

# The Impact of Eurasianism on the Transformation of the Turkish State

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I was quite surprised in March 2002 when General Tuncer Kılınç, the General Secretary of Turkish National Security Council, said on TV:

“Turkey has never received help from European Union on the matters regarding its national interest. On the contrary, European Union has a negative attitude against Turkey when it comes to its national interests. Therefore, Turkey should look for new approaches. I think the best way is to approach Russia, who is alone and pretends to be on good terms with the United States and include Iran into this alliance, if possible.”<sup>1</sup>

His statement was interesting—shocking, in fact—because Russia and Iran had always been considered as the historical rivals of the Turkish Republic. Iran has been regarded as evil, not only because it used Shia idealism and minorities to subvert the Ottoman Empire, but also because it had a policy of exporting an Islamist regime to the Turkish Republic. Especially during the 1990s, there was a certain *Iran-phobia* in Turkey, to the degree that any religious activity could easily be

accused of being pro-Iran. Russia, with its centuries-old goal of “reaching warm waters,” played a major role in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire with its decisive attacks from both the Caucasus and the Balkans between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The relations between the two countries had been poor even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, except for the short period between the two World Wars. In particular, the tension between the two countries reached its apex in the aftermath of the Second World War when Stalin requested land/naval bases in the Turkish Straits and a modification to Turkey’s eastern border in favour of Soviet Union. These demands were not acceptable to Turkey as a sovereign nation and eventually led Turkey to NATO membership. For these reasons, it was confusing to see a four-star general, who could be interpreted as the representative of Turkish regime at that time, discussing a potential alliance with Iran and Russia while the Turkish military, the main power in the Turkish state system, still positioned itself as the guardian of laicism and Ataturk’s revolution, which in essence promotes Western civilization.

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<sup>1</sup> “Tuncer Kılınç (Em. Org.)Harp Akademileri Komutanlığı Mart 2002”, Youtube video, 0:59, “Ulusal Kanal”, June 17, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knHLCwyyvA-I>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

After 15 years, General Tuncer Kılınc's wish came true. While it was shocking at the time, today Turkey has closer relationships with Russia and Iran than ever before. Turkey's relations with Russia have gained greater importance as Russia again becomes a major actor in the region, if not in the world, while Turkey becomes a key player in Russia's plans to disrupt the Western solidarity. While numerous analysts have interpreted Turkey's affinity towards Russia as Erdogan's personal preference, this article aims to present an alternative story about Eurasianism and an effective pro-Russian group within Turkey. It begins with a description of the current relationship between Russia and Turkey and its asymmetrical nature. In the second section, the Erdogan regime's rapprochement with Eurasianists is examined in the context of the 2013 Corruption investigations. The third section touches upon Turkey's shoot down of a Russian fighter plane and briefly explains the role of Eurasianists in the normalization of Turkish-Russian relations. The fourth section discusses the coup attempt in 2016 and how the Erdogan regime, in collaboration with Eurasianists, leveraged this event in order to transform the Turkish state. The fifth section discusses the impact of Russia and Eurasianists on the Turkish state's policies, while finally, the last section covers the implications of this relationship from the perspectives of Russia and the European Union.

### **The Relationship between Russia and Turkey: "Seemingly" Closer Than Ever**

Although the relationship between the two countries appears to be better than ever before, it is not a relationship "*inter pares*", but rather follows an "asymmetrical model" in favour of Russia.<sup>2</sup> Last year, Russia's exports constituted

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<sup>2</sup> Kerim Has, "Turkey, Russia, and the Looming S-400 Crisis", The Middle East Institute Website,

\$22,3 billion out of a total trade volume of \$25.7 billion between the two countries,<sup>3</sup> which largely stems from Russia's gas and crude oil exports. As Turkey has become increasingly reliant on Russian energy as it currently imports more than 50% of its natural gas from Russia. Furthermore, a Russian state-owned company, Rosatom, has already started construction on Turkey's first nuclear power plant.<sup>4</sup> Despite this "close relationship," Turkey has yet to take full advantage of it. For instance, Turkey currently pays \$305 per 1000 m<sup>3</sup> of Russian natural gas whereas Europe pays \$208 for the same amount.<sup>5</sup> It is hard to find a single good reason for the purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system, which is incompatible with Turkey's existing NATO-based systems. The transfer of technology was allegedly one of the main reasons that Turkey turned towards other alternatives to the Western countries. However, Russia rejected sharing electronic codes and internal data, which eventually might cause the Turkish radar and air defence systems to detect every object in Turkish airspace other than Turkish jets as being "unknown.". Furthermore, without NATO interoperability, stand-alone S-400 batteries cannot operate at full capacity and will be limited

