of world politics in Turkish foreign policy. In terms of new conceptualization of international system in world politics, Regional Multipolarity, refraining from direct involvement of superpower (US) as in the times of bi-polarity and also interacting with the states which were under rival superpower (Soviet Union) provide clues on basic features of the "Regional Multipolarity", that is, self-initiated regional politics origins from its national interest rather than being a part of superpower's agents in a region. In practice, the early years of the International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY) did not yield positive results due to the resistance of Turkic states, but in the long term, they paved the way for the establishment of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS). As a founding member and leading power, Turkey has been successful in agenda setting, bolstering Turkic identity among members and initiating economic, political, cultural, and even military projects as part of OTS's members.

The fourth characteristic of a regional multipolarity system is a balance in interaction between leading states and other regional or international organisations. In this case, Table 2 suggests that, as an emerging power, Turkey applied for and was granted a status in most of the regional organisations. Turkey's status in these regional organisations, from Sectoral Dialogue Partner to Observer, enables it to strategically observe regional dynamics and position itself accordingly at both the regional and international levels of politics. In addition, high-level participation in these regional organisations also creates official platforms that allow Turkey to clarify its position on



specific issues among member states and offer potential political and economic contributions. In this regard, despite initiating a foreign policy orientation discussion (Öniş and Kutlay 2017), Turkey has always been a significant player in world politics, from Latin America to Southeast Asia, and, even as an observer, is able to discern regional developments and their international (global) implications.

In recent years, Turkey's instrumentalisation of regional institutions has become increasingly visible through its leadership initiatives, agenda-setting capabilities, and examples of institutional entrepreneurship. For instance, within the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS), Turkey has moved beyond cultural solidarity to develop concrete economic and security cooperation. The Turkish Investment Fund, established under Ankara's diplomatic leadership in 2023, demonstrates Turkey's use of OTS as a strategic platform to promote regional financial integration and infrastructure investments. Similarly, during its term as president of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Turkey aligned its energy and transportation agendas with the Middle Corridor and Zangezur Corridor projects, thereby successfully integrating its national priorities into the regional policy framework (Tüfekçi, Bayrak, and Uslu 2024). These examples demonstrate that Turkey utilises regional organisations not only as platforms for cooperation but also as tools for transforming its national interests into collective regional policies.

In addition, Turkey's diverse participation patterns, ranging from full membership to dialogue partnership (e.g., founding/leading roles in organisations such as the BSEC and D-8; and observer or dialogue partner status in structures such as ASEAN, MERCOSUR, and the SCO), demonstrate a versatile and flexible foreign policy approach. Furthermore, Turkey's hosting of high-level events such as the 2021 Istanbul Turkic Council Summit and the 2023 Ankara MIKTA Ministerial Meeting positions it not only as an active participant but also as a norm-setting and policy-making regional actor. These trends demonstrate that Turkey does not passively participate in regional institutions; rather, it strategically utilises them to consolidate its position as a central actor within the multipolar order.

Conclusion

While Barry Buzan sought a theoretical integration between structural realism and international society, he emphasised that "...international societies, like international systems, will emerge initially within regional subsystems and only later develop at the level of the international system as a whole" (Öniş 2009). It was the time of post-bipolarity and referred to the evolution of international society into an international system from regional origins to global extent. By the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, it is highly likely that a regionally oriented bloc, interacting and competing with each other, will emerge as one of the great powers or great power candidates (emerging powers) that dominates international politics.

This paper is a humble intellectual effort to introduce a new conceptualisation in international system studies, arguing that current international world politics can be defined as regional multipolarity. Previous systemic studies at the regional level have



mostly conceptualised this phenomenon under the subsystem conceptualisation, but this paper elevates the regional orientation of world politics to the global level. Given that global rivalry between the US and China currently occupies the focus, this paper proposes an alternative conceptualisation through the emerging powers' struggle to integrate their own foreign and regional policies into world system studies. They neither bandwagon super nor great powers nor bow their head to international pressure. Instead, they seek to enforce their regional economic, security, political and military visions to be accepted by the other powers, whether super, great or hegemonic powers.

In summary, the paper argued that there are four main principles of regional multipolarity. First, Turkey, as an emerging power, has regional organisations that extend beyond economic development to encompass political interests, security provision, and cultural and ethnic identity. Secondly, they, including Turkey, continue to collaborate with the embedded international organisations but do not refrain from establishing a regional organisation that serves their national interests. Thirdly, there is no need for emerging powers to be encouraged or supported by a superpower or hegemonic power to initiate a regional organisation. Lastly, emerging powers, such as Turkey, not only focus on the regional organisations they initiate but also participate in almost all regional organisations by obtaining official status in other regional organisations.

Within the context of the paper, it might sound as if there are no more super/hegemonic/great powers in world politics, but it does not suggest that. It indicates that the number of emerging powers increases, and that leads to the formation of regional organisations led by emerging powers, which would drive a new international system in world politics. To support this argument, there should be more extensive case studies focusing on other emerging powers. That is for sure. Only in this way can the four principles of regional multipolarity and their conceptualisation be tested. This paper, as mentioned earlier, is a preliminary step to an extended examination of regional multipolarity.

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