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Kemalist Eurasianism: An Emerging Geopolitical Discourse in Turkey

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Over the past decade or so, there has been a convergence between the Eurasianist and Kemalist ideologies in Turkey. A number of Kemalist and Socialist intellectual and political actors together with sections of the military have started to articulate Eurasianism (Avrasyacılık in Turkish) as a new geopolitical discourse for Turkey and as an alternative to Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy orientation. In this perspective, Eurasianism stands for a political, economic and cultural alliance with 'Eurasian countries', such as Russia, Iran, and Turkic countries in Central Asia, as well as Pakistan, India and China. This article aims to deepen the analyses carried out thus far on this emerging geopolitical discourse. To this end, it contextualises the emergence of the Eurasianism in Turkey within the wider social, political and historical context of which it forms a part, including the framework of asymmetrical political and economic relations that developed between Turkey and its Western allies in the post-Cold War period.

INTRODUCTION

Eurasianism originally emerged as an intellectual movement within the Russian émigré community in the 1920s that was critical of the Western-centric vision of understanding and explaining world history, geography and politics. Since the collapse of the USSR, Eurasianism (or neo-Eurasianism) has

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re-emerged in Russia itself, where it is embraced broadly and has become “a flexible concept, used by different political and intellectual actors for different agendas”.¹ Kemalism was a modernist state ideology, launched by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the 1920s, in the aftermath of a Turkish liberation war fought against the occupying European powers. It aimed at forming a Turkish nation-state based upon six fundamental principles: republicanism, secularism, statism, revolutionism, populism and nationalism. Over the past decade or so, there has been a convergence between these two ideologies in Turkey.

Since the mid-1980s, IMF prescriptions and massive privatisation have undermined the Kemalist principles of populism, revolutionism and statism. At the same time, the rise of political Islam and Kurdish ethnic separatism have further challenged the Kemalist ideology. Kemalist, Social Democratic and a segment of Socialist intellectual and political actors, such as the supporters of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), Democratic Leftist Party (DSP) and the Worker’s Party (IP) have identified the pro-Western, and more specifically pro-US policies of Turkish governments as the main reasons behind the decline of Kemalism and consequently the secular and social Turkish nation-state. Their stance has resonated with the National Manufacturers and Businessmen Association (USIAD) and sections of Turkey’s military elite. Since the mid-1990s, all of these forces have started to articulate Eurasianism (*Avrasyacılık*), as a new geopolitical discourse and as an alternative to Turkey’s pro-Western orientation.² Eurasianism calls for a cultural, military, political and commercial alliance with Turkey’s eastern neighbours, notably Russia, Iran, the Turkic countries of Central Asia, and even Pakistan, India and China. Although Russian Eurasianism has had a certain influence on its development, its supporters argue that the Eurasianist movement in Turkey has its roots in Kemalism.³

Eurasianist discourses have also been proposed, after the end of the Cold War, by liberal, centre-right and nationalist political and intellectual actors in Turkey. On the one hand, establishing closer links with the Turkic countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus has always been a popular foreign policy orientation for the right-wing, religious, and ultra-nationalist political movements, which have claimed legitimacy for their views on cultural, historical and racial grounds.⁴ For the centre-right and liberal political parties, by contrast, Eurasianist discourse has primarily been about enabling geo-economic opportunities. Kemalist Eurasianism, however, differs radically from all of these conceptions, mainly because of its hostility towards any type of pro-Western policy in what they refer to as “Eurasian space”, be it political or economic, but also because of its call for an alliance with Russia, China and Iran instead.⁵

Out of the small academic literature on Kemalist Eurasianism, two particular perspectives have taken shape thus far.⁶ One of these characterises it as “Turkish Eurasianism”, which it argues should be considered as a

“counter-hegemonic vision” that emerged as a reaction to Western-led project of economic and political globalisation.⁷ According to this perspective, Kemalist Eurasianism is “a good example of the alternative globalisations that are currently underway albeit unnoticed by the mainstream media and the scholarly community alike”.⁸ The second perspective, informed by a critical geopolitical approach, instead deconstructs Kemalist Eurasianism as a “radical” foreign policy, serving the purposes of the nationalists and the military, which if successful would bar the EU-led reform process of Turkey.⁹ In line with this latter argument, and due to the fact that the main followers of Kemalist Eurasianism have recently been linked to a an alleged “Ergenekon Terror Organization”¹⁰ said to support a military coup against the pro-Western AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, the pro-Western and liberal intelligentsia in Turkey also argue that Kemalist Eurasianism is an “irrational” (*sürrealist*) foreign policy, conceived to serve the interests of the nationalist *milieus* in Turkey or to act as a fifth-column on behalf of Russia.¹¹

