

**G.B. Zhumatay\*** , **A.S. Yskak** 

Narxoz University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

\*e-mail: gabit.zhumatay@narxoz.kz

## KEY DISCOURSES OF TURKISH EURASIANISM AND THEIR IMPACT ON TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY

The paper sheds light on Turkish Eurasianism (Avrasyacılık), identifying various versions and traditions of Eurasianism in Turkey. Analyzing conceptual, theoretical, and ideological underpinnings of different varieties of Turkish Eurasianism, we will look into how they affect Turkey's foreign policy course, especially in steering the country away from the conventional unidimensional pro-Western orientation and shifting it towards greater Eurasia through building a strategic alliance with states in Eurasia. The results of our research have shown that all varieties of Turkish Eurasianism to a certain extent are anti-imperialist, anti-Western and counter-hegemonic discourses, which place greater emphasis upon Turkey's strategic independence from the West and its shift towards Eurasia. Yet it has been also revealed that despite their forceful advocacy for a deep paradigm shift and foreign policy change by reorienting from pro-Western to pro-Eurasian policy, as political forces Turkish Eurasianists are not powerful and their influence in informing and guiding Turkish foreign policy is rather marginal and limited. It is evident that despite the ruling AKP and its leaders occasionally ally themselves with Turkish Eurasianists, Turkey's foreign policy is based on realism and pragmatism, rather than sentimentalism and ideology. From this standpoint, it would be premature to talk about the Turkish disengagement from the West and its pivot to Eurasia, as Ankara's security and foreign policy are closely intertwined with the West and deeply embedded within the Western security system.

**Key words:** turkish eurasianism, kemalism, nationalism, neo-Ottomanism, pan-Turkism, islamism, Turkey, West, Eurasia.

Ғ.Б. Жұматай\*, А.С. Ысқақ

Нархоз Университеті, Алматы қ., Қазақстан

\*e-mail: gabit.zhumatay@narxoz.edu

### Түрік еуразияшылдығының негізгі дискурстары және олардың Түркияның сыртқы саясатына ықпалы

Бұл мақалада түрік еуразияшылдығының (Avrasyacılık) түрлі нұсқалары мен дәстүрлерінің саяси және идеологиялық мәні ашылып көрсетіледі. Түрік еуразияшылдығының концептуалдық, теориялық және идеологиялық негіздерін талдай отырып, біз олардың Түркияның сыртқы саясатына қаншалықты ықпал ететінін ашып көрсетеміз. Түрік еуразияшылдары Түркияның Батыспен ара қатынасын үзіп, Еуразия құрлығындағы елдермен одақтасуына басымдық береді. Зерттеудің нәтижелері түрік еуразияшылдығының барлық түрлері белгілі бір дәрежеде антиимпериалистік, Батысқа қарсы бағытталған анти-гегемониялық дискурстар екенін көрсетті. Олардың барлығы Түркияның сыртқы саясаттағы стратегиялық дербестігіне және Еуразияға қарай ойысуына басымдық береді. Бұған қоса түрік еуразияшылдарының елдің сыртқы саясатында терең парадигмалық өзгерістерді талап еткеніне қарамастан, олардың жеткілікті ықпалға ие емес екені, сондай-ақ олардың Түркияның сыртқы саясатына ықпалының айтарлықтай шектеулі екені айқындалды. Биліктегі Әділет және даму партиясының (АК партия) және оның жетекшілерінің түрік еуразияшылдарымен одақ құруына қарамастан, Түркияның сыртқы саясаты сентиментализм мен идеологияға емес, ең алдымен реализм мен прагматизмге негізделгені анықталды. Осы тұрғыдан келгенде, Түркияның Батыстан біржолата алшақтауы мен оның Еуразияға бағытына қарай толық ойысуы туралы тұжырым жасау тым ерте, өйткені Анкараның қауіпсіздігі мен сыртқы саясаты Батыспен етене тығыз байланысты.

**Түйін сөздер:** түрік еуразияшылдығы, кемализм, ұлтшылдық, неоосманизм, пантүркизм, исламшылдық, Түркия, Батыс, Еуразия.

Ғ.Б. Жұматай\*, А.С. Ысқақ  
Университет Нархоз, г. Алматы, Казахстан  
\*e-mail: gabit.zhumatay@narхоз.edu

### Основные дискурсы турецкого евразийства и их влияние на внешнюю политику Турции

В статье рассматривается турецкое евразийство (Avrasyacılık) и выявляются различные версии и традиции евразийства в Турции. На основе анализа концептуальных, теоретических и идеологических основ различных вариантов турецкого евразийства выявлены их влияние на внешнеполитический курс Турции в контексте отхода страны от традиционной одно векторной прозападной ориентации и смещения ее в сторону Евразии, путем образования стратегического союза с государствами Евразии. Результат исследования показал, что все разновидности турецкого евразийства в определенной степени антиимпериалистические, антизападные и контр-гегемонистские дискурсы, в которых основной упор делается на стратегическую независимость Турции от Запада и ее сдвиг в сторону Евразии. Также выяснилось, что, несмотря на их решительную борьбу глубокой смены парадигмы и изменения внешней политики путем переориентации с прозападной на проевразийскую политику, турецкие евразийцы как политические силы не являются достаточно влиятельными, и их влияние на внешнюю политику Турции достаточно ограничено. Очевидно, несмотря на это, правящая ПСР и ее лидеры время от времени вступают в союз с турецкими евразийцами. Тем не менее, внешняя политика Турции основана на реализме и прагматизме, а не на сентиментализме и идеологии. С этой точки зрения было бы преждевременно полагать об отходе Турции от Запада и ее переориентации к Евразии, поскольку безопасность и внешняя политика Анкары тесно переплетены с Западом и глубоко укоренены в западной системе безопасности.

