THE MARK OF TURKISH NATIONALISM ON TURKISH POLITICAL LIFE: THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT PARTY AND THE IDEALIST-NATIONALIST MOVEMENT, PAST AND PRESENT

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Introduction

Looking at the last two centuries of Turkish history, it becomes evident that Ottoman modernization and the Westernization movements during the Republican period should be considered together, and that political life must be analyzed within this framework. Political changes can be better understood when Turkish political life is examined from a perspective that focuses on socio-cultural changes rather than solely relying on a political history narrative.

Of course, the opposite argument can also be made. The notion that political changes influenced social changes and were more determinative is also prevalent in the literature. However, the main point here is that modernization, which began in the late Ottoman period and gained momentum with the establishment of the Republic, played a decisive role in shaping political life. Additionally, the idea that this modernization was informed by an alternative framework that began to express and incorporate the values of religion, culture, and tradition—especially since 1970—was also significant in political life.

This perspective constitutes one of the main arguments of this text and will be discussed and elaborated upon from various angles throughout the work.

To elaborate, the first main hypothesis is that the impact of social developments on political life is greater than the reverse. Even in instances where political developments occur first, societal reactions play a decisive role in shaping political life in the subsequent stages. A prime example of this is the dichotomy between democracy and tutelage, which immediately comes to mind. This idea holds true for periods when democracy functioned effectively in terms of representation. Therefore, this argument specifically pertains to the era following the transition to multi-party politics and excludes periods of military coups.

A potential criticism of this approach might be that excluding the coup periods omits a significant portion of Turkish political history. While this critique is valid from an administrative perspective, the focus here is not solely on the determination of political power. Rather, the emphasis lies on the influence of social changes and societal reactions on political developments—such as the emergence, rise, or decline of political groups and movements—and the broader effects these dynamics have on the political landscape.

The second hypothesis asserts that it is not possible to discuss Turkish modernization under a single framework. The historical developments of the last two centuries demonstrate that Türkiye's social structure has been shaped by a struggle between various modernization perspectives. While the extensive literature on these differing perspectives will not be explored in this text, as it falls outside the main scope, this diversity is viewed positively from the standpoint of postmodernity. This notion of diversity also forms a key argument in support of the third hypothesis, which will be elaborated on later in the text.

The third hypothesis expands the text beyond a simple political history narrative, positioning it as a study that aims to present a broader discussion on Turkish modernization—one of the author's primary efforts. The key argument here is that the nationalist tradition, as represented by the Nationalist Movement Party, has offered an alternative perspective on modernization, both in terms of its ideological roots and the political path it has followed over time.

One of the most influential aspects of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which has maintained its foundational dynamics to the present day, is its representation of an alternative approach to modernization. The MHP's perspective emphasizes the integration of culture, tradition, and religion with the core principles of the Republic, rather than adopting a purely Westernizing stance or radically rejecting the West. This approach can be described as a "third way," attempting to merge the nation's historical roots with the demands of the contemporary era.

In this study, the developments and role of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in Turkish political life, from its establishment to the centennial of the Republic, will be evaluated through the lens of this perspective. In addition, the study will examine the MHP's political history by focusing on the fundamental dynamics of Turkish political and social life and assess its impact on shaping these dynamics by comparing and interpreting various perspectives and opinions. This emphasis is important because many texts analyzing the MHP and nationalist mainstream politics tend to shift from critical analysis to partisanship or, conversely, aim to defend the MHP. However, common judgments in both Turkish and foreign literature that characterize the MHP as "extreme," "affirming or inciting violence," "creating paramilitary structures," or having an "exclusionary and aggressive ideological background" often stem from a departure from an objective, scientific perspective. Moreover, it is noteworthy that respected academics and researchers, more than the general public, have been instrumental in shaping these misguided views. It is important to clarify that the aim here is not to question intentions but rather to examine how certain factual inaccuracies have become widely accepted in studies on the MHP.

Although this will be elaborated upon in greater detail in the text, a few examples can be provided here for clarity. In his extensive study on the three right-wing currents in Turkish political life, Hugh Poulton attributes the murder of Musa Anter to the foreign press and claims that it was carried out by a Turkish nationalist group called *Grey Arrow*.[1] However, not only has the murder never been conclusively solved, but there is also no information or documentary evidence confirming the existence of such a group.