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<https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-russia-and-loomng-s-400-crisis#pt6>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Türkiye Ticaret Bakanlığı (Turkey Commerce Ministry), Türkiye-Rusya Dış Ticaret Değerleri, <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/avrupa/rusya-federasyonu/ulke-profili/ekonomik-gorunum/turkiye-ile-ticaret>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Frank Umbach, "Turkey's energy dilemma: Brussels or Moscow?", Geopolitical Intelligence Services Website, 14 December 2017, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/turkeys-energy-dilemma-brussels-or-moscow,energy,2416.html>, (accessed November 28, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Zeynep Gurcanli, Dondurma Diplomasisi, Sözcü Gazetesi, (Sozcu Daily Newspaper), 02 September 2019, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/yazarlar/zeynep-gurcanli/dondurma-diplomasisi-5311529/>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

to protecting specific targets.<sup>6</sup> Worse, due to the acquirement of a Russian system, Turkey was removed from the F-35 fighter program, together with its contractors. This will not only cost Turkey's economy around \$9 billion over the lifetime of the program,<sup>7</sup> but also the opportunity to add the next generation of fighter aircraft to its air force in order to become the strongest and most well-equipped air force in the region.<sup>8</sup>

Besides the technological and economic dimensions, having a Russian intelligence collection platform, as everyone can easily understand, is a clear political message to the West, indicating that Turkey has chosen to reposition itself towards Russia. It is indeed incredible to see that Turkey is risking all of the achievements it gained over the course of its Westernization to date—a national target established by Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. But why? Why did General Tuncer Kılıç talk about rapprochement with Russia and Iran in 2002? Why has Turkey turn away from the West, looking instead to Russia, Iran, and China despite the simple fact that more than half of its exports go to the European Union and even Turkey's exports more to Belgium than it does to Russia.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kerim Has, "Turkey, Russia, and the Looming S-400 Crisis", The Middle East Institute Website,

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Mehta, "Turkey officially kicked out of F-35 program, costing US half a billion dollars", Defense News, July 17, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2019/07/17/turkey-officially-kicked-out-of-f-35-program/>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Sinan Ciddi, "The Real Cost of Ejecting Turkey From the F-35 Program," Stratfor Website, August 12, 2019, [https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/real-cost-ejecting-turkey-f-35-program-trump-administration-erdoganrussia?id=743c2bc617&e=1da557ada2&uuiid=7e8703e8-ec48-4fd0-a131de1084ed738c&utm\\_source=Topics%2C+Themes+and+Regions&utm\\_campaign=f852851809-](https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/real-cost-ejecting-turkey-f-35-program-trump-administration-erdoganrussia?id=743c2bc617&e=1da557ada2&uuiid=7e8703e8-ec48-4fd0-a131de1084ed738c&utm_source=Topics%2C+Themes+and+Regions&utm_campaign=f852851809-), (accessed October 31, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, "Dış Ticaret İstatistikleri Ülkelere Göre İhracat," TUIK Website, [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1046](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046), (accessed November 01, 2019).

The following paragraphs might provide an answer to these interesting questions.

### **A Different Story behind the Close Relationship: "Eurasianists" or "Pro-Russian groups" in Turkey**

It is hard to ascertain whether Erdogan has always had authoritarianism in mind, but the corruption investigation that was conducted against his family and four ministers of his cabinet in December 2013 played a crucial role in his radical turnabout against democracy. The judicial evidence was so clear that most people felt it was time for Erdogan to leave office. However, he chose to fight instead. Caught red-handed, he passed a series of laws such as the "MIT Law" (Turkish Intelligence Service Law), which prevents bringing members of the Turkish Intelligence Service to court without the permission of the President; the "Internet Law," which allows censorship of the internet; the "HSYK (Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors) Reform Law," which allows the government to shape and control the high Judiciary. These laws were not only anti-democratic, but also unconstitutional. Every step away from democracy without suffering any consequences increased the self-confidence of Erdogan to the degree that he could publicly state, "I neither respect the decision of the Constitutional Court, nor abide by it," in another case two years later.<sup>10</sup> In fact, he had no other chance than removing democracy and law, as otherwise he would be brought to court and most likely be jailed. However, at the same, these were the first steps in transforming the Turkish state into an autocracy, something which Erdogan himself could not handle alone. At this stage, among other things, the most critical