**Ключевые слова:** турецкое евразийство, кемализм, национализм, неоосманизм, пантюркизм, исламизм, Турция, Запад, Евразия.

### Introduction

With the end of the Cold War and the outset of a new global order Turkey's traditional unidimensional Western security and foreign policy experienced a deep crisis. Turkish intellectuals, political and military figures as well as diverse political groups have engaged in heated debates and discussions about defining and designing a new foreign policy course for Turkey. A central question in these debates has been an issue of gaining strategic autonomy for Turkey from the West in dealing with its own security concerns and foreign policy issues. The end of the Cold War and emergence of a new balance of power in Eurasia prompted a deep paradigm shift in Turkey's foreign policy, which induced Turkey to pursue a more ambitious foreign policy with greater autonomy. Previously, Turkey had been considered the Western frontier in the Middle East, yet this social construct collapsed during the 1980s and 1990s. This paradigm shift opened up borders, providing opportunities for Turkey to extend its influence over regions of Eurasia that had been beyond its reach before. Policy debates in Turkey showed the need to move from the conventional unidimensional pro-Western foreign policy during the Cold War to more independent multidimensional foreign policy (Tüysüzoğlu, 2014). The collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of sovereign Turkic states in

its ruins provided Turkey with the opportunity to expand its outreach into the untapped regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus. A remerged discourse of pan-Turkism informed and guided Turgut Özal's new multidimensional foreign policy agenda, who dreamed of a Turkey stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China. This policy was informed by Turkish Eurasianism (Balci & Liles, 2018, p. 13; Landau 1995; Tüysüzoğlu, 2014, p. 97).

Turkish Eurasianism has been behind a profound foreign policy shift from pro-Western orientation to Eurasian pivot. The emergence and evolution of Turkish Eurasianism has been increasingly influenced by Kemalism, Turkish nationalism, neo-Ottomanism, pan-Turkism, pan-Turanism, and Islamism (Tufekci, 2017a). That is why, Turkish Eurasianism is not a homogeneous monolithic rigid perspective, rather it is a heterogeneous fluid paradigm, consisting of multiple diverse traditions and versions. Turkish Eurasianism was at the center of intellectual and political debate on foreign policy in Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s when Turkey redefined its role in international relations as a 'bridge' between the West and the East and as a 'central country' linking three continents (Tanrisever, 2018). Moreover, strategic autonomy in Turkey's foreign policy from the West and the quest for expanding Turkish influence into untapped areas of Eurasia through building strategic alliances with Eurasian countries lie at the core

of Turkish Eurasianism. Turkish Eurasianism is first and foremost a nationalist discourse that places Turkey at the center of regional and global politics as a 'middle power'. Therefore, the current study seeks to investigate Turkish Eurasianism and identify its various versions and traditions. Besides, the paper analyzes conceptual, theoretical, and ideological underpinnings of different versions of Turkish Eurasianism, looking into how they affect Turkey's foreign policy course, especially in steering the country away from the conventional unidimensional pro-Western orientation and shifting it towards greater Eurasia through building a strategic alliance with Russia, China, Iran, the Turkic republics, and other states in Eurasia.

### Materials and methods

With the goal to shed light on Turkish Eurasianism, this article seeks to examine various versions and traditions of Eurasianism in Turkey, analyzing conceptual, theoretical, and ideological underpinnings of different varieties of Turkish Eurasianism, and looking into how they affect Turkey's foreign policy. In undertaking this study, we have engaged in critical analysis of the relevant literature pertaining to the research problem, specifically we have critically analyzed studies written in English and Turkish. We have reviewed a variety of relevant sources and materials pertaining to our study, in particular we have thoroughly scrutinized data from online media, reports produced by leading analytical centers, research papers and studies of Turkish and other foreign scholars. The data collected for our study provides rich, overlapping, and conflicting information with respect to the research problem. That is why, we have been aware that a critical interrogation and in-depth analysis is essential in terms of what relevant and reliable information the data can provide, whether we have missed important context, theoretical and conceptual aspects of the research problem. Hence, while interpreting and analyzing the collected data, we have ensured that the data is reliable and relevant to our study and can provide sufficient information that helps us to find answers to the research questions.

