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# Debating Eurasia: Political Travels of a Geographical Concept in Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

This article reviews the ways in which various actors in Turkey have used the terms 'Eurasia' and 'Eurasianism' since the end of the Cold War. It presents two arguments. First, compared to Russian Eurasianism, it is difficult to talk about the existence of a 'Turkish Eurasianism'. Yet, the article employs the term Turkish Eurasianism as a shorthand to describe the ways in which Eurasia and Eurasianism are employed in Turkey. Second, Turkish Eurasianism is nothing but the use or instrumentalization of Eurasia to create a geopolitical identity for Turkey that legitimizes its political, economic, and strategic interests primarily in the post-Soviet space, but, from time to time, also in the Balkans and Africa. Various Turkish state and non-state actors have used Eurasia to mean different things and justify different goals: reaching out to Turkic Republics, being pro-Russian, creating a sphere of influence in former Ottoman lands, or, recently, cloaking anti-Western currents.

**Keywords:** Eurasia, Eurasianism, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey, Russia

## Avrasya'yı Tartışmak: Coğrafi Bir Kavramın Türkiye'deki Siyasi Yolculuğu

### ÖZET

Bu makale Soğuk Savaş sonrasında 'Avrasya' ve 'Avrasyacılık' kavramlarının Türkiye'de değişik aktörler tarafından kullanılmasını incelemektedir. Makalenin iki ana savı vardır. İlki, Rus Avrasyacılığıyla karşılaştırıldığında bir 'Türk Avrasyacılığı'ndan bahsetmek pek mümkün görünmemektedir. Buna rağmen, bu makalede, Türkiye'de Avrasya ve Avrasyacılığın kullanımı kısaca Türk Avrasyacılığı terimi ile karşılanmıştır. İkincisi ise, Avrasya ve Avrasyacılık kavramının, farklı dönemlerde, Türkiye için bir kimlik oluşturmakta kullanıldığı gibi, Türkiye'nin başta Sovyet sonrası alan olmak üzere, zaman zaman da Balkanlar ve Afrika'daki siyasi, ekonomik ve stratejik çıkarlarını meşrulaştırmak ve gerçekleştirmek için bu terimden faydalandığıdır. Çeşitli devlet ve devlet dışı aktörler, yeri geldiğinde bu terimleri, kimi zaman Türkiye'nin Türk Cumhuriyetleri ile olan ilişkilerini meşrulaştırmak, kimi zaman Rusya yanlısı politikalarının altını çizmek ya da Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun bir zamanlar sahip olduğu topraklarda bir nüfuz alanı tesis etmek veya daha yakın dönemde, Batı-karşıtlığını kamufler etmek için kullanmışlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrasya, Avrasyacılık, Türk Dış Politikası, Türkiye, Rusya

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O'Tuathail and Dalby have argued that geographical naming practices are not as innocent as they seem, but rather shape "the ongoing social reproduction of power and political economy."<sup>1</sup> The way that the terms 'Eurasia' and 'Eurasianism' are used in Turkey is an excellent such example. This article reviews the discourses produced by Turkish state, semi-state, and military actors, and the scholarly work produced around these discourses. It traces the ways in which the use of the terms Eurasia and Eurasianism have helped these actors in Turkish politics to reproduce Turkey's 'power' in a symbolic sense in the post-Cold War period.

While some scholars who have written about Eurasianism in Turkey do not specifically call it "Turkish Eurasianism," others prefer to define the situation with adjectives placed in front of Eurasia, i.e. Turkish Eurasianism,<sup>2</sup> or 'Kemalist Eurasianism',<sup>3</sup> 'Westernist multiculturalist Eurasianism',<sup>4</sup> and, recently, 'Erdoğanist Eurasianism'.<sup>5</sup> Within the first group, İmanov prefers to talk about 'reflections of Eurasia' in Turkey,<sup>6</sup> while Laruelle formulates the situation as 'the idea of Eurasia in Turkey',<sup>7</sup> or has chosen to describe the use of the term in Turkey as a "competition for the control over the concept of Eurasia in Turkey."<sup>8</sup> Erşen, too, is on the same wavelength as İmanov and Laruelle, preferring to regard the situation in Turkey as instrumentalizations of Eurasia as a geopolitical concept.<sup>9</sup> Yet, in a later piece, he also chooses to use Turkish Eurasianism,<sup>10</sup> showing the need to define and conceptualize these debates about Eurasia. İmanov, Laruelle, and Erşen argue that one cannot really talk about 'Eurasianism' in Turkey, at least in the Russian sense, because Eurasianism in Turkey, or frequent references to Eurasia under the guise of Eurasianism, lacks the theoretical and ideological rigor and sophistication that is present in Russian Eurasianism. This article concurs with this line of thought, and yet, very briefly, talks about Russian Eurasianism in the next section to clarify what is meant by Turkish Eurasianism lacking theoretical and ideological rigor.

There is, however, one interesting overlap between Russian and Turkish Eurasianisms. Mark Bassin et al. argue that the emergence of Eurasianism in Russia was in response to dealing with the 'perennial backwardness' of Russia vis-à-vis Europe/the West, finding the most appropriate way to run these countries, debating the civilizing mission of Russia in Asia, and inserting spirituality while

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- 1 Gearoid O'Tuathail and Simon Dalby, "Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics: Towards a Critical Geopolitics", Gearoid O'Tuathail and Simon Dalby (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 2.
  - 2 Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu, "Strategic Depth: A Neo-Ottomanist Interpretation of Turkish Eurasianism", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol 25, No 2, 2014, pp. 85-104; Ebru Eren-Webb, "To Which Eurasia Does Turkey Belong? A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Eurasianist Discourses", *Boğaziçi Journal*, Vol. 25, No 2, 2011, pp. 59-82.
  - 3 Emel Akçalı and Mehmet Perinçek, "Kemalist Eurasianism: An Emerging Geopolitical Discourse in Turkey", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 14, No 3, 2009, pp. 550-569.
  - 4 Özgür Tüfekçi, "Ahmet Davutoğlu's Foreign Policy Understanding: A Blend of Westernist and Multiculturalist Eurasianism", *The Arab World Geographer/Le Geographe du Monde Arabe*, Vol. 17, No 3, 2014, pp. 275-289.
  - 5 Metin Gürcan, "The Rise of the Eurasianist Vision in Turkey", <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/turkey-rise-of-euroasianist-vision.html> (Accessed 30 July 2017).
  - 6 Vügar İmanov, *Avrasyacılık: Rusya'nın Kimlik Arayışı*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2008, pp. 291-378.
  - 7 Marlene Laruelle, "Russo-Turkish Rapprochement through the Idea of Eurasia: Alexander Dugin's Networks in Turkey", *The Jamestown Foundation, Occasional Papers*, 2008.
  - 8 Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson Press/The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, p. 199.
  - 9 Emre Erşen, "The Evolution of 'Eurasia' as a Geopolitical Concept in Post-Cold War Turkey", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 18, No 1, 2013, pp. 24-44.
  - 10 Emre Erşen, "Geopolitical Traditions in Turkey: Turkish Eurasianism", Mark Bassin et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy*, London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017, pp. 263-281.

dealing with these issues.<sup>11</sup> When it comes to the emergence of Eurasia or Eurasianism in Turkey, the two issues that led to the emergence of Russian Eurasianism also shaped Turkish Eurasianism: an extensive search for an identity first in the post-Cold War and then in the post-9/11 international system, i.e. questions of self identification vis-à-vis the West; and, related to this, attempts to redefine Turkey's international role by rendering a civilizing role via the idea of the 'Turkish model'.<sup>12</sup> It was, however, the improvement of Turkey's ties with Russia and its simultaneous fallout with the United States and EU that led to a further increase in the use of the term Eurasia, which paved the way for Turkish Eurasianism.

