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SWP Research Paper

Suat Kınıklıoğlu

Eurasianism in Turkey

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
International and Security Affairs

Centre for Applied
Turkey Studies CATS

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- Turkey's neo-Eurasianist ideologues describe themselves as "Kemalist Eurasianists". They argue that "Eurasianism calls for a cultural, military, political and commercial alliance with Turkey's eastern neighbors, notably Russia, Iran, the Turkic countries of Central Asia, and even Pakistan, India and China" and is "hostile towards any type of pro-Western policy in the Eurasian space.
- Turkey's neo-Eurasianists transformed from incarcerated villains to coalition partners in government and the bureaucracy. This spectacular reversal of fortunes could only materialize due to the special circumstances that arose from the ruthless power struggle between Turkey's Islamists.
- Nationalist-Islamism and Eurasianism overlap as they both despise Western dominance in the international order, feel threatened by the liberal cultural-civilizational siege of the West and thus have a common counter-hegemonic view of the world.
- Turkish Islamists and Eurasianists believe that a post-Western world is in the making. They argue that the unipolarity of the 1990s is over and that the West is essentially in an unstoppable decline — not least because of its degeneration in values.
- The true significance of Turkish "Eurasianism" does not lie in its capacity to shape foreign and security policy although that cannot be totally disregarded; rather, its real contribution to the current regime comes from its critical role in widening and solidifying consent to authoritarian rule in Turkey.

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Ludwigkirchplatz 3—4
10719 Berlin
Germany
Phone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-200
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

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Suat Kınıklıoğlu is a former CATS Fellow at the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) at SWP.

Eurasianism in Turkey

Turkey's foreign and security policy identity seems to be in a dramatic flux in recent years. Turkey's relations with its traditional allies in the West, namely, the European Union and its member states, the United States and NATO have been in constant crisis mode since 2013, but more acutely so since 2015, when Turkey's domestic and foreign policy environment began to be intensely securitized in a multitude of theaters ranging from Turkey's southeast to Syria, Libya, the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus. President Erdoğan, who frequently entertains an anti-Western discourse, has hinted that Turkey may join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, expressed numerous times his displeasure about the European Union and has blamed the United States for supporting the coup attempt in 2016. Meanwhile, Turkish policies countered the interests of EU member states in Libya, the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus. Furthermore, Ankara's relations with the Russian Federation have deepened exponentially despite clear policy differences. In a controversial move, Turkey acquired the Russian S400 missile defense system notwithstanding strong objections from Washington and its NATO allies. Ankara is also deepening its ties with China despite China's genocidal policies against the Turkic Uyghurs.

Ankara has made it clear that it is not interested in a value-based relationship but rather favors transactional relations with the West. This state of affairs has direct ramifications for Germany, Europe and NATO. Turkey's drift away from Europe and the U.S. may have serious consequences from a security, economic and political perspective. NATO is already weakened by Turkey's unorthodox policies while tensions between Ankara and a multitude of European capitals have been on the increase in recent years. Not surprisingly, the debate about Turkey's strategic identity has intensified in Western capitals and invites a closer look at the domestic political coalition in Turkey.

What role do Turkey's Eurasianists play in the country's domestic political setting? What is their contribution to Turkey's increasingly frequent divergence from its traditional allies? Are they playing a critical role — as is often alluded — in Ankara's ten-

dency to work more closely with Russia, Iran and China? Or is their influence exaggerated and thus needs to be properly explained? What sort of ideological overlapping exists between Turkey's Eurasianists and Islamists and how does that benefit President Erdoğan's rule? Lastly, what does all of this mean for Turkey's NATO allies, Germany and Europe?

Turkey's Eurasianists are a subgroup of *ulusalcıs*, namely secular leftist nationalists who are vehemently anti-Western, view themselves anti-imperialist and advocate a paradigmatic shift toward Russia and China. Despite their small numbers and poor electoral showing, they have disproportionate influence within the security bureaucracy and judiciary and are vocal in trying to shape the strategic debate in Turkey.

The true significance of Turkish "Eurasianism" does not lie in its capacity to shape foreign and security policy although that cannot be totally disregarded; rather, its real contribution to the current regime comes from its critical role in widening and solidifying consent to authoritarian rule in Turkey. Eurasianists have little regard for democracy, pluralism or the rule of law. They worship the State and harbor strong disdain for democratic rights. For them the State's interests — of course defined solely by them — are supreme. In view of Erdoğan's strong anti-Western rhetoric and dramatic democratic decline since 2013, they duly complement Turkey's ultranationalist coalition. The predominantly secular Eurasianists help widen the governing consensus of the AKP and President Erdoğan to pockets of the electorate beyond the ruling coalition's conservative base. The ruling coalition's narrative that Turkey is surrounded by a multitude of existential threats finds sympathy among Eurasianists who favor a strong state with strong leadership. Turkey's Eurasianists also provide intellectual capacity to foreign and security thinking and have proven themselves to be imaginative as has been the case with the *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland) doctrine pertaining to the eastern Mediterranean. Eurasianists also provide critical knowhow within the security bureaucracy; and offer policy proposals that help build domestic legitimacy for Erdoğan's nationalist foreign and security policies. Lastly, they have proven effective in popularizing ultranationalist foreign policy views for the Turkish mainstream.

Throughout his political journey, President Erdoğan has allied himself with a multitude of actors, including liberals, conservative Kurds and others. However, his current allies — the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the Homeland *(Vatan)* Party (VP), which is Eurasianist, tap into the infinite potential of Turkish nationalism in an unprecedented manner. And while Ankara's urge for strategic autonomy is an implicit component of Turkish nationalism, it is made explicit and legitimate through an ultranationalist discourse entertained by the Eurasianists and the MHP.

That said, Turkish Eurasianism remains a relatively small component of Turkish nationalist imagination while the urge for Turkish strategic autonomy from the West seems more durable than the expiration date of the current governing coalition. Consequently, Europe needs to brace itself and take Turkey's search for autonomy from the West seriously rather than seeing it merely as a trait of Erdoğan's erratic policies. The Turkish instinct for strategic autonomy from the West is here to stay. European decisionmakers need to coordinate among themselves and with the United States to deal with a more independence-minded Turkey that is indifferent to 'common values' but reads the world from a purely realist perspective. Robust transatlantic policy coordination is key to preventing a rupture and managing the relationship with the "New Turkey."

Europe also needs to contemplate a scenario where a rupture with Western capitals may deepen Ankara's dependence on Moscow and Beijing — both eager to project more influence over this geopolitical asset. Such an estrangement may not be sudden but could be an incremental process — a strategy that worked well for President Erdoğan in the domestic political scene. Eurasianists and ultranationalists still do not have an answer to Turkey's external economic relations. Trade with Russia and China is nowhere near the trade volume with the EU. Worse, it is extremely uneven favoring Moscow and Beijing considerably more than Ankara. This presents a structural advantage that needs to be harnessed.

Eurasia Enters the Turkish Horizon

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a renewed interest in Eurasianism. Hence, the writings of Soviet history-ethnologist Lev Gumilëv, who regarded Russians as a 'super-ethnos' and kindred to the Turkic-Mongol peoples of the Eurasian steppe became very popular in the mid-1990s. However, it was in 1997 when Alexander Dugin, a Russian Eurasianist, fascist and nationalist published his *The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*, which transformed him into a celebrity in Russia while his book had influence on the Russian security elite and has even been used as a textbook in the Academy of the General Staff of the Russian military.[1] In his book, Dugin argued that the rule of ethnic Russians over the lands from Dublin to Vladivostok was a preordained and natural phenomenon.

Dugin is considered to be the founder of neo-Eurasianism which diverges from classical Eurasianism in a number of ways, including identifying the United States and the United Kingdom (the pillars of "Atlanticism") as the main enemy of Eurasianism. Unlike classical Eurasianists who targeted Western Europe as the main menace confronting Russia, Dugin's neo-Eurasianism sees potential for cooperation against Atlanticism with a number of European countries especially Germany. Dugin originally viewed Turkey as an adversary that was a "political-ideological colony" of the U.S. and needed to be countered by a strategic alliance between Russia and Iran.[2] This view would later change as Turkey's relationship with Russia deepened and Dugin's prestige increased in Turkish political circles who increasingly shared his deep-seated anti-Westernism.

As Turkish Eurasianism is a relative latecomer when compared with Russian Eurasianism, it might be appropriate to mention some precursors to what we today define as Turkish Eurasianism. The expansion of the Turkish horizon to some parts of Eurasia can be traced back to the early years of the 20th century when Tatar intellectual Yusuf Akçura advocated cooperation between Russians and Turkic peoples against Europe and China. Following the Russian rejection of his proposal, he focused his attention on pan-Turkism which informed the newly born Turkish Republic. Pan-Turkism lost its appeal after World War II as Turkey became a frontline state in the Cold War and its attention inevitably focused on the Soviet threat. During the Cold War, Turkish intellectuals exhibited little to no interest in the works of Russian émigré writers such as Trubetskoi or Gumilëv.

It was the Turkish poet and writer Atilla İlhan (1925—2005) who "popularized the idea of a historically embedded Turkish-Russian alliance preordained by geopolitics and nature."[3] Educated in France, İlhan was a prolific writer and an ardent Marxist who advocated Turkish-Russian cooperation throughout his life. His extensive writing describes centuries of Russian-Ottoman rivalry as a giant Western conspiracy, views the cooperative relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Turkish Kemalists from 1919 to 1938 as a golden age that needs to be emulated and is generally very conspiratorial to the extent that many of his premises or conclusions are simply false. Despite spending many long years in Paris, he was vehemently anti-Western and perceived himself as anti-imperialist. İlhan was a brilliant poet but his political views invited considerable scrutiny. For instance, his writ-

1 John B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's Foundations of Geopolitics", *The Europe Center* (date unknown), https://tec.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/aleksandr-dugins-foundations-geopolitics (accessed 1 December 2020).

2 Emre Erşen, "The Return of Eurasianism in Turkey", in *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia*, ed. Emre Erşen and Seçkin Öktem, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333351572_The_Return_of_Eurasianism_in_Turkey_Relations_with_Russia_and_Beyond/citation/download (accessed 1 October 2020).