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<sup>10</sup> BBC Türkçe, "Erdoğan: AYM'nin kararına saygı duymuyorum", February 28, 2016, [https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/02/160228\\_erdogan\\_dundar\\_aym](https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/02/160228_erdogan_dundar_aym) (accessed November 01, 2019)

step taken by Erdogan was his rapprochement with the Eurasianists in Turkey.

“Eurasianism” is an ideology promoted by Alexander Dugin, former head of the department of sociology at Moscow University, an informal but very vocal ideologue of Putin. For many analysts, Dugin is one of Russia’s most powerful men—sometimes referred to as “Putin’s brain” — whose followers hold powerful positions at the highest levels of Russia’s government.<sup>11</sup> With the aim of establishing Eurasia as a world power displacing America, Eurasianism provides the ideological basis for Putin’s foreign policy. According to Dugin, Western liberalism has clearly been rejected and is regarded as “the greatest threat to the ethno-cultural survival of all the Earth’s people.”<sup>12</sup> Placing Russia at the centre and the West in the periphery, it envisages a Russian dominion over neighbouring countries, expanding Russia’s borders to include the regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia,<sup>13</sup> with the goal of ultimately creating a massive Eurasian super-state.

Interestingly, one of the most powerful men in Turkey is also an Eurasianist, Dogu Perincek, who has close relations with Alexander Dugin. Perincek is a bizarre figure, being a former Marxist-Maoist-leftist now turned ultra-nationalist, once a former supporter of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, but now anti-Kurdish as well. Perincek has always been a marginal but

also important figure for Turkish politics,<sup>14</sup> having been the Workers' Party's (İşçi Partisi) leader from its foundation in 1992 until it was rebranded in 2015 as the "Patriotic Party" (Vatan Partisi). He was sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment as part of Turkey’s Ergenekon trials in August 2013. In March 2014, he was released from prison together with other Ergenekon convicts, which was something impossible without the consent of Erdogan, who gave his approval since the Eurasianists are the only group that can protect him from the wrath of the Turkish military and judiciary.<sup>15</sup> In fact, what makes Perincek powerful is not the public’s support, since his political party has a vote share of around 0,23% in the general elections, but his secretive and close ties within high-level military circles and bureaucracy.

Indeed, it is quite interesting to see that some high-level retired generals, most of whom worked as the intelligence chiefs of respective services—the army, navy, gendarmerie—retired military officers and members of the high judiciary joined the Patriotic Party.<sup>16</sup> It was not normal that the retired generals allied themselves with such a marginal party, whose vote share is less than 1%, and that they collaborated with Perincek, who had been involved leftist terrorist organizations and even supported the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers’ Party) in the past. This raised questions about whether the high-level officials had

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<sup>11</sup> John Rice-Cameron, Eurasianism is the New Fascism: Understanding and Confronting Russia, 02 February 2017, Stanford Politics, <https://stanfordpolitics.org/2017/02/02/eurasianism-new-fascism/> (accessed at 28 October 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Claude Forthomme, The Deadly Ideology Driving Putin: Eurasianism, March 14 2019, IMPAKTER, <https://impakter.com/deadly-ideology-putin-eurasianism/>, (accessed at 28 October 2019).

<sup>13</sup> John Rice-Cameron, “Eurasianism is the New Fascism.”