[1] Poulton, H. (1997). Top Hat, Grey Wolf, Crescent. New York University Press.

Similarly, Mehmet Ali Ağaoğulları, in the encyclopedia section where he discusses the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in detail, refers to attacks and acts of violence allegedly carried out by *Ülkücü* youth with the support of the MHP. In this context, he mentions an organization called the ETKO (Captive Turks Rescue Army)[2] However, the fictitious nature of such an organization is evident from both the response to a parliamentary question on March 21, 1979, where the justice minister from the Republican People's Party (CHP) stated that no public case related to the organization existed[3] from the writings of some *Ülkücü* figures, who emphasized the "ridiculousness" of the allegations regarding the organization's existence. For instance, it is noted that these allegations were "derived" from a book titled *90 Days in Captive Turkish Provinces*, which was seized by POL-DER[4] police officers during a raid, further highlighting the absurdity of the claims about the organization.[5]

Over a historical process spanning more than half a century, it can be clearly stated that the MHP's ideological stance and understanding of nationalism have remained consistent, although its discourse has inevitably hardened or softened in response to specific developments.

To deepen the analysis of the MHP's ideological stance and its role in political life, it is crucial to examine the politicization of Turkish nationalism, beginning in the late Ottoman period, and to accurately interpret the process that led to the formation of the MHP. The birth of the MHP, along with its sustained influence and power in Turkish political life — unlike many of its contemporaries — is closely linked to these historical roots. Thus, this text will begin by analyzing those origins. Next, the emergence of the MHP and its role in the turbulent political environment of the 1970s will be discussed, followed by an evaluation of the events leading up to the September 12 coup in terms of both political developments and ideological shifts. Subsequent developments, such as the closure of the party after the coup and the formation of alternative parties, will be briefly summarized. Finally,

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[2] Ağaoğulları, M.A. (1983). Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi. Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi. İletişim Yayınları

[3] Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi D:5 C:12 T:2 pp. 56-57

[4] Police association of police officers with left-wing views.

[5] https://hayatibice.net/?p=505 Yaşanmış Bir Pantürkizm Masalı

the shift in the MHP's societal profile in the 1990s after its reopening will be explored, with a focus on changes in Türkeş's policy-making approach and style rather than his ideological stance or rhetoric. Additionally, the articulationist nature of nationalism in theory[6] will be argued as being reflected in the MHP's political history, particularly in terms of its methods.

After the death of Alparslan Türkeş, the ambiguity created by the sudden loss of a leader at an unexpected moment, coupled with the ensuing chaotic situation, will be examined in relation to the significance of the congress process in political history. The election of Devlet Bahçeli as the party's president and his decision to make the party a coalition partner in the first elections, followed by its failure to meet the electoral threshold, will be analyzed in terms of internal dynamics. The Devlet Bahçeli era in the MHP is as significant as the party's founding period because, after falling below the threshold, the party's focus on institutionalization established it as one of the cornerstones of Turkish political life. The developments that followed this process will be categorized based on key concepts up to the present day. This will facilitate both a reading and analysis of recent history, specifically regarding the role and influence of the MHP and the Ülkücü Movement.

Roots: The Process Leading to the MHP

An Introduction to the Politicization Process of Turkish Nationalism

Turkish nationalism has been promoted and disseminated by numerous associations and organizations in both intellectual and social contexts since the late Ottoman period. However, this discussion will focus on the organizations that aim to represent this ideology in the political arena, as well as associations that closely resemble political parties.