## A Short History of Russian Eurasianism

The Oxford Online Dictionary defines Eurasia as the "continental landmass of Europe and Asia combined."<sup>13</sup> Eurasia, as a concept, came to life only in the nineteenth century, when the two continents—Europe and Asia—started to be imagined as one by two German geographers, Alexander von Humboldt and Oskar Peschel.<sup>14</sup> While the creation of the term Eurasia is attributed to these scholars, it was another geographer, Eduard Suess, an Austrian, who gave the term a geological spin, arguing that Europe and Asia, should be considered as one continent because both lay on one tectonic plate.<sup>15</sup> As Laruelle argues, Eurasia's transition from a geological term into an ideology happened after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, in the 1920s, when a group of émigré intellectuals tried to find an answer to centuries-old questions that engulfed the Russian Empire: whether or not Russia belonged to Europe or to Asia and what would be the best way to save and govern it and keep all of its ethnicities together.<sup>16</sup> These questions would be answered by Nikolai Trubetskoï (1890-1938) and Peter Savitski (1895-1968), the two most well known classical Eurasianists.<sup>17</sup>

In his works, Trubetskoï, highlighting the role of Asian (especially Mongol) influence in bringing out the distinctive character of the Russian ethos, criticized Peter the Great's modernization efforts,<sup>18</sup> and argued that Europeanization had eroded Russia's cultural fabric, unity, and self-

11 Mark Bassin et al., "What is Eurasianism and Who Made It?" Mark Bassin et al. (eds.), *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*, Pittsburgh, PA, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015, p. 1.

12 Akçalı and Perinçek, "Kemalist Eurasianism", p. 551; Erşen, "The Evolution of 'Eurasia'", p. 25; Erel Tellal, "Türk Dış Politikası'nda Avrasya Seçeneği", Mustafa Aydın (ed.), *Türkiye'nin Avrasya Macerası (1989-2006)*, Ankara, Nobel Yayınevi, 2007, p. 13.

13 "Eurasia" <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/eurasia> (Accessed 21 June 2017).

14 Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, p. 129.

15 Marlene Laruelle, "The Notion of Euraisa: A Spatial, Historical, and Political Construct", Edward Holland and Matthew Derrick (eds.), *Questioning Post-Soviet*, Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2016, p. 129; Emre Erşen, "Avrasyacılık ve Uluslararası İlişkiler", Sevinç Alkan Özcan (ed.), *Avrasya Konuşmaları: Medeniyet, Modernite, Kimlik*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2010, p. 33.

16 Laruelle, "The Notion of Eurasia", p. 129; Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 3; Vügar İmanov, "Klasik Avrasyacılık: Rus Medeniyet Kimliği İnşası", *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, No 35, 2007-2008, p. 2; Vügar İmanov, "Avrasyacılık: Alternatif Bir Dünya Düzenine Doğru Mu?" Mesut Özcan et. al (eds.), *Modernite ve Dünya Düzen(ler)i*, pp. 223-225; Muhittin Tolga Özsağlam, "Geçmişten Günümüze Avrasyacılık", *Kıbrıs Yazıları*, No 3, 2006, p. 114.

17 Mark Bassin et al., "What is Eurasianism and Who Made It?" Mark Bassin et al. (eds.), *Between Europe and Asia*, p. 4; İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 65.

18 Mark Bassin, "Classical Eurasianism and the Geopolitics of Russian Identity", *Ab Imperio*, No 2, p. 257 and 259; İmanov, "Klasik Avrasyacılık", p. 4.

confidence, causing significant self-alienation.<sup>19</sup> Trubetskoi and other Eurasianists also wrote a great deal about the ways and means that would help best govern Russia politically and economically.<sup>20</sup> The solution would be inventing a ‘third way’—something between capitalism and socialism and also between liberalism and dictatorship—because Russia was unique, third way country, i.e. a Eurasian country.<sup>21</sup>

The other ideologue of the movement, Peter Savitski, argued that rather than thinking of Russia as partly in Europe and partly in Asia, one should conceive of Russia as Eurasia because both Europe and Asia were a single, continuous continent and the Ural Mountains should not be considered as a border dividing Europe and Asia.<sup>22</sup> Savitski based his argument that Eurasia was a single distinct continent on different categories, such as climate, fauna, flora, and soil, which were in unison throughout Eurasian geography, lending somewhat scientific credentials to the conception of a unified-yet-distinct idea of Eurasia.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, classical Eurasianism had several tenets. The first was its criticism of Europe as the ‘only’ source of development and progress for Russia. The classical Eurasianists opposed the idea of Europe being considered the sole yardstick for measuring economic and political progress in Russia. The second was the acknowledgement of the idea of hybridity, or the fusion that encompassed the Eurasian geography; for them, if it was not for the Mongol invasion, the Slavic tribes would not have come together to form a Russian identity and protect Orthodoxy—an approach that led to the formation of a narrative that had an extremely positive view of the Mongolian and Turanian elements as the reason for this fusion.<sup>24</sup> Third was the idea that not being European and commandeering a distinct geography rendered Russia unique and exceptional. Fourth, Eurasianism wanted to create a third way ideology that tried to spawn a solution for best governing Russian state and society.<sup>25</sup> Put differently, Eurasianism was not only a school of thought, or an ideology that aimed to find an alternative way to best run Russia internally, but also, at the international level, it tried to find a way to elevate Russia’s position vis-à-vis the West.

The classical Eurasianist movement had its heyday in the 1920s, but slowly disappeared in the 1930s when some of its members were co-opted by the Bolshevik regime.<sup>26</sup> Although the life of classical Eurasianism was short, its brief existence provided the necessary ammunition for the revival of the idea in the 1990s in post-Soviet Russia as ‘neo-Eurasianism’. Lev Gumilev (1912-1992), who produced his work almost a generation after the classical Eurasianists, is usually credited for making this connection.<sup>27</sup>

19 İmanov, “Avrasyacılık: Alternatif Bir Dünya Düzenine Doğru mu?” p. 223.

20 İmanov, “Klasik Avrasyacılık”, pp. 4-5; Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 25-30.

21 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 25.

22 Mark Bassin, “Russia Between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No 1, Spring 1991, p. 14; İmanov, “Klasik Avrasyacılık”, p. 3.

23 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 32.

24 Bassin et al., “What Was Eurasianism and Who Made It ?” p. 8; Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 38.

25 Ibid., p. 27.

26 Bassin et al., “Russia Between Europe and Asia”, p. 8; İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 147-160; Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 22-23.

27 Gumilev’s correspondence with Petr Savitskii and Vernadskii is the reason why most texts about the history of Eurasianism credit Lev Gumilev as the person linking the classical Eurasianists and the neo-Eurasianists—though with some grain of salt. See for example, Martin Beisswenger, “Was Lev Gumilev a ‘Eurasianist?’: A New Look at His Postwar Contact with Petr Savitskii”, *Ab Imperio*, No 1 2013, pp. 85-108; İmanov, “Avrasyacılık: Alternatif Bir Dünya Düzenine

Gumilev was interested in explaining the rise and the fall, and the stages in between, of nations or *ethnos*, in Gumilev's terminology. His theory of *ethnogenesis* argued that the emergence of certain *ethnos* on the world stage would happen with the appearance of *passionarii* (passionary individuals) who come into being as a result of heightened levels of cosmic energy at certain parts of the world at certain times. These *passionarii* would then bring different groupings together to create a synthesis of not only a new group of people, but also new types of social and political behavior. As the number of *passionarii* increased and decreased, *ethnos* would, according to Gumilev, rise and decline.<sup>28</sup> Gumilev also revised the Mongol chapter in Russian history, saying that rather than being invaded by the Mongols, Russians made an alliance with them and co-existed peacefully—something that would go against the arguments of the classical Eurasianists who insisted on the existence of the Mongol invasion, but rather portrayed it positively because of its unifying character on the dispersed Russian tribes.<sup>29</sup> Though Gumilev diverged from the classical Eurasianists in this regard, he agreed with them on many other issues, including Russia as an exceptional civilization separate from Europe and Asia, anti-Westernism, criticism of the Euro-centric reading of world history, the ethnic fusion that formed the Russian nation, and the interaction of history with geography in determining the fate of nations.<sup>30</sup>

Gumilev died in 1992 as the Soviet Union disintegrated, which left countries in the post-Soviet space, especially Russia, scrambling for an identity in the international system. Led by Aleksandr Dugin, a new group, called the 'neo-Eurasianists' took Gumilev and his predecessors, the classical Eurasianists, as their points of inspiration.<sup>31</sup> Dugin accepts some of the arguments made by the classical Eurasianists yet he departs from them as well. For example, he concurs with them on the role that the Mongols played in making contemporary Russia and on Russian exceptionalism,<sup>32</sup> but he does not subscribe to the idea of the West being an antithesis of Russia. Instead, he considers the West a place that would come under the domination of Russia—when Russia creates alliances as part of pursuing Eurasianist geopolitics—placing Russia back on track as a major power against the Atlanticist-globalizationist camp.<sup>33</sup> This Eurasianist Alliance, which was the only way to fight against the Atlanticists, according to Dugin, would be larger than the post-Soviet space and would include parts of China and the Orthodox Balkans. Yet in Dugin's alliance making scheme, the Turkic people were given an unclear position depending on whether or not they were in a cooperative or non-cooperative position towards Russia.<sup>34</sup> Finally, what makes Dugin important for the purposes of this article is that he was the one who led the International Eurasianist Movement in 2003 that tried to reach out to groups sympathetic to the idea of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan and Turkey,<sup>35</sup> connecting

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Doğru mu?" p. 229; Laruelle, "The Notion of Eurasia", p. 130. In *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Laruelle argues that Gumilev "was not "the last Eurasianist" as Gumilev called himself, but an initiator of one of the versions of neo-Eurasianism, see Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 81

28 Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2016, pp. 55-59.