3 Şener Aktürk, "Counter-Hegemonic Visions and Reconciliation through The Past: The Case of Turkish Eurasianism", *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2004): 214—15.

ings contained strong anti-Semitic and xenophobic descriptions similar to the Islamist genre critical about Western influence in Turkey. İlhan was also very disapproving of the Turkish intelligentsia which he viewed — like the Islamists — as disconnected from the masses and part of another civilization. An important contribution of İlhan was his success in introducing political and cultural personalities such as Ismail Gasprinsky and Sultan Galiyev to Turkish audiences. Gasprinsky was a Crimean Tatar educator and journalist who believed in pan-Turkic unity while Galiyev was a Tatar Bolshevik revolutionary who rose to prominence in the Russian Communist Party in the early 1920s. As noted by Şener Aktürk, İlhan's appeal stems from his ability to "articulate and refine Turkish Eurasianism as a master narrative and as an ideology very much distinct from all others."[4]

At the dawn of World War II, Turkey's politics were sympathetic to the growing strength of the Nazis. The times pointed to tectonic changes in Europe and possibly in Turkey's neighborhood space. While Ankara was hedging its position vis-à-vis the new rising power in Europe, the country's pan-Turkists saw an opportunity in the rise of Nazi Germany as they dreamed of the liberation of the Turkic peoples under Soviet rule. Hence, Eurasia as a geographical and political concept did not find its way into the Turkish ideological debate solely through a Marxist lens as was the case with İlhan. Turkish pan-Turkists such as Nihal Atsız, Alparslan Türkeş and Zeki Velidi Togan were active in promoting Turkey's entry into World War II on the side of Nazi Germany. Atsız was an ardent nationalist writer and publisher who admired Nazi race theories. He advocated the unity of all Turkic peoples stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Meanwhile, Türkeş was an anti-Communist nationalist officer who developed Atsız's ideas and became a key nationalist politician for decades to come. Finally, Togan was a leader of the Bashkir liberation movement after WWI but by profession was a historian dedicated to Turkish history and Turkology.

Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu's impassioned speech of 1942 in the Turkish parliament reflects the pan-Turkist mood of the times:

> "We are Turks, Turkists and we shall remain so. For us Turkism is as much as a blood issue as it is one of conscience and culture. We are not Turkists who are marginal but on the contrary, we are Turkists who aim to enrich this ideology. We will always work in this direction."[5]

When it became clear that Germany would lose the war, Ankara quickly closed down all pan-Turkist publications and imprisoned its prominent ideologues. Eurasia and pan-Turkism retreated into being a fringe ideology under the heavy shadow of the Cold War.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union rekindled Turkish interest in Central Asia "beyond the restricted extreme-right pan-Turkic circles to which it [had] been confined since the age of Kemalism."[6] The opening up of a vast "Turkic" geography presented Ankara with an opportunity to enhance its geostrategic role both in the region and within the Western camp. Ankara quickly understood that the question of transporting Central Asian and Caspian oil and gas to Western markets would underscore Turkey's strategic significance. Turkish decisionmakers also saw the opening up to Eurasia as a conduit to counter speculation that its geopolitical position no longer mattered after the end of the Cold War. Fearful of the spread of the Iranian Revolution, the U.S. was particularly keen to promote Turkey instead of Iran as a model for the newly independent Turkic states. Hence, "Eurasia" became fashionable again in Turkish political discourse. Its usage transformed from having an ethnicity-laden meaning to referring more to the geographical and political reality of the mid-1990s. Turkish presidents Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel repeatedly asserted that a "Turkish world stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China" had presented itself to Turkey.[7] Ankara responded quickly and devised a multitude of programs geared toward the new Turkic republics, including programs allowing Central Asian students to study in Turkey, the launching of two TV channels geared towards Central

4 Ibid., 215.

5 "3 Mayıs Türkçüler Günü" (3 May Turkists Day), *Yeniçağ Gazetesi* (date not available), https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/3-mayis-turkculer-gunu-1781g-p2.htm (accessed 6 December 2020).

6 Marlène Laruelle, *Russo-Turkish Rapprochement through the Idea of Eurasia: Alexander Dugin's Networks in Turkey*, The Jamestown Foundation Occasional Paper (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, April 2008), https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/Jamestown-LaruelleRussoTurkish_01.pdf?x34987 (accessed 3 December 2020).

7 "Turkey's New President Signals Subtle Shift in Style", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 May 1993, https://www.csmonitor.com/1993/0517/17042.html (accessed 12 January 2022).

Asian audiences as well as extensive technical assistance programs through the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TİKA).[8]

The mere ability to access, travel, invest and establish contacts with the newly independent Turkic republics made "Eurasia" rapidly popular in Turkey. The term *Avrasya* (Eurasia) was quickly adopted by pragmatic businesses and other entities reflecting the zeitgeist of this period. The mainstreaming of Eurasia somewhat validated pan-Turkists and provided them with a new sense of purpose. Ultranationalists influenced a variety of center-right coalitions throughout the 1990s and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) became a coalition partner from 1999 to 2002. In addition, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency, which was a key instrument of Turkish activism in Central Asia, was under the MHP's control throughout those years.[9]

The disintegration of the Soviet Union opened up a vast geography and tens of millions of "ethnic brethren" to Turkey. Moscow viewed with deep suspicion Turkish engagement with the newly independent Turkic republics not to mention federal republics within Russia such as Tatarstan.[10] This was hardly surprising as Turkish-Russian relations in the 1990s were tense not only because of Russian concerns about a pan-Turkic revival in Central Asia but also due to Turkey's support to the Chechen cause and Moscow's assistance to the PKK.[11] In fact, Ankara and Moscow were in competition for most of the 1990s in a number of theatres ranging from the Balkans to the Caucasus and the Black Sea to Central Asia. It is thus understandable that this new Turkist awakening had not yet discovered Alexander Dugin or his writings. On the contrary, it was rather critical of Russian Eurasianism, which it deemed as a dangerous rival in the race to win the hearts and minds of Central Asia's Turks.

Things began to change toward the late 1990s. The then-prime minister Bülent Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP) followed a Region-Centered Foreign Policy *(Bölge-Merkezli Dış Politika)* which introduced fresh diversification from Ankara's traditional pro-Western/American orientation. Ecevit, a four-time prime minister, was a key ideologue in introducing social democracy to Turkish politics in the early 1970s. He was prime minister in 1974 when Turkey intervened into Cyprus causing the division of the island. His dovish foreign minister İsmail Cem, was also a central figure among Turkey's center-left and was behind an important rapprochement with Greece in the late 1990s. His term in office as foreign minister is deemed to be one of the more successful periods in advancing Turkish foreign policy.

In relation to Eurasia, Cem noted that "by virtue of its historical and cultural attributes and its privileged European as well as Asian identity, Turkey is firmly positioned to become the strategic center of Eurasia."[12] However, it must be underlined that at that time engagement with Eurasia was very much seen as complementing Turkey's Western vocation rather than being an alternative to it. For instance, Ankara was strongly supported by Washington in its quest to win the fierce strategic competition over the final route of the Baku—Tbilisi—Ceyhan gas pipeline. Yet, following the initial wave of excitement, Ecevit and Cem acknowledged that Turkish policy toward Eurasia needed to be better formulated and conceptualized. Recognizing that confrontation was a lose-lose situation for Ankara and Moscow, the two sides began to develop relations. Following the signing of the Blue Stream project in 1997, a major trans-Black Sea gas pipeline that carries natural gas from Russia into Turkey (see Visual 1), the two parties signed the Eurasia Action Plan in 2001, which opened the gates for the partnership to deepen further.

8 See Yavuz Tüylüoğlu, *Turkish Development Assistance as a Foreign Policy Tool and Its Discordant Locations* (Berlin, 2020), https://www.cats-network.eu/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/CATS_Working_Paper_Nr_2_2021_Turkish_Development_Assistance_as_a_Foreign_Policy_Tool.pdf (accessed 30 August 2021).

9 Ironically, the agency's performance by the MHP resulted in one of its most corrupt and wasteful periods with little impact in the region. TİKA would only recover from this degeneration after the AKP took over government in late 2002.

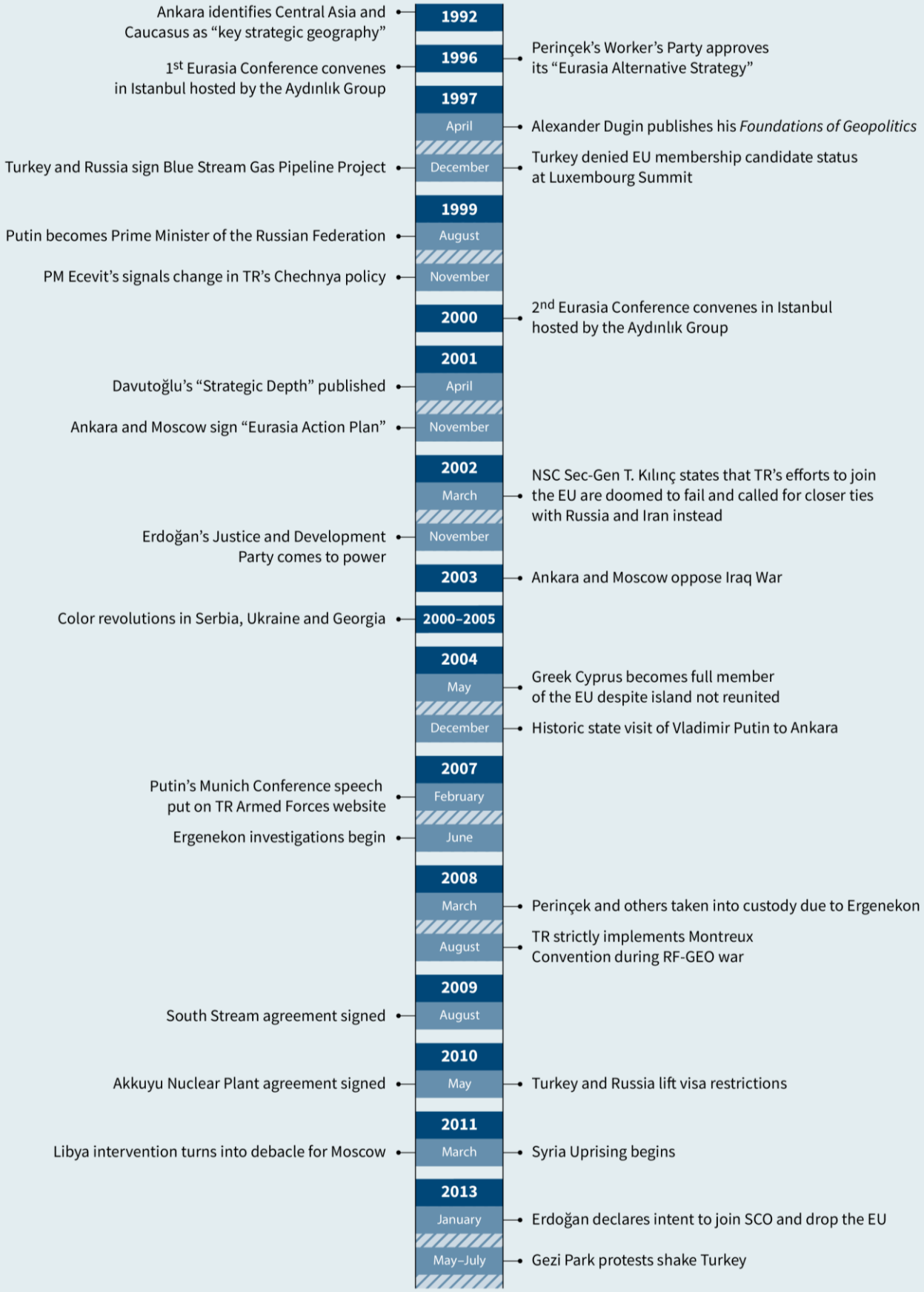
10 Muzaffer Ercan Yılmaz, "Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Türk-Rus İlişkileri" (Turkish-Russian Relations in the aftermath of the Cold War), *Akademik Fener*, 2010, https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/203474 (accessed 10 September 2021).