In this article, we aim to deepen the analyses carried out so far on Kemalist Eurasianism. To this end, we will contextualise the emergence of this discourse historically, politically and socially, with a particular emphasis given to the asymmetrical political and economic relations that developed between Turkey and its Western allies in the post-Cold War period. Only in this way, we argue, can one offer a more complete account of Kemalist Eurasianism and understand its rationale as an emerging geopolitical discourse in Turkey. In our endeavour, we first look at the dynamics behind the convergence of Kemalism and Eurasianism. We suggest that Kemalism, as it is understood by its adherents today, has never been synonymous with Westernisation, but rather with anti-Imperialism. Indeed, this has always been the main motivation behind the convergence of Kemalists with a segment of the Socialists and sections of the military elite in Turkey. The most recent and important outcome of this convergence is the current support of these groups for Eurasianism, an intellectual movement originally developed by Russian émigrés which rejected a Western-centric understanding and explaining of world history, geography and politics. Our discussion thus proceeds in the second section, with a consideration of the anti-Imperialist dimension of Kemalism. The third section continues by briefly outlining the origins of Eurasianism. The fourth section contextualises how the convergence of Kemalists and Eurasianists gave birth to Kemalist Eurasianism as a new geopolitical discourse in the making in Turkey. This section also demonstrates the links of Kemalist Eurasianism with the International Eurasian movement. The fifth section scrutinises the feasibility of Kemalist Eurasianism, casting doubt upon its adoption as a viable foreign policy. Finally, the conclusion discusses the findings, and presents some new perspectives on Kemalist Eurasianism, and consequently on the ways in which geopolitical discourses can be analysed in non-Western settings.

THE DILEMMAS OF KEMALISM

Although Kemalism is broadly understood as a project for the Westernisation of Turkey,¹² supporting the argument of Turkish governments and pro-Western elites that joining the European Union is the natural outcome of Turks' 200-year-old quest;¹³ in fact, Turkey's modernisation discourse has never been entirely synonymous with Westernisation. As Atatürk emphasised in his speeches, the French Revolution constituted the ideological background of the Kemalist Revolution.¹⁴ However, Kemalism came into being thanks to a war of liberation (1919–1922) fought against the occupying European powers. Its architects admired the Enlightenment and the principles of the French Revolution, but they emphasised the fact that they stood against Western imperial objectives. Moreover, while four of the six foundational principles of Kemalism – republicanism, secularism, revolutionism and nationalism – all originated from the French Revolution, the remaining two principles, statism (promoting a state led mixed-economy model) and populism (opposition towards class privileges and class distinctions) were influenced by Soviet Bolshevism. In fact, the Soviet Union considered the Turkish War of Liberation as an act against Western imperialism, signalling the awakening of Asian and Muslim peoples.¹⁵

The cultural representation of Europe as an enemy or a sinister force threatening to break up Turkish national unity is also one of the legacies of the War of Liberation for present-day Turkey.¹⁶ This representation also has its roots in the “Sèvres complex” of Turks. This refers to the Treaty signed with the Allied Powers in the aftermath of the First World War which foresaw the partition of the Ottoman Empire among its ethnic communities, with large territorial shares given to Christian populations. The Treaty of Sèvres was cancelled after three years of the War of Liberation led by Atatürk against the Allied Powers, but it has remained as one of the most disturbing reference points in Turkish collective memory.

Atatürk continued to be the central figure in the aftermath of the War of Liberation in Turkey. He put his military career aside and dedicated his life to the building of the modern Turkish nation-state, by launching legal, political and social reforms known as the Kemalism Revolution.¹⁷ Despite the fact that many of his reforms were along Western lines, nowhere in the official discourses of the republic or in Atatürk's speeches themselves, was the Kemalist Revolution specifically equated with Westernisation. Here Turkey was establishing a pattern that would be apparent in other non-Western nationalist movements “which articulated strong anti-Western themes, yet were all destructively modern”.¹⁸ Atatürk viewed modernity as universal and defended the idea that in order for a nation to develop, participation in modern civilisation is indispensable.¹⁹ He emphasised that modern culture belongs not only to the nation that possesses it, but to the world as a whole.²⁰ On the seventh anniversary of the establishment of the

Republic of Turkey, Atatürk remarked to an American journalist: “Turkey is not a monkey and is not aping any nation. It will neither Americanize nor Westernize. It will only become pure”.²¹ As Atatürk’s biographer Andrew Mango emphasises, Atatürk’s “aim was not imitation, but participation in a universal civilization”.²²

The official historical discourses of the Kemalist revolution emphasised that great reforms do not come from imitation of the West, but rather stem from the non-written laws, *töre*, of the Turks of Central Asia and the Anatolian civilisation of the Hittites.²³ The founding fathers of the Turkish Republic thus looked for the roots of secularity, gender equality, and parliamentary democracy not in the West, but in the ancient land of Turks, on the banks of the Orkhon river, where these norms and values were believed to exist at a time when “many of the European languages had not yet come into existence”.²⁴ (Also see Figure 1.) Later, the myth of Central Asian origins was abandoned by Kemalists because it was adopted by ultranationalists, who glorified the Central Asian past of Turks. However, today Turkish school textbooks still depict Central Asia as the *anayurt* (motherland) of Turks. The view of Hittite civilisation as a founding element of the Turkish culture, however, has not been accepted by any of the Turkish political factions.

In the atmosphere of fear and isolationism that followed the Second World War and the emergence of opposing superpower blocks, the anti-imperialist dimension of Kemalism and its conception of neutrality in



FIGURE 1 Atatürk, marking Central Asia in a geography class at a secondary school in Samsun on 16 November 1930.