29 Vügar İmanov, "Geçmişle Hal Arasında 'Son Avrasyacı': Lev Nikolayeviç Gumilev (1912-1992)", *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, No 23, 2004-2005, p. 157.

30 Ibid.; Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, pp. 105-106.

31 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 83. This does not, of course mean that neo-Eurasianism is strictly limited to Dugin. Neo-Eurasianism also has followers in different circles as well. See, İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 213-239.

32 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 116.

33 Ibid., p. 116-117; İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 204-206.

34 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 118.

35 Ibid., p. 113.

with the self-proclaimed Eurasianists of Turkey led by Doğu Perinçek. However, besides the Doğu Perinçek-led Workers' Party (İşçi Partisi),<sup>36</sup> there were other state and non-state actors who used Eurasia or subscribed to some version of self-created Eurasianism without having organic ties to Dugin or Perinçek. The following section reveals that much of 'Turkish Eurasianism' is about employing the term Eurasia in their discourses rather than subscribing to any kind of Eurasianism *per se*.

## The 'Not-So-State' Agents of Turkish Eurasianism

The intricate ties of state and non-state actors make a clear-cut categorization of Turkish Eurasianism extremely difficult. However, scholars have attempted to offer a classification that combines both non-state or semi-state actors or state actors both from the right and the left of the political spectrum, who have used Eurasia or claim to subscribe to Eurasianism in their thinking on Turkey.<sup>37</sup>

On the left, İmanov traces the first appearance of Eurasia to a special issue of the *Ulusal* journal in 1996 that was known to be close to Democratic Left Party and Doğu Perinçek's Workers' Party.<sup>38</sup> This first group was known as the *Ulusalçıs*, or, as İmanov puts it, the 'nationalists'.<sup>39</sup> The most important ingredient that rallied the intellectuals around *Ulusal* and Perinçek was its subscription to Kemalism, or better said, neo-Kemalism as a potential solution to the ills of the countries in Eurasia, with a pinch of Sultan Galiyevism, staunch anti-imperialism, and an association and pre-dating of Eurasianism to Atatürk and his early Republican foreign policy.<sup>40</sup> Doğu Perinçek, on the other hand, in his short articles under the title of *Avrasya Seçeneği: Türkiye İçin Bağımsız Dış Politika* (Eurasia Option: Independent Foreign Policy for Turkey), does not directly link Atatürk with Eurasia; instead, he highlights the fact that Turkey was an 'oppressed nation' before the War of Liberation, thus underscoring the anti-imperialist nature of the war.<sup>41</sup> As İmanov notes, oppressed nations is one of the common points in neo-Kemalist nationalists' thinking, although a difference of opinion did exist among members as to how to classify 'oppressors' and 'imperialists'. For example, some contributors to *Ulusal*, including its editor, would see Russia (and also China) as oppressors in Eurasia, and thus have no place for it in their strategy, while Bülent Ecevit, the former Prime Minister of Turkey, argued in *Ulusal* that Turkey could not distance itself either from Russia or the United States when becoming an actor in Eurasia.<sup>42</sup> For Mehmet Perinçek, Doğu Perinçek's son, on the other hand, after 1990, Russia too became an

36 Doğu Perinçek renamed his party the Fatherland Party (*Vatan Partisi*) in 2015.

37 Vügar İmanbeyli, "Failed Exodus: Dugin's Networks in Turkey", Marlene Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship*, London, Lexington Books, 2015), p. 146; Erşen, "The Evolution of 'Eurasia'"; Erşen, "Geopolitical Traditions in Turkey", pp. 263-281; Eren-Webb, "To Which Eurasia Does Turkey Belong? A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Eurasianist Discourses", pp. 59-82; Özgür Tüfekçi, "Turkish Eurasianism: Roots and Discourses", Özgür Tüfekçi et al. (eds.), *Eurasian Politics and Society: Issues and Challenges*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, pp. 1-35; Mehmet Aça, "Avrasyacı Yaklaşımın Türkiye Çeşitlenmeleri ve Türk Dünyasının Geleceği", in Emine Gürsoy-Naskali and Erdal Şahin (eds.), *Bağımsızlıklarının 10. Yılında Türk Cumhuriyetleri*, Haarlem, SOTA, 2002, pp. 159-176; and Laruelle, "Russo-Turkish Rapprochement through the Idea of Eurasia", p. 10.

38 İmanov, "Avrasyacılık: Rusya'nın Kimlik Arayışı", pp. 299-300.

39 İmanbeyli, "Failed Exodus", p. 147.

40 İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 307. See for example, Anıl Çeçen, "Atatürk ve Avrasya", Erol Göka and Murat Yılmaz (eds.), *Uygarlığın Yeni Yolu Avrasya*, İstanbul, Kızılelma Yayıncılık, 1998, p. 131; "Atilla İlhan İle Söyleşi: Avrasya Kutbu ve Siyaset Tarihi Üzerine", Göka and Yılmaz (eds.), *Uygarlığın Yeni Yolu Avrasya*, p. 137.

41 Doğu Perinçek, "Yeni Dünya Düzeni ve Dış Politika Seçeneği", *Avrasya Seçeneği: Türkiye İçin Bağımsız Dış Politika*, İstanbul, Kaynak Yayınları, 1996, p. 20.

42 İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 301.

oppressed country because its interests had become the same with the other oppressed countries.<sup>43</sup> Though some of the leading nationalists are divided as how to categorize the oppressed nations, Atilla İlhan, Doğu Perinçek, and Mehmet Perinçek are all staunchly anti-American and pro-Russian, as well as oppose Turkey's presence in NATO.<sup>44</sup> Finally, what distinguishes the Perinçeks from the rest is the links that they established with Dugin around 2003.<sup>45</sup> This happened despite Perinçek's and Dugin's visions of Eurasianism differed in various ways,<sup>46</sup> and despite Dugin's previous remarks that saw Turkey as subservient to Atlanticist interests.<sup>47</sup> Their despise of American hegemony and 'anti-imperialist' stance had brought them together.<sup>48</sup>

On the right, İmanov gives a threefold breakdown of Turkish Eurasianism that involves the nationalists,<sup>49</sup> Ottomanists, and Gulenists. Among the nationalists that espoused Eurasianism, Namık Kemal Zeybek and Ümit Özdağ are two important names. Zeybek, a former Minister of Culture from 1989 to 1991 and an advisor to Süleyman Demirel from 1992 to 1995, was one of the prominent names among the nationalist right with links to Ahmet Yesevi University and *Yeni Avrasya* journal. He argued for a Eurasian Union or the unification of the Turkic nations and groups in Eurasia.<sup>50</sup> The priority, according to Zeybek, should not be cooperation with Russia, but the formation of a Turkish Eurasianism that would put Turkey at the center of this formation.<sup>51</sup> A similar Turkey-centered approach that unifies all Turkic groups and also other 'related communities' under the understanding of Eurasianism can be found in Ümit Özdağ's writings, who established and led *Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi* (ASAM) (Eurasian Strategic Research Center) from 1999 to 2004.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the nationalist-Turanist-Turkist version, the neo-Ottomanist Eurasianists emerged around 2002 in *Yarın* journal.<sup>53</sup> According to articles appearing in this journal, Eurasia was a geography that placed Turkey at the center and the 'subjects' of the former Ottoman Empire around Turkey, and it was this mix of nations that would protect both the Islamic world and the Turkish world. This would be open to the conscience of humanity representing an alternative globalization and get on well with the EU and Russia at the same time.<sup>54</sup> According to Demirhan, the pieces in *Yarın* also offered an alternative vision for Turkish domestic politics through a pax-Ottomana, thus making Turkish Eurasianism similar to Russian Eurasianism by focusing on both the internal and external affairs of Turkey.<sup>55</sup> The Gulenists, too, had their own version of Eurasianism, mostly presented in *Diyalog Avrasya* (DA) journal, published in both Turkish and Russian. As the title of the

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43 Ibid., p. 36.