11 PKK *(Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê)* stands for Kurdistan Workers' Party in Kurmanji Kurdish. That said, the PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the EU and the U.S.

12 İsmail Cem, *Türkiye, Avrupa, Avrasya Cilt II* (Turkey, Europe, Eurasia, Part II), (İstanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2009), 93.

Visual 1

The rise of Turkish Neo-Eurasianism: a timeline (part 1)



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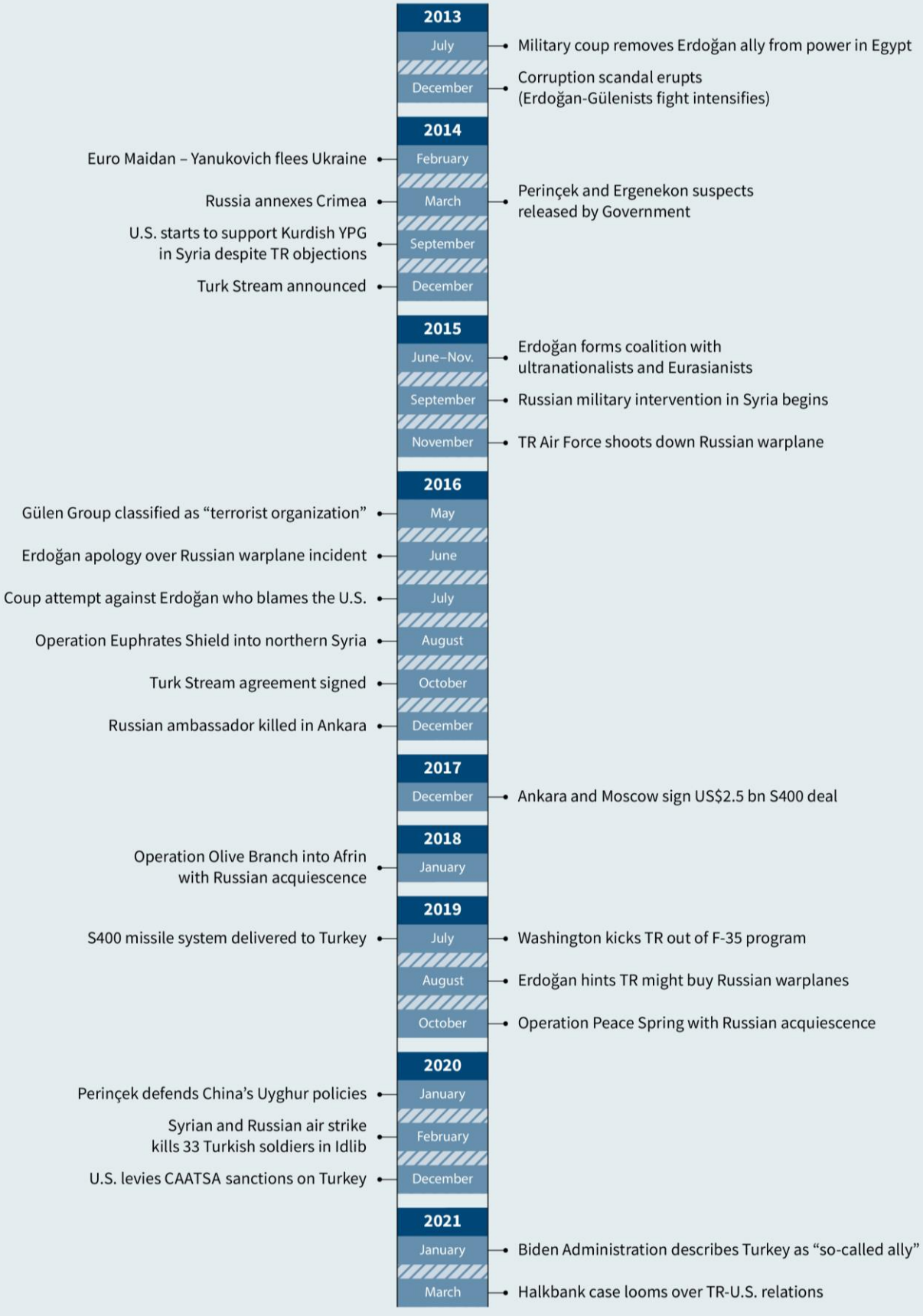
Visual 1

The rise of Turkish Neo-Eurasianism: a timeline (part 2)



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In the plan that bears the title "From Bilateral Cooperation Towards Multidimensional Partnership", it is emphasized that the fundamental changes in the world of historic magnitude opened a new phase in Turkish-Russian relations characterized by opportunities in developing fruitful bilateral and regional cooperation in every field in the spirit of friendship and mutual trust.[13]

Through this groundbreaking partnership, the concept of "Eurasia" began to change. "Eurasia" would gradually be contemplated as a region in which Ankara was not in competition with Moscow but rather a territory where the two sides would at least tolerate each other. The AKP's early years should be seen as a continuation of İsmail Cem's region-centered, pro-engagement strategy toward Russia and by extension Eurasia. In his seminal book *Strategic Depth* AKP foreign policy guru Ahmet Davutoğlu introduced the term 'Afro-Eurasia' which conveniently situated Turkey at the center of multiple regions rather than at the edge of Europe and awarded it a more functional role as a country located at the intersection of a number of civilizations. Davutoğlu served as a close foreign policy advisor to both Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül before becoming foreign and prime minister for successive Erdoğan administrations.

The rise of the AKP also coincided with the Turkish state's determination to deepen its partnership with Russia amidst growing concerns about Washington's neoconservative outlook on the region. Washington was seeking strong support from Ankara in its quest to topple Saddam Hussein while both the Turkish Armed Forces as well as the political class had deep misgivings about such a destabilizing intervention not least because of the Kurdish dimension in Iraq.[14] Eventually, the Turkish parliament denied the government the required support for a U.S. invasion of Iraq through Turkish territory in March 2003.[15] Hence, President Putin's trip to Ankara in December 2004 constituted a historic visit that further developed areas of cooperation between the two countries under the shadow of Turkey's very visible fallout with the neoconservative Bush administration.[16] Turkey's Eurasianists went even further and interpreted the occasion as a sign of fraternization between Turks and Slavs.

Nevertheless, even during these years it is not possible to speak of Eurasianism as an ideology that significantly influenced Turkish foreign policy. Instead, Eurasia primarily meant ancestral lands where ethnic affinity carried the potential to offer new political, cultural and economic opportunities. For instance, the Nationalist Action Party's 2002 election manifesto called for "developing relations with the Turkic republics on a strategic level" and the "establishment of a Eurasian Union" clearly meaning a Turkic union rather than one with Russia.[17] While the Turkish political mainstream viewed Eurasia as a geopolitical prize that presented itself due to global developments, neo-Eurasianist ideology would only spring up in much more fringe segments of the political spectrum.

13 For more detail see "Turkey's Political Relations with Russian Federation", *Turkish MFA website*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa (accessed 14 January 2021).

14 Then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz noted his disappointment by stating that the Turkish military "for whatever reason […] did not play the strong leadership role on that issue that we would have expected." "Wolfowitz: Accept Your Mistake, Our Partnership Shall Continue", *Hürriyet*, 7 May 2003, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/wolfowitz-accept-your-mistake-our-partnership-shall-continue-38460319 (accessed 10 September 2021).

15 "Turkish Parliament Refuses to Allow U.S. Troops In", *Deutsche Welle*, 1 March 2003, https://www.dw.com/en/turkish-parliament-refuses-to-allow-us-troops-in/a-789744 (accessed 10 September 2021).

16 To the chagrin of U.S. decisionmakers prior to the vote in the Turkish parliament the two sides engaged in tense bargaining, including large financial aid to Turkey in exchange for allowing the U.S. to invade Iraq from the north. For many long years the U.S. defense establishment would hold strong feelings against Ankara due to the eventual refusal to allow the invasion from the north.

17 "Seçim Bildirgelerinde Dış Politika" (Foreign Policy in Election Manifestos), *BİA Haber Merkezi*, 11 October 2002, https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/13815-secim-bildirgelerinde-dis-politika (accessed 21 November 2020).

The Advent of Neo-Eurasianism in Turkey

The origins of classical Eurasianism were based on the assumption that the Bolsheviks would not be able to govern Russia and thus Russia needed a new ideology. This is in some way similar to the situation that emerged when the AKP came into power in late 2002. Turkish Eurasianists and *ulusalcıs* (secular, leftist ultra-nationalists) also thought that the AKP would not be able to govern the country for too long and that there was a need to present an alternative to them.

The emergence of Turkish neo-Eurasianism can be traced back to the publication of Doğu Perinçek's book *Avrasya Seçeneği* (*The Eurasian Alternative*) and the 1st Eurasia Conference organized by the then-Worker's Party (İP) (now Homeland Party [VP], both led by Perinçek) in November 1996. A year later, Dugin published his seminal book *The Foundations of Geopolitics* in Russia. In 2000, the 2nd Eurasia Conference convened in Istanbul. Around these times, Mr. Perinçek and his son established contact with Alexander Dugin. In November 2003, Perinçek participated in the establishment of the International Eurasian Movement in Moscow and was elected as a member to the High Council of the movement while Dugin became its chairman. The High Council also included Viktor Kalyuzhny who was Russia's deputy foreign minister and special representative of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The day after the establishment of the Eurasian Movement, Dugin underlined to Perinçek's delegation that,

> "Eurasianism has two main pillars. One is Turkish and the other is Russian. These are not alternatives to each other. On the contrary, they are pillars who support each other and should unite."[18]

In December 2003, Dugin visited Turkey for the first time for a Eurasia symposium, which was widely covered in the Turkish media.[19] While similar attendances occurred afterwards, the climax came in December 2004 only days before a historic visit by President Putin to Ankara. This gathering brought together an array of *ulusalcı* dignitaries including retired generals Tuncer Kılınç and Şener Eruygur, CHP party whip Ali Topuz, TRNC President Rauf Denktaş, former foreign minister Şükrü Sina Gürel and disgruntled center-right politicians such as former president Süleyman Demirel.