Source: Archives of Anitkabir (Atatürk’s mausoleum) in Ankara.

foreign policy were abandoned. In their place, the Turkish government sought an unconditional Western alliance through joining NATO, and rejected statism in favour of liberalism in political economy.²⁵ The new pro-Western and pro-democracy administration suppressed many of its opponents, especially those on the left who called for modernisation without Westernisation and liberal economy.²⁶

In 1960, the pro-Western elected civilian government was overthrown in a military coup. The military *junta* executed the heads of the civilian administration that it overthrew, but handed power back to civilian government within a short period of time, after promulgating a “remarkably liberal constitution, in which human rights were protected and special measures were taken to prevent a future government assuming dictatorial powers”.²⁷ A new era began in Turkey in the name of structuring a social welfare state and a parliamentary democracy with all their implications. In this new democratic political environment, socialist and communist ideas flourished for the first time in Turkey, along with anti-US sentiments. During this period, a significant convergence started to take place between the Kemalists and the Socialists, producing a type of Kemalist Socialism. The *YÖN* magazine, launched by Doğan Avcioğlu, Mümtaz Soysal and Cemal Reşit Eyüboğlu in 1961, became the main intellectual platform of this convergence. Kemalists/Socialists stressed the anti-imperialist, egalitarian and statist aspects of Kemal’s legacy seeking “to consolidate state power against bourgeoisie”.²⁸ However, the military intervened again in 1971, this time mainly to suppress Marxist and non-Marxist leftist activities, including some Kemalists/Socialists. Mass arrests, torture and censorship prevailed under the martial law, undermining the belief – held by many who had supported the 1960 *coup* – that the Turkish military would always be on the side of liberal democracy.²⁹ Finally, a third military coup took place in September 1980, establishing a brutal military regime, which lasted until 1983.

The most important point about all these *coup d'états* is that, although each had a different motivation and ideological background and each served the evolution of a different political faction or social thought, they were all carried out in the name of restoring Kemalism.³⁰ The practical effects of this on the concept on Kemalism have been two-fold. Internally, it has transformed Kemalism into a flexible state ideology, compatible with almost any political discourse or condition, while externally it has helped to distort its image as a modernisation project of Turkey, by associating it first and foremost with brutal military interventions.

The 1990s became a time of significant change for Turkish society, when all institutions, values and ideals of modernity came to be seriously challenged.³¹ Privatisation and liberalisation have become the names of the game in economy. “In economic terms, the 1990s were Turkey’s lost decade.”³² Successive governments restricted expenditure in order to comply with IMF prescriptions. This resulted in the deterioration of public

education and health services. Nationally owned companies were privatised and consumer subsidies, agricultural support and public investment were reduced. No new social assistance measures were implemented to respond to the new poverty. The emergence of the Islamist parties caused a particular problem at this period. The 1980 military *junta* had followed the US policy of encouraging Islamism as a buffer against the socialist movement in Turkey.³³ Now religion was made a compulsory element of the educational curriculum. As spending was cut on the educational system, due to IMF fiscal austerity measures, more and more youngsters began to enroll in government-backed religious high schools. All these developments have helped the Islamists to gradually increase their share of the vote, a tendency which continues to the present day. Meanwhile, Kurdish ethno-nationalism launched an armed struggle challenging the territorial integrity of Turkey.

Although Turkish governments and the military obediently followed pro-Western or, better, pro-US policies since the 1980 *coup*, this did not save them living through shaky relationships with their Western partners. Since the mid-1990s, Turkey has intensified its efforts to join the European Union (EU) as a full member. This was not only a favourable foreign policy orientation in the eyes of its most important Western ally, the United States, but it was also viewed as the best option to bring viable solutions to its political and economic instabilities. During this period, the Turkish liberals and the business circles, which have been the most ardent supporters of EU membership, were joined by three other groups – the leftist political formations in favour of a plural democracy, the moderate Islamists, and the Kurdish political leadership. This alliance was motivated by the belief that EU integration and the reform process that it endorses was an opportunity to relax the firmness of the secular unitary state-structure of Turkey and also to enlarge various liberties and rights in the country. Alongside various NGOs, they all increased their pressure on Turkish governments in their bid to join the EU.

The Kemalists/Socialists have not approached the EU project with the same enthusiasm and trust. They have objected specifically to signing a Customs Union with the EU without being its member, and in general to EU-led economic reforms aimed at downsizing vital sectors in Turkey such as agriculture.³⁴ EU concepts such as ‘federalism’ and ‘regionalism’ have also started to strike negative chords with them as they were associated with separatism, and they have viewed the EU as an imperialist power trying to revive the Sèvres Treaty.³⁵ They have insisted that the EU has never employed a sincere attitude towards Turkey’s membership, and moreover that EU political and economic prescriptions are intended to downsize and transform the Turkish unitary state structure and Kemalism as a state ideology.

