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Research Report

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SWP Research Paper, No. RP 11/2006

Provided in Cooperation with:
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Suggested Citation: Grigoriadis, Ioannis N. (2006) : Upsurge amidst political uncertainty nationalism in post-2004 Turkey, SWP Research Paper, No. RP 11/2006, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/253062

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Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International
and Security Affairs

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Upsurge amidst Political Uncertainty

Nationalism in post-2004 Turkey

RP 11
October 2006
Berlin

SWP
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Politik German Institute for
International
and Security Affairs

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ISSN 1863-1053

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Upsurge amidst Political Uncertainty Nationalism in post-2004 Turkey

Recurrent emanations of extreme nationalism continue to endanger Turkey's complete fulfilment of the political Copenhagen criteria for European Union membership and, consequently, its eventual accession to the EU. This is especially so with regard to minority rights, freedom of expression and, more generally, embedding liberal-democratic norms in Turkey's state and society.

This paper addresses the status of nationalism in Turkey in the aftermath of the December 2004 Brussels European Council decision for the start of accession negotiations with Turkey. Nationalism has proven particularly resilient in Turkey, not least due to Turkey's public education and political party system. A growing feeling of insecurity, a defensive reaction to other nationalisms, a rising opposition to US policies in the Middle East and a silent policy change of the AKP government have contributed to a significant rise of nationalism in Turkey. Traditional foci of nationalist mobilisation, such as the Cyprus and the Kurdish issues, have been complemented by issues such as the US policies in the Middle East and EU–Turkey relations.

Nationalist mobilisation is manifested in popular culture and initiatives against intellectuals and minorities, while a growing wave of anti-Americanism, which has affected for the first time the whole of Turkish society, has been part and parcel of it. This novel trend may have an enduring impact on US–Turkey relations. Despite progress made in the political reform process after 1999, nationalism has proven its resilience as a substantial element of Turkish political discourse. Uncertainty in the course of Turkey's EU accession negotiations and the volatile situation in the Middle East spell no good omens for a recession of nationalism in the near future. Nationalism maintains its popular appeal, which is not limited to parties of the political right and pervades across Turkey's political spectrum. This makes populist appeals to nationalist mobilisation particularly attractive when domestic political problems accumulate or on the eve of elections. A populist reversal of the AKP government towards more nationalist positions may pay off domestically in view of the upcoming parliamentary elections, but also have a

disastrous impact on the course of Turkey's EU accession negotiations.

The lasting change of this deficient situation is a primary task for Turkey's political leadership. However, it is also possible and necessary to support such endeavours from the outside:

- To help deter the rise of nationalism in Turkey, the European Union should publicly take a clear position on the recent PKK terrorist attacks, which have again dangerously polarised the Kurdish issue in Turkey and undermined the credibility of political reform regarding minority rights. It should emphasise its support for a comprehensive dialogue between the Turkish government and non-violent Kurdish political forces. This dialogue should point towards a democratic, peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue, which would entail full respect for Turkish territorial integrity and Kurdish minority rights.
- Regarding the Cyprus issue, while insisting on the fulfilment of Turkey's commitments, the European Union could support measures lifting the embargo against Turkish Cypriots and reiterate its support for the UN Secretary's mission and a quick solution on the basis of the Annan Plan.
- A clearer articulation of EU policies in the Middle East could contribute to the improvement of EU–Turkey relations, as it may lead to the emergence of common fields of cooperation and will prevent the convolution of EU policies with the US policies in the region, which have met the opposition of Turkish public opinion.
- At the level of education, more should be done to advance non-nationalist education in Turkey. Cooperation between Turkish and EU universities and institutes should be promoted, while existing university mid-career training programmes of highschool teachers to should be considerably expanded. Sponsoring projects advancing the rewriting of history books, the translation of academic literature on history and nationalism and prose literature from neighbouring countries into Turkish are some indicative measures in that direction.
- Finally it should become clear to the AKP government that the rise of nationalist sentiment comprises a serious threat for Turkey's EU accession negotiations and could potentially question the success of the reform process which has transformed Turkey since 1999 and has brought. The AKP government should be advised not to fall into the trap of populism and continue the reform policies which have brought to Turkey unforeseen political and economic stability over the recent years.

Introduction

Nationalism has been one of the most enduring themes in Turkish public discourse and a common denominator in Turkish political spectrum. This became once more clear in an opinion poll held in early 2006, in which 62 percent of the population declared itself as "nationalist," while among these, 32.3 percent declared himself as "fully nationalist."[1] Republican Turkish nationalism, a combination of French-style civic and German-style ethnic nationalist models attempted and—to a large extent—succeeded to unify the Muslim citizens of the neophyte Republic. While Islam was initially not considered an element of Turkish national identity, it became so, under the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" (*Türk-İslam Sentezi*) doctrine, which was officially accepted in the 1980s when Kurdish nationalism and leftist radicalism were feared to threaten Turkish national cohesion. Nationalism has maintained a strong appeal to the majority of the Turkish public and affected the formation of policy-making more than in other European states. National memory played a very important role in that respect. Due to the conditions under which the Republic of Turkey emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, an atavistic fear of Turkey's partition through concerted operations of foreign powers and domestic collaborators, successfully coined as the "Sèvres Syndrome,"[2] became one of the largest obstacles to the course of Turkey's democratisation reform. All issues which were suspected to affect national unity and state sovereignty such as minority rights, bilateral disputes with neighbouring states and regional security issues were examined with extreme circumspection and intransigence. This deadlock could only be overcome in the late 1990s, when a favourable combination of international incentives and domestic political conditions allowed for a relative recession of the power of nationalist discourse and the realisation of the most comprehensive democratisation reform programme to materialise. While nationalist opinions never disappeared, more liberal views prevailed, and this resulted to the liberalisation of legislation dealing with issues such as minority rights, freedom of expression and limitations of state sovereignty. It also resulted to new, more moderate approaches to long-lasting international disputes in which Turkey was a party such as the Cyprus question. This process culminated on December 17, 2004 when the European Council set October 3, 2005 to be the start date of accession negotiations with Turkey.