The ascent of neo-Eurasianism was conditioned by parallel developments on both Turkish domestic and foreign policy fronts. First of all, the rise of the AKP — a conservative/Islamist political party in the early 2000s was a shock to the traditional state establishment. Worse, in view of the Eurasianists, the AKP seemed to enjoy strong support in Washington and many European capitals. The AKP's eagerness to pursue political and judicial reforms toward starting accession negotiations with the EU presented a serious threat to the establishment as such reforms promised comprehensive change, including diminishing the role of the military in politics. These reforms also enjoyed widespread support from Turkey's liberals and its business community. Moving towards the EU would inevitably mean democratization, pluralism and respect for the rule of law, which were all anathema to the establishment who was used to securitizing politics via the Kurdish question and dominating

18 "Uluslararası Avrasya Hareketi kuruldu" (International Eurasian Movement was founded), *Mezhdunarodnaya Yevraziskoye Dvijenie* (International Eurasian Movement) website, 2 December 2003, http://med.org.ru/article/1568 (accessed 1 March 2021).

19 The Turkish media consistently presents Dugin as a close and influential advisor of Putin which is far from reflecting the truth. In fact, Dugin was fired from his job at Moscow State University in 2014 by the Kremlin. Some sources even claim that Dugin never met Putin, but Turkey's Eurasianists and pro-government media outlets continue to present him as a consequential figure.

the political scene. Hence, it was of little surprise that strong elements of the Turkish military leadership started to associate themselves with Eurasianist ideas. These circles were satisfied to see "that Russia share[d] the same preference for 'stability' and [would] not press the Turkish State to continue to democratize."[20]

On the foreign policy front, relations with the U.S. were extremely tense especially from March 2003 onwards when Ankara refused to allow U.S. troops to invade Iraq from the north until late 2007 when the two sides finally agreed upon more robust intelligence sharing against the PKK. Ankara began EU accession negotiations in 2005 when overall momentum was very much in favor of further democratization and pluralism at home. However, expectations of rapid progress were seriously dampened by the inclusion of the Greek-dominated Republic of Cyprus into the enlargement round in 2004.[21] Nevertheless, foreign direct investment flows from EU countries into Turkey increased exponentially, further reinforcing interdependence, while growth in the Turkish economy accelerated and civil society bourgeoned in an unprecedented manner.[22]

20 "The Turkish General Staff: A Fraction and Sullen Political Coalition", *Wikileaks.org*, Cable from U.S. Amb. Robert Pearson to Washington dated 18 April 2003, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03ANKARA2521_a.html (accessed 8 March 2021).

21 Evangelia Axiarlis, *Political Islam and the Secular State in Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 31.

22 "Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP) — Turkey", *World Bank Data*, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?locations=TR (accessed 3 January 2022).

Who Are These Neo-Eurasianists?

Eurasianists in Turkey are part of a political group that is called *ulusalcı*, which is a term not easy to translate in a non-Turkish context. *Ulusalcıs* are secular, leftist, anti-Western nationalists who favor a republic based on an extremely selective reading of the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Not all *ulusalcıs* are Eurasianists and not all *ulusalcıs* support the same political party. In fact, increasingly many *ulusalcıs* refrain from being identified as Eurasianists primarily due to the growing realization of the Vatan Party/Perinçek agenda, which is seen by them as overtly pro-Chinese, pro-Russian and distastefully pro-Erdoğan.[23] Many former high-ranking officers who were engaged by Mr. Perinçek's Vatan Party during the highly controversial Ergenekon trials have recently distanced themselves from Eurasianist politics out of fear that Turkey's independence might be compromised by its pro-Russian and pro-Chinese politics.[24] They tend to prioritize Turkish national interests and are not eager to acquire a new Big Brother in the form of Moscow or Beijing. This distancing is all the more apparent as Mr. Perinçek and his media outlets have adopted a staunch pro-Erdoğan posture whom many of these former officers see as exceedingly religious and as a threat to the secular republic.

Support for the VP is extremely low as the party garnered only 0.23 percent of the vote in the country's 2018 parliamentary election.

Popular support for the Vatan Party is extremely low as the party garnered only 0.23 percent of the vote in the country's 2018 parliamentary election.[25] However, this should not be misleading as the *ulusalcıs* and Eurasianists enjoy wider support among the elite as well as voters of the main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP). Also, they are disproportionately represented in the security bureaucracy and the armed forces.[26] Numerically, there are many more *ulusalcıs* than there are Eurasianists who also come in different guises. A proper categorization of neo-Eurasianists is not easy and sometimes some of these categories overlap:

1. Perinçekists (often referred to as the *Aydınlık Grubu* (Aydınlık Group) in Turkish, after the homonymous daily)
2. Non-Perinçekist *ulusalcıs* with Eurasianist leanings (the daily *Sözcü*, the TV-stations *OdaTV*, *VeryansınTV*, the publishing house *Kırmızı Kedi*)
3. Turanists, anti-Western, Turkist circles: MHP and the Good Party (IYI Party) as well as the Idealist Hearths *(Ülkü Ocakları)*
4. Islamist Eurasianists (TASAM think tank, daily *Dik*).

23 Interview with the retired admiral Türker Ertürk on 27 September 2020.

24 The Ergenekon trials (2008—2016) were a series of high-profile trials which took place in Turkey in which 275 people, including military officers, journalists and opposition lawmakers, all alleged members of Ergenekon, a suspected secularist clandestine organization, were accused of plotting against the Turkish government. The trials resulted in lengthy prison sentences for the majority of the accused. However, most of them were released by 2014 due to AKP government's changing needs emanating from its intra-Islamist struggle for power with the Gülenists.

25 Perinçek's Labor/Vatan Party vote was 0.35 and 0.25 percent in June 2015 and November 2015 respectively.

26 The proportion of *ulusalcıs* among Republican People's Party voters is often speculated to be around 10 percent of all CHP voters (approximately 2.5 percent) but this is difficult to verify. What is clear though is that many CHP *ulusalcıs* frequently criticize the party's shift toward the center-right.

1. The Perinçekists

The Perinçekists — also known as *Aydınlık Grubu* in Turkish — make up the largest and most vocal group of Eurasianists in Turkey. Having aligned himself with President Erdoğan, Mr. Perinçek has become a permanent member of discussion programs on pro-government media channels and is seen as an organic member — albeit the smallest — of the ruling coalition. This group has its own political party (formerly the Worker's Party/Vatan Party until February 2015), media outlets (Ulusal TV, Aydınlık newspaper, *Bilim ve Ütopya* magazine among others), a publishing house *(Kaynak Yayınları)* and since 2015 growing financial resources as well as a disciplined and committed party youth branch *(Türkiye Gençlik Birliği)*.[27] The Vatan Party and the whole Perinçek Group is very much dominated by Mr. Perinçek himself and follows a pro-Erdoğan line of politics and publishing strategy.[28]

Perinçekist Eurasians are vehemently anti-American, anti-EU and anti-NATO, not only because of Turkey's strategic orientation or defense considerations, but also due to their suspicion about NATO's "clandestine operations within member states that aim to transform ruling political structures."[29] They refer to purportedly US-led unofficial organizations that stem from the time of the Cold War such as Gladio whom they suspect of implementing "psychological and irregular warfare [in order to] bring member states 'into line' [with Washington]."[30] Hence, in the eyes of the Perinçek Group, NATO is not only a military threat vis-à-vis Turkey's integrity but it is also a comprehensive political threat to Turkish patriots within the country.[31] This view about the U.S. and NATO is conditioned by Cold War practices and feeds well into the deep suspicion about Western motivations towards Turkey that has been ingrained into the Turkish psyche since the last century of the Ottoman Empire.[32]

2. Non-Perinçekist secularist nationalists *(ulusalcıs)* with Eurasianist leanings *(OdaTV, VeryansınTV, Sözcü, Tele1 TV, Kırmızı Kedi* Publishing)

Both OdaTV and VeryansınTV — small Internet-based TV outlets — have their origins in the Aydınlık/Perinçek Group. Both media outlets are known for their sensational and often conspiratorial news coverage.[33] OdaTV is the better-known outfit of the two, and since its most popular columnists have faced court cases and prison the outlet has gained more recognition and circulation among the opposition.[34] Unlike the Perinçek Group, they are generally anti-Erdoğan and despise religious foundations, brotherhoods or any other organizations they deem as being against the secular republic. When Cihat Yaycı, a prominent admiral, resigned from the navy and the Aydınlık Group adopted a pro-government position on the matter retired admiral Cem Gürdeniz — a renown Eurasianist — left the Aydınlık paper and joined VeryansınTV, a smaller but uncompromising outfit when it comes to the issue of Erdoğan. Both Gürdeniz and Yaycı are the most vocal proponents of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, which has garnered greater international attention since tensions in the eastern Mediterranean increased in 2021.[35] *Sözcü* has wide circulation and is relatively more mainstream. It has more impact and is more effective than OdaTV though there is no uniformity of views on Eurasianist issues

27 For more detail about content and focus in Perinçekist publications see Martin Riexinger, "'Turkey, Completely Independent!' Contemporary Turkish Left-wing Nationalism (ulusal sol/ulusalcılık): Its Predecessors, Objectives and Enemies", *Oriente Moderno*, no. 2 (2010): 368—79, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23253466?seq=1 (accessed 24 November 2020).

28 Interview of the author with retired general İsmail Hakkı Pekin on 19 October 2020.

29 Tolga Gürakar, *Aydınlık Hareketi: Küreselci Çağında Ulusalcı Tarz-ı Siyaset* (The Aydınlık Movement: Nationalist Politics in the Age of Globalization), (İstanbul: Asi Kitap, 2017), 164.

30 Ibid., 164—65.

31 Ibid.

32 For more detail on Turkish perceptions vis-à-vis the U.S., NATO and the West see *Turkish Perceptions Survey 2015* commissioned by the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. at https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/TurkeySurvey_2015_web1.pdf (accessed 10 September 2021).

33 Interview with Fatma Sibel Yüksek on 29 September 2020.

34 In February 2021 OdaTV's most well-known journalists Barış Pehlivan and Barış Terkoğlu left the outlet which is likely to take a toll on its outreach and impact.