The methodology of our study is qualitative because our study employs a historical-comparative and discourse analysis to examine Turkish Eurasianism, its emergence, evolution, and development, as well as its various versions and their ideological underpinnings. A historical-comparative and discourse analysis is a powerful tool that helps us identify and critically analyze the historical roots of Turkish Eur-

asianism, its rise and spread in the 1980s-1990s in Turkey. Besides, this analytical tool allows us to understand why and how Turkish Eurasianism and its offshoots have been produced, reproduced, and reinforced in Turkish intellectual and political circles. Through deploying this analytical tool, we could ascertain the root cause of why such a powerful ideology came into being and what were the driving forces behind Turkish Eurasianism. Thus, we have come to the conclusion that the reason behind the genesis of Turkish Eurasianism was a response of Turkish society to the challenges and transformations resulted from the end of the Cold War and search for a new foreign policy approach that would empower Turkey to play a central role in a new global order. By using a historical-comparative and discourse analysis we have revealed that Turkish nationalism and anti-Western sentiment lie at the core of Turkish Eurasianism. In addition, Turkish Eurasianism is informed and shaped by neo-Ottomanism, pan-Turkism, pan-Turanism, and Islamism. Furthermore, we have closely examined the existing gap between theory and practice in terms of to what extent Turkish Eurasianism affects and shapes Turkey's foreign policy trajectories. It has been identified that even though Turkish Eurasianism is a powerful political discourse, Turkey strongly adheres to pragmatic and realist approaches in its foreign policy and in dealing with international issues. From this perspective, our study seeks to answer the following questions: a) Why has Turkish Eurasianism come into being? b) What are ideological underpinnings of Eurasianist discourses in Turkey and how do they affect foreign policy of Ankara?

### Literature review

There has been much scholarly analysis of Turkish Eurasianism, its various discourses, ideological underpinnings, and how Eurasianism has affected Turkey's foreign policy (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009; Çolakoğlu, 2019; Erşen, 2019, 2022; Kınıklioğlu, 2022; Perinçek, 2012; Tanrısever, 2018; Tüfekçi, 2017a, 2017b; Tüysüzoğlu, 2014, 2021, 2023; Yavuz, 2022). Turkish Eurasianism is a relatively new geopolitical and foreign policy discourse that emerged in Turkish intellectual circles as a response to the new challenges caused by the end of the Cold War. Moreover, Turkish Eurasianism appeared as a response to the overdependence of Turkey on the West in terms of ensuring security reflected in the hegemonic Kemalist ideology. Colakoğlu (2019) claims that Turkish Eurasianism ideologically is close to Ba'athism in the Arab world. The central

idea of Turkish Eurasianism lies in the demand that Turkey ought to abandon the West as its interests lie outside the West and are closely intertwined with Eurasia. In this regard, Turkey is perceived by Turkish Eurasianists as a Eurasian country, belonging to a Eurasian civilization (Perinçek, 2012). Brzezinski (1997) considers areas encompassing Turkey, the Middle East, and Central Asia to be part of Eurasia, to which he referred as the Eurasian Balkans. Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" has been linked to 'neo-Ottomanism' and 'Turkish Eurasianism' (Davutoğlu, 2001). Tüysüzoğlu (2014) highlights that Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" is a conceptual amalgamation of neo-Ottomanism and Turkish Eurasianism, or it is an attempt to connect Ottoman geography to Turkish Eurasianist thought.

Turkish Eurasianists seek to divorce Turkey from the West and incorporate it into Eurasia because Eurasian powers position themselves as powerful centers to challenge the US-led global order (Gürçan, 2021). Therefore, anti-Westernism and anti-imperialism lie at the core of Turkish Eurasianism because Turkish Eurasianists are convinced that Atlanticism as the ideology of the West and NATO is no longer confined within the Euro-Atlantic area, rather it is embarking on a quest for the global domination and the subjugation of the countries of the Global South (Gürçan, 2013). That is why, increasingly felt threatened by the Western imperialism, Turkish Eurasianists advocate a foreign policy shift to Eurasia (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022). Tüysüzoğlu (2014) indicates three key dimensions of Turkish Eurasianism. First, leftist, and socialist Eurasianism places greater importance on close collaboration with Eurasian powers such as Russia and China in countering Western imperialism. Second dimension of Turkish Eurasianism is dominated by nationalist political groups and figures. Third dimension of Turkish Eurasianism is led by conservatives who focus on close cooperation with the Muslim nations of the Middle East. Nonetheless, studies highlight that Eurasianism is invoked by Turkish policymakers when it is necessary and hence Turkey's foreign policy is based on pragmatism and realism (Tüysüzoğlu, 2021, 2023). In fact, although Turkey uses Eurasianism as a foreign policy tool when it suits its interests, Ankara does not change its strategic alliance with the West (Tüysüzoğlu, 2021).

## Results and Discussion

### *The rise of Turkish Eurasianism*

Since the establishment of Turkey in 1923 Turkey's involvement in international politics has been

within the Western Transatlantic security system where Turkey had very limited autonomy in its foreign policy. For a long time, Turkey's domestic and foreign policy developments and trajectories have been informed and guided by the Kemalist ideology mostly oriented towards the West. Kemalism has stirred the nation in the Western direction. In Turkey Kemalism is a modernist state ideology underpinned by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's political thought and views. It became an official state ideology of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 in the aftermath of the Turkish liberation war waged against invading European powers and their proxies such as Greece. Kemalism was designed to transform post-Ottoman Turkey into a modern advanced society based on six key principles such as republicanism, secularism, statism, revolutionism, populism and nationalism (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 551). Although Kemalism has remained the official state ideology since 1923, with time passing under deep transformations and deep paradigm shifts in Turkey during the 1980s-1990s such as neoliberal globalization facilitated by the IMF and massive privatization, Kemalism was challenged and undermined. Its further erosion has been induced by the resurgence of Islam and ethnic separatism represented by Kurdish struggle for national self-determination, which threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Turkish state. These challenges and transformations have particularly eroded the Kemalist principles of populism, revolutionism, and statism (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 551).