This study will explore the state of nationalism in Turkey in the aftermath of the December 2004 European Council decision. It will also address reasons for the persistence of nationalism in Turkey, themes around which the nationalist discourse is currently developing and focus on key events, which exemplified the nationalist upsurge. It will be argued that a nationalist education and political party system are two main reasons for the resilience of nationalism in Turkey. A considerable rise of nationalist sentiment in Turkey has taken place in the aftermath of the December 2004 European Council decision. This can be attributed to a growing feeling of insecurity, a defensive reaction to other nationalisms, a rising opposition to US policies in the Middle East and a silent policy change of the AKP government. Issues such as the US policy in the Middle East and the course of EU–Turkey accession negotiations have been added to issues, such as the Cyprus and the Kurdish issues. Nationalist mobilisation was expressed in popular culture and initiatives against intellectuals and minorities. The diffusion of anti-Americanism in ever-larger segments of Turkish public opinion is another key characteristic of this nationalist upsurge, which may have an enduring impact over US–Turkey relations. The populist reversal of the AKP government towards more nationalist positions may have a disastrous impact on Turkey's EU membership ambitions.

1 Umut Özkırımlı, "'Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik' Araştırması [A Survey of Nationalism in Turkey]," *Tempo*, No. 957, April 6, 2006, p. 20.

2 This refers to the abortive 1920 Sèvres Treaty, according to which most of the Ottoman Empire would be partitioned among Western powers and non-Turkish minority groups.

The Persistence of Nationalism in Turkey: Education and Political Party System

While nationalism is anything but unknown in the public discourse of all European countries, its persistence and resilience in Turkey is of special interest. Among several reasons for that phenomenon, one could indicatively mention public education and the political party system. Turkish public education still maintains a very nationalist outlook. In the Law on National Education, the instruction of "Atatürk's nationalism," national culture and morality is described as a cornerstone of the Turkish education system.[3] School textbooks are still replete with nationalist clichés, while attempts to cure deficiencies in the context of Turkey's EU accession process have been insufficient and incomplete. The existence of private schools and universities, which provide non-nationalist education, cannot be relevant to the vast majority of Turkish students. Nationalism is also a common theme in Turkish political party system and not limited to parties on the right of the political spectrum. The far-right Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*—MHP), the most authentic representative of nationalism in Turkey, cannot claim monopoly in the representation of nationalist views. Nationalism has been diffused throughout the political spectrum and become a common denominator of party politics in Turkey. This means that even the AKP and the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*—CHP) carefully keep a flawless nationalistic profile, which may, in the long term, affect their party disposition. The transformation of the CHP under the leadership of Deniz Baykal from a social-democratic into an étatist nationalist political party is characteristic of that trend. The abject failure of the CHP to play the role of a centre-of-left political party, which could contribute to Turkey's democratisation and its adoption of an anti-Western, third-worldist, nationalist agenda has clearly manifested the inertia of the party system.[4] The AKP also very carefully maintains its nationalist profile, and so does its leader. According to a recent poll, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is seen by 40.4 percent of the public opinion to be the most nationalist party leader, followed by the MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli with 30.5 percent and the leader of the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*—DYP) Mehmet Ağar with 17.6 percent. Deniz Baykal only came fourth in this list with 14.4 percent.[5] Under these circumstances, nationalism has become a "flag of convenience," a source of party loyalty and method of stabilising a party's corroded electoral base. A vicious circle can be observed in which a nationalist minded public opinion leads parties to adapt their political rhetoric and action on nationalist lines, which in turn deprives the public of the opportunity of socialisation into non-nationalist political ideas.

3 Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM), *Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu [The Fundamental Law of National Education]* (1739/1973).

4 Umut Özkırımlı, "CHP Milliyetçiliği, Etnik Milliyetçiliktir [The CHP Nationalism Is Ethnic Nationalism]," *Interview with Neşe Düzel, Radikal*, May 15, 2006

5 Özkırımlı, "'Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik' Araştırması."

Issues That Sparked the Post-2004 Nationalist Upsurge

The Iraq Crisis

Although US policies in the Middle East were not always popular within Turkish public opinion, this had an only marginal impact on the formation of Turkish policy-making in the region. Strategic alliance and cooperation between the United States and Turkey meant that Turkey would support the US strategic priorities in the Middle East, even when this would come to the point of forging a strategic alliance with Israel and thus alienating the Arab states and Iran. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the new more proactive US policy in the Middle East marked a turning point in US–Turkey strategic alliance in the Middle East. As it became clear that the United States would invade Iraq, the divergence of US and Turkish policies on Iraq became bitterly pronounced on March 1, 2003, when the Parliament failed to ratify a government bill allowing for the use of Turkish territory by US troops on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq. While the AKP government bore the main burden of responsibility for that failure, the military had also refused to openly condone the bill in the crucial National Security Council meeting of February 28, 2003.

This seminal event dealt a heavy blow to the US–Turkish strategic alliance and alienated neoconservative circles in Washington that had traditionally advanced Turkish foreign policy interests. The consequence of this refusal was the US occupation of Iraq without a Turkish military presence in the country. This allowed Iraqi Kurds to become increasingly assertive and influential in post-war Iraq. The proclamation of the new Iraqi Constitution turned Iraq into a federal state with a predominantly Kurdish federal state in the north. While the Turkish government had originally vehemently opposed plans for Kurdish autonomy, it had to slowly adapt to the new reality and build a new two-pronged policy. The first target was to prevent Iraq's partition and the establishment of a sovereign Kurdish state in the north. There were strong fears that such a development would have a destabilising effect on Turkey's southeastern and eastern provinces where sizable Kurdish populations live. The second target was to convince the US occupation forces to disband the PKK bases in Northern Iraq, which were used to launch attacks within Turkish territory. Meanwhile, Ankara pledged its support for Iraqi Turcomans[6]. Ankara hoped to obtain an additional lever in domestic Iraqi politics by claiming a guardian role for the Turcoman minority.