44 "Atilla İlhan İle Söyleşi", p. 136; Perinçek, "Yeni Dünya Düzeni ve Dış Politika Seçeneği", p. 23; Mehmet Perinçek, *Avrasyacılık: Türkiye'deki Teori ve Pratiği*, İstanbul, Bilgi Yayınevi, 2006, p. 15.

45 For an excellent discussion of these ties, see İmanbeyli, "Failed Exodus".

46 İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 314.

47 İmanbeyli, "Failed Exodus", p. 155.

48 İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 315.

49 Though İmanov classifies this group "nationalist", this group could be better described as 'Turkist' or 'Turanist'.

50 İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 317.

51 Ibid., p. 317; Mehmet Mert Kaleci, "Ülkücü Hareket ve Avrasyacılık", *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, No 23, 2004-2005, p. 249.

52 İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 321.

53 Ibid., p. 339.

54 Ahmet Özcan, "Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset", *Yarın*, December 2005 quoted in İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 339.

55 Demirhan Fahri Erdem, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Avrasya ve Avrasyacılık: Algılamalar Yaklaşımlar ve Stratejiler* Ankara, Barış Kitap, 2016, p. 182, 184.



journal indicated, this version of Eurasianism mostly targeted a cultural dialogue by bringing different intellectuals from the region and Turkey, but lacked a specific political message.<sup>56</sup>

Interestingly enough, in the early 2000s, the Eurasianists on the left and right would unite as the *Kızıl elma Koalisyonu* (The Red Apple Coalition). Fueled by staunch anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism, the Perinçekists and the intellectuals around *Ulusal* would situate themselves on the left. They thought that EU harmonization undermined Turkey's territorial integrity and interests, and that by turning East, Eurasia would be the solution to Turkey's problems. This led the *Ulusalcılar* to overlap with groups of the nationalist right, leading to the formation of the *Kızıl elma Koalisyonu*.<sup>57</sup> But the left and right ostensibly finding a common ground on Eurasia did not change the fact that Eurasia and the idea of Eurasianism was an addendum to their existing ideology, rather than being a purely ideological position, as it was the case with the Russian Eurasianism. What is more, these actors have also developed a tendency to think of any hybridity (geographical, ethnic or like) as Eurasianism, without understanding the nuances of hybridity and fusion or the role of the outsiders, i.e. the Mongols, in creating it, in the way Russian Eurasianism does.

## State Actors and “Turkish Eurasianism”

### *Turkish Eurasianism in the First Decade of the Post Cold War Period*

Similar trends can also be observed in the discourses of state actors as well. The first frequent appearance of Eurasia in the lexicon of Turkey's politicians is around 1992, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. From the perspective of Turkish foreign policy, this was a period in which Turkish foreign policy makers would not only start using the term Eurasia, but also think of Eurasia in conjunction with the West and Western interests, locating Turkey both geographically and functionally, at the center of Eurasia. Overall, up until the 2000s, Eurasia, for Turkish politicians, meant the advancement of Turkey's interests in the post-Soviet space, especially vis-à-vis the Turkic states, but not very overtly. This advancement, however, is thought in conjunction with the advancement of U.S. and European interests and, more broadly, with the interests of the Transatlantic community, placing Turkey at the center of the world map in terms of function and location. This was simply a product of the mindset that continued to see Russia as Turkey's enemy in the region and paradoxically tried to chart a central role for Turkey in the new international system by extending Turkish interests as part of the Western interests into the region. Yet the focus on Turkic states as part of an understanding of Eurasia as a means to extending Western interests ended with Turkey being accused of pan-Turkism.<sup>58</sup> Yet the term Eurasia quickly became a foreign policy instrument trying to advance Turkish interests into the post-Soviet space.

During these years, for example, while the then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel stated that a unified Europe and a unified Eurasia would serve peace,<sup>59</sup> Hikmet Çetin, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, argued that “Turkey was the country to establish the emergence of Eurasia as a

56 İmanov, “Avrasyacılık”, p. 334; Aça, “Avrasyacı Yaklaşımın Türkiye Çeşitlemeleri”, p. 170.

57 Kaleci, “Ülkücü Hareket”, p. 243.

58 Büşra Ersanlı, “Türkiye'nin Dış İlişkilerinde Türkçülük ve Avrasya”, Emine Gürsoy-Naskali and Erdal Şahin (eds.), *Bağımsızlıklarının 10. Yılında Türk Cumhuriyetleri*, Haarlem, SOTA, 2002, pp. 145-157.

59 Süleyman Demirel, *Başbakan Süleyman Demirel'in Konuşmaları, 1.3.1992-31.5.1992*, (no place, no press: 1992), p. 398.

fact, and that this fact should be evaluated in conjunction with the strategic future of Euro-Atlantic community,”<sup>60</sup> and that “Turkey was a European country located at the crossroads of Eurasia.”<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, though former Turkish President Turgut Özal advocated the establishment of strong ties with the Turkic Republics and saw it as an opportunity that opened ‘the door of potentials’<sup>62</sup> for Turkey, he did not have the opportunity to pronounce the term Eurasia, as much as others, as he died in April 1993, after returning from a long and exhaustive trip from the former-Soviet Turkic Republics.

In an attempt to institutionalize relations in the early 1990s, Turkey would be very active in the region and take various measures. These measures included the creation a Turkish Agency for Technical and Economic Cooperation (TiKA), modeled after the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), to provide development aid to a group of countries in the Balkans and post-Soviet space. Also, two organizations were set up: the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to provide a platform for border security and economic cooperation. Direct flights started on Turkish Airlines to the capitals of these countries; in addition to the schools of the Gülen community, schools were established and run directly by the Ministry of National Education, providing scholarships to students coming from the region to study in Turkey; a platform called Turkic Summits was created to bring the leaders of these countries together; and efforts to form a common cultural ground were made by establishing TRT-Avrasya and TÜRKSOY (Türk Kültür ve Sanatları Ortak Yönetimi)—an institution aiming at the management of Turkish culture and arts.<sup>63</sup>

Turkey’s extensive engagement in the region did not mean that its politicians had a clear-cut definition of Eurasia. For them, the term came to mean the landmass “from Belarus to Tajikistan,”<sup>64</sup> or the area from “Vancouver to Vladivostok;”<sup>65</sup> or as the frequently used slogan of the era stated, “the twenty-first century would be the century of Turks, from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall.”<sup>66</sup> Tansu Çiller, then the Prime Minister, portrayed the ‘Turkish World’ (*Türk Dünyası*) in the “heart of Eurasia,” and argued, “the Turkish World, which is in the center of Europe and Asia, was a bridge between different civilizations, cultures, religions and nations.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in Çiller’s first government program, Europe was declared an inseparable geopolitical entity from Eurasia, and Turkey a major contributor to Eurasian security, cooperation, and stability.<sup>68</sup> For İsmail Cem, the Minister of Culture from July to October 1995 and the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1997 to 2002, writing in 1998,

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60 *Dışişleri Bakanı Hikmet Çetin Tarafından Dışişleri Bakanlığı 1993 Mali Yılı Bütçe Tasarısının TBMM Genel Kurul’unda Görüşmesi Vesilesiyle Yapılacak Konuşma* (np: 1992), p. 2.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

62 Turgut Özal, “Özal: Türkiye’nin Önünde Hacet Kapıları Açılmıştır”, Interview by Mustafa Çalık, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, No 19, 1992, pp. 5-23.