Furthermore, this turbulent and volatile period coincided with the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union, which caused tremendous paradigm shifts in the conventional deep-seated Cold War security and strategic thinking and discourses. During the Cold War Turkey's national security and foreign policy were closely embedded within the Western Transatlantic security systems, Turkey being part of the American-led NATO. With the advent of the post-Cold War era the strategic significance of Turkey as Western outpost and frontier in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East has eroded, which pushed Turkish policymakers to search for alternative foreign policy and security strategies to play decisive role within the Western security arrangements as well as regional and global politics. The genesis of a new world order and structural changes in the Western approaches to international politics in the 1990s caused certain frictions, and crises in Turkish-Western relations, forcing Turkey to look for autonomy in its foreign policy and alternative geographical areas for its geopoliti-



cal and geo-economic maneuvers (Yavuz, 2022). Turkish quest for autonomy and greater engagement in international politics induced paradigm shifts in Turkey from the hegemonic pro-Western Kemalist perspective to alternative foreign policy approaches. In the process of searching for alternative strategies to diversify its unidimensional Western foreign policy Turkish political circles proposed multidimensional foreign policy, including Eurasianism as a new approach to deal with the challenges presented by a new international environment. Moreover, in the post-Cold War era the US and European policies towards Turkey's neighborhoods such as Iraq, Syria, and the whole Middle East have mostly been at odds with Turkish national interests. The US unilateral actions in the Middle East have irritated and angered Turkish intellectuals and politicians who have been forced to pivot to Eurasia.

Tufekci identifies four key political ideologies that have been dominant since the late 1980s in Turkey such as neo-Ottomanism, Islamism, pan-Turkism, and pan-Turanism (2017a, p. 96). In his view, these ideologies have been essential in Turkish political thought, shaping and affecting the discourse of Turkish Eurasianism (Tufekci, 2017a). Thus, the rise and development of Turkish Eurasianism has been facilitated by these four major discourses in the Turkish political environment. The discourse of Eurasianism became part of mainstream debate on foreign policy in Turkey in the 1990s when Turkey redefined its role as a 'bridge' between the West and the East (Tanrısever, 2018, p. 20).

It is true that Eurasianism originated in Russia, yet this concept is not confined to Russia in the post-Cold War era (Erşen, 2022). Although it is acknowledged that Dugin's neo-Eurasianism did have substantial impact on the rise of Eurasianism in Turkey, to a certain extent affecting political debates among Turkish political pundits in the 1990s, geopolitical thoughts about Eurasia came into being independently from debates on Eurasianism in Russian political circles (Erşen, 2022, p. 114). In a similar vein, while admitting the impact of Russian Eurasianism upon Turkish Eurasianism, Multiculturalist or Kemalist Eurasianists in Turkey claim Turkish Eurasianism originates from Kemalism (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 551; Perinçek, 2012). New geopolitical and security challenges and anxiety emanating from the sustainability of Ankara's strategic alliance with the West became a key reason that compelled the Turkish political establishment to shift their attention to the Middle East, and greater Eurasia (Erşen, 2022).

### *Varieties of Turkish Eurasianism and their ideological underpinnings*

It should be noted that there was not any compromise among Turkish intellectuals and politicians regarding forms, styles, and contents of Eurasianism (Tanrısever, 2018, p. 23). Turkish scholars emphasize the difficulty to properly categorize Eurasianists in Turkey. Unlike Russian Eurasianism which is theoretically and conceptually well-developed and well-established, Turkish Eurasianism has not been crystalized as it lacks the sophistication, theoretical and ideological depth (Kınıklioğlu, 2022, p. 21). Moreover, Turkish scholars underline that because of the conceptual and ideological deficiencies, there is not common ground among Turkish intellectuals regarding Eurasianism (Erşen, 2022; Tanrısever, 2018). That is why unlike Russian Eurasianism that has the single highly sophisticated neo-Eurasianist discourse defined, conceptualized, and promoted by Alexander Dugin, Turkish Eurasianism has not developed a comprehensive and all-embracing perspective, instead splitting into a variety of discourses depending on the political and ideological outlook and orientations of its proponents.

In Kınıklioğlu's view, Eurasianists in Turkey are mostly a subgroup of *ulusalcı*s, notably leftist secular nationalists who are united in their opposition to the West, considering themselves anti-imperialists, and pushing for pivot to Eurasia towards close cooperation with Russia and China against the US and Western imperialism (Kınıklioğlu, 2022, p. 6). Yet at the same time, studies point to the Western-oriented Eurasianism (Tanrısever, 2018), as well as currently neo-Eurasianists in Turkey position themselves as Kemalist Eurasianists (Kınıklioğlu, 2022). Kınıklioğlu stresses that Turkish neo-Eurasianists refer to themselves as Kemalist Eurasianists to provide legitimacy for their activity by exploiting traditional national support for the founder of the Turkish republic (Kınıklioğlu, 2022, p. 21). It is evident that Turkish Eurasianism is not a monolithic discourse theoretically and conceptually, rather it consists of diverse conflicting and overlapping discourses. According to Tufekci, neo-Ottomanism, Islam, and Turkish nationalism are ideological underpinnings of Turkish Eurasianism (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 123).