Kemalism has not been the only modern state ideology to undergo challenge during this period. As a consequence of globalisation, which has raised the possibility that the two-century-old “modernity project” (at least

in terms of its classic formulation) is exhausted, many components of the classical models of nations and revolutionary states have been heavily attacked.³⁶ The state as a totalising modern project has been challenged by post-structuralists and neo-liberalists alike. Post-modernism has further signalled the death of modern meta-narratives whose function is to ground and legitimate the illusion of a 'universal human history'.³⁷ All of this has worked to undermine the authority of Kemalism. Despite this, modernity is still alive and well in Turkey,³⁸ along with its particular vision of the world and its meta-narratives. Its supporters have started to form alliances against the new paradigms of post-modernity. Those who support a strong secular and social Turkish unitary state and are generally hostile to pro-Western politics and globalisation have found a common ground under the banner of Kemalism, as they have done so in the past. They have also developed their own geopolitical discourse: Eurasianism.

THE ORIGINS OF EURASIANISM

Eurasianism was first launched as a political and intellectual movement by the Russian émigré community in the 1920s. The representatives of the Eurasian movement, the linguist and ethnologist Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoi, the geographer Petr Savitskii, the theologian George V. Florovsky, the musicologist Petr P. Souvchinsky and the legal scholar Nicolai N. Alekseev offered a different, i.e., non-Western, way of imagining both history and geographical space. 'Eurasia' (*Evrasiia* in Russian) was conceived as a geographical world distinct from Europe and Asia,³⁹ where ethnic Russians and other Eastern Slavs were identified with Finno-Ugric, Turkic and Mongolian people in this vast cultural, economic, linguistic and geographical arena. Eurasianism was characterised among other things by a powerful anti-West and anti-imperial sentiment, which resonated with the Turkish 'Sèvres complex' noted above. As Trubetskoi wrote,

Europeans look upon Russia as a potential colony. Her vast dimensions disturb them not in the least. In terms of population, India is larger than Russia, but England has snapped up the entire country. Africa exceeds Russia in size, but it has been divided among several of the Romano-Germanic states. The same will probably happen to Russia. Russia is seen only as a territory on which certain things grow and within which such and such minerals are available.⁴⁰

Although Eurasianism as a political movement had died out by the end of the 1930s, Eurasianist ideas were revived in the last decades of the Soviet regime by Lev Gumilev. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, they were also gradually transformed into a new geopolitical discourse by the post-Soviet elite.

In the first few years following the collapse of the Soviet regime, pro-Western liberals were in power in Russia and they defended a closer cooperation with the West and NATO – a policy orientation that the Eurasians call ‘Atlanticism’. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, ethno-nationalist and military conflicts in the Russian periphery, anti-Russian attitudes and politics of some ex-Soviet Republics, and NATO expansionism stimulated sharp criticism towards Gorbachev’s New Political Thinking and Boris Yeltsin’s pro-Western policies. Eurasianism started to find an echo again among the post-Soviet Russian elite especially after the parliamentary elections of December 1993, when the then president Boris Yeltsin used military force against its opponents to dissolve the Parliament. As a result, when Yevgeni Primakov became the minister of foreign affairs in 1996, Russian foreign policy tilted towards Eurasianism, which appealed to all those who refused a unipolar world politics under Western hegemony and those who would like to make Eurasia an alternative geopolitical space.

Alexander Dugin emerged as the principal spokesperson of this movement. Strongly influenced by classic Eurasianism and Lev Gumilev, Dugin started opposing Western liberalism and ethnic nationalism that he viewed as sources of destruction of the Russian society. He advocated a mixed economy with small-scale capitalism and strategic sectors under the control of the state. Arguing in geopolitical terms, he defended the constitution of a ‘Eurasian socialism’, in which Russia should cooperate with India, Turkey, Central Asian countries and Iran. Dugin’s Eurasianism considers the Muslim population of the Russian Federation as an organic part of Eurasia, which is based on a system of values elaborated through the centuries by the traditional Eurasian confessions: Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism.⁴¹

There are various academic readings of the re-emergence of Eurasianism as a geopolitical discourse in Russia. Some are convinced that Eurasianism, just like Pan-Europeanism is originally an idealist discourse, far from cynical geopolitical constructions⁴² Kerr claims that it constitutes the continuing basis of Russia’s great power aspirations.⁴³ Tsygankov argues that the discourses of Dugin and like-minded Eurasians are in reality “the discourse of war”, resembling that of the Western adherents of the realist perspective in international relations.⁴⁴ Laruelle maintains that both traditional and current Eurasianism legitimises the Russian Empire, its continental and Asian dimension, to give Russia a more hard-line and quasi-totalitarian position against Europe.⁴⁵ Vinkovetsky finds it misleading, however, to link Eurasianism mainly to Russia and Russia’s ethnic nationalists.⁴⁶ Finally, Eurasianism is considered to be too esoteric, dogmatic, and idiosyncratic to conceptualise within a Western conceptual scheme, and too abstract to go through an academic analysis or to gain popular support.⁴⁷ Despite its controversy, however, Dugin’s Eurasianism has found an echo beyond Russian frontiers, in Tatarstan, Kazakhstan and Turkey as well.

THE EMERGENCE OF KEMALIST EURASIANISM

Due to the specific context of political and economic transformations that Turkey has gone through during the post-Cold War period, Kemalists, segments of Socialists and sections of the military, as we mentioned above, were becoming highly critical about Turkey's pro-Western policies. These critiques fed further upon the asymmetrical economic and political developments between Turkey and its Western partners, the continuation of PKK terrorism and problems with territorial integrity.