63 Erşen, “The Evolution of ‘Eurasia’”, pp. 27-28; Tellal, “Türk Dış Politikası’nda Avrasya Seçeneği”, pp. 23-25.

64 *Dışişleri Bakanı Hikmet Çetin Tarafından Dışişleri Bakanlığı 1993 Mali Yılı Bütçe Tasarısının TBMM Genel Kurul’unda Görüşmesi Vesilesiyle Yapılacak Konuşma*, p. 2.

65 Süleyman Demirel, “DEİK, KEİ İş Konseyi ve CERA Tarafından Düzenlenen “Üç Denizin Hikayesi” Konferansında Yaptıkları Konuşma”, <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/konusmaları-suleyman-demirel/1718/4142/deik-kei-is-konseyi-ve-cera-tarafindan-duzenlenen-uc-denizin-hikayesi-konferansinda-yaptiklari-konusma.html> (Accessed 4 July 2017).

66 Erşen, “The Evolution of ‘Eurasia’”, p. 27.

67 Tansu Çiller, “Avrasya’nın Kalbinde Türk Dünyası”, *Yeni Türkiye*, No 15, 1997, p. 30.

68 İrfan Neziroğlu and Tuncer Yılmaz, *Hükümetler, Programları ve Genel Kurul Görüşmeleri (9 Kasım 1989-30 Ekim 1995)*, Vol. 8, Ankara, TBMM Basımevi, 2013, p. 6741.

argued that Eurasia was “the geography stretching from Western Europe to Western China,” and 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.”<sup>69</sup> Yet these unclear boundaries of Eurasia also greatly contributed to the liminal-hybrid identity that Turkey was trying to create in the post-Cold War period.<sup>70</sup> Bülent Ecevit, in 2000, for example, argued:

The Turkish nation is not only European. It is also Central Asian, Middle Eastern, Caucasian, and belongs to the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean as well. The hybrid nature of the Turkish nation is not a liability, but an asset. This is especially true when Europe and Asia are integrating; this hybrid identity of the Turkish nation and its location has gained importance in this Eurasianization process.<sup>71</sup>

This Europe-centered Eurasia view excluded Russia until 2001. While, for example, a 1992 treaty between Turkey and Russia described the location of both countries as “the merging point of Europe and Asia,” only in a November 2001 agreement did Turkey and Russia consider each other the two states of Eurasia, carrying the features of Europe and Asia as a result of history, culture, and a common geography.<sup>72</sup>

### **“Turkish Eurasianism” and the Justice and Development Party (JDP)**

Interestingly, when the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government was handed a question in Parliament regarding this 2001 agreement, which had been signed by the previous government, and was asked whether the agreement intended a ‘Eurasian Union’, the answer was that the intention was neither to form a Eurasian Union nor an alternative to the existing commitments of Turkey.<sup>73</sup> From this neutral beginning toward Russia and Eurasia, however, the 17-year period of JDP government introduced several different twists to the way Eurasia is understood by Turkey’s politicians. One of these twists was Ahmet Davutoğlu’s introduction of the term ‘Afro-Eurasia’. The term first appeared in Davutoğlu’s *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth: The International Position of Turkey) in 2001 and included the countries of the Islamic Conference Organization.<sup>74</sup> While Davutoğlu invented the term Afro-Eurasia, his thinking of Eurasia, as the sub-title of a chapter indicates, was more Central-Asia focused.<sup>75</sup> Yet at the same time, Davutoğlu argued that “Ottoman history contained these Eurasian elements.”<sup>76</sup>

69 İsmail Cem, “The Eurasian Dimension”, in *Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Speeches and Texts Presented at International Fora (1995-2000)*, Nicosia, Rüstem, 2000, pp. 25-26.

70 Lerna K. Yanık, “Constructing Turkish “Exceptionalism”: Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 30, No 2, 2011, p. 85.

71 “Başbakan Sayın Bülent Ecevit’in Uluslararası Avrupa Birliği Şurası’nın Açılışında Yaptığı Konuşma (3 Mayıs 2000)” in *Başbakan Bülent Ecevit’in Konuşmaları* (1 Ocak-30 Mart 2000), Ankara, Başbakanlık Yayınevi, 2000, p. 147.

72 “Türkiye Cumhuriyet ile Rusya Federasyonu Arasındaki İlişkilerin Esasları Hakkında Antlaşma”, [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc07703927.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc07703927.pdf) (Accessed 20 July 2017) and “Samsun Milletvekili Sayın Mehmet Kurt’un Yazılı Soru Önergesi”, <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d22/7/7-0660c.pdf> (Accessed 20 July 2017).

73 “Samsun Milletvekili Sayın Mehmet Kurt’un Yazılı Soru Önergesi”, <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d22/7/7-0660c.pdf> (Accessed 20 July 2017).

74 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu*, 81th edition, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2012, pp. 247-250.

75 Ibid., p. 455.

76 Ibid., p. 205.

The existence of the term Eurasia did not preclude Davutoğlu from using the term Afro-Eurasia in different venues, including in a collected volume of his speeches and interviews titled *Küresel Bunalım: 11 Eylül Konuşmaları* (The Global Crisis: September 11 Speeches). In it, Davutoğlu argued that in order to better position itself, “Turkey should be carrying its geographical depth in Afro-Eurasia and should synthesize its Eastern features with the rationality of the West.”<sup>77</sup> The Afro-Eurasia concept took on a life of its own during Davutoğlu’s tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister. Davutoğlu argued that

In terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia’s vast landmass, it may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character. Like Russia, Germany, Iran, and Egypt, Turkey cannot be explained geographically or culturally by associating it with one single region. Turkey’s diverse regional composition lends it the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously; in this sense, it controls an area of influence in its immediate environs.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, he used the term Afro-Eurasia first to justify Turkey’s presence in Africa under the name of *Afrika Açılımı* (African Initiative) and second to claim that Turkey was a ‘center’ state rather than a ‘bridge’, as Afro-Eurasia became one of the markers of Turkey’s central role and unique position in the lexicon of Turkish politicians.

Yet one cannot talk about the rise and fall of Afro-Eurasia during the JDP period and whether this constitutes another form of Eurasianism as if they were independent of the international context, which was greatly marked by the deterioration of Turkey’s ties with the United States and EU.<sup>79</sup> The neoliberal export-oriented growth model that Turkey adopted in the 1980s was amplified under the JDP, enabling Turkey to emerge as a ‘trading state’ in the last decade or so.<sup>80</sup> This became a great impetus for Turkey to further improve its relations with Russia, which had already started to improve since the early 2000s. The improvement was significant especially in the economic realm, and meant creating new areas of cooperation in trade, tourism, and energy, even setting a target of \$100 billion of trade volume by 2023.<sup>81</sup>

The improvement in Turkey-Russia ties continued until the downing of the Russian SU-24 in November 2015, despite the fact that Turkey and Russia supported different sides in the Syrian Civil War and other crises, such as the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and Georgian-Russian War in 2008—a clear manifestation of the fact that both sides tolerated each other in political disputes, giving economic interests a priority.<sup>82</sup> The crisis that came in the aftermath of the downing of the SU-24 was eventually overcome when President Erdoğan sent an ‘apology’ letter to President Putin in June 2016; and it was accompanied with Turkey making a U-turn in its Syria policy, concurring

77 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Küresel Bunalım: 11 Eylül Konuşmaları*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2002, p. 207.

78 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2008, p. 78.

79 Ziya Öniş, and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey During the AKP Era”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2009, pp. 7-24.

80 Kemal Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 40, 2009, pp. 29-56.

81 “Türkiye ve Rusya Arasındaki Karşılıklı Güven Bölgenin Barış ve İstikrarına Katkı Yapacak”, <https://www.tcceb.gov.tr/haberler/410/1534/turkiye-ile-rusya-arasindaki-karsilikli-guven-bolgenin-baris-ve-istikrarina-katki-yapacak.html> (Accessed 25 July 2017).