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<sup>14</sup> Leonardo Veneziani, “If Erdogan has a boss, it must be Dogu Perincek”, February 11, 2018, <https://www.vocaleurope.eu/if-erdogan-has-a-boss-it-must-be-dogu-perincek/>, (accessed November 28, 2019)

<sup>15</sup> Ahmet S Yayla, “The Strange Case of Perincek, Erdogan and the Russia Triangle”, September 11, 2019, <https://investigativejournal.org/the-strange-case-of-perincek-erdogan-and-the-russia-triangle/>, (accessed November 28, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Milliyet Daily Newspaper, “Vatan Partisi’nde asker ağırlıkta”, April 08, 2015, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/vatan-partisi-nde-asker-agirlikta-2040563>, (accessed November 28, 2019).

connections with the Perincek group when they were on active duty, especially when they were at such crucial posts. This was also reminiscent of some top-secret documents found in the office of Perincek during previous investigations, which again raised doubts as to the secretive connections of Perincek within high-level bureaucracy. In fact, currently, it is beyond any doubt that these secretive connections are real as Perincek behaves like a “shadow defence minister”<sup>17</sup> and he has stated publicly that he has close friends within the state.

Under normal circumstances, former leftist/communist but now Eurasianist Perincek’s alliance with Islamist Erdogan was something impossible in Turkey. Nevertheless, Erdogan was so desperate due to the corruption investigations that he had no other choice than to collaborate with the Eurasianists and exploit their power within the bureaucracy. This symbiotic relationship was a breaking point in Turkish policies, as Eurasianists are anti-Western, pro-Russian and very influential on the policies of Turkey. In the following sections, the impact of the Eurasianists on Turkish policy will be examined over key events in the recent past.

### **Shoot Down of the Russian Fighter Plane and the Aftermath**

In November 2015, a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian fighter on the Syrian border, marking the first time that a NATO member had shot down a Russian jet since the 1950s. In retaliation, Russia employed a series of countermeasures against Turkey in the economic, diplomatic, and informational domains. After seven months, Russia’s pressure on these fronts forced Erdogan

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Rubin, “Michael Rubin: Turkey is headed for a bloodbath”, November 03, 2016, Newsweek Magazine, <https://www.newsweek.com/michael-rubin-turkey-headed-bloodbath-515787>, (accessed November 28, 2019)

to apologize for the downing of the plane and as a result the relationship was normalized. However, this normalization did not come about due solely to Russia’s pressure but also the active role played by Perincek’s Patriotic Party, as advertised on the party’s official Youtube channel.<sup>18</sup>

As explained in the video, they sent a group of party members to Russia, consisting mainly of the retired generals, to talk with Alexander Dugin and other officials from the Russian Strategic Research Centre, connected directly to Putin. In the video, Dugin states that, “they joined some secret meetings in Moscow and talked about how to ease the tensions.” But, interestingly enough, they also informed Russian authorities about an approaching U.S. supported Gulenist coup that would likely occur in Turkey.<sup>19</sup>

### **The 15 July 2016 Coup Attempt and Restructuring the Turkish State**

Two weeks after the Eurasianists’ visit to Moscow, the expected coup attempt occurred in Turkey. Around the same time that the coup attempt began on the night of 15 July 2016, Alexander Dugin got on a plane in Ankara to go to Moscow, after having been hosted for two days in Turkey by the Patriotic Party. As Perincek revealed later on, Dugin and Perincek warned the AKP (Justice and Development Party) officials about the coup on 14 July 2016, the day before the coup attempt took place.<sup>20</sup> On the night of

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<sup>18</sup> “Türk-Rus İlişkilerinin Düzelmesinde Vatan Partisi'nin Rolü”, Youtube video 2:55, “Vatan Partisi”, August 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWkHihbiYDw>, (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> “Türk-Rus İlişkilerinin Düzelmesinde Vatan Partisi'nin Rolü”, Youtube video 2:55, “Vatan Partisi”, August 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWkHihbiYDw>, (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> CNN Turk, “Doğu Perinçek'ten 15 Temmuz iddiası: Putin'in temsilcisi bir gün önce haber verdi”, November 01, 2018, <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/dogu->

the coup, while everybody was confused about what was going on, Perincek gave a speech on TV just a few hours after it started, stating that “this is an American coup to save PKK from the trenches. This is American coup to save Fethullah Gulen from the Republic. You will see, Turkish Armed Forces will suppress this coup. I ask all people to unite against this coup.”<sup>21</sup> Under normal circumstances, it was impossible to know who the perpetrators were during that chaos, as the putschists did not name themselves as a specific group. However, Perincek was highly confident about both the perpetrators behind the coup and its inevitable results.