In 1995, Turkey signed the Customs' Union with the European Economic Union. It then became the first and only country to sign the Customs' Union before being a member, and consequently started to be concerned with all the commercial decisions of a Union where it does not participate in any level of decision-making. In time, most Turkish small and medium-scale enterprises could not compete and went bankrupt. Over the past 11 years, Turkish imports from the EU member states have consistently increased and finally reached \$28 billion in 2007.⁴⁸ Turkish current deficit has further amounted to \$5.8 billion while Turkey ranks the sixth in the world as an EU export target.⁴⁹ When Turkey entered the Customs Union, the EU promised full membership in return. However, the EU has never had clear-cut views on Turkey's membership, even after Turkey became an official candidate during the Helsinki Summit in December 1999. Turkey's declaration not to recognise the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), a recent EU member, has added another dimension to the problem. As the Greek Cypriot side rejected, in May 2004, the UN plan for a reconciliation and reunification in Cyprus before the RoC's entry into the EU, Turkey will not recognise the internationally accepted RoC before a comprehensive peace settlement has been reached. After becoming an EU member, the RoC thus blocked Turkey's accession talks with the EU. France, who is not keen on Turkey's accession, has backed the RoC, arguably in the interest of using the negotiations as a way to create pressure on the Turkish governments. The German chancellor Angela Merkel has also stressed the option of keeping Turkey's entry to the EU as an open-ended process.

PKK terrorism, on the other hand, has continued to threaten Turkey's territorial integrity. Turkey managed to capture and arrest Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's leader, in 1999, but following the first and the second Gulf Wars, a de facto Kurdish state has been installed in Northern Iraq, thanks to the support of United States and despite the opposition of Iran, Syria and Turkey. The reason behind these three countries' opposition is that the mental map of the Kurdistan state includes territories from Iran, Syria, and Turkey. The PKK can also now more easily launch attacks to Turkish territory from Northern Iraq. In this context, a pro-Western Kurdish state in the region has brought the US and Turkish interests into opposition. Turkey did not let US soldiers use its territory before the 2003 invasion of Iraq,

which led to the deterioration of US-Turkish relations, and a major confidence crises between the Turkish and US armed forces. On 4 July 2003, the US army, aided by the Kurdish *Peshmerge* soldiers, held 14 Turkish officers along with 13 civilians, who were led away with hoods over their heads, on the pretext of plotting to assassinate the governor of Kirkuk. Soon after this event, the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrote an article in the Washington Post, giving details about the US Greater Middle Eastern Project of transforming politically and economically 24 countries, from Morocco to China and the Middle East.⁵⁰ This article has further increased suspicions in Turkey that the US will try to transform the Turkish state, by giving support to political Islamism and ethnic separatism, so that Turkey can fit better into the US Greater Middle Eastern project.

The European Union has also given little support to Turkey in its fight against PKK terrorism. PKK was listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU only in 2003.⁵¹ However, the EU member states reacted much more quickly when they perceived that their security was threatened. When the Dutch authorities discovered a PKK training camp near Liempde in Holland, in November 2004, for example they launched a police operation, closed the camp and arrested 29 PKK members.⁵² For decades, Turkey has also been informing the EU countries that PKK is funded largely through drug smuggling, human trafficking and prostitution in Europe – a policy which was often dismissed as Turkish propaganda.⁵³ However, in 2006, when a Turkish Kurd was convicted of drug trafficking in the UK, British police revealed that he had controlled up to 90% of the UK's heroin trade by working with PKK activists and sympathisers in Turkey and in Europe.⁵⁴

All these developments have enforced the image of both EU countries and the USA as sinister imperial powers in the Turkish public opinion, trying to weaken or divide up Turkey. They have also consolidated the Kemalists/Socialists' long-term criticism towards the unconditionally pro-Western policies of successive Turkish governments. These groups were empowered in their endeavours to develop alternative geopolitical discourses. This is how they started to articulate "Eurasianism" together with the sections of the military elite, basing their discourse in the anti-imperialist dimension of Kemalism. "Eurasianism" meant the creation of a non-Western "Eurasian space" through an alliance with Turkey's eastern neighbours like Russia and Iran and even with Pakistan, India and China where Turkey would feel a secure and welcomed partner. Dugin's Eurasianism began to attract Kemalist Eurasianists, during this period, primarily because Dugin started publicly to construct a pragmatic conception of Eurasia, based on a regional economic integration model and presented as the only plausible resistance strategy against the perceived Western global hegemony.⁵⁵

The socialist Worker's Party (IP) took up the Kemalist Eurasian banner by initiating a close cooperation with Dugin's International Eurasian movement in Russia, and setting its party programme to promote Eurasianism as

a foreign policy option for Turkey. The first International Eurasian Conference, held in Istanbul on 19–20 November 1996, included participants from the communist and socialist parties of China, Korea, Serbia, Bulgaria, Palestine, Syria and Russia. In the concluding remarks of the conference, ethnic separatism and religious fundamentalism were underlined as the major threats to peace across Eurasian space and as the main reasons behind terrorism. Western powers and international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank were also considered as the main destabilising factors of the Eurasian countries' sovereignty and security. The participants agreed that the Eurasian conference must initiate forms of solidarity among the Eurasian countries to struggle against these perceived threats.