82 Lerna K. Yanık, “Keep(ing) Calm and Carry(ing) On Business’: Turkey-Russia Relations at a Glance”, *Turkish Review*, Vol. 5, No 5, 2015, pp. 366-375.

with Russian policy.<sup>83</sup> Turkey-Russia relations even survived yet another crisis in December 2016: the murder of the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, Andrey Karlov, in Ankara by an off-duty Turkish police officer.<sup>84</sup>

Starting from the mid-2000s, this improvement of Turkey's ties to its 'East' and the deterioration of its ties with the 'West' prompted foreign and domestic observers and scholars to evaluate Turkey and Russia in Eurasia from a variety of perspectives, including a slow shift towards Eurasianism. For example, Hill and Taşpınar suggested in 2006 the formation of an 'axis of the excluded' between Turkey and Russia;<sup>85</sup> and Aras and Fidan, who went on to become the chief of Turkish National Intelligence Organization, interpreted the situation in 2009 as Turkey's new "geographic imagination in Eurasia."<sup>86</sup> Bilgin and Bilgiç, in contrast, argued that there is nothing new in the JDP's "new foreign policy towards Eurasia," other than approaching the region from a civilizational perspective, and thus placing Turkey at the center of it, thus effectively placing the country outside the Western civilization.<sup>87</sup> Öniş and Yılmaz, on the other hand, evaluated the situation as Turkey's retreat to 'soft Euro-Asianism', meaning that Turkey is active "in all neighboring regions, but with no firm EU axis as was the case (before)."<sup>88</sup> While Tüfekçi likened Davutoğlu's argument that "Turkey is the glue which brings together Europe and Asia," to "Russia in the mindset of classical Eurasianism during the 1920s and 1930s,"<sup>89</sup> Tüysüzöğlü said that "an Afro-Eurasian discourse may be viewed as an attempt to link the Ottoman geography to Turkish Eurasianist thought."<sup>90</sup> Yılmaz and Bahrevskiy, meanwhile, said that the multiethnic structure of the Ottoman Empire was an indication of 'Ottoman Eurasianism.'<sup>91</sup> Aktürk also described Turkish Eurasianism as "alternative globalization and counter-hegemonic visions,"<sup>92</sup> resulting from "asymmetrical political and economic relations between Turkey and its Western allies in the post-Cold War period."<sup>93</sup>

The common point in most state and non-state uses of Eurasianism or the JDP's 'turn to Eurasia' is the fact that the terms Eurasia and Eurasianism were transformed into concepts overtly indicating a pro-Russian attitude in Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>94</sup> This pro-Russian attitude was complemented by Turkey's flirtation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with President Erdoğan from time to time hinting at Turkey's potential membership in the organization as an alternative to Turkey's EU

83 Evren Balta, "Kirpi İkilemi: Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri", <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/kirpi-ikilemi-turkiye-ve-rusya-iliskileri> (Accessed 21 September 2017).

84 Ibid.

85 Fiona Hill and Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded", *Survival*, Vol. 48, No 1, 2006, pp. 81-92.

86 Bülent Aras and Hakan Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a New Geographic Imagination", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No 40, 2009, pp. 193-215.

87 Pınar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç, "Turkey's "New" Foreign Policy Toward Eurasia", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* Vol 52, No 2, 2011, p. 173-195.

88 Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era", *Turkish Studies*, Vol 10, No 1, 2009, pp. 7-24.

89 Tüfekçi, "Ahmet Davutoğlu's Foreign Policy Understanding", p. 284.

90 Tüysüzöğlü, "Strategic Depth", p. 99.

91 Salih Yılmaz and Evgeniy Bahrevskiy, *Rusya ve Türkiye: Avrasya Paktı Mümkün mü?*, Ankara, SRT Yayınları, 2017, pp. 244-245.

92 Şener Aktürk, "Counter-Hegemonic Visions and Reconciliation Through the Past: The Case of Turkish Eurasianism", *Ab Imperio*, No 4, 2004, pp. 207-238.

93 Akçalı and Perinçek, "Kemalist Eurasianism", p. 566.

94 Erşen, "Avrasyacılık ve Uluslararası İlişkiler", p. 53.

membership,<sup>95</sup> which prompted another round of public debate about the Eurasianist currents in the JDP government.<sup>96</sup>

However, the July 2016 coup attempt further increased the pro-Russian emphasis in the use of Eurasia and Eurasianism in Turkey, especially in journalistic accounts that speculated that the coup attempt was an outcome of the Eurasianist-Atlanticist rift in Turkey. For example, Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, writing in *Cumhuriyet*, argued that the presence of Fetullah Gülen, the alleged mastermind of the coup attempt, in the United States led the JDP government to conclude that the United States is behind the coup, prompting ‘winds of Eurasianism’ in the government.<sup>97</sup> In December 2016, Sinan Birdal, an academic and columnist for *Gazeteduvar.com*, called the signing of the Moscow Memorandum, in which Turkey declared that it was on the same wavelength as Russia and Iran regarding the territorial integrity of Syria, the “Victory of the Eurasianists,” but also argued that it was Atlanticist support that brought the JDP to power in 2002. Yet now, he claimed the JDP needed the Eurasianists to remain in power and control the state apparatus.<sup>98</sup> Metin Gürcan described the rise of ‘Erdoğanist Eurasianism’ in Turkey since Erdoğan was going against Western interests and criticizing the Western global order.<sup>99</sup> Overall, since the end of the Cold War, the extensive engagement and re-engagement with the post-Soviet space and then Russia, combined with Turkey’s perception of real or perceived unequal and unfair treatment by its Western and Atlanticist allies, has led to an increase in the ways Eurasia and Eurasianism is used and understood in Turkey. The initial pro-Atlanticist understanding of Eurasia now had an anti-Western and pro-Russian stance—a discourse that had emerged in the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) much earlier.

## **Eurasianism in the Turkish Armed Forces: Is Russia an Alternative or a Balancer?**

The term Eurasia first appeared in a military document in the 1998 White Paper issued by the Ministry of National Defense. In this document, Turkey is described as having a special geography and belonging to different locations at the same time, but is “in summary a Eurasian country.”<sup>100</sup> The transition from employing Eurasia in the document to speculating that the TAF subscribes to Eurasianism took time. General Tuncer Kılınç’s statement in 2002 is considered one of the first instances of the TAF searching

95 Vahap Munyar, “Varsa yoksa AB Demeyin, Şanghay 5’lisi Bizi Rahatlatır”, *Hürriyet*, 20 November 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/varsayoksa-ab-demeyin-sanhgay-slisi-bizi-rahatlatir-40282883> (Accessed 20 July 2017). Turkey not only became a dialogue partner in the organization in 2013, but was elected to the term presidency of its Energy Club for 2017. “Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü”, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sanghay-isbirligi-orgutu.tr.mfa> (Accessed 20 July 2017).

96 See, for example, Emre Erşen, “Türk Dış Politikasında Avrasya Yönelimi ve Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü”, *Orta Doğu Analiz*, Vol 5, No 52, April 2013, p. 14-23; Doğu Perinçek, “Doğu Perinçek Yazdı: Niçin Şanghay İşbirliği”, <http://www.ulusal.com.tr/gundem/dogu-perincek-yazdi-nicin-sanghay-isbirligi-orgutu-h130042.html> (Accessed 25 July 2017); Barış Doster, “Hindistan, Çin ve Rusya Gezilerinden Avrasyacılık Çıkar mı?” <http://odattv.com/hindistan-cin-ve-rusya-gezilerinden-avrasyacilik-cikar-mi-0805171200.html> (Accessed 25 July 2017).

97 Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, “Türkiye Neden Anlaşılmıyor”, *Cumhuriyet*, 11 August 2016, [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/582599/Turkiye\\_neden\\_anlasilamiyor.html#](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/582599/Turkiye_neden_anlasilamiyor.html#) (Accessed 25 July 2016).

98 Sinan Birdal, “Avrasyacıların Zaferi”, *Gazeteduvar.com*, 22 December 2016, <http://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2016/12/22/avrasyacilarin-zaferi/> (Accessed 27 July 2017). Birdal also refers to a 2011 Wikileaks document based on a report written by the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey about the alleged Eurasianist-Atlanticist rift in the Turkish Armed Forces.