35 *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland) is a pro-active Turkish naval policy developed since 2006 which underscores Ankara's maritime claims in the eastern Mediterranean. These claims primarily consist of large deposits of natural gas off the coast of the island of Cyprus. This policy is opposed by Greek-dominated Cyprus, Greece, the U.S. and a number of EU member states.

among its writers. Soner Yalçın, a conspiratorial writer who runs OdaTV is also a columnist at *Sözcü* demonstrating the intersecting nature of these groups. Tele1 is an opposition TV channel which adopted an overtly pro-Russian view during the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

3. Turanists, "ethno-nationalists" or idealists *(ülkücüs)*: MHP-IYI Party Turkists

In essence, Turkey's pan-Turkists should have little in common with leftists Eurasianists whom they used to fight against in the 1960s and 1970s. In essence, the former are more interested in steering Turkey's foreign and security attention away from the West and believe that Turkey's ethnic brethren in the Caucasus and Central Asia should constitute Ankara's primary direction. While their view toward Eurasia used to be predominantly ethnicity-based, the propagation of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis throughout the last four decades has taken its toll on them. This Synthesis was developed by a group of conservative intellectuals *(Aydınlar Ocağı)* in the 1970s who were concerned by the rise of socialist ideas. They argued that Turkish culture is a synthesis between pre-Islamic Turkic culture and Islam and called for a powerful, centralized state that would destroy socialists/leftists who undermine "national culture" and "national consensus", a policy that would find strong support from Turkey's military leaders in the 1980s.[36]

Consequently, these modern pan-Turkists have become more religious and their outlook on the region is now more colored by Islam and the glorification of the Ottoman era. That said, the pro-Chinese attitude of the Aydınlık Group as well as the air strikes of February 2020 in Syria whereby 33 Turkish soldiers were killed by Russian/Syrian warplanes has dented the formerly eager approach toward China and Russia which we had seen during the acquisition of the S400s — a controversial Russian air missile defense system acquired by Ankara despite strong warnings by the U.S. and NATO. While Turkey's pan-Turkists, idealists and MHP/IYI Party followers are genuinely interested in the fate of Turkey's ethnic brethren in the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkestan, apart from the Azerbaijani case which is geographically much closer and therefore more 'real', their interest toward these ancestral lands is rather romantic and distant. The recent fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh and the military campaign that resulted in significant territorial gains against a historical nemesis has caressed not only nationalist but also pan-Turkist souls. All in all, idealist and MHP/IYI Party interest in Eurasia is heavily mixed with neo-Ottomanism, Turkish grandeur and a rather suspicious feeling toward Russia and China, especially since awareness about the Uyghur genocide became more widespread.

4. Islamist Eurasianists

The smallest and least significant group of Turkish Eurasianists has Islamist leanings. Although its outlook is very similar to that of some of the idealists, and MHP/IYI Party circles, most of its reflexes are conditioned by a mixture of neo-Ottomanist/Islamist ideological positions. The primary difference here stems from the group giving Islam precedence over Turkic ethnic links. This form of Eurasianism conveniently compounds Ottoman history with ethnic brotherhood and a global role for modern Turkey under the leadership of President Erdoğan. It interprets every contact of the Turkish president with his Russian and Chinese counterparts as evidence of a well-contemplated and conscious strategy that will raise Turkey's global eminence.[37] This position also values greatly President Erdoğan's challenge to the UN Security Council's five permanent members symbolized in the slogan "The World is greater than five" *(Dünya beşten büyüktür)* on the basis that Turkey has a moral duty to aid victims (read Muslim) throughout the world despite the fact that both Russia and China are part of the five.[38] That said, Erdoğan's challenge to

36 Erkan Akın and Ömer Karasapan, "The 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis'", *Middle East Report*, no. 153 (July/August 1988), https://merip.org/1988/07/the-turkish-islamic-synthesis/ (accessed 10 September 2021).

37 İbrahim Karagül, "Avrasya'nın iki merkez ülkesi dünyayı sallıyor!" (Eurasia's two central states shake the world!), *Yeni Şafak*, 7 August 2009, https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahimkaragul/avrasyanin-iki-merkez-ulkesi-dunyayi-salliyor-18013 (accessed 14 June 2021).

38 This position against the dominance of the permanent five in the UN Security Council stems from Erdoğan's frustration with Russian and Chinese vetoes in the UNSC particularly on resolutions dealing with Syria. Also see Mustafa Aytürk, "20 ve 21. Yüzyılda Türk-Rus ilişkilerinin genel seyri" (An overview of Turkish-Russian relations in the 20th and 21st centuries), *Dik Gazete*, 6 March 2021, https://www.

the Permanent Five is an issue that has even broader appeal beyond the interests of the Islamist Eurasians. Lastly, there are some circles close to the presidency who believe that a closer relationship with Russia, China and Iran will contribute better to the prolonged survival of the current authoritarian order in Turkey. And although it is not always easy to pinpoint these circles, there is little doubt that there is a distinct anti-Western outlook prevalent in Ankara that often seeks cooperation and solidarity with like-minded regimes in Russia, China and Iran.[39]

dikgazete.com/20-ve-21-yuzyilda-turk-rus-iliskilerinin-genel-seyri-makale,3382.html (accessed 12 April 2021).

39 For a sample piece published by the Turkish Presidency Directorate of Communication which is run by one of President Erdoğan's closest aides see "Putin, Türkiye ve Çin ile yeni bir G7 oluşturmak istiyor" (Putin wants to set up a new G7 with Turkey and China), *iletişim.gov.tr*, 12 September 2009, https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/dis_basinda_turkiye/detay/putin-turkiye-ve-cin-ile-yeni-bir-g7-olusturmak-istiyor (accessed 1 June 2021).

The Neo-Eurasianists' Peculiar Reversal of Fortunes

During the AKP's first and second terms (2002—2011), the neo-Eurasianists were seen as adversaries by the AKP.[40] When the AKP and their Gülenist allies began to consolidate their power following the AKP's second consecutive electoral victory in July 2007, the neo-Eurasianists became the target of the government's wrath. Doğu Perinçek and many *ulusalcıs*, including Eurasianists, were detained and charged with taking down the democratically-elected government in March 2008 as part of the infamous Ergenekon case.[41] In August 2013, Perinçek was sentenced to an aggravated life sentence.[42] This case, which has generated immense controversy in Turkish politics, was pursued by Gülenist-dominated police and judiciary aimed at breaking resistance against the AKP government with which the Gülenists were in an alliance at the time. Many secularists, *ulusalcıs* and Eurasianists viewed this case and the following *Balyoz* case as a vicious attempt to liquidate the last bastions of the secular establishment and obtain complete control over the state apparatus.

Following the AKP's third consecutive election victory in 2011, signs of an intra-Islamist fight emerged between the AKP and the Gülenists.[43] Tension between these two powerful Islamist groups gradually intensified and finally exploded in the form of a large corruption scandal in late 2013 only months after the Gezi Park protests. The AKP managed to survive the assault but decided to release from prison the *ulusalcıs* and Eurasianists who were primordial enemies of the Gülenists.[44] In other words, it was only due to an intense intra-Islamist struggle for power between the AKP and the Gülenists in 2013 that the AKP's approach toward the neo-Eurasianists radically changed. The release of the Eurasianists occurred parallel to the further criminalization of the Gülenists and the jaw-dropping result of the June 2015 election which saw the AKP lose its parliamentary majority for the first time. It is within this context that Erdoğan decided to dump his allies, quit the Kurdish reconciliation process and embrace a more nationalist and authoritarian governance model at home. As Karabekir Akkoyunlu eloquently stated "seeing himself in the shoes of Abdulhamid, but eager to avoid his fate, Erdoğan struck a Faustian bargain with Turkey's

40 The Gülen movement is an Islamist fraternal movement led by Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim preacher who has lived in the United States since 1999. In May 2016 — two months before an unsuccessful coup attempt — the movement was designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey. The movement preaches a soft version of Sunni Islam but appears to have strong political motives to obtain power and dominate Turkey. It was an ally of the AKP from 2002 until late 2013 when the intra-Islamist struggle for power came into the open.

41 The Ergenekon trials (2008—2016) were a series of high-profile trials in which 275 people, including military officers, journalists and opposition lawmakers, all alleged members of Ergenekon, a suspected secularist clandestine organization, were accused of plotting against the Turkish government.

42 Perinçek was sentenced to 117 years of aggravated prison due to setting up and administering an armed terror group, rising up against the Turkish Republic and obtaining illegal documents.

43 There is no consensus on the issue when the split actually started. Some sources point to Fethullah Gülen's open criticism as to how the *Mavi Marmara* incident was handled in 2010. Other theories exist as well.

44 Metin Gürcan, a prominent security analyst and former army officer, argued that Erdoğan felt "a vital need for the Perincek Group in his struggle with Gulenists and for his personal security." Metin Gürcan, "Power Struggle Erupts in Turkey's Security Structure", *Al-Monitor*, 11 October 2016, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/10/turkey-power-struggle-between-islamists-and-secularits.html (accessed 16 May 2021).

ultra-nationalists to secure his grip on power."[45] The dramatic coup attempt in 2016 completed the process of liquidating the Gülenists from Turkish public life — a process in which many *ulusalcıs* and Eurasianists seem to have played an active role.[46]

Turkey's neo-Eurasianists transformed from incarcerated villains to coalition partners in government and the bureaucracy.

Due to the intensifying intra-Islamist fight for power and the defining turning point in the form of the 2016 coup attempt, the AKP has been left "with a dwindling pool of competent administrators to run the state efficiently."[47] This occurred amidst a "highly volatile geopolitical environment, reduced state-capacity and an insecure one-man rule" which exposed "Turkey to the violent centrifugal effects of regional conflicts."[48] This deficiency was filled with the rapid staffing of vacated positions within the bureaucracy — especially the police and judiciary — by Islamist sects loyal to the AKP, ultranationalist idealists and Eurasianists. Hence, through their sudden release from prison, Turkey's neo-Eurasianists transformed from incarcerated villains to coalition partners in government and the bureaucracy. This spectacular reversal of fortunes could only materialize due to the special circumstances that arose from the ruthless power struggle between Turkey's Islamists.

45 Karabekir Akkoyunlu, "The Defeat of the 'Real' Neo-Ottomanists", *Open Democracy*, 5 August 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/defeat-real-neo-ottomanists/ (accessed 12 March 2021).

46 The Eurasianists also seem to have played an active role in drafting lists of Gülenists that would be purged from the bureaucracy immediately after the coup attempt. For more detail see Fatma Sibel Yüksel, "Ulusalcılığın Dramatik Rotası/İsmet Paşa'lardan Cihat Paşa'lara Düşmek" (The Dramatic Course of Ulusalcılık/Falling from İsmet Pashas to Cihat Pashas), *Patreon*, 26 May 2020, https://www.patreon.com/posts/ulusalciligin-37538625 (accessed 2 February 2022).

47 Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem, "Existential Insecurity and the Making of a Weak Authoritarian Regime in Turkey", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 515, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14683857.2016.1253225?journalCode=fbss20 (accessed 12 January 2021).

48 Ibid.

The Ideological Component of Turkish Neo-Eurasianism

Turkey's neo-Eurasianist ideologues describe themselves as "Kemalist Eurasianists", a description clearly aimed at exploiting widespread support through association with the founder of the republic. According to its protagonists, "Eurasianism calls for a cultural, military, political and commercial alliance with Turkey's eastern neighbors, notably Russia, Iran, the Turkic countries of Central Asia, and even Pakistan, India and China" and is "hostile towards any type of pro-Western policy in the Eurasian space."[49] Hence, Eurasianism is counter-hegemonic against Western-led globalization and defines itself as a "radical" foreign policy, "serving the purpose of the nationalists and the military, which if successful would bar the EU-led reform process of Turkey."[50]

Mehmet Perinçek (son of Doğu Perinçek), who is one of the leading ideologues of Turkish neo-Eurasianism, argues that Kemalism "has never been synonymous with Westernization, but rather with anti-imperialism", a view that finds its roots in Atilla İlhan's selective reading of Turkish-Russian history that focuses excessively on the cooperation between Ankara and Moscow of the 1920s—1930s. Although it is clear which direction the founder of the Turkish Republic steered the country by his Westernizing reforms, Mr. Perinçek's views presume that Russia and China could have no imperial motivations. This sort of skewed understanding is very common in contemporary Turkey whereby imperialism is only associated with the West while Russia and China are depicted as selfless political actors who could have no imperial ambitions whatsoever.