The first of these is the National Constitutionalist Party, which corresponds to the Constitutional Monarchy period. This was the first party to define itself as nationalist. The name of the party was originally the Nationalist Party but was later changed to include all political or

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[6] Turan, E. (2022). Milliyetçiliğin Eklemlenmeci Yapısını Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Üzerinden Okumak. Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler ve Milliyetçilik (Ed. Mustafa Yiğit). Konya: Palet Yayınları. Pp. 105-189

ethnic groups within the empire.[7] n 1912, the party was actually gathered and formed around a publication. Its place of establishment was the İfham Newspaper. Among its founders were prominent Turkist intellectuals of the period, such as Ahmet Ferit (Tek) Bey and Akçuraoğlu Yusuf Bey. The period that corresponded to the Unionist-Ittilafist confrontation, from the establishment of the party to its closure, was a time when the Unionists were in opposition and there were no elections. The party was closed in 1914 and therefore did not participate in any elections. Although this had an effect, the party was already seen as an "intellectual party." The party program is a text that lists the proposals and views of the party in various fields such as the economy, education, domestic politics, and foreign affairs.[8]

After the closure of the party due to various challenges, the Turkists of the period attempted to engage in politics through organizations in the form of associations and foundations for a time. Then, in 1919, the National Turkish Party was founded as a new nationalist party, continuing the legacy of the previous party. In fact, the party's place of establishment was the office of the İfham newspaper. In addition to Ahmet Ferit (Tek) Bey and Akçuraoğlu Yusuf Bey, prominent Turkists of the period such as Mehmet Emin (Yurdakul) Bey and İsmail Hakkı (Baltacıoğlu) Bey were among the founders. The main goal of the party, as with the National Constitutionalist Party, was to make Turkist intellectuals active in Turkish politics amid the occupying and cosmopolitan ideas that dominated the Armistice period. Despite accusations from some circles that "the party was born dead," the National Turkish Party entered the 1919 elections and successfully sent Mr. Adnan (Adıvar) to the parliament. As Tunaya states, the fact that a nationalist party was able to gain seats in the parliament in Armistice-era Istanbul provides insight into the true political tendencies of the capital, which was dominated by cosmopolitan pluralism. Additionally, the party consistently acted in harmony with the Mudafaa-i Hukuk group and sent Ahmet Hikmet (Müftüoğlu) Bey and Hamdullah Suphi (Tan-

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[7] Yiğit, M. (2022). Türkiye'nin İlk Milliyetçi Fırkaları: Milli Meşrutiyet Fırkası ve Milli Türk Fırkası. Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler ve Milliyetçilik (Ed. Mustafa Yiğit). Konya: Palet Yayınları. Pp. 63, 71.

[8] Tunaya, T. Z. (1988). Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler Cilt 1. İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları. Pp. 351-355

rıöver) Bey as members to the National Congress in Istanbul. After the occupation forces raided and dissolved the Parliamentary Assembly, the party became ineffective, and some of its founders joined the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in Ankara.[9]

Along with this political representation, one important issue was the fact that, of the three major ideologies of the late Ottoman period — Islamism, Westernism, and Turkism — only the last one survived by the end of the First World War. Nationalism, which was also articulated with some ideas from Westernism, was the only ideology that persisted, and according to Karpat, after 1918, this ideology would be expanded by purifying it from Turanism. In the Republican period, both of these transformations took place most drastically. The nationalism identified with Ziya Gökalp, based on religion, history, and traditional society, was replaced by a "rational, materialist, and highly secular" nationalism, especially from the second five-year period of the republic. Gökalp's understanding of secularism, which was based on adapting Islam to the Turkish way of life, was replaced by an understanding in which religion and the state were completely separated, with the state being absolutely superior. Gökalp's idea of Westernization based on technique was extended to the cultural sphere. This differentiation, which Karpat emphasizes, is actually the distinction between classical Turkish nationalism and the Kemalist understanding of nationalism that developed after the republic and continued in Turkish political life after the birth of the MHP. Today, this distinction continues to exist in Turkish politics.[10] This differentiation, which Karpat emphasizes, is actually the distinction between classical Turkish nationalism and the Kemalist understanding of nationalism that developed after the republic and continued in Turkish political life after the birth of the MHP. Today, this distinction continues to exist in Turkish politics.

The aforementioned Kemalist nationalism also diverged from classical Turkish nationalism on the issue of "Foreign Turks", and the event in which this divergence emerged most clearly was the Turkism-Turanism Trial of 1944. However, in 1944, the negative attitude of

[9] Tunaya, T. Z. (1988a). Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler Cilt2. İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları. Pp. 531-533
[10] Karpat, K.H. (2010). Türk Demokrasi Tarihi: Sosya Kültürel Ekonomik Temeller. İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları.

the president and the government toward the Turkism-Turanists was based on the realization that the USSR and its allied forces would win the Second World War.