While US–Turkey relations were anything but rosy, an incident sharply deteriorated the situation. On July 4, 2003, US soldiers in the Northern Iraqi city of Suleymaniyah arrested eleven Turkish special-force officers, whom they suspected for plotting the assassination of a local Kurdish politician. Bags were pulled over the heads of the arrested, who were so walked from their headquarters for questioning. The publication of this event caused enormous reaction in Turkey. This treatment of Turkish military staff by US forces was seen as national disgrace and treason by an old ally. This event was the clearest manifestation of the decline of US–Turkish relations and had major repercussions in the domestic scene. Throughout the history of the republic, the military had carefully cultivated a profile of honour, integrity and efficiency. The Suleymaniyah incident was one of the heaviest blows against that impeccable image and could only cause fierce resentment even among the most pro-US secularist officers and a sharp rise of nationalist sentiment. The failure of the European Union to articulate a distinct and coherent policy on Iraq and the Middle East in general facilitated the convolution of EU and US policies in the eyes of Turkish public opinion and limited the prospects of EU–Turkish diplomatic cooperation. The circumspect positions of major EU member states like Germany and France were overshadowed by the identification of other member states like the United Kingdom and Poland with the US policies and their participation in the Iraq occupation forces.

6 The Iraqi Turcomans, a Turkic-speaking ethnic group living in Northern Iraq, form a sizeable minority in parts of Northern Iraq, and especially in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. During Iraq's post-war institutional reconstruction, they have unsuccessfully attempted to limit Kurdish political powers by means of constitutional veto rights in the federal state of Northern Iraq.

The Kurdish Question

The rise of nationalist feeling in Turkey was also due to developments in the country's own Kurdish question. For the first time after the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999, the PKK intensified its operations from 2005 onwards. While the PKK operational capabilities had been largely disabled in 1999, the situation in Iraq after the US invasion of March 2004 allowed for the reinforcement of the PKK.[7] Good relations with Iraqi Kurdish leaders were matched by the inability of Turkish armed forces to pursue PKK guerrillas within US-protected Iraqi territory. PKK's unilateral ceasefire was lifted in 2004. Increasing attacks on military units, terrorist attacks in cities of Western Turkey followed suit. The unwillingness of the US government—despite continuous Turkish protests—to risk its relations with Iraqi Kurds by eliminating the PKK bases in Northern Iraq further alienated Turkey. In the meantime, the situation in Turkey's Kurdish-inhabited southeastern provinces sharply deteriorated. The most serious riots in a decade broke out in late March and early April 2006 in Diyarbakir, Mardin and Batman, which resulted to 16 civilians killed and hundreds injured and arrested by security forces.[8] PKK operations within Turkey also continued to claim a heavy toll among Turkish security personnel and civilians.

This situation bore resemblances with the 1990s, in which bitter fighting between Turkish security forces and the PKK had cost thousands of human casualties.[9] Nonetheless, state behaviour towards the Kurds had profoundly changed in the meantime. Democratisation reform and the prospect of EU membership had led to the recognition of Kurdish minority rights at an unprecedented—albeit still unsatisfactory—level. As the human rights situation improved, one expected that political violence would lose popularity to non-violent means for advancing Kurdish rights in Turkey. Nonetheless, no Kurdish political party proved to be willing to contribute to Turkey's democratisation process by repudiating PKK terror and political violence and vowing to advance Kurdish rights in Turkey by peaceful democratic means. By taking equal distance from the Turkish state and the PKK and refusing to condemn the PKK methods, Turkey's Kurdish political leadership put the Turkish supporters of democratisation reform and recognition of minority rights for Kurds in a difficult position. Their stance allowed Turkish nationalists to argue that the recognition of full minority rights to the Kurds would not resolve the question of PKK terrorism and put Turkey's security and territorial integrity into grave threat. In that view, given that Turkey's Kurds seemed not to be interested in enjoying full citizenship rights within the Republic of Turkey but were aiming at the secession of the Kurdish-populated provinces, any reconciliation effort could not combat PKK terrorism; on the contrary, it could be interpreted as weakness by the PKK. This vicious circle of Turkish and Kurdish nationalism took the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which nationalist Turks and Kurds—in effect—reinforced each other in their respective constituencies by pointing at the intransigent policies of their counterparts. This event—alongside with developments in Northern Iraq—threatened to deteriorate relations between Turks and Kurds at the social level and questioned the continuation of reform on the Kurdish issue.

Turkey's EU Accession Negotiations

The decision of the European Council in December 2004 for the start of Turkey's EU accession negotiations on October 3, 2005 marked the heyday of a long and tedious process. It took Turkey more than four decades to come from the Association Agreement it had signed with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963 to the start of its accession negotiations with the European Union, and a degree of enthusiasm was justified and manifested. However, a series of political developments since December 2004 has led to the dissipation of that enthusiasm. The persistence of a debate about the impossibility of Turkey's EU membership and the need to promote a "privileged partnership" solution allowed many Turks to believe that the European Union was applying double standards against Turkey. Opinion polls observed a considerable drop in support for Turkey's EU membership and a corresponding increase in nationalist feeling. According to a survey published in June 2006, support for Turkey's EU membership dropped from 74.3 percent after the November 2002 elections to 57.3 percent

7 Heinz Kramer, *Unruhen im türkischen Kurdengebiet: Herausforderungen für die Türkei und die EU* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2006), SWP-Aktuell 20/06, p. 3.
8 Ibid., pp. 1–2.
9 See Kerem Öktem, "Return of the Turkish 'State of Exception'," *Middle East Report Online* (2006).

in April 2006.[10] This trend is not unusual in countries in the course of EU accession negotiations. In many Central and East European states support for EU membership dropped considerably in the course of accession negotiations in the 1990s. However, in the case of Turkey, this drop was also followed by particular qualitative characteristics. An opinion poll conducted in early 2006 produced interesting results. 50.3 percent of Turkey's population agreed with the statement that the European Union wants to divide Turkey, while only 36.3 percent negated that statement.[11] According to the results of the Euro-barometer in spring 2006, the percentage of those stating that Turkey's EU membership would be a "good thing," dropped from 55 percent in autumn 2005 to 44 percent in spring 2006, while the percentage stating the opposite rose from 15 to 25 percent. The percentage of those indicating that becoming a member of the EU would be an "advantage" for Turkey dropped from 68 percent in autumn 2005 to 51 percent in spring 2006, while the overall "image of the EU" is positive for 43 percent in spring 2006, compared to 60 percent in autumn 2005.[12] This highlighted a loss of enthusiasm and public concerns about the EU involvement in Turkey's foreign and security affairs, and not least among which with the Cyprus question[13], which directly affected the relations between Turkey and two EU member states, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus.