In the following days, he showed up on various TV channels and explained how his close friends—implying the retired generals who visited Russia two weeks before—listed the Gulenists within the military based on their “estimation” and how those Gulenists should be “cleaned” from the Turkish Armed Forces.<sup>22</sup> Although these words were a confession of a full crime, such as indexing officials without evidence and dismissing them without a trial, he was so confident that he would not be held responsible for his words as the judiciary is completely controlled by the coalition between the Erdogan regime and the Eurasianists. 2.745 judges and prosecutors, who were accused of being Gulenists, were already arrested on the day following the coup attempt.<sup>23</sup>

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[perincekten-15-temmuz-iddiasi-putinin-temsilcisi-bir-gun-once-haber-verdi](#) , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> “Darbe Gecesi Vatan Partisi”, Youtube video 05:37, “Vatan Partisi”, July 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJtmu9KNx2I> , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> “Teke Tek - 16 Ağustos 2016 (15 Temmuz Darbesinin Ardında Hangi Güçler Var)”, Youtube video 2:36:13, “Habertürk TV”, August 17, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrGKy88\\_Wac](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrGKy88_Wac) , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Anadolu Ajansı, “2 bin 745 hakim ve savcı hakkında gözaltı kararı”, 16 July 2016, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/-2->

Nobody knows whether they were Gulenists or not, but most probably they did not meet the expected standards of obedience. Later, on another TV program, Perincek clearly stated his thoughts on the judiciary by saying “law is the dog of the politics”.<sup>24</sup> Unsurprisingly, in the months and years following the coup attempt, thousands of military personnel and other public servants were dismissed from their posts, without any trial, by government decrees. Although the general staff of Turkish Armed Forces stated that 5.761 military personnel on active service (soldiers and military students not included) were involved in the coup attempt in its official statement,<sup>25</sup> 17.498 military personnel and at least 125.678 public servants have been dismissed to date.<sup>26</sup> Across the nation, more than 500.000 people have been investigated, while 30,947 people are currently in prison on terror and coup related charges. Additionally, arrest warrants for another 22,000 suspects at-large have been issued,<sup>27</sup> And 179 media outlets have been shut down.<sup>28</sup> Of course, a great majority of

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[bin-745-hakim-ve-savci-hakinda-gozalti-karari/609308](#) , (accessed November 28, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Aydınlik Daily Newspaper, “Perinçek’in sözü yıllarca konuşulacak”, October 28, 2017, <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/perincek-in-sozu-yillarca-konusulacak-politika-ekim-2017-1> , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> NTV News, “TSK, darbe girişimine katılan personel sayısını açıkladı”, July 27, 2016, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/tsk-darbe-girisimine-katilan-personel-sayisini-acikladi,ns92udU75k2vw-1OIEK4gQ> , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Deutsche Welle, “Akar: TSK’dan 17 bin 498 kişi ihraç edildi”, August 30, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/tr/akar-tskdan-17-bin-498-kişi-ihraç-edildi/a-50223992> , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Cumhuriyet Daily Newspaper, “İşte yargıdaki FETÖ bilançosu”, March 03, 2019, <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/1276109/iste-yargidaki-feto-bilancosu.html> , (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> euronews Türkçe, “Verilerle 15 Temmuz sonrası ve OHAL süreci”, July 15, 2019, <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/07/12/verilerle-15->

these people have had nothing to do with the coup attempt.

No doubt, the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 will be a milestone in the history of the Turkish Republic. In the atmosphere created by the coup attempt, both the demography of the Turkish bureaucracy and the structure of the state have been altered. While they claim that the Turkish state has been cleaned of the “terrorists,” what has happened in reality is that they have replaced the liberals, western-minded officials, Gulenists, supporters of a peace process with the Kurds, or any other opponents with Eurasianists and pro-AKP officials. The New Turkish Presidential System, which is in fact an autocracy, would never be possible without the context created by the coup attempt. There is much to discuss about the coup attempt itself, as inconsistencies, controversies, dilemmas and hundreds of questions remain, however it is a too broad subject to discuss in the scope of this article. In short, Turkey after July 15, 2016 is radically different than before.