Nihal Atsız's critical letter to the prime minister of the time, Şükrü Saraçoğlu—in which he heavily criticized the appointment of Hasan Ali Yücel as Minister of National Education and the assignment of Sabahattin Ali in this ministry—resulted in his being taken to court by Yücel, and the first hearing of the relevant court was held on April 26, 1944. May 3 was the date of the second hearing, during which the Turkic youth who filled the courtroom at the first hearing started an anti-communist march. On May 9, just before the court convened, Nihal Atsız was arrested, followed by the arrest of other important Turkists of the period, such as Nejdet Sancar, Zeki Velidi Togan, and Alparslan Türkeş. In the following process, İsmet İnönü, the president of the period, issued a communiqué on the issue on May 18, and in his speeches on May 19, he accused the Turkists of mischief-making and harming the state, using heavy language to insult them. On the same days, the Turkist *Orhun* Magazine was closed down. The arrested Turkists were subjected to a form of torture known as coffin torture. A total of 23 detainees were released in different months in 1945, and all of them were acquitted on March 31, 1947.[11]

The 1944 events have taken their place in the pages of history as the first time Kemalist nationalism and classical Turkish nationalism confronted each other in the clearest way, even though there were also international conjunctural reasons behind it. After 1944, the Turkists continued their activities of publishing periodicals and forming associations. Founded in 1946, associations such as the Turkish Cultural Center, the Turkish Cultural Studies Association, and the Turkish Youth Organization can be cited as examples. In 1948, the Millet Party, which would later form the root of the MHP, was founded, and nationalism began to actively exist in Turkish politics as a "third way."

Nation Party

In this study, the main reasons why the party is considered to be among the roots of the MHP will be elaborated upon below in terms of the party's program, executives, and policies. The primary reason is that

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[11] Öznur, H. (1996). Ülkücü Hareket I: 1908-1980. Asya Kitap Kulübü. pp. 68-72

the Millet Party was a nationalist third-way alternative to the lines represented by the Republican People's Party and the Democratic Party.

The ideological similarity and the emphasis on the "nationalist third way," which is the most important dimension of the aforementioned "root-tree" relationship, in addition to the reactions to political developments and the political discourse of the party, are actually most fundamentally reflected in Articles 1, 8, and 9 of the party program.[12] The first article of the program, which was presented as the founding document of the party in 1948, reads as follows: "*A political party has been established under the name MILLET PARTY on the basis of the ideals of Republic, Justice, liberalism, and Nationalism*". The party's view on the concepts of nation and nationalism, which lists the foundations of its views in the first article and includes nationalism among them, is clearly stated in Article 9 as follows:

> *"Nationalism, which is one of the main characteristics of the Republic of Türkiye, is one of the main principles of our party. In our opinion, the most important element of the concept of a nation is a kind of unity of thought and feeling, which constitutes the national conscience and the belief in a common life and future. We recognize the great role of language unity in the formation of national consciousness. The Party considers every person who says 'I am a Turk' and considers himself or herself a Turk as a Turk, believes in the ancient and honorable civilized past of Turkishness and in a future full of great hopes, considers it a national duty to implement a program that is conducive to the strengthening of national consciousness in educational and training institutions; and considers it necessary to try to raise the youth with this belief even outside of school."*

The understanding of nationalism expressed in the article in question points to an understanding of the nation based on a sense of belonging and consciousness and considers everyone who says "I am a Turk" to be a Turk, which is the same as the words of Alparslan Türkeş mentioned in the introduction. The emphasis on school curricula to raise generations with a national consciousness and the party's duty to raise the youth with this ideal outside of school, if necessary, aligns

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[12] Millet Partisi Parti Programı ve Tüzük. pp. 40.

with the MHP's political method and understanding. Another important point at this juncture is the last sentence of Article 8 of the program, which states that "The party is respectful of the institution of religion and national traditions." This statement shows that the party's basic policy was based on not ignoring the fact that religion was also an important value of the nation, which is quite significant considering the political spirit of the period. It is also consistent with the MHP's political stance.