99 Gürcan, “The Rise of the Eurasianist Vision”.

100 Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, *Beyaz Kitap: Savunma*, (no place, no press: 1998), p. 5.

for alternatives,<sup>101</sup> an overt implication of a pro-Russian attitude growing among members of the TAF. In March 2002, Kılınç, the then Secretary General of the National Security Council, stated at a conference at the War Academy in İstanbul:

“I totally concur with Professor Manisalı’s argument that “the EU would never grant membership to Turkey”; it looks negatively to the questions related to Turkey’s national interest. As a result, Turkey needs to cooperate with other countries. If possible, without disregarding the United States, Turkey should consider an approach (*arayış*) that would include Russia and Iran.”<sup>102</sup>

Although Kılınç specifically insisted on not disregarding the United States, his statement was taken as an indication of the TAF being highly critical, if not against, of the West, prompting a flurry of counter-statements trying to negate the statement. For example, the then Commander of the First Army Çetin Doğan stated that Kılınç had been misunderstood, and that “all of the TAF are in favor of Turkey uniting with Western civilization.”<sup>103</sup> The Prime Minister at the time, Bülent Ecevit, argued that these were Kılınç’s personal opinions, that he personally wondered how one could bring the United States and Iran together, and “that Turkey’s relations with the EU were positive at the time; necessary steps could be taken if problems occurred in the future. But we are not in pursuit of this kind.”<sup>104</sup> In another statement on the same subject, Ecevit stated that “from time to time, we can have arguments and misunderstandings with the EU. But there is one thing that cannot change: the Turkish nation is a European one, geographically and culturally.”<sup>105</sup> There would be two issues noteworthy in Kılınç’s statement. The first would be that having an anti-Western attitude mixed with some pro-Russian attitude or engagement with Russia was now considered a manifestation of Eurasianism in Turkey, hence removing Eurasianism once more from its original meaning and turning it into a term to indicate a pro-Russian attitude in Turkish politics. Second, the timing of the statement coincided with the EU’s demands for democratization, which involved giving Turkey’s Kurds, minorities, and Islamists more rights. The Turkish establishment considered these as “undermining Turkey’s independence” and started to question the United States as an ally that understood Turkey’s ‘special circumstances’ vis-à-vis demands for democratization.<sup>106</sup>

Later, retired members of the TAF Çetin Doğan and Tuncer Kılınç gave talks at two different conferences in 2003 and 2004, respectively, titled “Cyprus and Iraq from the Eurasian Perspective” and “Turkey, Russia and Iran Relations at the Eurasian Axis,” respectively. The presentations were then published by the Bilgi Publishing House led by Attila İlhan in a 2006 book, *Avrasyacılık: Türkiye’deki Teori ve Pratiği* (Eurasianism: Theory and Practice in Turkey) edited by Mehmet Perinçek. Doğan argued that ‘Eurasianness’ (*Avrasyalılık*) is an identity that would help Turkey stand against the role

101 İhsan Dağı, “Competing Strategies For Turkey: Eurasianism or Europeanism?” *CACI Analyst*, 8 May 2002, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/7074-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2002-5-8-art-7074.html?tmpl=component&print=1> (Accessed 5 July 2017).

102 “Türkiye, Rusya ve İran’la İttifak Arayışında Olmalı”, *Sabah*, 8 March 2002. The observers who were quick to declare this statement the manifestation of Eurasianist tendencies within the TAF missed several things. First, Kılınç had spoken after Erol Manisalı who had argued that “the EU would never grant membership to Turkey.” Second, Kılınç specifically stated that this was his personal opinion.

103 10 March 2002, [www.ayintarihi.com](http://www.ayintarihi.com) (Accessed 5 July 2017).

104 “Türkiye, Rusya ve İran’la İttifak Arayışında Olmalı”, *Sabah*, 8 March 2002.

105 8 March 2002, [www.ayintarihi.com](http://www.ayintarihi.com) (Accessed 5 July 2017).

106 İhsan Dağı, “Competing Strategies For Turkey: Eurasianism or Europeanism?” *CACI Analyst*, 8 May 2002, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/7074-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2002-5-8-art-7074.html?tmpl=component&print=1> (Accessed 5 July 2017).

of the beacon of liberal Islam by helping it retain its secular identity.<sup>107</sup> However, according to Doğan, Turkey's relations with the West should also continue without "fighting against the West," but on equal grounds and conditions.<sup>108</sup> Kılınç, on the other hand, regarded Eurasia as a potential platform for "solidarity and cooperation" for countries like Russia, China, Iran, and Turkey, forming an alternative locus of power and resistance against the NATO and U.S. encroachment in the region. That would help resolve some of the conflicts in the region using the model of the EU.<sup>109</sup> Perinçek's volume, also contained the 2004 speech of another retired general, Şener Eruygur, regarding the current state of affairs in the broader Middle East and Central Asia, which he considered parts of Eurasia.<sup>110</sup> From 2007 onwards, all these retired generals, along with thousands of other retired and active members of the TAF, academics, the self-proclaimed Eurasianists, and Doğu and Mehmet Perinçek were arrested and accused of allegedly plotting a coup to overthrow the JDP government. Named the *Ergenekon Trials*, the arrests came in waves and included top brass generals of the Turkish army, including a former Chief of General Staff, İlker Başbuğ. The defendants maintained their innocence and argued that this was a conspiracy, and the evidence that formed the basis for the prosecution's indictment had been planted and forged.<sup>111</sup> Regardless of their defense, and prolonged court cases, most of them were sentenced to jail time in varying degrees—sometimes including a lifetime sentence—to be freed only after the JDP government's existing rift with the Gülenist Movement turned into a total fallout.<sup>112</sup>

The other sign of a pro-Russian attitude in the TAF was the publication of Vladimir Putin's famous 2007 speech at the Munich Conference for Security on the Turkish General Staff's website. The website provided the link to the original website that contained the English version of Putin's speech,<sup>113</sup> which, in a nutshell, was critical of the West, especially the "hyper use of force" by the United States, the 'provocative' expansion of NATO, and the utter disregard towards Russian national interests.<sup>114</sup> After uploading the link to Putin's speech, the link to the then NATO Secretary General's speech was also uploaded to the Turkish General Staff's website, trying to create a sort of balance.<sup>115</sup> However, symbolically, this move was considered another indication of Turkey showing that "it is not bound to the United States and EU in the resolution of its problems,"<sup>116</sup> or "finding a partner that is as

107 "Eski 1. Ordu Komutanı Em. Org. Çetin Doğan'ın İstanbul Üniversitesi'ndeki 'Avrasya Açısından Kıbrıs ve Irak' Başlıklı Konferansta Yaptığı Konuşma", in Perinçek, *Avrasyacılık*, p. 166.

108 *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

109 "Eski MGK Genel Sekreteri Em. Org. Tuncer Kılınç'ın İstanbul Üniversitesi'ndeki 'Avrasya Ekseninde Türkiye, Rusya, Çin ve İran İlişkileri,' Konulu Konferansa Sunduğu 'Büyükortadoğu ile Avrasya'nın Geleceği ve Güvenliği Başlıklı Tebliğ", in Perinçek *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 188-193

110 Eski Jandarma Genel Komutanı Em. Org. Şener Eruygur'un Gazi Üniversitesi'ndeki Avrasya Sempozyumu'nda Yaptığı Konuşma, (4 Aralık 2004)", in Perinçek, *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 215-219.

111 See for example the defense of İlker Başbuğ, Mustafa Erdoğan ve Serpil Kırkeser, "Ergenekon Davasında Başbuğ Savunma Yaptı", *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ergenekon-davasinda-basbug-savunma-yapti-23457006> (Accessed 21 September 2017).

112 "Turkey's Ergenekon Plot Case Overturned by Top Court of Appeals", <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-ergenekon-plot-case-overturned-by-top-court-of-appeals-.aspx?PageID=238&NID=98113&NewsCatID=509>, (Accessed 21 September 2017).

113 "Putin'in Münih Konuşması Genelkurmay'ın Sitesinde, *Hürriyet*, 15 Şubat 2007, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/putinin-munih-konusmasi-genelkurmayin-sitesinde-5956456> (Accessed 20 July 2017).

114 "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43<sup>rd</sup> Munich Conference on Security Policy, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html> (Accessed 20 July 2017).