Other scholars likewise highlight diverse discourses of Turkish Eurasianism, which to a certain extent overlap with Tufekci's categorization. Tanrısever highlights the Western-oriented, pan-Turkist, and neo-Ottomanist discourses of Turkish Eurasianism (Tanrısever, 2018, p. 24-25), whereas Erşen (2022) identifies two key versions of Eur-

asianism in Turkey such as pan-Turkic and wider Eurasian. In Erşen's view (2022), while pan-Turkic Eurasianism is represented by nationalist-conservative circles in Turkey, wider Eurasian discourse is backed by national-patriotic groups. Moreover, while pan-Turkic Eurasianism is more exclusivist, and based on common ethnic, cultural, and linguistic affinities of Turkey with the Turkic republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, wider Eurasianism is more inclusive and comprehensive, focusing on Ankara's strategic alliance with Russia and China in their opposition to the Western imperialism (Erşen, 2022). According to Gurcan (2017), Turkish intellectuals and political groups are divided on Turkish Eurasianism, on its ideology and trajectory. Gurcan (2017) indicates four distinct varieties of Turkish Eurasianism such as pro-Russian Eurasianism, pan-Turkic Eurasianism, Islamist Eurasianism and Erdoğanist Eurasianism. Kınıklioğlu highlights that neo-Eurasianists in Turkey are divided into four main categories such as Perinçekists, non-Perinçekist, Turanists, and Islamist Eurasianists (Kınıklioğlu, 2022, p. 15).

If Russian neo-Eurasianism is built on Orthodox Christianity, Russian imperialism, and Russian nationalism, Turkish Eurasianism is built on Islamism, Turkism, and Ottomanism (Tufekci, 2017a). Tufekci (2017a) points to three distinct perspectives of Turkish Eurasianism such as Nationalist Eurasianism, Multiculturalist Eurasianism and Westernist Eurasianism. Nationalist Turkish Eurasianism has been defined and advanced by prominent Turkish intellectuals, political and military figures such as Anıl Çeçen, Şener Üşümezsoy, Özcan Yeniçeri, Ümit Özdağ, Namık Kemal Zeybek, Suat İlhan, Ali Külebi, Arslan Bulut, and İhsan Çomak (Tufekci, 2017b, p. 24). It should be noted that even within Nationalist Eurasianism there is not unanimity and consistency among its proponents regarding foreign policy approaches. Nationalist Eurasianism is greatly influenced by Turkish nationalism, pan-Turkism, pan-Turanism, Islamism and Ottomanism, and its prominent representatives perceive Eurasianism as the basis of Turkish identity (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 116).

An influential group within Nationalist Eurasianism is Turkish ultranationalists and pan-Turkists led by the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) founded by Alparslan Türkeş. Erşen (2022) argues that the discourse of pan-Turkism or Turkic world is a Turkish version of Eurasianism. Since the early 1990s Turkish rightist nationalist groups have advocated Turkish Eurasianism in the form of the Turkic Union that

includes Turkey and Turkic republics of the former USSR in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Pan-Turkic Eurasianism has been instrumental in establishing certain pan-Turkic political and economic institutions such as the Turkic Council (currently the Organization of Turkic States) (Erşen, 2022). At present time, the MHP led by Devlet Bahçeli is quite supportive of the Turkic unity and Turkic integration, and at the same time, pan-Turkists have reservations about Turkey's EU membership (Erşen, 2022). In addition to pan-Turkism, Nationalist Eurasianists pursue pan-Turanism, the unification of Turkic peoples with the Finno-Ugric peoples. Yet, while pan-Turkism is considered feasible to a certain extent, a prospective pan-Turan union is called into question ((Tufekci, 2017a). Nationalist Eurasianists is an eastern-oriented political discourse that places greater emphasis on rapprochement or an alliance with Eurasian countries like Iran, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkic republics in Central Asia. Some Nationalist Eurasianists are not in favor of a union with Russia as it has had a history of imperial expansion and domination most of its history; that is why such a union should be built with countries with no imperial ambitions, and past (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 116).

Yet at the core of Nationalist Eurasianism lies an idea of building an anti-Western and anti-American alliance with or without participation of Russia. Although they acknowledge that not all bad things come from the West, Turkey has to counter or resist the Western imperialism, and if Turkey keeps building a strategic alliance with the West, it may lose its national sovereignty and its Eurasian identity (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 116). Şener Üşümezsoy's nationalist Eurasianism is not only a counter-hegemonic discourse against American imperialism, but also against Russian imperialism because Russian Eurasianism is seen through the lens of Russia's endeavor to restore the Soviet empire and expand its influence into its neighborhoods (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 117). Nationalist Eurasianism is basically a counter-hegemonic discourse that excludes any country with imperial expansionist agenda from a prospective Eurasian Union project, and hence those political entities with imperial intentions such as the US, the EU and Russia cannot be part of such a Eurasian-wide union (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 117). However, not all Nationalist Eurasianists oppose and exclude Russia, there are certain prominent intellectuals and political figures such as Arslan Bulut, Özcan Yeniçeri, Ümit Özdağ, Namık Kemal Zeybek, Suat İlhan, Ali Külebi, and İhsan Çomak who are in favor of partnership with Russia (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 117).