A second Eurasian Conference was held in Istanbul again, in April 2000, with participants from the same countries and similar resolutions were adopted in its conclusion. Then, in November 2003, a delegation from the Workers' Party in Turkey participated in the International Eurasian Congress, in Moscow, where participants from 22 countries attended and Alexander Dugin was formally elected as the leader of the International Eurasian movement. Dugin's concluding remarks, which followed the playing of the Eurasian Anthem composed by D. Shostakovitch (grandson of Dimitri Shostakovitch), were straightforward, explaining also the Kemalist/Socialist rationale for supporting Eurasianism:

The modernists who have not fallen on the postmodernist side have similar concerns. That's why today the socialists and nationalists can find themselves on the same front. However, Eurasian patriotism does not mean chauvinism and micro-nationalism. We oppose these two. Postmodernism in return opposes socialism, the real industry, and the nation-state. In Russia, postmodernists are not in power, anymore. With Putin's presidency, liberals and pro-westerns lost power and we, the Eurasianists fully support this development."⁵⁶

In December 2003, Alexander Dugin visited Turkey for the first time, as the leader of the International Eurasianist movement and he gave a seminar about Eurasianism at Istanbul University. The Turkish media widely covered Dugin's seminar, especially thanks to the participation of the famous Kemalist/Socialist Turkish poet, writer and columnist Attila İlhan.⁵⁷ İlhan has been adamant on a Turkish-Russian alliance even during the extremely Russophobic Cold War period in Turkey.⁵⁸ Over decades, he singly popularised the Muslim "Eurasianist" heroes, such as Ismail Gasprinskii, Sultan Galiyev and Mulla Nur Vahidov, bringing them back from complete obscurity.⁵⁹

Almost a year later, on 3 September 2004, the Strategical Research Centre of Istanbul University organised another symposium on Eurasianism, entitled "Turkish-Russian-Chinese and Iranian relationships on the Eurasian

axis". Chaired by Professor Nur Serter, who is currently a member of the Turkish parliament from the Republican People's Party (RPR), the conference hosted, as keynote speakers, the Iranian Ambassador Firouz Devletadabi, the Russian Ambassador Albert Chernishev, the vice president of the RPR, Onur Öymen, the ex-Secretary General of the Turkish National Security Council (NSC), retired General Tuncer Kılınç and the president of the Worker's Party Doğu Perinçek. Kılınç had previously attracted wide attention in Europe for his televised conference at the Military Academy on 7–8 March 2002, where he claimed that the EU will never accept Turkey and Turkey should engage in a search for new allies such as Russia and Iran.⁶⁰ His speech during the symposium in Istanbul University, "The Greater Middle East and the future of Eurasia", this time found a significant echo in Russia and was published in the official press of the Russian Ministry of Defense, *Krasnaya Zvezda* (The Red Star) on 20 October 2004.

A few months later, another symposium on Eurasia, *Avrasya Sempozyumu* took place in Gazi University in Ankara from 4 to 5 December 2004, just a few days before an official visit of Vladimir Putin to the Turkish capital. Alexander Dugin participated as a keynote speaker to this Eurasian Symposium, which was jointly sponsored by Gazi University, the International Eurasian Movement, The Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk İŞ), Ulusal Kanal (a TV channel, closely related to the Worker's Party) and the Association of Atatürkist Opinion (Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği). The symposium gathered the sympathisers and supporters of all sorts of Kemalist and Eurasianist concepts in Turkey, including the former president Süleyman Demirel, the former president of the de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Rauf Denktaş, the president of the Worker's Party (IP), Doğu Perinçek, the President of the Parliamentary Group of the Republican People's Party (CHP), Ali Topuz, ambassadors of Russia, China, Iran, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, the vice president of the National Businessmen Association (USIAD), Fevzi Durgun, retired military officers, like General Tuncer Kılınç and General Şener Eruygur, a former minister of Foreign Affairs, Şükrü Sina Gürel and a considerable number of professors and scholars. After this symposium, Alexander Dugin visited the TRNC by using the Ercan airport, considered illegal by the Republic of Cyprus administration, and embargoed by the international community. There, he carried out interviews with the Turkish Cypriot leaders and politicians, including Mehmet Ali Talat, the actual president and Rauf Denktaş, the ex-president of TRNC.

What the Kemalist Eurasianists mainly articulated in all these gatherings was their opposition to decentralised government structures and neo-liberalism in political economy, since they view these policies as postmodern strategies promoted by the West with the objective of disintegrating, weakening and even eliminating nation-states like Turkey. They expressed their admiration of China's, Russia's and India's resistance to Western dominance

in global politics and economy, viewing this resistance as the main rationale behind these countries' economic strength and independence.⁶¹ They argued that the Russian, the Turkish, the Chinese and the Indian people all have similar experiences of anti-Imperialist struggles. They thus claimed that an alliance between them through the creation of "Eurasia" can save all these countries from a Western cultural, historical, political and economic standardisation and bring more egalitarian economic and social policies. These Kemalist Eurasianists also argued that the Turkish nation can receive respect for its culture, traditions, and history in the "Eurasian" space, from the "Eurasian people", much more than in the Western one. They showed China as an example where Atatürk is well respected for being anti-imperialist and revolutionary and is given a place alongside Ghandi and Lenin in high school textbooks.⁶²

KEMALIST EURASIANISM AS A VIABLE FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION IN TURKEY?