Turkish Eurasianism lacks the theoretical and ideological depth and sophistication one sees in its Russian counterpart.

Turkish Eurasianism then lacked and still lacks the theoretical and ideological depth and sophistication one sees in its Russian counterpart.[51] As noted by Igor Torbakov, Turkish neo-Eurasianism did not produce serious content in their "ideological and geopolitical constructions", and what appears to link Turkish and Russian neo-Eurasianism is a "kind of counter-hegemonic vision that is advanced as an alternative to a Western-led — and specifically U.S.-led — globalization project."[52] This aspect of the ideology reverberates with Islamist and nationalist ideologies which will be taken up below.

As has been mentioned before, an important divergence between Turkish and Russian neo-Eurasianism presents itself in how they view Europe and Germany specifically. While the Russian variant views Continental Europe, particularly Germany, as a potential ally against the "Atlanticists", Perinçek's Turkish variant as well as other *ulusalcıs* are vehemently hostile to Germany and Europe. A point in case is the

49 Emel Akçalı and Mehmet Perinçek, "Kemalist Eurasianism: An Emerging Geopolitical Discourse in Turkey", *Geopolitics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 551, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14650040802693564 (accessed 8 March 2021).

50 Ibid., 552.

51 Some analysts such as Galip Dalay argue that neo-Eurasianism rather than offering a geopolitical vision merely represent an ideological point of view and thus contains all of the extremes, prejudices and inconsistencies of such an ideological standpoint. Galip Dalay, "Avrasyacılıktan Mavi Vatana: İdeolojiyi Jeopolitikleştirmek" (From Eurasianism to Blue Homeland: Geopoliticizing Ideology), *Mesail*, February 2021, https://www.mesail.org/yedinci-sayi/avrasyaciliktan-mavi-vatana-ideolojiyi-jeopolitiklestirmek/ (accessed 11 November 2021).

52 Igor Torbakov, "Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism? Nationalism and Symbolic Geography in Postimperial Turkey and Russia", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (June 2017): 134, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/667498/pdf (accessed 10 March 2021).

book by the then-Workers' Party Germany organization chairman Alp Hamuroğlu titled *Alman İslamı* (German Islam) published in 2001. In this book, Germany is accused of attempting to assimilate Turks and strip them of their identity[53] — a view echoed by President Erdoğan numerous times. One can also detect deep suspicion toward German foundations and Western think tanks that are spontaneously associated with intelligence agencies — a view that is widely shared across the Turkish political spectrum.[54] The negative view toward Europe is undoubtedly due to the transformational power of the EU in the early 2000s as well as long held European sensitivity toward Kurdish and human rights in Turkey.

Overlapping aspects of Islamism and neo-Eurasianism

The appeal of Eurasianism for Turkey's Islamists emanates from its legitimizing role for authoritarianism, a powerful state and strong leadership. Furthermore, Eurasianism's antagonism towards the West fits well with republican-era Islamist ideas typically articulated by ideologues such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, a prominent poet and polemicist of the 1950s and beyond. Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* (Great East) outlook particularly stressed the significance of nativism, authenticity and uniqueness. His criticism of the Turkish elite's "civilizational conversion" is very similar to Atilla İlhan's critique of the Turkish elite albeit from a socialist perspective. Kısakürek's search for authenticity led to an intellectual attitude that emphasized the religious, cultural and ethical superiority of Islam over the West.[55] His ideas inspired many Islamists, including Erdoğan and the founding cadre of the AKP. Interestingly, Dugin was in Turkey on 15 July 2016, the day of the coup attempt, and visited with Mehmet Perinçek the grave of the Nakshi Sheikh Abdülhakim Arvasi who was the sheikh and inspiration of Kısakürek.[56]

The ideological emphasis on the *yerli ve milli* (local and national) after 2015, which strongly rejects liberal, global cosmopolitanism has been a defining characteristic of the AKP-led ultranationalist coalition in Turkey. This glorification of the local and national could be seen both as a continuation of Turkish conservative thought and a political value that is fully in tandem with Eurasianist ideas forwarded by Dugin, İlhan and Perinçek. In essence, nationalist-Islamism and Eurasianism overlap as they both despise Western dominance in the international order, feel threatened by the liberal cultural-civilizational siege of the West and thus have a common counter-hegemonic view of the world. At the moral-ethical level, the AKP's anti-Western ideology reproduces images of an ancient and authentic Ottoman-Islamic civilization against an 'immoral West'.[57] This is astutely instrumentalized in the AKP's efforts to transform state and society into a "New Turkey" that would undoubtedly be authoritarian, conservative / Islamist and secure the political and material gains made by the Erdoğan regime. In addition, Islamists tend to "deplore the loss of a complex and culturally diverse Ottoman society as well as the integrity of the Ottomans' 'historic' territory."[58] Also, neo-Ottomanists who generally iden-

53 Alp Hamuroğlu, *Alman İslamı* (German Islam), (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2001).

54 The turning point for the AKP was the Gezi Park protests in 2013. Prior to that the AKP used to mock its opponents for their presumed paranoia about western think tanks and NGOs. Further, the AKP enjoyed very much the warm welcome offered by these think tanks both in the U.S. and Europe. This view radically changed after 2013 and then deteriorated in 2015 and 2016. For more detail about suspicion toward western motives see *Turkish Perceptions Survey 2015* commissioned by the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. at https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Turkey Survey_2015_web1.pdf (accessed 10 September 2021).

55 Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın, "Competing Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity", *The Muslim World* 103, no. 4 (October 2013), https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12028 (accessed 9 April 2021).

56 "Putin'in özel temsilcisi Alexander Dugin Abdulhakim Arvasi Hazretlerinin mezarını ziyaret etti!" (Putin's special envoy Alexander Dugin visits Abdulhakim Arvasi's grave!), *NabizHaber.com*, 18 August 2016, http://www.nabizhaber.com/putinin-ozel-temsilcisi-alexander-dugin-abdulhakim-arvasi-hazretlerinin-mezarini-ziya-12354h.htm (accessed 12 November 2021).

57 For an interesting piece examining this subject see Semuhi Sinanoğlu, "Parti Ebed Müddet: Bir Siyaset Teknolojisi Olarak Yeni Osmanlıcı TRT Dizileri" (The Party Forever: Neo-Ottoman TRT TV Series as a Political Technology), *Birikim*, 30 March 2017, https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/8236/parti-ebed-muddet-bir-siyaset-teknolojisi-olarak-yeni-osmanlici-trt-dizileri (accessed 17 September 2021).

58 Igor Torbakov, "Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism?" *Utrikes Magasinet*, January 2017, https://www.ui.se/utrikesmagasinet/analyser/2017/januari/neo-ottomanism-vs-neo-eurasianism/ (accessed 11 March 2021).

tify with Erdoğan's Islamist policies blame the West for the demise of the Ottoman Empire due to the pernicious Western ideas of ethnonationalism and secularism penetrating the Empire.[59]

Similar to Moscow's exploitation of Eurasian ideas, which "seeks an ideological rationale to support its nostalgia for a romanticized, great-power past", Erdoğan's domestic strategy is aimed at his nationalist-conservative base that yearns for Ottoman imperial glory.[60] Both Islamists and Eurasianists utilize anti-Semitic language. The writings of Kısakürek and Atilla İlhan as well as the statements of Perinçek carry distinct anti-Semitic overtones. Perinçek particularly liberally associates the U.S. with Israel which is often music to Islamist ears. However, fundamentally, the source of this anti-Semitism seems to stem from a very insecure regional outlook that harbors a latent mistrust towards the West and outside powers overall. This worldview is mirrored by a "narrow notion of security — limited to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state — that characterizes Turkish politics."[61]

The legitimization of authority and strong leadership is also solidified ideologically through Russian neo-Eurasianism's calls for an alliance of faiths between Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Alexander Dugin argues that both Orthodox Christianity and Islam have their "basis in Eurasian civilization and share certain core values, such as respect for centralized authority and strong leadership."[62] Needless to add, Dugin does not view the two religions as equals but sees them in a certain hierarchical order that gives Orthodox Christianity more eminence.

Turkish Islamists and Eurasianists believe that a post-Western world is in the making.

Finally, Turkish Islamists and Eurasianists believe that a post-Western world is in the making. They argue that the unipolarity of the 1990s is over and that the West is essentially in an unstoppable decline — not least because of its degeneration in values. The recent Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, which aims at preventing violence against women and domestic violence, constitutes a symbolic reaction to the perception of Western degeneration as gender equality, sexual identity and LBQT rights do not conform with the AKP's conservative agenda. By extension it follows, that human and minority rights, freedom of expression and assembly, rule of law and the separation of powers are alien — read Western — values that should be rejected. Hence, the view in Ankara is that it makes more sense to find like-minded partners in the East not only due to the changing global geopolitical map but also due to Ankara's preference to deal with similarly authoritarian states such as Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan.

59 Ibid.

60 Paul Pryce, "Putin's Third Term: The Triumph of Eurasianism?" *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 13, no. 1 (March 2013), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2233842 (viewed on 30 November 2020), 34.

61 "The Sèvres Syndrome", *American Diplomacy*, August 2003, https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2003/08/the-sevres-syndrome/ (accessed 28 March 2021).

62 Pryce, "Putin's Third Term" (see note 60), 34.

Neo-Eurasianist Impact on Turkish Foreign Policy

The issue of Turkish Eurasianism has become more pronounced in recent years as Turkey's allies have viewed Ankara's foreign policy behavior as increasingly divergent from its traditional foreign policy choices. Turkey's deepening relations with Russia, its developing partnership with China and increasingly unilateral actions in a multitude of areas have invited interest as to the impact of Eurasianism in Turkish foreign policy.

One of the most outstanding features of Turkish foreign policy since the rise of the AKP, but more so since the Arab Uprisings is the increasing emphasis on former Ottoman geography and Turkey's neighborhood space. Similar to Russian political elites, the Islamist and nationalist elites of the country entertain issues of influence, responsibility and even intervention in its neighborhood as natural political reflexes. When pressed, Ankara has repeatedly denied a strategy that aims to restore empire, but Turkish elites also remind their counterparts that Turkey is not an ordinary nation-state.[63] The idea that Russia plays a special role in the territories of the former Russian Empire and the USSR is similar to the Turkish understanding that Turkey has a long and unique history with former Ottoman territories and thus is entitled to interfere, influence and articulate these territories in its own way. This view is very much supported, if not encouraged, by the MHP who forms the other critical component of the current ruling coalition. These sentiments manifest that both countries are plagued by post-imperial status crises and a subsequent yearning for international recognition and grandeur. As Lewis noted, the linkage between "great power status and dominance of geopolitical spaces" in the Turkish case has been amply demonstrated in military theatres such as Syria, Libya, eastern Mediterranean and by adopting a more intransigent policy in Cyprus.[64]

Eurasianists believe that the use of military power for the achievement of foreign policy objectives is a legitimate instrument.