### **Turkish Foreign Policy aligned with pro-Russians, hence with Russia**

As mentioned above, Erdogan has succeeded in restructuring the state and saving himself from the checks and balances of a real democracy. However, one fact often overlooked is that Erdogan is not the only power within the Turkish state. Since his deal with the Eurasianists following the events of December 2013, he has altered his policies dramatically and aligned himself with the policies of the Eurasianists. For instance, he suddenly ended the peace process with the PKK in 2015, launched a war against the Kurds in the East of Turkey, and even using the conventional army in the cities. He further began

operations into Syria, which had been opposed by the former military bureaucracy before the coup attempt; he also later took an anti-western stance, accusing the United States and NATO as being the perpetrators behind the coup attempt and arresting Western citizens from the United States, Germany, and France. He even purchased an S-400 air defence battery which was thought to be inconceivable by many analysts at the time as it would mean an actual disengagement from the West. All of these new policies adopted by Erdogan were completely in line with the ideals Perincek had been upholding before. As these examples demonstrate, the policies of Erdogan’s regime cannot be considered independently from the policies of the Eurasianists, and hence the policies of Russia.

This dependence can also be discerned through the attitude of the pro-government media. Hardly a day passes without negative news in the Turkish media about the United States or Europe while there is always a positive picture being portrayed about Russia. Even though Russia has always been more hostile against Turkey than the West, even when it comes to matters which cross a “red line” for Turkey (such as the PKK or the Armenian Question), Russia is never criticized. For instance, Russia does not recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization while all Western countries do. Yet, it is always the West that is demonized in the Turkish media on the grounds that the West wishes to create an independent Kurdish state in Syria, although there is a silence on Russia, even when the Russian general staff talks with the leader of the YPG, the Syrian affiliate of PKK, via video teleconference and disseminates this meeting via “Russia Today.”<sup>29</sup>

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[temmuz-sonras-ve-ohal-sureci](#), (accessed November 02, 2019).

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<sup>29</sup> Russia Today, “‘Thanks Russia!’: Kurdish military chief welcomes Russian peacekeeping patrols”, October 23, 2019, <https://www.rt.com/news/471674-kurds-abdi-shoigu-russia-thanks/>, (accessed November 29, 2019).

The same goes for the pro-Russian group within Turkey. There is not a single reaction from Erdogan against the Eurasianists, although they criticize Erdogan harshly whenever possible. This is not normal under today's circumstances in Turkey given the fact that Erdogan's lawyers have already filed defamation cases against around 14.000 people while this number averaged less than 500 during the terms of previous presidents.<sup>30</sup> Even Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the main opposition party leader, was fined 359.000 TL (\$75.000) in 2018 for defaming President Tayyip Erdogan and his family over claims about international money transfers.<sup>31</sup> However, Perincek has the freedom to criticize Erdogan, even on sensitive issues such as the corruption cases that Erdogan and his ministers had been involved in.

### **Conclusion and the Implications for the European Union**

Although some analysts go back to the 2011 elections, it is clearly visible in the last five years that there has been a dramatic change in the axis of Turkey's foreign policy towards Russia, China, and Iran. Unfortunately, this change might not to be temporary given that such a shift had been signaled much earlier by some officials like General Tuncer Kilinc, which demonstrates that it has been a rather long-term policy of the Eurasianists and that there is still an effective Eurasianist presence within Turkey. This article has illustrated the impact of the Eurasianists on

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<sup>30</sup> Gazete Duvar, "'Cumhurbaşkanına hakaret' sanığı sayısı 13 kat arttı", April 26, 2019, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/04/26/cumhurbaskanina-hakaret-sanigi-13-kat-artti/>, (accessed November 02, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Reuters, "Turkish opposition leader fined record sum for defamation of Erdogan, family", July 18, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-court-opposition/turkish-opposition-leader-fined-record-sum-for-defamation-of-erdogan-family-idUSL8N1UE2Y2>, (accessed November 02, 2019).

the transformation of the Turkish state as opposed to the widely accepted story which gives all of the credit to Erdogan.

From the viewpoint of Russia, this is a great success which deserves deep respect. Without firing a single bullet, through its proxies within Turkey, it has achieved disengaging Turkey from NATO, which has the second largest army. Under the cover of the coup attempt, more than 90% of the staff officers, who form the core of the Turkish Armed Forces in terms of operational planning; more than 300 fighter pilots, whose absence caused a sharp decrease in the pilot/plane ratio from 1,5 to 0,3; and a great number of special forces and helicopter pilots were dismissed from the Turkish Armed Forces. Presumably, Russia would not cause more damage in a conventional confrontation with the Turkish Army. As Sun Tzu once said, this is the highest form of warfare, or so to say in the contemporary lexicon, one of the best examples of hybrid warfare.