Multiculturalist Eurasianism has been conceptualized and promoted by Attila İlhan, Doğu Perinçek, Mehmet Perinçek and others (Tufekci, 2017b, p. 24), who advocate an all-comprehensive and inclusive Eurasian Union that would include Turkey, Russia, the Turkic nations, Iran, and India to counter the collective West (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009; Tufekci, 2017a, p. 119). Multiculturalist Eurasianism is sometimes referred to as Kemalist Eurasianism, socialist or leftist Eurasianists, neo-Eurasianists, and Perinçekists (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009; Kınıklıoğlu, 2022). Akçali & Perinçek (2009) explain why multiculturalist or socialist Eurasianists identify themselves with the founder of the Turkish republic because Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was an ardent anti-imperialist and fought against Western imperial powers to liberate Turkey in 1919-1922. That is why, as Atatürk's followers, Doğu Perinçek and other Kemalist Eurasianists have inherited an anti-imperialist discourse and believe that they should continue to fight Western imperialism in conjunction with their allies within Turkey and beyond (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009). During the Turkish War of Independence in 1919-1922 Atatürk and his followers fought for national independence and destroyed the Western powers' plan to partition the country and put an end to the Turkish state by imposing upon the nation the Treaty of Sèvres (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009). So-called the "Sèvres complex" has been deeply ingrained and embedded in the national psyche in Turkey, and there is permanent and persistent fear that enemies of Turkey, first and foremost Europe and the USA have always had a sinister plan to destroy Turkey and they are intended to carry out this plan. Therefore, an idea of fighting enemies of Turkey, specifically countering Western imperialism, who is purportedly seeking to revive the Treaty of Sèvres, lies at the heart of Kemalist Eurasianism (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 556). That is why in views of Kemalist Eurasianists, Kemalism should not be identified with Westernization but rather with anti-imperialism because Atatürk never sought to Americanize or Westernize the country. In fact, his goal was not to emulate someone, but rather to participate in the development of a universal civilization as an equal and fully sovereign partner (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 552-554).

Since Europe and the US still harbor a plan to undermine and eventually dismantle the Turkish state, Multiculturalist or Kemalist Eurasianists tend to be vehemently anti-American and anti-Western, deeply suspicious and distrustful of the US and Europe (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022, p. 16). Converging Kemalism with socialist Eurasianism leftist intellectuals

in conjunction with political and military figures articulated a new geopolitical discourse of Eurasianism for Turkey as an alternative to Ankara's unidimensional Western foreign policy, advocating a strategic alliance with Eurasian states to counter the Western imperialism (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009). Negative perceptions of the US and European countries as sinister imperial powers seeking to threaten and divide up Turkey feed into anti-Western sentiments within Kemalist Eurasianism. In this regard, Kemalist Eurasianism is meant a paradigm and geopolitical shift in foreign policy of Turkey from traditional unidimensional Western orientation to the East, specifically to Eurasia by forging a strong alliance with Russia, Iran, the Turkic states, as well as even with Pakistan, India, China, where Turkey would be treated as an equal and respected partner (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 560; Colakoglu, 2019).

Attila İlhan argues that for the last two centuries Western imperialism was seeking to obstruct a rapprochement between Turks, Slavs, and Arabs, and was striving to colonize their lands. That is why, Attila İlhan points to Turkey's geopolitical significance and its ability to play a substantial role as a positive force in Eurasia, especially in countering Western imperialism and its encroachments into Eurasia (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 120). In his view, as an anti-Western alliance, a Eurasian Union may develop into one of the centers of world politics. Attila İlhan's view is shared by Doğu Perinçek, the leader of the Workers' Party (later the Patriotic Party), and Mehmet Perinçek, who are convinced that the US imperialism is too aggressive and has a global dimension in terms of American endeavor to forge a unipolar world order dominated by the US (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 120). From this perspective, Doğu Perinçek draws attention to the capabilities of Turkey, Russia, Iran, India, and China to project power as the major powerhouses in Eurasia in dealing with the Western imperialism, building a multipolar world as opposed to the US-dominated unipolar world. In this regard, Mehmet Perinçek suggests that a Eurasian Union can include any nation in the world except the US because the essence and mission of this union is to tackle and dismantle the US imperialism; such a union is perhaps only tool to counter the US influence and to save Turkey from the US aggression, and hence, a Eurasian Union is indispensable for Turkey (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009; Tufekci, 2017a).

Besides Nationalist and Multiculturalist Eurasianists, there is Westernist Eurasianism in Turkey, which is more accommodating, inclusive, and conciliatory. Conceptualized and articulated by Erel

Tellal, Sami Güçlü, Nabi Avcı, Akkan Süver, and Hakan Fidan, Westernist Eurasianism puts emphasis upon close cooperation virtually with all countries of Eurasia, calling for peaceful coexistence between the West and the East, between Eurasia and the Atlantic Western world (Tufekci, 2017b). According to this discourse, existing Eurasian institutions should not be regarded as conflicting or an alternative, but rather as complementary and mutually inclusive. Erel Tellal advocates strong collaboration with both the West and East and they ought not be seen as rival geopolitical entities (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 121). Similarly, Sami Güçlü claims that an artificial division of Eurasia into rival areas is wrong because Eurasia consists of Europe and Asia and thereby such artificial constructs ought to be abolished. He believes that as soon as Turkey is acceded into the EU, it can play a positive role in converging Europe and Asia into a holistic civilizational and geopolitical body (Tufekci, 2017a). Since Westernist Eurasianism is perceived as a softest and accommodating discourse of Turkish Eurasianism, it is broadly accepted by the decision makers, and it is believed that this discourse can enable Turkey to pursue its own independent foreign policy (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 121).