115 "Genelkurmay'dan Sanal Balans Ayarı", <http://www.memurlar.net/haber/65393/genelkurmay-dan-sanal-balans-ayari.html> accessed 20 July 2017.

116 Murat Yetkin, "Putin Genelkurmay'ın Gündemine Nasıl Girdi?" *Radikal*, 17 February 2007 <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/murat-yetkin/putin-genelkurmayin-gundemine-nasil-girdi-806170/> (Accessed 25 July 2017).



deeply troubled as Turkey in terms of its relations with Europe.”<sup>117</sup> Overall, this version of Eurasianism in Turkey, or “Turkey’s turn to Eurasia,” was a balancing act of Turkey vis-à-vis the EU and to some degree the United States without really severing ties with both. The need for this balancing act was prompted as a result of the democratization demands of the EU, which were perceived by Turkey’s military as an encroachment of the country’s sovereignty and independence. A partnership with Russia, or balancing the West with the East seemed the right message to send to Turkey’s Western allies.

The speculations regarding Eurasianist and Atlanticist rift in the TAF were later confirmed *ex post facto* and started to be more openly discussed after the failed military coup attempt of July 2016. In an interview in *Hürriyet* newspaper just days after the coup, retired admiral Cem Gürdeniz, who was also arrested and then released as part of the *Ergenekon Trials*, openly talked about the rift between the Atlanticists and the Eurasianists within the TAF predating the JDP period. According to Gürdeniz, it was the Hood Incident in July 2003, when American soldiers raided the headquarters of Turkish special operations in Suleymaniya, Iraq and made hooded arrests of the Turkish team for allegedly planning an assassination of the Kurdish mayor of the city that opened the TAF to manipulations and making the Atlanticist-Eurasianist rift more concrete. This, according to Gürdeniz, was followed by the *Ergenekon Trials*, during which scores of TAF members who “focused on the national interests and were patriotic” were arrested with the help of the Gulenists for allegedly plotting a coup against the government.<sup>118</sup> In this way, he hinted that the *Ergenekon Trials* and July 2016 coup attempt were planned by the United States and Fetullah Gülen, which brought the military and JDP government into alignment in their attitudes towards the United States and Gülen. In the same interview, Gürdeniz, stated that he concurred with Emre Uslu, a known Gulenist, who argued that the winner of the failed coup attempt was the Eurasianists, and that “Turkey should be an element of balance between Eurasia and the Atlantic, as it has become clear that neither NATO nor the Atlantic front has served Turkey’s interests in the post-Cold War period.”<sup>119</sup> Gürdeniz, in another edited volume, titled *Avrasya’nın Kilidi Türkiye* (Turkey: Key to Eurasia), published by Kaynak Publications, which is linked to the Perinçek group, argues that “Turkey is a geostrategic actor in Eurasia,” and that “turning to Eurasia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be Turkey’s geopolitical and geo-economic fate.”<sup>120</sup> Again, in the same volume, a retired member of the Turkish Navy Admiral, Soner Polat,<sup>121</sup> who was also tried as part of *Ergenekon Trials* and then released, argues that despite all Western efforts to weaken Turkey, Turkey would eventually join the Eurasian bloc, which would change the balance against the West. “What they desire,” argues Polat, “is that when Turkey eventually joins the bloc, it would be weakened as much as possible, and possibly in a divided way.”<sup>122</sup> Polat finishes his piece by saying:

117 Ömer Taşpınar, “Rusya ve Türkiye El Ele Veriyor”, *Radikal*, 19 February 2007, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yorum/rusya-ve-turkiye-el-ele-veriyor-806336/> (Accessed 25 July 2017).

118 Cansu Çamlıbel, “Emekli Tümamiral Cem Gürdeniz: Gülecilerle Mücadele Aczi ‘Atlantik’ Korkusundan Üst Akıl ‘Roma’” *Hürriyet*, 24 July 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/emekli-tumamiral-cem-gurdeniz-gulencilerle-mucadele-aczi-atlantik-korkusundan-ust-akil-roma-40167424> (Accessed 25 July 2017).

119 Ibid.,

120 Cem Gürdeniz, “Türkiye ve Deniz Jeopolitiği”, Erdem Ergen (ed.), *Avrasya’nın Kilidi Türkiye*, İstanbul, Kaynak Yayınları, 2017, p. 138.

121 For an expanded version of this article see Soner Polat, *Türkiye İçin Jeopolitik Rota*, İstanbul, Kaynak Yayınları, 2015. It is noteworthy that this book was also published by Kaynak Publishing House, known to be close to Doğu Perinçek and his party.

122 Soner Polat, “Türkiye İçin Jeopolitik Rota”, in *Avrasya’nın Kilidi Türkiye*, p. 152.

One of the most important and unchangeable facts for a country is its geography. If we cannot masterfully bridge geography and politics, we will always be deceived and make the wrong choices. Turkey turning to Eurasia is not a political choice but a geopolitical requirement. Otherwise, Turkey would be drowned facing relentless attacks from the West and be disintegrated.<sup>123</sup>

Coming from a retired member of the TAF, this quote obviously cannot be considered a view representing the institution, but it is definitively indicative of the fact that Russia, under the disguise of the concept of Eurasianism, has slowly moved from being seen as a balancer to a potential alternative for Turkey.

## **Conclusion: Turkish Eurasianism: An Alternative, Balancing Act, Ideology, or Foreign Policy Instrument?**

This article reviewed the ways in which the term Eurasia and Eurasianism have been used in Turkey by various actors and scholars since the end of the Cold War. The argument presented was twofold. First, concurring with scholars who have written about the subject, compared to Russian Eurasianism, one cannot really talk about a “Turkish Eurasianism,” at least in the Russian sense. Russian Eurasianism is an ideology with intellectual depth and rigor, whereas Turkish Eurasianism has emerged as a foreign policy instrument trying to justify and execute Turkey’s political and economic interests.<sup>124</sup> Second, Turkish Eurasianism, or the way Eurasianism is instrumentalized in Turkey, is primarily used to create a vision for Turkey’s external relations. Unlike the Russian Eurasianists, who have a detailed domestic agenda, the domestic agenda of Turkish Eurasianists is limited to espousing Turkish nationalism, which takes a xenophobic view of foreigners as well as Turkey’s minorities. Turkish Eurasianism does not presuppose the equality of ethnic groups internally, but rather argues for the superiority of Turks internally and externally. What is more, when it comes to the basic organizing principle of a community, the nation-state is still at the center by those in Turkey who call themselves Eurasianists, probably unaware of the sheer fact that Russian Eurasianists had taken empire as their basic organizing principle early on and currently preferring a federation.<sup>125</sup> Finally, Turkish Eurasianism is mostly the instrumentalization of the concept of Eurasia by Turkey’s political elite with which they could reach out to the Turkic Republics, be pro-Russian, create a sphere of influence in former Ottoman lands, or cloak anti-Western trends in Turkey.

Overall, coming back to O’Tuathail and Dalby’s quote in the introduction of this article, Eurasia and the way Eurasianism is reappropriated have indeed become a tool of ‘power’ at different levels. The two terms have become a conceptual overstretch to initially highlight Turkey’s hybrid identity immediately after the Cold War and to cloak its interest in the Turkic Republics of the former Soviet Union. However, with the changing conditions in the international system, accompanied by the belief among the Turkish elite and intelligentsia that the West may not be working to protect Turkey’s interests and the relative improvement of Turkey-Russia relations, Eurasia garnered a more pro-Russian and then anti-Western attitude. The question that remains unanswered is whether or not Turkey is earnest in its intentions of anti-Westernism and pro-Russianness, or is it simply another turn in Turkish history where Turkey is threatening the West with ‘turning to the East’. Previously, when

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123 Ibid., p. 161.

124 For an excellent comparison of the two Eurasianisms, see İmanov, *Avrasyacılık*, pp. 373-379.

125 Özsağlam, “Geçmişten Günümüze Avrasyacılık”, p. 122.

Turkey had its run-ins with the United States or EU, the standard reaction from Turkish politicians was that Turkey would turn East towards the Middle East. But it seems that, given Turkey's deteriorating relations with its immediate neighbors in the Middle East, this time, Turkey is left with no Middle East to turn to, making Eurasia and Eurasianism emerge as an alternative to the West rather than a balancer against the West.