For all these reasons, the Millet Party is one of the roots of the MHP and the first nationalist political party in the republican era to display these characteristics. The party was founded in 1948 with these principles under the honorary presidency of Field Marshal Fevzi Çakmak Pasha and the general presidency of Hikmet Bayur. Other founding members of the party included Osman Bölükbaşı, Osman Nuri Köni, Kenan Öner, Mustafa Kentli, Enis Akaygen, and Sadık Aldoğan.[13] At this point, it should be immediately noted that one of the most important names to be remembered when discussing a nationalist third way in Turkish politics is Field Marshal Fevzi Çakmak Pasha. Long before the formation of the Millet Party or the figure of Bölükbaşı, he opposed the Kemalist understanding of the İsmet İnönü era with a vision of nationalism that did not set aside the influence of religion.

In the 1950 elections held immediately after the sudden death of the Field Marshal, the Millet Party failed to achieve significant success, and only Osman Bölükbaşı was elected as an MP for Kırşehir. The Millet Party was dissolved in 1953 under the Democrat Party government as a result of a lawsuit filed on the grounds that people involved in reactionary activities were in the party. Osman Bölükbaşı then founded a new party, the Republican Nation Party, which can be seen as a continuation of the nationalist tradition. The Republican People's Party also included the principle of nationalism in the first article of the party program, and in Article 13, it expressed its understanding of nationalism in a content very close to the Millet Party's understanding. In addition, the phrase "a peaceful and humanitarian nationalism in international relations" was added. The party then de-

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[13] Millet Partisi Parti Programı ve Tüzük. pp. 40.

cided to merge with the Peasant Party of Türkiye in 1958. The main reason for this merger was the belief that it would create a third major party, other than the DP and CHP.[14]

Republican Peasant Nation Party

Following the decision to merge the Republican National Party and the Peasant Party of Türkiye, the Republican Peasant National Party was founded in 1958. This party, which would later be named the Nationalist Movement Party with Alparslan Türkeş as its chairman, had already clearly stated in its founding program that it was the party of the nationalist tradition. In fact, the party program[15] included almost the same statements on the definition of nation and nationalism as the program of the aforementioned Millet Party. Article 1 of the program emphasizes commitment to the principle of nationalism. Article 7 is word-for-word identical to Article 9 of the Millet Party's program, which defines the nation, summarizes the concept of nationalism, and states that young people should be educated accordingly in and out of school. Article 9 of the CKMP program further elaborates on the issue of youth education and mentions the "need for a democratic and nationalist spirit," stating that it aims to make the necessary preparations for young people to pursue their education in the best way possible without getting caught up in party debates and to provide them with wide development opportunities when they enter life.

The founding chairman of the party was Osman Bölükbaşı, who would later resign—before Türkeş had joined the party—and re-establish the Millet Party. The reason for this resignation was that a group within the party thought that a coalition should be formed with the CHP, but Bölükbaşı strongly opposed this. As a result, Bölükbaşı resigned, and the CKMP formed a coalition with the YTP in support of the CHP. The base of the CKMP was not happy with the coalition either, as the party's vote share dropped considerably in the 1963 local elections, and the coalition disintegrated after this election.[16]

[14] Bölükbaşı, D. (2005). Türk Siyasetinde Anadolu Fırtınası: Osman Bölükbaşı. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap. pp. 259.

[15] Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi Programı. pp. 7-8.

[16] Ahmad, F. (2010). Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye 1945-1980. İstanbul: Hil Yayınları. pp. 229-230, 274.