The Cyprus Issue

In the aftermath of the April 2004 failed double referenda on the Annan Plan, Turkey had to accept the reality of the EU membership of the Republic of Cyprus without a solution of the Cyprus issue. Given that Turkey has not recognised since 1963 the government of the Republic of Cyprus as the lawful government of the island, this led to serious legal complications. In the December 2004 European Council, Prime Minister Erdoğan was disappointed to see that, despite Turkey's constructive position in the Annan Plan referenda, Cyprus remained a serious obstacle to the improvement of EU–Turkey relations. The recognition of the Republic of Cyprus became the new point of dispute in EU–Turkey relations. Turkey, which was applying an embargo against Cypriot vessels and aircraft, refused to extend the Association Agreement to the Republic of Cyprus, as it did with the other nine new EU member states, as this would imply a lifting of the embargo and be interpreted as a *de facto* recognition of the Republic of Cyprus. When signing the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement to the ten new EU member states, Turkey made a unilateral statement that "this signature did not mean recognition of the Greek Cypriot government." This statement provoked strong Cypriot reaction and objections to the protocol which were overcome only after the European Union issued a counterstatement in September 2005 to counter Turkey's unilateral declaration. In this statement, the European Community and its member states declared that Turkey's declaration was unilateral and had no legal effect. The statement added that the Republic of Cyprus became an EU member state on May 1, 2004, and that its recognition by Turkey was a necessary component of Turkey's EU accession process. Finally, the Union stated Turkey had to apply the Protocol fully to all EU Member States—i.e. lift the trade embargo against the Republic of Cyprus—and that it would monitor this issue closely and evaluate full implementation in 2006.[14]

Despite that statement, Turkey maintained its embargo against the Republic of Cyprus and set the lifting of the embargo against Turkish Cypriots as a condition for the full application of the Additional Protocol. Setting new conditions on something already agreed upon and as self-evident as the *de facto* recognition of an EU member state did anything but to improve the image of Turkey within the Union. On the other hand, the failure of the European Union to deliver promised financial aid toward Turkish Cypriots and lift the embargo, which has hampered economic activity in the north since 1974, had seriously hurt EU popularity in Turkey. This issue attracted considerable public interest, as the public opinion saw that the European Union did not remain neutral in the Cyprus dispute but took the Greek Cypriot side. While the Greek Cypriots were respon-

10 Ümit Aktaş, "Halkımızı Tanıyalım [Let's Know Our People Better]," *Radikal*, June 14, 2006.

11 Özkırımlı, "'Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik' Araştırması," p. 7.

12 European Commission's Delegation in Turkey, *Standard Eurobarometer 65: National Report Executive Summary Turkey* (Brussels: European Commission, 2006).

13 Owen Matthews and Sami Kohen, "Turks: We Don't Want Europe," *Newsweek*, August 21, 2006.

14 Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Debating the Most Difficult Enlargement Ever," *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2006), pp. 154–155.

sible for the lack of the solution in the Cyprus issue, it was not them but the Turkish Cypriots who were penalised for that. This impartiality fitted long-held nationalist discourses, in which the West—and particularly the European Union—unconditionally and consistently supported Greek and Greek Cypriot positions against legitimate Turkish national interests.

The refusal to unconditionally open Turkish air space and ports to Cypriot vessels became a symbol of Turkish intransigence in the aftermath of the December 2004. While the AKP government had dared a historic shift in Turkey's Cyprus policy by endorsing the UN Annan Plan for the resolution of the Cyprus issue, it then slowly shifted back to more conventional and nationalistic Turkish policies on the Cyprus issue. The visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan to the north of Cyprus on the anniversary of the Turkish invasion of the island on July 20, 1974 is indicative of the nationalist shift of his position. One should point that the stance of the government of the Republic of Cyprus, with its also strongly nationalistic stance was also not constructive. By attempting to use its EU membership and Turkey's EU membership ambitions to extract more Turkish concessions that those made in the context of the Annan Plan, it impeded any progress in the aftermath of the Annan Plan referenda and contributed to the further rise of nationalistic feeling in Turkey. However, Turkey's refusal to abide by its commitments emanating from the agreement of September 2005 further undermined the already sensitive EU–Turkey relations. While such tactics could only backfire at the EU level and strengthen the voice of Turkey's opponents, at the domestic level it boosted the government's nationalist credentials and popularity. It was—once again—the use of foreign policy questions for domestic political consumption that boosted the popularity of a government, but seriously undermined Turkey's international position and long-term interests.