Kemalist Eurasianism has not thus far achieved in Turkey the status of an official foreign policy. However, after the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, Eurasianism as a wider concept has started to attract more supporters among Turkish business circles which are disillusioned with Turkey's Western allies. Under Putin's regime, Russian-Turkish relations have entered a new phase. Economic relations between Turkey and Russia have already reached "unprecedented levels, historically and by regional standards in the post-Soviet era."⁶³ Putin and Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan have already met three times over the last few years. In 2006, the bilateral trade volume surpassed 20 billion US dollars. The growth continued in the first seven months of 2007 and if this trend is preserved during the rest of the year, the trade volume would soon easily climb to annual \$25 billion.⁶⁴ Russia is today Turkey's second largest trade partner after Germany.

Due to these figures, the Turkish government has further examined the possibility of establishing a zone of Turkish commerce and investment in Moscow, where the Turkish Prime Minister travelled in January 2006, accompanied by 600 businessmen. The leaders of both countries talked of joint ventures, a possible cooperation in the energy domain, and the resolution of the Cyprus conflict. During this visit, Putin referred for the first time to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as "Northern Cyprus", instead of as "occupied territories" and underlined the necessity to lift the sanctions towards this entity. He also sent a message to the Greek Cypriot administration in Cyprus concerning the visa restrictions imposed on Russian citizens, suggesting that the entry of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU can lead to a modification in the Russian foreign policy towards Cyprus and to a closer cooperation with Turkey and the TRNC.⁶⁵

However, until now, Russia has not taken concrete initiatives to develop any closer relations with the TRNC. Only a delegation from the Russian Chamber of Commerce has so far visited the TRNC and met their counterparts in the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, which is the only Turkish Cypriot institution internationally recognised. As put by the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, “Big countries do not change their foreign policy in a radical manner”.⁶⁶ It would thus be naïve to expect a radical shift in Russian foreign policy concerning Cyprus. Nevertheless, the International Eurasian movement has shown some signs of cooperation with the TRNC. The Kemalist Eurasianists were against both the reunification of the island under a federal form as proposed by the UN-brokered Annan Plan and its entry into the EU. They favoured instead the recognition of the TRNC as an independent entity by the international community. The Greek Cypriot government at the time was also against the Annan Plan, since they deemed it the dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus. Russia vetoed the Security Council resolution to endorse the Annan Plan before it was put into referendum on both sides of the island. The International Eurasian movement in Russia supported this Russian veto. However, according to them, this veto was not in favour of the Greek Cypriot side, who was openly against the Annan plan, but in favour of the Kemalist Eurasianists.

We [the Eurasianists] put the veto. It's the result [the pressures] of the Eurasian movement on the Russian Foreign Ministry, ideas that we have diffused thanks to our close cooperation with the Workers Party in Turkey and the personal preferences of Putin and A. S. Chernyshev [ex-ambassador of Russia in Turkey and the president of the Turkish–Russian friendship association]. This veto changes the geopolitical destiny of Russia, in displacing Russia from the West towards the East. It will be studied in school books. The partitions in Cyprus and in Transnistria are partitions between the West and the East, conflicts between the West and the East, and their resolutions have to spread to a longer period of time.⁶⁷

Notwithstanding these developments, a significant sector of pro-Western Russian elite and intelligentsia considers Turkey as the traditional enemy of Russia and the Russian society believes that Ankara is supporting Chechen separatism and Islamic movements in Crimea and Sebastopol.⁶⁸ There is some truth in this perception, since pro-Western governments in Turkey have supported the Chechen movement in Russia in the past. More recently, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government in Turkey has supported Georgia's bid to join NATO, which was strongly objected to by Russia. Reciprocally, a considerable segment of the Turkish intelligentsia, critical about the unconditional pro-Western politics in Turkey, but still liberal when it comes to political economy, is also suspicious about Dugin's Eurasianism and the Kemalist Eurasianist movement in Turkey. They view

this type of Eurasianism as a hidden agenda of Russia to make this country a global power. Moreover, unlike Russia, Turkey is militarily and economically dependent on the West, and pro-Western governments and policies have been in power in Turkey ever since the 1980 *coup d'Etat*.

These are the major grounds which explain why Kemalist Eurasianism has a difficult path in Turkey at the policy level. At the societal level, however, it has not yet become a popular discourse, as it is closely associated with the military elite, just like in Russia. This does not create a magnet of attraction for a society which has suffered from three military regimes. This negative association is enhanced by the fact that the *ex-gladio*, that is to say the remnants of the organisations set up by the CIA in various NATO countries during the Cold War to counter the rise of Communist/Socialists movements, have also taken up the banner of Kemalism, patriotism and anti-Westernism after their *raison d'être* and financial resources disappeared with the end of the Cold War. These organisations, which today in Turkey are closely related with terror and mafia activities, have started to cast a shadow on all Kemalists.