Similar to Russian neo-Eurasianists, Turkish neo-Eurasianists as well believe that the use of military power for the achievement of foreign policy objectives is a legitimate instrument at the disposal of the respective states. Russian military interventions in Ukraine, Crimea, Syria and Libya are matched by Turkish military interventions in Syria, Libya, eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus.[65] Turkish military power projection also extended into the Gulf (Qatar) and Africa (Somalia and Sudan) in recent years.[66] This should not come as a surprise due to widespread popular and elite support for military interventions which inevitably nurtures populist nationalism and serves to legitimize Turkish authoritarianism.

63 Torbakov, "Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism?" (see note 58).

64 David G. Lewis, "Eurasian Spaces in a New World Order: *Großraum* Thinking in Russian Foreign Policy", *Conference paper presented at the 59th International Studies Association*, San Francisco, 4–7 April 2018, https://www.academia.edu/36441262/Eurasian_Spaces_in_a_New_World_Order_Gro%C3%9Fraum_Thinking_in_Russian_Foreign_Policy (accessed 12 November 2020).

65 For more on Turkish military power projections see S. Adar, H. A. Aksoy, S. Çevik, D. Isachenko, M. Rau, N. T. Yaşar, *Visualizing Turkey's Foreign Policy Activism*, 20 August 2021, https://www.cats-network.eu/topics/visualizing-turkeys-foreign-policy-activism (accessed 17 September 2021).

66 For more detail about Turkey's overseas military activities see ibid.

Relations with Russia

Turkish-Russian relations have been steadily developing since the early 2000s. From energy to trade, tourism and culture, from foreign and security relations to defense acquisitions, the relationship has become a structural factor in Turkish foreign policy.[67] Turkish Eurasianists, especially its Perinçekist wing, are particularly pro-active and enthusiastic about this partnership.[68] When relations went into crisis mode due to the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkey in 2015, Perinçek claimed that "Turkey's future was assassinated" and that the mistake — the downing of the Russian warplane — needed to be corrected.[69] Taking the initiative, a Vatan Party delegation quickly visited Damascus and Moscow with the aim to facilitate reconciliation between Ankara and Moscow.[70] Although the effort was not critical in the eventual fixing of the crisis, the delegation's visit nevertheless counted as a genuine effort to bring the two sides together.

Perinçekists also do not view the annexation of Crimea as an act of occupation. Mr. Perinçek is a master in coming up with interesting linkages in international relations as he proposed a quid pro quo with Russia on the Crimea issue. He said, "Crimea is not occupied by Russia. If we don't recognize Crimea as Russian territory, we cannot get the world to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus."[71] Perinçek is a staunch defender of Ankara's decision to acquire the S400 Russian missile defense system. He frequently depicts this decision as a major strategic choice and underlines in no uncertain terms against whom this missile defense system is meant to defend Turkey:

> "The S400s are not only an armament preference, they constitute a strategic choice. They symbolize our defense against the U.S. Threats are coming from east of the Euphrates both from the U.S. and Israel. The second threat comes from the eastern Mediterranean. The U.S., Israel, Greece and South Cyprus are all jointly organizing military displays against Turkey. Agreements are signed in the Black Sea to cut off Turk Stream. Whatever direction we look at we see threats from the U.S. and Israel. Turkey is forced to defend itself against these threats. Hence, the S400s are a strategic choice, they signify resoluteness against surrender to the U.S. From the very beginning VP has been in favor of Turkey acquiring the S400s."[72]

Most non-Perinçekist *ulusalcıs* and Turkish nationalists also defend the decision to acquire the S400s. Also, many military officials believe that Turkey needs the S400s regardless of what the U.S. thinks.[73] Notwithstanding complications in U.S. defense equipment acquisitions, this view attests to the success of the Eurasianist and pro-Russian lobby to portray the acquisition of the S400s as a step toward gaining independence from the U.S. Indeed, both Eurasianists and *ulusalcıs* see the issue as a critical step toward

67 Turkish exports to Russia and China in 2020 were US$4.5 bln / US$2.8 bln while imports from Russia and China were US$18 bln / US$23 bln respectively. According to the Turkish Ministry of Trade Turkish exports to the EU totaled US$69 bln while imports from the EU reached US$73 bln in the same year. See *Trading Economics* at https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/russia and https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/china and https://www.trade.gov.tr/turkey-and-eu/turkey-and-the-eu (all accessed 17 September 2021).

68 Yet, Russia treats Turkish neo-Eurasianists at a much lower diplomatic levels than they would like. Interview with Behlül Özkan on 27 October 2021 in Istanbul.

69 "Perinçek: Rusya'nın uçağını düşürürseniz, İsrail'in kucağına düşersiniz" (If you down a Russian warplane you will end up in Israel's laps), *Sputnik Türkiye*, 18 December 2015, https://tr.sputniknews.com/politika/201512181019751500-perincek-rusya-ucak-dusurme-israil-kucak-/ (accessed 16 March 2021).

70 The real breakthrough in fixing the relationship did not come through Perinçek's efforts but he nevertheless worked hard to contribute to end the crisis. The VP delegation made up of former generals met with intelligence people and VP contacts in Moscow such as pro-Kremlin businessman Konstantin Malofeev. Interview with former general İsmail Hakkı Pekin who led the VP missions to Damascus and Moscow in late 2015.

71 "Doğu Perinçek'i kızdıran soru" (The question that angered Doğu Perinçek), *OdaTV*, 17 September 2020, https://odatv4.com/dogu-perinceki-kizdiran-soru-17092042.html (accessed 25 March 2021).

72 "Doğu Perinçek: S-400 bir stratejidir ve kullanılacaktır" (Doğu Perinçek: S-400s are a strategy and they will be used), *Vatan Partisi website*, 9 May 2020, https://vatanpartisi.org.tr/genel-merkez/basin-aciklamalari/dogu-perincek-s-400-bir-stratejidir-ve-kullanilacaktir-29286 (accessed 18 March 2021).

73 Interview in September—October 2021 with a number of active and retired Turkish Air Force officers who asked not to be named in this report.

obtaining strategic autonomy from the West.[74] That a new dependency would be established — in this case with Russia — has largely escaped public debate.

Relations with China

One of the most controversial issues regarding Eurasianists is their unconditional advocacy for Chinese policies, especially the Perinçek Group. This is nowhere more distinguishable than with the plight of the Uyghur Turks.

Despite growing international pressure on Beijing to stop the Uyghur genocide, Perinçek is actively defending the Chinese cause.

Despite growing international pressure on Beijing to stop the Uyghur genocide, Perinçek is actively defending the Chinese cause. This is of no surprise as the Aydınlık Group seems to be supported by the Chinese government.[75] In response to growing criticism against his stance, Perinçek said in May 2020:

> "China is combating its own FETÖ, its own PKK. Eastern Turkestan [Xinjiang] is China's FETÖ. Camps, torture and all of that are lies! They are like village institutes. They are teaching them Chinese."[76]

Furthermore, he argues that Turkey could not be "local and national" — a recent slogan utilized by the AKP denoting being patriotic — without being friends with China.

OdaTV's editor-in-chief Soner Yalçın has a more sophisticated approach to doubt the plight of the Uyghurs. He sees a Western conspiracy behind the Uyghur issue and develops the argument that the U.S. is primarily behind disrupting the Silk Road Initiative. He warns his fellow *ulusalcıs*, whom he describes as generally being alert about certain Kurds [read PKK] who are nothing but the U.S.' "imperialist pawns," to recognize the "U.S. provocation" behind the Uygur cause. Finally, unearthing the conspiracy, he asks: "How many more times will we fall to Gladio's 'slave Turks' rhetoric?"[77]

The Aydınlık Group's publishing house *Kaynak Publishing* offers an extensive variety of books ranging from Chinese culture to Chinese history and political publications by Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong. The daily *Aydınlık* paper follows a notoriously anti-American publishing policy and provides extensive space for pro-Chinese views, including highly unpopular issues such as the Uyghur genocide.[78] When it comes to the Uyghur matter there is no pro-Chinese commentary from Turanists or Islamist Eurasians as it is widely seen as a form of victimhood of an ethnic and religious brethren. These groups either choose to compartmentalize the issue and join the overall criticism of Chinese policies or pragmatically ignore it.

74 Daria Isachenko, *Turkey and Russia: The Logic of Conflictual Cooperation*, SWP Research Paper 7/2021 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, October 2021), https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021RP07/#hd-d22609e2449 (accessed 19 February 2022).

75 One of the ways the Aydınlık Group is supported by China is through the Turkish-Chinese Business Matching Center (TUCEM) which is headed by Mr. Adnan Akfırat who is a long-time associate of Mr. Perinçek and a columnist at Aydınlık daily.

76 "Doğu Perinçek, Uygur Türklerine karşı Çin'i böyle savunuyor" (Doğu Perinçek defends China against Uyghur Turks in this manner), *Habertürk TV video on Youtube*, 27 May 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_l-I5tZa13c (accessed 11 December 2020).

77 Soner Yalçın, "Çocuk muyuz kandırılacak" (Are we kids to be fooled), *Sözcü*, 8 October 2019, https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/yazarlar/soner-yalcin/cocuk-muyuz-kandirilacak-5375885/ (accessed 25 March 2021).

78 For a sample news piece see "İstanbul'un göbeğinde yıkıcılarla toplantı" (Meeting in the center of Istanbul with the subversives), *Aydınlık*, 19 February 2022, https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/haber/abd-ankara-buyukelcisi-jeff-flake-sozde-dogu-turkistan-ayrilikci-teskilatlariyla-bir-araya-geliyor-301753 (accessed 19 February 2022).

Conclusion

Similar to Dugin whose direct influence over Russian policymaking has been exaggerated both in Turkey and the West, Perinçek's influence over Turkish policymaking has also been widely overstated. While the Kremlin found Dugin's fascist views somewhat embarrassing and thus distanced itself from him, it entertains the notion of Eurasianism if and when it suits its own nationalist foreign and security policy agenda. Similarly, Ankara makes use of Eurasianist ideas if and when it fits its agenda. Yet, when the threat of EU sanctions against Turkey became real as a result of *Mavi Vatan* policies, Erdoğan immediately reacted to appease the EU. Further, some *ulusalcı* admirals found themselves under detention and dealing with ongoing court cases after issuing declarations opposing the withdrawal from the Montreux Convention and the Islamization of the navy.[79] Nevertheless, despite their respective lack of direct influence on policymaking, both Dugin and Perinçek serve significant functions in popularizing ultranationalist views for Russian and Turkish mainstreams, respectively. This has been seen clearly during Turkey's military incursions into northern Syria and the crisis in the eastern Mediterranean.[80]

Thus, contrary to considerable speculation in the West, Turkey's Eurasianists exert only indirect influence on the shaping of Turkish foreign policy. Similar to many other areas, the new executive presidency has de-institutionalized policymaking to a handful of people, and Eurasianists are not among them. Eurasianists attempt to influence Turkish security policy and at times provide indirect influence via those who are sympathetic to them within the security bureaucracy.