Public Manifestations of the New Nationalist Wave

Rallying around the Turkish Flag

The Turkish flag became another focal point of the resurgence of nationalist feeling in Turkish public sphere. This was prompted by an event in the city of Mersin in March 2005. During a Kurdish demonstration, three juveniles attempted to burn a Turkish flag, but were prevented by a plain-cloth police officer. The video record of that incident was repeatedly broadcast by the electronic media, paving the ground for enormous popular reaction. For several days, Turkish flags were flying in private apartments, cars and public buildings. This was meant to restore due respect to the Turkish flag which had been disgraced by the juveniles and also clearly express a feeling of national unity. In the following months, public manifestation of flags beyond national holidays increased significantly, as new bigger flags were flown in existing flagpoles, new flagpoles were raised in public and private property, especially factory plants and newspapers announced the construction of record-size flags in different parts of the country. These activities, often spearheaded by the military and state bureaucracy, became a very visible manifestation of the nationalist upsurge which spelled no good omens for the future of Turkish-Kurdish relations.[15]

Two Best Best-Selling Books: "Those Mad Turks" and "The Metal Storm"

The book "*Şu Çılgın Türkler*" (Those Mad Turks) authored by Turgut Özakman comprised a popular historical account of the Turkish War of Independence. This book was published in April 2005 and achieved 292 editions by March 2006. It comprised a succinct account of the Turkish nationalist thesis regarding the War of Independence, "one of the most legitimate, the most moral, the most just, the most holy wars in human history."[16] The aim of the book was to counter alternative accounts of recent Turkish history which appeared over the last years, as public discourse was increasingly liberalising. As the author himself stated in a conference:

"National education became a pawn in the hands of those who came to power. Through their experimentations, a non-national education emerged. For 30–35 years we could not narrate Çanakkale, the War of Independence to our youth. We have to narrate our history; otherwise, false histories take its position."[17]

The widespread approval of the book found its most prominent representative in the person of the President of the Republic. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer praised the author of the book in the same conference with the following words:

"You said words which we all needed to hear. You interpreted our feelings. I find important to narrate to the young generations the continuity of the nation. I congratulate you on your efforts and successful work."[18]

While European campaigns to examine history schoolbooks with the aim of removing explicitly nationalistic references to historical events or other nations attracted interest in Turkey in the course of democratisation reform, the huge commercial success of a book, which reiterated and aggrandised Manichean nationalist grand narratives about the Turkish War of Independence, was a powerful message that nationalism persisted and could even bounce back.

"The Metal Storm" (*Metal Fırtına*), a fiction book by Orkun Uçar and Burak Turna, narrated a war between Turkey and the United States in the near future.[19] According to the plot, in year 2007, US forces invade Turkey from northern Iraq, when they realise that large reserves of borax, a strategic mineral, are found in Turkish territory. The Operation "Metal Storm"—the equivalent of US Operation "Iraqi Freedom"—results in the occupation of Turkey's main cities but not periphery. A second phase, Operation "Sèvres"—named after the 1920 Treaty—intends to divide Turkey

15 Murat Belge, "Büyük Bayrak Merakı [The Big Flag Passion]," *Radikal*, July 30, 2006.
16 Turgut Özakman, *Şu Çılgın Türkler [Those Mad Turks]* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2005), Backcover.
17 Yılmaz Önder, "Çılgın Türkler'e Sezer'den Övgü [Praise from Sezer to the Mad Turks]," *Milliyet*, March 19, 2006.
18 Ibid.
19 Orkun Uçar and Burak Turna, *Metal Fırtına [Metal Storm]* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2004).

between Greece and Armenia and also allow for the emergence of a Kurdish state. Then the Turks form an anti-US alliance with China, Germany and Russia, while Gökhan, a Turkish secret agent steals a nuclear missile and detonates it in Washington DC. This grave blow against the United States leads to the triumphant end of Turkey's US occupation.[20] The book, which from its publication in late 2004 until summer 2006, has made ten editions and sold about 500,000 copies, was another example of a best-selling book replete with nationalist and anti-American content. The authors skilfully capitalised on emerging anti-American feelings and existing phobic syndromes in Turkish society. They created a nationalist epic, in which Turkey defeats new—the United States, the Kurds—and old enemies—Armenia, Greece—to triumphantly reclaim its independence. The huge commercial success of the book strongly inferred the appeal of such ideas in public opinion.

A Telling Movie: "The Valley of Wolves: Iraq"

"The Valley of Wolves: Iraq" (*Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak*) movie is a powerful manifestation of the new anti-American nationalism which has become popular in Turkey. Following a popular TV series, the film cost about ten million dollars which made it the most expensive production in the history of Turkish cinema. After its release in January 2006, it soon also became the biggest commercial success. It featured the adventures of Polat Alemdar, a Turkish agent who operated in Iraq defending justice, restoring Turkish honour and revenging American atrocities in Iraq. The movie offers a kaleidoscope of nationalist, Orientalist and Occidentalist prejudices and stereotypes.[21] It starts with the Suleymaniyah incident, in the aftermath of which one of the Turkish officers involved is presented to commit suicide after writing a letter to Polat Alemdar asking from him to "restore Turkey's honour." The US troops and civilians in Iraq are uniformly portrayed as barbarous and bloodthirsty, who indiscriminately and joyfully kill civilians and storm a wedding celebration to kill the bridegroom and a child in front of his mother's eyes; there is not a single US figure portrayed in positive colours. Massacres of Iraqi civilians are organised so that their kidneys and other organs are sold to customers in the United States and notably Israel, while torture and other atrocities in Abu Ghraib Prison receive special attention. Meanwhile, the movie portrays the people of Iraq as underdeveloped, timid, overtly religious and clearly in need of Turkish big-brother-like assistance. The only positive descriptions in the film are spared for the Turcomans of Northern Iraq, ethnic affiliates of Turks, and for those Kurds who joined Alemdar and his group in their operations. The film culminates with a duel between Alemdar and his American arch-enemy, in the end of which Alemdar stabs his rival to death. Positive critiques about the film were not limited to nationalist papers and circles. Numerous members of the government, the parliament and the wife of Prime Minister Erdoğan attended the *avant première* and expressed their utter satisfaction with the film, while a special showing was organised for Prime Minister Erdoğan himself. The movie was circulated in Western Europe and the United States causing concern and acrimonious remarks. In February 2006, the President of the State of Bavaria Edmund Stoiber came to the point of asking German cinema operators not to "broadcast that racist and anti-Western hate film." A similar warning was issued by the Jewish Central Council in Germany, while American military personnel in Europe were told to avoid the cinemas where the movie was broadcast.[22] The spectacular commercial success of a movie replete with nationalistic and anti-American messages comprised a clear signal about the growing popular appeal of nationalism in Turkey, which did not leave unaffected even prosecutors. In April 2006, three journalists, Metin Uca, Hıncal Uluç and Perihan Mağden, were prosecuted for defamation after arguing that Polat Alemdar was "a cross between Rambo and Abdullah Çatlı."[23]