It would not be wrong to say that the European Union has remained silent during this transformation. The refugee agreement between the European Union and Turkey, which was signed in March 2016, is usually referred to as the main reason behind the European Union's silence. Given the fact that the number of refugees coming to Greece via Turkey fell by 97 percent in the two years —the agreement,<sup>32</sup> this view might have merit. Erdogan's use of the agreement to blackmail Europe is another indicator as to why the agreement is so effective. From time to time, Erdogan threatens the European Union with opening the "floodgates" of Syrian refugees whenever their relations worsen.

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<sup>32</sup> Deutsche Welle, "The EU-Turkey refugee agreement: A review", March 18, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-eu-turkey-refugee-agreement-a-review/a-43028295>, (accessed November 04, 2019).

Last time, he threatened to send millions of refugees to Europe if the EU countries did not back his proposals for those refugees to be settled in a “safe zone” in Syria.<sup>33</sup> This demonstrates Erdogan’s blackmailing strategy continues to work as long as continues to get away with it.

It is understandable that the European Union might have to engage in *Realpolitik* towards Turkey, even though it is the principal advocate for fundamental values in the world. However, even in terms of *Realpolitik*, the current policy of the European Union might fall short of expectations. First of all, Turkey might lose its capacity to fulfill the requirements of the refugee agreement given the deteriorating economic and social conditions in the country. Increasing numbers of Syrian refugees within the Turkish population has already led to the emergence of social unrest within Turkish society, and with an economy on the verge of crisis and the unsteady policies of the government, Turkey does not hold promise when it comes to meeting the requirements of the agreement. This means the European Union can only delay the refugee problem rather than facing it today. Secondly, and more importantly, the European Union should change its priority from tactical issues of “migration” to the strategic issues of “Turkey’s posture.” The primary concern for the European Union should be whether to keep Turkey in the European sphere as a liberal democracy or risk losing it as a Russian proxy authoritarian regime. While this does not mean that migration is a tactical issue itself, in the case of Turkey, focusing

on the short-term achievements of a refugee agreement is a tiny matter compared to Turkey’s future posture.

The best policy for the European Union is to take a firmer stance on upholding democracy, rule of law, freedom, and human rights in Turkey. For instance, the European Union can begin with questioning why the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rejected the applications of the dismissed public servants of Turkey on the grounds that they had not yet exhausted domestic remedies, while in fact even the Constitutional Court of Turkey admitted its non-functionality in terms of the exhaustion of domestic remedies and defined itself as “unauthoritative” in cases of government decrees.<sup>34</sup> Although three years have passed since the purge of thousands of public servants, no single decision has yet been made by the ECtHR and no one knows how long it will take for such a decision to be made. In fact, from the viewpoint of the European Union, ECtHR decisions would be an efficient way of upholding the law in Turkey.

Last but not least, I would like to reiterate the main idea of this article. Although Turkey has become an authoritarian regime where democracy, rule of law, and freedom have been utterly decimated, the power in Turkey remains shared between the Erdogan regime and the Eurasianists in a symbiotic relationship. This is because it was impossible for Erdogan to transform the regime and restructure the state without the support of the Eurasianist bureaucracy, especially after he was caught red-handed in the corruption investigations at the end of 2013. It was also impossible for the

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<sup>33</sup> Independent, “Turkey’s Erdogan threatens to send millions of refugees to Europe unless it backs Syria ‘safe zone’”, October 26, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/erdogan-syria-turkey-refugees-safe-zone-kurds-trump-europe-borders-a9172311.html> , (accessed November 04, 2019).

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<sup>34</sup> BBC News Türkçe, “AYM’den CHP’nin KHK başvurusuna ret”, October 12, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-37630485> , (accessed November 04, 2019).

Eurasianists to change the axis of Turkish foreign policy towards Russia without a populist figure like Erdogan as they do not have public support. The best way of fighting against these two entities who have transformed Turkey into a tyranny, is to uphold democracy and fundamental values within Turkey as none of them can live in a real democracy. But of course, this is only if the European Union is interested in having a democratic Turkey in the Western sphere.



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