Turkish neo-Eurasianism is an ideology that is primarily instrumentalized for domestic political purposes although there are aspects of its existence useful for foreign and security policy preferences as well. Turkey's Islamists who make up the dominant component of the current religious-ultranationalist coalition astutely utilize the neo-Eurasianists for a number of reasons: (1) the AKP used the Eurasianists effectively against the "Gülenist threat";[81] (2) the Eurasianists serve as a useful legitimization tool for authoritarian rule and the glorification of the state whose head is President Erdoğan; (3) Eurasianists broaden the coalition that manufactures consent for the government by reaching out to otherwise impenetrable secular constituencies; (4) the Eurasianist cadre provide critical knowhow and support within the security establishment for the projection of military power; and (5) Eurasianists are critical in popularizing ultranationalist foreign policy views for the Turkish mainstream.

In an ideal world, Ankara would prefer to pursue a policy of full strategic autonomy away from the West but economic, geographical and security realities currently prevent such a rupture. Hence, Ankara can neither turn away from the West nor can it embrace

79 Recognizing the threat Mr. Perinçek quickly sided with the AKP selling out his former comrades and prison mates, including Admiral Gürdeniz — a prominent admiral who used to write for *Aydınlık*. Adopted in 1936 the Montreux Convention guarantees the freedom of passage through the straits for merchant ships of all countries; both in peacetime and in wartime. However, the rules of passage of warships are different for the Black Sea states and others. For the warships of the non-Black Sea powers, significant restrictions on class and duration of stay have been introduced. The convention is widely seen as one of the founding international agreements confirming the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic.

80 For an interesting piece expanding on this function of Eurasianists see Ryan Gingeras, "Turkey's Talk Show Nationalists", *War on the Rocks*, 8 April 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/turkeys-talk-show-nationalists/ (accessed 9 April 2021).

81 Apart from providing strong public support to the liquidation of the Gülenists the Eurasianists helped shape the public discourse on the issue — especially vis-à-vis secular audiences — the AKP often assigned *ulusalcıs*/Eurasianist prosecutors and judges to prosecute Gülenists harshly. They also used them effectively in "weeding out" Gülenists from the armed forces — a task they performed very willingly.

a Eurasian future. That said, the government's efforts to demonize the West in its domestic narrative — aided by the Eurasianists — seem to be gaining traction as recent public opinion polls show a growing interest in seeing Turkey's future aligned with Russia and China rather than with the EU and the U.S.[82] The extent to which pro-Russian views have made headway in the Turkish media and among opinionmakers has been particularly noted during the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, driven primarily by its instinct for political survival, Ankara perhaps does not know itself which direction it should move toward and thus it continues to oscillate between seemingly inconsistent policies. Having rid itself of the institutional constraints of the foreign ministry, the direction of the country is very much decided by the two main players of the ultranationalist coalition: President Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the MHP. Both men have no qualms to direct foreign and security policy in the form of short-term reflexes according to their domestic political needs rather than any long-thought-out, grand strategy.

Ultimately, Turkey's Islamists are too savvy and realistic to leave important segments of governance and/or foreign policy to the marginal Eurasianists. While there is little doubt that Erdoğan has astutely exploited Eurasianist political support and thus widened his government's capacity to manufacture consent, as was the case with the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, he will not share power with anyone unless he has absolutely no other option. In the long journey of Erdoğan's changing domestic political coalitions, the Eurasianists are nothing but a small coalition partner enabling Turkey's Islamists to remain the dominant political actor in the Turkish body politic. True, Eurasianists offer an antithesis to liberal democracy by supporting a strong state with a strong leader. They complement the religious-ultranationalist coalition between the AKP and the MHP and form the secular link in a broad ultranationalist front. Yet, they are not a major player in the overall Turkish political scene and are likely to remain marginal unless a major breakdown occurs between Ankara and the leading Western capitals.

Also, Turkey's Eurasianists are very much likely to find themselves out of favor in a post-Erdoğan era. Even under the current ultranationalist coalition, they can become a liability from time to time — especially Mr. Perinçek whose political career is full of contradictions. This is nowhere more visible than his current engagement with Beijing while Turkey's ethnic brethren — the Uyghurs — are put in concentration camps. The development and prospering of Turkish neo-Eurasianism was rooted in the steady deterioration of Ankara's relations with the West. In view of the growing divergence between Ankara and its Western allies on a number of critical issues such as Syria's Kurds, the PKK, human rights, rule of law and NATO, this may only deepen over time and result in structural crises. In such an eventuality, there may be openings for Turkey's neo-Eurasianists although this is difficult to ascertain at present. That said, closer relations with Western allies in a post-Erdoğan era could spell the further marginalization of the neo-Eurasianists.

Given the transatlantic interest in keeping Turkey within the Western camp, it is imperative that a well-designed Turkey policy needs both intra-European and transatlantic coordination. Clear and credible conditionality on fundamental issues and deliverables is of essence. A well-coordinated transatlantic approach toward Turkey also needs to be sensitive to how high-level engagement is exploited by Ankara for domestic political purposes. Both President Biden's preference not to call President Erdoğan for months after his inauguration and the visibly more engaged approach by Germany and the EU demonstrate the contrasting approaches taken with the New Turkey.[83] While high-level engagement may be necessary due to pressing issues such as illegal migration, the eastern Mediterranean and Afghanistan, an appropriate balance needs to be struck both for Turkish and European audiences. European engagement with Erdoğan without obtaining clear assurances on fundamental issues risks being perceived as a sell-out of Turkey's democrats and European values. Therefore, the proper articulation of a European Turkey policy acquires even more significance despite complications in attaining a common position on Turkey.

A transatlantic Turkey strategy should include the following: (1) Deepening the economic partnership and solidifying interdependence with Turkey; (2) Supporting Turkey in its fight against terrorism

82 "Bir yılda olanlar oldu: Türkiye 'Avrasya' dedi" (A lot has changed in a year: Turkey opted for Eurasia)", *OdaTV*, 24 January 2022, https://odatv4.com/siyaset/bir-yilda-olanlar-oldu-turkiye-avrasya-dedi-227579 (accessed 19 February 2022).

83 The author recognizes the potential of this contrasting approach as deliberate policy coordination between Washington and Brussels.

and Kurdish rights forwarded by legitimate political entities; (3) Recognizing that both Russia and China have made considerable progress in winning hearts and minds among the Turkish media, opinionmakers and the Turkish population, the new strategy should seek imaginative ways and means to counter this trend; (4) Offering Turkey new economic opportunities in a post-pandemic environment such as restructuring supply lines via Turkey; (5) Engaging with the Turkish elite, civil society and society at large in new proactive ways that underscores Turkey's role in Wider Europe; (6) Increasing quotas for Turkish students to study at European universities and easing financial conditions for them by offering scholarships and grants.

With or without neo-Eurasianism, Turkey is likely to remain the odd country out that neither belongs to Europe nor to the Middle East or the vast territories of Eurasia. Hence, it is very likely that Turkey will continue to seek strategic autonomy from the West. The historical predicament of the lone wolf analogy still appears valid and is likely to remain that way for some time to come. Such a Turkey will continue to oscillate between seemingly contradicting positions in the foreseeable future and will continue to present an important challenge to the EU and the U.S. that is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon but can only be managed.

Abbreviations

AKP	*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* — Justice and Development Party
CHP	*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* — Republican People's Party
DSP	*Demokratik Sol Parti* — Democratic Left Party
FETÖ	*Fettullahçı Terör Örgütü* — Fettullahist Terror Organization
İP	*İşçi Partisi* — Worker's Party
IYI	*İyi Parti* — Good/Benevolent Party
MHP	*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* — Nationalist Action Party
PKK	*Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê* — Kurdistan Worker's Party
TASAM	*Türk-Asya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi* — Turkish Asian Strategic Research Center
TGB	*Türkiye Gençlik Birliği* — Turkey Youth Union
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
VP	*Vatan Partisi* — Homeland Party

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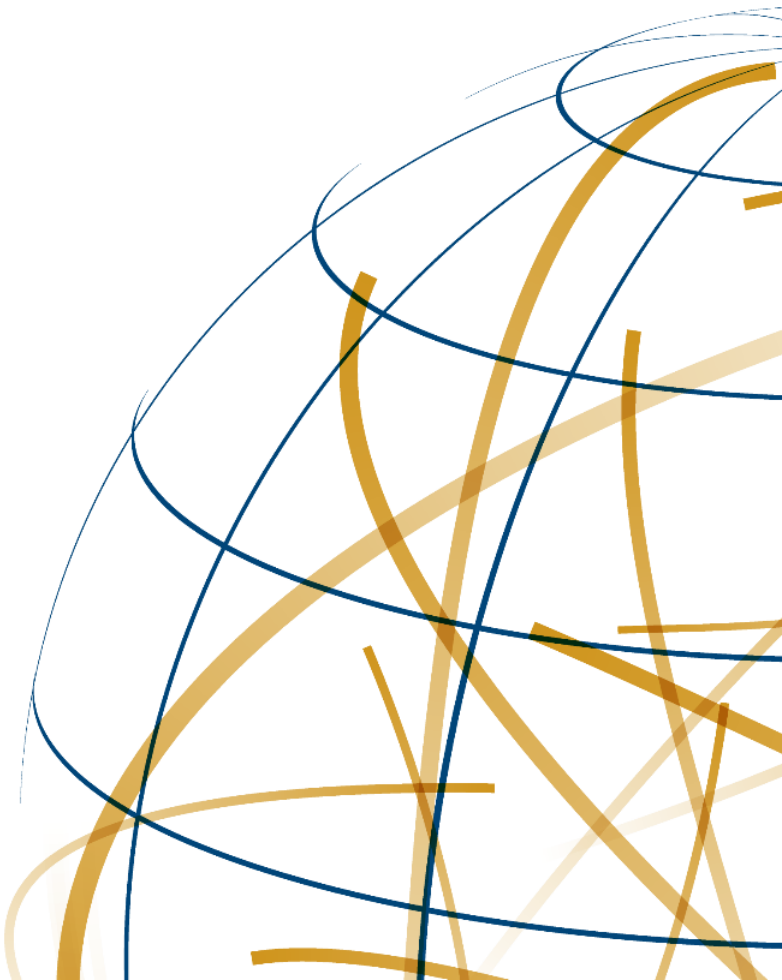
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