In Kınıklioğlu's opinion (2022), Islamist Eurasianism is in fact the smallest and least significant group within Turkish Eurasianism. Despite sharing similar ideology with Turkish nationalists, Islamist Eurasianists have been influenced by neo-Ottomanism and Islamism. In this sense, Islamists Eurasianism places greater emphasis on common Islamic Ottoman identity rather than Turkic ethnic identities (Kınıklioğlu, 2022). The neo-Ottomanist discourse has been backed by conservative Islamist segments of Turkish society, which trivialize narrow ethnic identity, prioritizing religious identity and brotherhood (Tanrısever, 2018, p. 26). In this sense, pan-Islamism is a counter-hegemonic vision that excludes ethnicity as an essential condition towards founding an Islamic state, and Muslim solidarity is necessary to challenge the Western imperialism (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 101). With the ascent of Özal, Ottomanism and pan-Islamism perspectives gained momentum in Turkey, and Özal's neo-Ottoman discourse was a synthesis of Turkism, Nationalism and Islamism (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 103). While Özal put greater emphasis on merging Turkishness and Islam into the official state discourse, with the ascent of Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) in 1995, and its leader Necmettin Erbakan, Islamist discourse became dominant (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 102-103). After the 1997 military coup against Erbakan, the Islamist

discourse lost its influence, yet with the rise of the AKP (the Justice and Development Party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) Islamism experienced its resurgence (Tufekci, 2017a, p. 105). Islamist Eurasianists are convinced that under the leadership of Erdoğan, through an alliance with Russia and China, Turkey will be able to raise its global eminence (Kınıklioğlu, 2022, p. 17).

### ***Impact of Turkish Eurasianist discourses on Turkey's foreign policy***

But the most important question is to what extent Turkish Eurasianism has fared in informing and guiding Turkey's foreign policy. Studies indicate the existing gaps between Eurasianists discourses and their translation into concrete actions. Kınıklioğlu (2022) claims that the influence of Turkish Eurasianists over Turkish policymaking is over-exaggerated. Similarly, Akçali & Perinçek (2009) point out that Kemalist Eurasianists have achieved little in Turkey. Over-exaggerated optimism regarding the impact of Eurasianism on Turkey's foreign policy is emphasized by Erşen who underlines that those political parties and groups advocating Eurasianism are not influential in Turkish society, and they merely constitute part of heated discussions about Turkish foreign policy (Erşen, 2022). That means Turkey is not strongly committed to Eurasianism and to close cooperation with Russia. When Eurasianism conflicts with the core Turkish national interests, Turkish Eurasianism can easily be dropped. Despite the existence of various discourses of Turkish Eurasianism, Turkey's Eurasianist policy is guided by a pragmatic approach, navigating between the West and East (Tanrısever, 2018).

Preeminence of a pragmatic approach in Turkish foreign policy is particularly emphasized in literature. This approach lies in the foreign policy doctrine that pursues pragmatic realist actions rather than pure ideological or sentimental course of action. Turkish leadership's embrace of a pragmatic version of Eurasianism has encouraged Turkey to gravitate towards Eurasia, even Turkey's possible membership in the SCO. These developments alarmed the West. However, Turkey has invoked a pragmatic version of Eurasianism to apply pressure on its Western partners (Tanrısever, 2018). Thus, Ankara's foreign policy is informed and guided by pragmatic political and economic concerns rather than ideological motivations, and Turkey's engagement with the OTS and SCO could be an example as evidence for this argument (Erşen, 2022). That is why Eurasianism may be invoked by Turkish political leaders when it fits their agenda as they approach



foreign policy issues from a purely pragmatic and realist perspective (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022). Ultimately, the full disengagement of Turkey from the Western political and security structures and entirely shift to Eurasia is unlikely and remote as Turkey's bond with the West is solid and its dependence on the West militarily and economically is strong.