Attacks against Catholic Priests

A particularly alarming development was also the increase in the number of attacks against Catholic priests in different parts of Turkey. Deteriorating

20 Ted Widmer, "Death to the Crusade," *New York Times*, September 18, 2005.
21 Also, see Cem Özdemir, "'Tal der Wölfe': Ein Film, der rassistische Einstellungen bedient," *Der Spiegel*, February 16, 2006.
22 "Stoiber kritisiert 'Tal der Wölfe': 'Rassistischer und antiwestlicher Hassfilm'," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 19, 2006.
23 Çatlı was an infamous mafia leader who also had links with Turkey's "deep state" *(derin devlet)*. See Mutlu Koser, "Mağden'e Kurtlar Vadisi Davası [A Valley of Wolves Trial against Mağden]," *Hürriyet*, April 20, 2006.

relations between the West and the Islamic world, but also soaring allegations about the role and activities of Christian missions in Turkey contributed to the creation of an inimical social environment, especially in the periphery of Turkey. Conspiracy theories in which Western missionary activities to convert Turks into Christianity and partition Turkey were playing a central role abounded in nationalist media and contributed to the following incidents. On February 5, 2006, Andrea Santoro, a Catholic priest serving a tiny parish in the city of Trabzon on the Black Sea, was shot dead from his back while praying in his church. The Turkish and world public opinion was shocked to hear that the culprit, who shouted "God is great" (Allah-u-ekber) while shooting, was a sixteen-year old boy. The boy said during his investigation that he had killed Santoro as a reaction to the Danish caricature crisis which had shaken the relations of the West with the Islamic world some weeks ago. However, allegations that the priest was using money to invite youth to his services had also been widely circulated by nationalist circles to media. Some days later, a Catholic friar in Izmir was assaulted by a group of youths in the Western city of Izmir, while a similar assault took place in the southern city of Mersin in March 2006. On July 5, 2006, Pierre Brunissen, a 76-year-old Catholic priest, was stabbed in the city of Samsun on the Black Sea coast. These repeated acts of violence manifested the extent to which anti-Western and anti-Christian nationalist propaganda had affected parts of the Turkish population, rendering Turkey less safe for Christians and slandering its image in Europe.

A Rising Star in Turkey's Nationalist Stage: Kemal Kerinçsiz and the "Great Union of Jurists"

In the context of rising nationalism in Turkey after December 2004, one should not forget to mention the "Great Union of Jurists" *(Büyük Hukukçular Birliği)* and its leader Kemal Kerinçsiz. This association spearheaded a new wave of nationalist mobilisation against liberal intellectuals and minorities. A lawyer by profession, Kerinçsiz skilfully exploited the remaining illiberal traits of Turkish criminal legislation, as well as the failure of judicial authorities to readjust the interpretation and implementation of existing legislation on liberal lines. Through the systematic exploitation of legal stipulations such as Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code which penalised "insults against Turkishness," Kerinçsiz targeted an increasing number of Turkish intellectuals which have personified the liberal democratic face of republican Turkey, as well as minorities. What follows is merely a sample of prosecutions which resulted from plaints submitted by Kerinçsiz.

In August 2005, Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature, was indicted under Article 301 § 1 for his comments on the Armenian and the Kurdish question during an interview with a Swiss newspaper.[24] His trial caused a worldwide sensation and brought to the fore the shortcomings of Turkish democracy and the limitations of freedom of expression, even for some of Turkey's most prominent intellectual figures. His acquittal did not mean the end of prosecutions for Turkish intellectuals nor did the Nobel Prize award stop Turkish nationalists from continuing to defame Pamuk for his "mediocre" literary work and lack of patriotism, and arguing that he was awarded the Prize precisely because of his "anti-Turkish" statements.

While Pamuk was eventually acquitted, the journalist Hrant Dink did not share the same fate. A member of Turkey's Armenian minority and editor of the bilingual weekly newspaper *Agos*, Dink was prosecuted on the basis of Article 301 after a plaint filed by Kerinçsiz for a comment he had made in his newspaper. In October 2006 he was sentenced to six months jail for insulting Turkishness. The same court later suspended the sentence due to the offender's goodwill and on the condition of not committing a similar offence. When Kerinçsiz appealed against the decision, the high court prosecutor demanded Dink's acquittal, arguing that the comments made by Dink were allegorical. Nonetheless, the Court of Cassation upheld the original court decision and even removed the suspension of the sentence. This decision caused wide criticism in Turkey and abroad, as the Court of Cassation set an alarming precedent for criminal cases based on Article 301. In September 2006, a new case was opened at the court against Dink on the basis of the same article for an older comment of his in *Agos* in which he had affirmed the Armenian genocide.

Elif Şafak, another prominent writer, has been the latest victim of Kerinçsiz's judicial activism. In July 2006, she faced criminal charges on the basis of Article 301 for the words of an Armenian character in

24 See Karl Vick, "Turkey Charges Acclaimed Author," *Washington Post*, September 1, 2005.

her book "The Bastard of Istanbul" *(Baba ve Piç)*.[25] Interestingly, when the case had been first brought to court in June 2006, the Public Prosecutor of Beyoğlu decided not to launch a criminal process. In the decision it was argued that the book was a work of literature, which aimed to promote peace and did not fit into Article 301. Yet, following an appeal filed by Kerinçsiz, this decision was overruled by the Istanbul 7th High Criminal Court. Şafak was finally acquitted from all charges on September 22, 2006.