Most recently, the Ergenekon operation, launched by the Istanbul High Criminal Court in summer 2007 and still ongoing, has allegedly linked these terrorist/mafia organisations with activist Kemalist politicians, academics, journalists and the retired generals, aimed at paving the way to a military coup against the pro-Western AKP government. The president of the Worker's Party (IP), Doğu Perinçek who is also the main supporter of the Kemalist Eurasianist discourse in Turkey, and the retired general and the current president of Association of Atatürkist Opinion (Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği) Şener Eruygur have been arrested, together with fifty others, including journalists and academics. All these developments feed people's reservation about any military involvement in politics. However, the same operation has served at the same time to empower the position of the Kemalists/ Socialists and sections of the military and their aspiration to find an alternative geopolitical space of allegiance and solidarity, since many in Turkey believe that the present AKP government, with the support of the United States, has been trying to silence all its opponents, by linking them with anti-democratic and terroristic acts and putting them in prison, especially after a closure case was filed against it by the Turkish Constitutional Court.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction we noted two contrasting interpretations of Kemalist Eurasianism. On the one hand, it has been interpreted as an example of an "alternative globalization" discourse,⁶⁹ while on the other hand, it has been deconstructed as a radical and militaristic ideology, conceived to serve "the

purposes of the conservatively oriented” and inherently opposed to the EU-led reform process of Turkey.⁷⁰ In line with this latter argument, the pro-Western and liberal intelligentsia in Turkey have also argued that Kemalist Eurasianism is “irrational”, which either serves the interests of the Turkish nationalist *milieus* or acts as a fifth-column on behalf of Russia.⁷¹

In order to engage these analyses, in this article we have sought to place the emergence of this discourse within a wider social, political and historical context, including the asymmetrical political and economic relations between Turkey and its Western allies in the post–Cold War period. Our analysis serves partially to confirm the critique raised by the “deconstructionist” and the “liberal” perspective: Kemalist Eurasianism is indeed a statist geopolitical discourse, embedded into the *Realpolitik* tradition. However, this “deconstructionist and liberal” perspective is blind to the fact that, rather than taking an ethno-nationalist stance, Kemalist Eurasianism defends the creation of a “Eurasian space” through an alliance between various “Eurasian countries and people”, where Turkey would also feel as a secure and welcomed partner. In this sense, it escapes any critique which aims to pin it down as a mere nationalist project. Our analysis resonates however with the characterisation noted above of Kemalist Eurasianism as an “alternative globalization” discourse. Kemalist Eurasianism emerged in the post–Cold War period within a context of asymmetric political and economic relations between Turkey and its Western partners. It has consequently developed a powerful critique of these relations, drawing upon the entrenched anti-Imperialist character of Kemalism. More than any rationale of sustaining nationalist, Kemalist or military elites, it is first and foremost this critical and anti-imperialist dimension that enables Kemalist Eurasianism to constitute and organise social relations around it. Hence, in order to fully grasp Kemalist Eurasianism as a geopolitical discourse, scholars need to engage this critical and anti-imperialist dimension, as well as its associated regionalist aspirations, more carefully without falling into the trap of simply dismissing it as one of the many neo-nationalist projects of the post–Cold War era.

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NOTES

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4. G. Fuller, 'Turkey's New Eastern Orientation', in *Turkey's New Geopolitics, From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder: Westview Press 1993) p. 68.

5. See İlhan, *Türklerin* (note 2) and M. Perinçek (note 2).

6. Its link to the neo-Eurasianist ideology in Russia has also been examined in two occasional papers published by the Jamestown Foundation in Washington DC, in order to critically explore the ideological rationales behind the recent Turkish-Russian rapprochement: I. Torbakov, 'Making Sense of the Current Phase of Turkish-Russian Relations' (Oct. 2007) and M. Laruelle, 'Russo-Turkish Rapprochement through the idea of Eurasia-Alexander Dugin's Networks in Turkey' (April 2008), available at <www.jamestown.org>.

7. S. Aktürk, 'Counter-Hegemonic Visions and Reconciliation through the past: The Case of Turkish Eurasianism', *Ab Imperio* 4 (2004) pp. 207–238.

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9. See P. Bilgin, 'Only Strong States Can Survive in Turkey's Geography. The Uses of "Geopolitical Truths" in Turkey', *Political Geography* 26 (2007) p. 753.

10. See <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7684578.stm>>.

11. H. Uluengin, 'İki Ergenekon', *Hürriyet*, 19 July 2008; C. Çandar, 'Avrasyacılık, Ulusalcılık ve Ergenekon'a dair', *Radikal*, 14 Sep. 2009.

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14. *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri* [Atatürk's speeches and statements] Vol. III (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları 1997) p. 81.

15. See M. Perinçek, *Atatürk'ün Sovyetler'le görüşmeleri-Sovyet Arşiv Belgeleri ile* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları 2005). See also H. F. Gürsel, *Tarih Boyunca Türk Rus İlişkileri* [Turkish-Russian Relations throughout History] (Istanbul: AK Yayınları 1968).

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17. See W. Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military* (London: Routledge 1994).

18. S. N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus* 129/1 (Winter 2000) p. 15.

19. *Atatürk* (note 14) p. 68.

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67. Interview with General Secretary of the International Eurasian Movement, Moscow, May 2006.
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69. Aktürk (note 7).
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