Before elaborating on the political environment of the 60s, it is, of course, necessary to discuss the military coup of May 27, 1960, and its aftermath in terms of the history of the nationalist community. Alparslan Türkeş was the one who read the coup declaration on the radio and was one of the influential colonels. He was also appointed as the undersecretary of the prime minister's office and was one of the names close to Cemal Gürsel, the chairman of the National Unity Committee, which formed the coup administration. However, due to internal strife and conflicts within the MBK, and with the influence of İnönü on Gürsel, Türkeş was removed as a member of the MBK and was later retired from the army and exiled to New Delhi as a government advisor. The 14 people who were dismissed and exiled together with Türkeş went down in Turkish political history as the "14s." The 14s were banned from entering the country for two years with a decision taken in November 1960, but with a statement he made in 1961, Cemal Gürsel paved the way for the 14s to return home. It is worth reminding that during this process, Alparslan Türkeş wrote a letter to Gürsel about the execution trials of the DP executives, and in this letter published in the Milli Yol Journal, he clearly stated that he absolutely rejected the executions and that this would only divide the nation. But, as is known, Gürsel did not take this into consideration. Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and two of his ministers were executed. After Gürsel's statement, the 14s, who came together abroad, decided to return home, and this process was completed with the return of Türkeş in February 1963. As soon as he returned home, Türkeş started to establish an association called "The Turkish Peace and Development Association," but this initiative was not possible due to the coup attempt by Talat Aydemir and his friends on May 21, 1963, as Türkeş was one of the names arrested in this context. However, Türkeş had received advance notice of this coup attempt and communicated it to the government. At the court hearing on this issue, he uttered the oft-cited phrase, "*The worst democratic rule is better than the best military rule.*" After his release, he also attempted to prevent the execution of Talat Aydemir but was unsuccessful.[17]

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[17] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp. 128-140.

After returning home, Türkeş, together with most of the 14s, joined the CKMP in 1965, and Türkeş was appointed as the Party's General Inspector. At the party congress held in July of the same year, Türkeş was elected as the chairman. Türkeş, who formed an administration dominated by his close friends among the 14, nevertheless did not rush to make structural changes in the party. In the same year, he published the text "Dokuz Işık" (*Nine Lights*), which became the main ideological textbook of the party, and this influence continues to this day.[18] In the new program of the party[19] published at the 1965 congress, the understanding of the nation in Article 7 continued the tradition of the 1948 Millet Party program and even used the phrase "accepts everyone who says 'I am a Turk' as a Turk."

While Türkeş was trying to produce policies on current issues in foreign and domestic affairs, the party increased the number of its organizations from 25 provinces to 61 provinces in the period between 1965, when Türkeş became the chairman, and the congress in 1967. Türkeş's "Nine Lights Doctrine" was officially adopted at this congress.[20] The CKMP was now clearly the political representative of nationalism in Türkiye. However, the name and emblem of a party with such great claims and ideals had to be in line with its ideological background. The 1969 congress was held with these discussions.

At the CKMP Congress held in Adana on February 8-9, 1969, the party's name was changed to the Nationalist Movement Party and its emblem to the white three crescent on a red background. In the same congress, the grizzly wolf within the crescent was adopted as a symbol for the youth.[21] As soon as the party was founded, both foreign and domestic media tried to equate it with German Nazism and fascist ideology due to its influence on the youth and its nationalist-socialist ideology. Even in June 1969, Galip Erdem, one of the most important writers of the nationalist movement, wrote about this issue and felt the need to respond to an article published abroad and tried to express

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[18] Landau, J.M. (2016). Radical Politics in Modern Turkey. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 208-209

19 Müreffeh ve Kuvvetli Türkiye İçin Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi Programı pp. 4, 6, 9.

[20] Bora, T. ve Can, K. (2019). Devlet Ocak Dergah: 12 Eylül'den 1990'lara Ülkücü Hareket. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları. pp. 42-43.

[21] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp. 156-157

that the allegations were completely false.[22] In the literature, opinions have been expressed that the party stopped using the term "toplumcu" (socialist) for these reasons and instead emphasized the "pro-poor" attitude of the nationalists-idealists.[23] This struggle continued throughout the 70s — and perhaps still continues today — with the MHP always attempting to clarify what it was not, while never having the opportunity to fully articulate what it truly was.