Apart from individually targeting intellectuals, Kerinçsiz and his Union also attempted to obstruct academic events in which views contrary to the Turkish nationalist grand narrative would be expressed. The organisation of an academic conference on the Armenian question in Istanbul, which intended to include the views of historians who disagreed with the Turkish official view of the events, comprised a clear example of this. The conference which was originally planned to take place at Bogaziçi University had to be postponed under state and government pressure to September 2005. Days before the conference start on September 23, 2005 at Bogaziçi University, Kerinçsiz filed a complaint against its organisation pointing at its "unscientific nature" and "uncertainties" about its organisation. On the eve of the conference start, an Istanbul administrative court issued an injunction barring Bogaziçi University and Sabancı University from hosting the conference, until information about the names, the qualifications of the speakers and the financial supporters of the event was collected. The organisers swiftly moved the venue to Bilgi University, which was not mentioned by the court decision, and finally held the conference there. In his statements, Kerinçsiz argued that the real aim of this conference was not academic but to push Turkey into chaos, break it up and create a (greater) Armenia and a Kurdistan. When journalists Murat Belge, İsmet Berkan, Hasan Cemal, Erol Katırcıoğlu and Haluk Şahin argued against the court decision, they faced a new trial by Kerinçsiz and his Union. While the drop decided in April 2006 to drop the cases against Berkan, Cemal, Katırcıoğlu and Şahin due to time lapse, it maintained the case against Belge ordering for a later hearing date to be set. In July 2006, Kerinçsiz, followed by a number of his supporters, disrupted the presentation of a book on the forced displacement of Kurdish villagers by Turkish military forces in southeastern Turkey, during the 1990s. This research project was funded by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (*Türkiye Ekonomi ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*—TESEV), accused by the agitators of being "spokesmen of George Soros." The book presentation was finally held a week later.[26]

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has been another favourite target of Kerinçsiz and his association. Increased international interest in minority rights and Turkey's drive for EU membership which required a drastic improvement of minority rights brought the issue of the Ecumenical Patriarchate under new attention. The numerous problems which hampered the smooth activity of the Ecumenical Patriarchate became increasingly pronounced in reports of human rights organisations and the annual European Commission reports. Although minority rights were the field where the least progress was made until December 2004, an increase of nationalist pressure was observed in its aftermath.[27] Kerinçsiz and his association organised numerous demonstrations in front of the Patriarchate building demanding its expulsion from Turkey. In an interview to a Greek newspaper, he argued that the Patriarchate was plotting a conspiracy to subvert Turkish sovereignty and establish an Orthodox Vatican in the heart of the old city of Istanbul. He added that his association had collected 2.5 million signatures from all over Turkey demanding the expulsion of the Patriarchate and had taken legal action towards that direction and estimated that as a result of his actions the Patriarchate would be closed within

25 Richard Lea, "'Insulting Turkishness' Case Reopens against Bestselling Author," *The Guardian*, July 7, 2006.

26 İsmail Saymaz, "Bu Zorbalara Kim Dur Diyecek? [Who Will Say 'Stop' to These Bandits?]," *Radikal*, July 7, 2006.

27 Besides Kerinçsiz's association, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its activities came under increased pressure from other nationalist groups as well. The regular visits of Patriarch Bartholomew to several provinces of Anatolia—often invited by local officials—where he held masses in abandoned Greek Orthodox churches had caused no public reaction. In the aftermath of December 2004, these visits came under the attack of local nationalist groups which organised counter-demonstrations and small-scale riots. See Taylan Yıldırım and Tahsin Tuna, "Bergama Bazilikası'nda Ayine 'Kızılelma' Protestosu," *Milliyet*, May 8, 2006. Similar nationalist demonstrations were held in consecutive years on January 6 during the traditional Greek Orthodox celebration of Epiphany on the shore of the Golden Horn, an ancient tradition revived in recent years. Several small-scale bomb attacks against the Patriarchate building completed the picture.

two years.[28] became repeatedly target of nationalistic groups.

Kerinçsiz explained his activism as a rectification for the existing idleness of Turkish authorities to defend Turkish national interests and the Republic. In his words:

"Some people say that 'you (The Great Union of Jurists) do not have to do all these.' ... We have to follow perhaps more than twenty trials. Unfortunately, however, if the persons charged with this duty do not appear, if the public prosecutors, who have the duty to protect and be alert about the Republic of Turkey, do not consider themselves responsible in this case and do not start an investigation, of course the children of Turkey, who eat the bread of this country, the Turkish jurists will appear."[29]

Kerinçsiz's Union managed to capture domestic and international attention and also show the limits of legislative reform as well as the implementation deficit of the new liberal legislation. It also aim to create anxiety and fear among minorities and Turkey's intellectual elites whose prominent members were faced with trials for the opinions, precisely at a time when they felt more empowered to express their grievances and opinions about Turkey's main political questions.[30]

28 Kemal Kerinçsiz, "Σε Δύο Χρόνια Θα Κλείσουμε το Πατριαρχείο [We Will Close the Patriarchate within Two Years]," *Interview with Anna Andreou, Τα Νέα [Ta Nea]*, July 8, 2006.
29 Kemal Kerinçsiz, "Bir Avuç Türk Düşmanı Faşist Düzen Kuruyor [A Handful of Enemies of Turkey Establishes a Fascist Order]," *Türk Solu*, No. 100, February 6, 2006.
30 See Elif Şafak, "Turkey's Home Truths," *OpenDemocracy*, July 25, 2006.

The Anti-American Twist of the Nationalist Upsurge

The anti-American character of this nationalist rise differentiates it from previous similar phenomena. Anti-Americanism is not something unknown to the Turkish society. It flourished in the 1970s when leftist opposition to US foreign policy in the Middle East and the developing world as well as the stationing of US troops on Turkish territory was extremely popular. Kemalist nationalism and its primary representative, the CHP had also often employed anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric in the 1960s and 1970s. This continued as leftist politics maintained their ideological appeal in Turkey until the 1980 coup. Besides, anti-Western Islamic nationalism was by no means unknown in Turkish politics. Islamist parties adopted an anti-Western political agenda generally identified with the Palestinian cause and objected to Western intervention in Middle East politics. Israel was viewed with animosity as the agent of Western and particularly US interests in the region and the oppressor of millions of fellow Muslims in the Middle East. Nonetheless, throughout these years, Turkey's military and bureaucratic elites maintained a clear pro-US position which made the overall picture much more balanced. The military and civil bureaucracies highly valued Turkey's strategic alliance with the United States, and this became more pronounced after the 1980 military coup. Regardless of public opinion views, US–Turkey strategic alliance developed to the point of forming a regional alliance with Israel, to the chagrin of a large part of Turkish public opinion. The reaction of most Turks to that alliance was not considered more important than the strategic benefits which this alliance would accrue for Turkey.