Yet even if Turkey remains a member of NATO and committed to the West, it does not prevent Ankara from engaging itself in Eurasian institutions like the OTS and the SCO that remain crucial platforms guiding Ankara's Eurasian strategy in coming years (Erşen, 2022). Moreover, while remaining committed to the West and NATO, Turkey will likely keep pursuing a policy of strategic autonomy (Yavuz, 2022). Therefore, Turkey can neither depart from the West nor can it fully shift to Eurasia (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022). Studies highlight that due to their strong anti-Western and anti-imperialist stance, Turkish Eurasianists have allied themselves with the ruling AKP led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, enabling Turkish Islamists to turn into the most powerful political force and monopolize the power (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022). From this standpoint, Turkish Eurasianists reinforce and perpetuate an undemocratic authoritarian regime, increasingly undermining liberalism, democracy, and human rights (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022). It is believed that by enabling authoritarianism and dictatorship in Turkey, Turkish Eurasianists are steering the country away from the West towards undemocratic and illiberal Eurasia. It is a widely held belief that Atlanticism represents Western values of liberal democracy as opposed to Eurasianism that enshrines authoritarianism (Sevimlisoy, 2023). That is why Turkish Eurasianists' disregard for democracy and rule of law is perceived by pro-Western liberal intellectuals, political figures, and groups in Turkish society as a grave threat. Accordingly, Turkish liberals perceive Turkish Eurasianists as a group who either serves the interests of Turkish ultranationalists or the interests of Russia as its fifth column within Turkey (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 552). Hence, liberal Turkish intellectuals call for necessary measures to halt the Eurasian Moscow-Beijing axis, who is seeking to undermine the global order dominated by the West (Sevimlisoy, 2023).

## Conclusion

Turkish Eurasianism is a powerful discourse in Turkish society and politics that seeks to steer the nation towards a particular course of action and foreign policy orientation to Eurasia. Although the influence of Russian neo-Eurasianism articulated

by Alexander Dugin upon political debates and discussions unfolding in Turkey is apparent, Turkish Eurasianism has come into being independently and has been shaped and guided by the Kemalist ideology. Turkish Eurasianism has also been affected by a set of ideologies such as Turkish nationalism, pan-Turkism, pan-Turanism, neo-Ottomanism, Islamism and leftist perspectives. Therefore, Turkish Eurasianism is not a conceptually and theoretically monolithic discourse, rather it consists of a variety of discourses, comprising various conflicting and overlapping traditions such as Nationalist Eurasianism, Multiculturalist or Kemalist Eurasianism, Westernist Eurasianism and other paradigms. During the Cold War Turkey was part of the Western world led by the US, conducting unidimensional pro-Western Atlanticist foreign and security policy. In this regard, Turkey was considered a strategic frontier and outpost of the West in the East, highly dependent on the Western political and security structures and institutions. Turkey's foreign policy and national security was closely intertwined with the West and deeply embedded within the Western security system. Having already integrated itself into NATO, Turkey has persistently sought EU membership, which has remained out of reach. Disillusioned with the Western reluctance to admit Turkey into the EU, Turkish Eurasianists have ardently advocated a deep paradigm shift in Turkey's conventional pro-Western foreign policy, calling for the abandonment of Atlanticism in favor of Eurasianism.

The quest for autonomy in its foreign policy led Turkey to search for paradigm shifts in foreign policy and alternative geopolitical spaces to expand Turkish outreach. Yet within Turkish Eurasianism a variety of discourses envision the position of Turkey in regional and global politics from different perspectives. Multiple and diverse varieties of Turkish Eurasianism aim to make Turkey a great power, yet each of them seeks to achieve that goal in different ways. While Westernist Eurasianism strives to reconcile the West and East, Nationalist Eurasianists put greater emphasis upon the Turkic unity between Turkey and the Turkic states of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Multiculturalist or Kemalist Eurasianists strongly advocate the Turkish departure from the Western camp and its pivot to Eurasia, a close alliance with Russia, China, Iran, the Turkic states, and other countries to counter the Western imperialism. Even though there is a lack of agreement between these various versions of Turkish Eurasianism, it is evident that all of them to a certain extent are anti-Western, anti-imperialist, and counter-hegemonic discourses, except Western-oriented Eurasianism

that seems to have lost its relevance (Tanrısever, 2018). In fact, the core idea of Turkish Eurasianism lies in the disillusionment and animosity towards the West and building an alliance with Eurasian powers

to ensure Turkey's strategic autonomy in its foreign policy. To materialize this goal, Turkish Eurasianists are even willing to build a strategic alliance with Russia, Turkey's historic nemesis.

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### Information about the authors:

*Gabit Zhumatay (corresponding author) – Candidate of Historical Sciences, Assistant Professor of School of Law and Public Policy, Narxoz University (Kazakhstan, Almaty, e-mail: gabit.zhumatay@narxoz.kz)*

*Akmaral Yskak – Doctor of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor of School of Arts and Social Sciences, Narxoz University (Kazakhstan, Almaty, e-mail: akmaral.yskak@narxoz.kz)*

### Авторлар туралы ақпарат:

*Жұматай Габит Бекенұлы (корреспондент автор) – тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, Нархоз университетінің ассистент профессоры (Қазақстан, Алматы қ., e-mail: gabit.zhumatay@narxoz.kz)*

*Ысқақ Ақмарал Сыдығалықызы – тарих ғылымдарының докторы, Нархоз университетінің қауымдастырылған профессоры (Қазақстан, Алматы қ., e-mail: akmaral.yskak@narxoz.kz)*

**Информация об авторах:**

*Жұматай Ғабит Бекенұлы (корреспондентный автор) – кандидат исторических наук, ассистент профессор университета Нархоз (Казахстан, г. Алматы, e-mail: gabit.zhumatay@narhoz.kz)*

*Бісқақ Ақмарал Сыдығалықызы – доктор исторических наук, ассоциированный профессор университета Нархоз (Казахстан, г. Алматы, e-mail: aktaral.yskak@narhoz.kz)*

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