Nationalist Movement Party: Türkeş Period

The period when the Nationalist Movement Party was officially founded marked the beginning of turbulent years in Turkish political life. The bipolar world order that emerged after the Second World War created an environment where countries were divided into liberal/capitalist and socialist/communist blocs. This division was not only between countries but also represented a power struggle between these two ideologies within the countries themselves. Türkiye was one of the nations most affected by the rising leftist movements of the '68 generation, with various leftist political organizations aiming to establish a socialist order in Türkiye and align it with the Soviet bloc. These organizations engaged in armed actions within the country, provoking social and political reactions. The Nationalist Movement Party became the focal point of the opposition to these socialist movements, making it the primary target of their efforts. The conflict generated by this struggle intensified and persisted until the military coup of 1980.

In 1968, Ruhi Kılıçkıran, regarded as the first martyr of the Ulkücü movement and still highly valued by its members, was joined in martyrdom by Süleyman Özmen and Dursun Önkuzu, who lost their lives in 1970 as a result of attacks by leftist organizations. All three of these martyrs were university students, marking a harbinger of the intensifying conflicts at universities.

By 1971, armed conflicts had accelerated, with numerous organizations led by Deniz Gezmiş and Mahir Çayan increasing their acts of violence, including bank robberies. In this environment, the Turkish

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[22] Erdem, G. (2013). Ülkücünün Çilesi. İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat. Pp. 196-198.
[23] Mete, Ö.L. (2003). "Türk Milliyetçiliğine Sivil Bir Bakış". Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik. (Ed. T. Bora, M. Gültekingil). pp. 696-705. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları. pp. 705.

Armed Forces issued the March 12 memorandum. While the March 12 regime targeted leftist organizations, it also dissolved the Union of the Ulku Ocakları and the Turkish Anti-Communist Associations. The Ulku Ocakları, originally established in 1966 at Ankara University's Faculty of Law by nationalist students, began to gain traction with the formation of the Ankara Ulku Ocakları Union in 1969.

During this period, leftist organizations continued their aggressive actions; for instance, they kidnapped and murdered the Consul General of Israel in the same year. Although the March 12 regime adopted a harder stance following this incident, this situation proved to be short-lived, as attacks and clashes began to increase again shortly thereafter. In response to the escalating violence, the Nationalist-Idealist Movement started to regain momentum, culminating in the founding of the Association of Ulku Ocakları in Ankara in 1974. In 1975, the Association of Ulku Ocakları and the MHP building in Erzincan came under attack, resulting in the tragic death of a 13-year-old boy. This incident is just one of hundreds exemplifying the violent climate of the time.[24]

In terms of ideology, the prevailing view in the literature is that the MHP's founding congress was significantly influenced by Islamic values intertwined with Turkism. This shaping of the party in the subsequent years marked a shift toward politics based on Islamic concepts and thought.[25] Notably, Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, a former deputy of the Justice Party who was well-known in both the nationalist community and the broader public, joined the MHP at this congress. Similarly, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, a prominent figure admired within Islamist circles, later became a member of the MHP, underscoring the continuity of this ideological trajectory.

In the second half of the 1970s, the influence of Islamic thought within the party continued to strengthen, building upon the rhetoric established at the 1969 congress. Central to this language were slogans such as "We are as Turkish as Mount God and as Muslim as Mount Hira," "Our call is for the resurrection in Islam," and "Victory belongs to Islam even if our blood is shed." As the 1977 elections approached, the MHP notably emphasized slogans like "Faith and Morality First"

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[24] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp. 205-223
[25] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp. 158-159

and "No nation without a religion, no state without law, no govern-ment without MHP."[26]

It is also important to note that during these years, the MHP em-ployed anti-communist rhetoric extensively in its propaganda. The party highlighted the actions of leftist and socialist organizations that contributed to an atmosphere of anarchy, asserting that only a govern-ment led by the MHP could restore order. Some of the most popular slogans during this period included "CHP feeds communism, AP for-gives, MSP watches, MHP crushes" and "MHP crushes the red ban-dit." Consequently, the party vowed to continue its struggle on the streets, leveraging state power to prevent Turkey from aligning with the USSR and establishing a communist-socialist system.

In an environment of violence and thousands of deaths, it is a fact that the party cannot pursue a policy focused solely on getting more votes, as this would not be enough. In the period in question, the MHP is still at the beginning of its transformation into a mass party and needs "a man with a cause" and "members of the movement" more than vot-ers. Therefore, the members of the nationalist movement thought that the movement was a movement that "thought about generations, not elections." They also acted with the belief that those who died for this cause attained martyrdom, the highest rank in Islam.