Nonetheless, the new US policies in the Middle East in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, the relapse of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the rise of the AKP into power and the US invasion of Iraq brought this alliance under severe pressure. Turkey's refusal to militarily support the invasion and growing mutual mistrust about US and Turkish objectives in post-war Iraq seriously influenced US–Turkey relations. Information that the United States were considering partition plans of Iraq and the establishment of a Kurdish state in the north of the country, or even further, a large-scale redrawing of the map of the Middle East, which entailed territorial losses for Turkey, only added fuel to existing nationalist conspiracy theories and even more stirred anti-US feeling in Turkey, which for the first time did not leave the secularist elites unaffected. This shift was also clearly documented in opinion surveys. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, the number of Turks who had a favourable view of Americans fell from 32 percent in 2004 to 23 percent in 2005 and a mere 17 percent in 2006. The same number was 27 percent in Pakistan, 36 percent in Indonesia and Egypt and 38 percent in Jordan.[31] Support for the US-led war on terror fell from 37 percent in 2004 to 17 percent in 2005 and 14 percent in 2006.[32] At 3 percent Turkey records the lowest level of confidence among the fifteen countries of the survey for President George W. Bush.[33] Anti-Americanism seems to have established a firm position in Turkish public opinion[34] and tends to become for the first time a pervasive theme of Turkish nationalism.

31 The Pew Global Project Attitudes, *America's Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas* (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2006), p. 10.
32 Ibid., p. 13.
33 Ibid., p. 11.
34 Mehmet Ali Birand, "Toplum, İsrail ve ABD Düşmanı Oluyor [The Society Becomes an Enemy of Israel and the United States]," *Posta*, July 25, 2006.

Conclusions

The above is by no means exhaustive list of incidents, which highlight the rise of nationalist sentiment in Turkey since December 2004. Yet it comprises a representative account of the trends in Turkish society. Nationalism maintains its dominant position in Turkish politics. Proliferated by public education, the media and supported by the political party system, it pervades through civil society, popular culture and other forms of collective expression and functions as a cementing and mobilising factor, especially in periods of crisis. Uncertainty, which emanates from the volatile situation in the Middle East, Turkey's Kurdish question, as well as the course of Turkey's EU accession negotiations, contributes to the rise of nationalist sentiment and spells no good omens for the near future. The crisis in the Middle East, the lack of any breakthrough in the Kurdish question and the relapse of PKK activity have considerably increased Turkey's insecurity. Similar was the effect of the rise of the Cyprus issue in the course of Turkey's EU accession process, as well as the debates within Europe on the impossibility of Turkey's EU membership and the need to promote a privileged partnership solution.

Apart from the feeling of insecurity, reaction to Kurdish and Greek Cypriot nationalism was also one of the reasons for the recent nationalist upsurge. Turkey's Kurdish leaders and the government of the Republic of Cyprus failed to follow the compromise steps which came from the AKP government in the first years of its tenure. By failing to respond on conciliatory lines and by strengthening their respective nationalist positions, they caused a nationalist reaction on the Turkish side. In the Kurdish issue, failing to explicitly condemn PKK terror threatened to identify the whole Kurdish political movement with the PKK and thus exposed the Turkish supporters of Kurdish rights and the reform process into harsh nationalist criticism. Regarding the Cyprus issue, the continuing political and economic isolation of the northern part of the island, despite initial EU promises, has provided Turkey with a pretext to refuse the implementation of its own commitments, which would entail the lifting of the embargo against and the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus.

US policies in the Middle East comprised an additional impetus for the rise of nationalism. They alienated Turkish public opinion and led to a nationalist riposte, which unleashed a large wave of anti-Americanism across Turkish public opinion and may prove to be the most enduring legacy of the current rise of nationalism. The failure of the European Union to articulate its own distinct Middle East and Iraq policies has also contributed to its sharing the animosity that US policies in the region have provoked within Turkish public opinion.

In that political context, old and new enemies are used as foci of nationalist mobilisation. "Internal enemies" such as Turkey's minorities, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Turkish intelligentsia, and "external enemies," such as the United States, the European Union, Israel, or foreign priests are seen as threats for Turkey's sovereignty. This may be manifested through judicial activism, but can also lead to violent reactions.

Finally, one needs to note the nationalist relapse of the AKP government.[35] The AKP government had taken great pains in the beginning of its tenure to reduce nationalist tendencies within Turkish public opinion, promote Turkey's EU candidacy and seek compromise solutions in issues as politically sensitive as the Cyprus and the Kurdish issues. Nonetheless, since December 2004 it has gradually reconfigured its position and reverted to the use of nationalist rhetoric regarding a series of issues, which could impact Turkish nationalist feeling. Domestic political considerations seem to be the primary reason for that shift. As parliamentary elections will be held at in November 2007 at the latest, the AKP is careful not to give pretexts for accusations that it compromises Turkish national interests. Appealing to the nationalist reflexes of the Turkish public is a very strong temptation for the AKP government, especially since it can help obliterate domestic political shortcomings and reduce vote losses towards its right. Adopting a more nationalist stance may accrue minor domestic

35 Also see Owen Matthews and Sami Kohen, "Sliding Backward: An Ugly Nationalist Mood Is Brewing in Ankara, Stalling Once Hailed Reforms," *Newsweek*, April 24, 2006.

political gains, but may also have a catastrophic impact on the course of EU–Turkey relations and other foreign policy issues. The lure of populism has always been great, but its price may in this case be higher than ever.

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