The second half of the 1970s was a period in which political strug-gles, bloody actions, and conflicts reached their peak, in a sense paving the way for the military coup of September 12, 1980. In 1975 and 1977, during the Nationalist Front Governments, the MHP both reinforced its position as a legitimate and influential figure in Turkish political life and attempted to fight against communist armed groups with state power. These coalition governments, often referred to in the literature as the Nationalist Front Governments, were formed with the support of the National Salvation Party, of which the Justice Party was the main element. However, the Nationalist Movement Party failed to last long in the instability of the period. Nevertheless, it is important for reasons such as the MHP and MSP traditions finding reciprocity and influence in the eyes of the state and preventing Türkiye from joining the USSR through a socialist revolution by restraining the armed actions of so-cialist-communist organizations by the state.

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[26] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp. 226-27, 232.

Under the CHP government established in 1978, the days of oppression began for the Nationalist-Idealist Movement. This pressure reached such dimensions that the MHP organized a large march-miting in Tandoğan on April 15, 1978, which holds an important place in the history of the nationalist-idealist movement and is always remembered and recalled as a "legend" by nationalists. In a sense, the government was intimidated as a "march for power."[27]

As the year 1979 was coming to an end, the casualties of the nationalists were also rising with the increasing conflict environment. For example, in Ümraniye, five nationalist workers were tortured and shot by TIKKO militants. This was another example of how the defense of workers' rights by the aforementioned socialist organizations only included workers who believed in and obeyed their organizational structure and the communist order they sought to establish. Hundreds of nationalists lost their lives in the attacks of these organizations.[28]

As a result of the increasing violence, former Minister of Customs and Monopolies Gün Sazak was assassinated by Dev-Sol militants on May 27, 1980. This assassination, which had a profound impact on the MHP community, revealed the level of danger.[29] This danger led to a military coup on September 12, 1980, and the "hard days" began for both Turkish democracy and the nationalists. In fact, the military seized power and stated that it did so on the basis of "making Atatürk's principles and reforms operational again," which was in a sense like "handing over the task to the army again" for the nationalist movement. As in the beginning of the March 12 process, or in the following years, when the clashes were at their most intense, the idealist movement saw the fight against communism as a duty of the state, and the intervention of the army could be perceived positively at the beginning. However, it turned out that this was not the case; the same pressure applied against communist organizations would also be applied to the nationalist-idealist movement; most of the nationalists, especially Alparslan Türkeş, would be arrested, and the "Nationalist Movement Party and Nationalist Organizations Case" would be opened.

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[27] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp. 236-37.
[28] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp.. 241.
[29] Öznur, H. (1996). Ibid., pp.. 263.

After the September 12 military coup, the MHP and Nationalist Organizations Trial was initiated with the indictment prepared, and a large part of the executives and even members of the Nationalist Movement Party, including its leader Alparslan Türkeş, were tried in this context. One of the most striking points about the trial process was the attitude of Türkeş and MHP members during the judicial proceedings. Türkeş wanted his actions, not his ideas, to be put on trial, claiming that putting his ideas on trial would be putting the Turkish nation on trial. This shows how strong the argument is that the ideological system of the nationalist movement is the same as Turkishness and the nation's history and value judgments and can be considered the moral basis of the "reaction" aspect of the nationalists. The reality of this basis is, of course, open to discussion and interpretation, but what is wanted to be emphasized here is the strength of the belief of the representatives of nationalist politics and the ideology of the nationalist movement to identify themselves with the Turkish nation.

In addition to the content of the trial, the junta administration's policy of "mix-and-match" between the communists and the nationalists in the barracks led the nationalists to realize that the state had lumped them in with the groups that wanted to change the regime, and this was an important break. The torture incidents also had the same effect, and hundreds of ülkücü had to experience the trauma of being tortured by members of the army, which they considered to be the most sacred national institution. However, no matter how one thinks about it, the generation that was imprisoned and tortured after the military coup of 1980 was referred to as the "Taşmedreseli" within the nationalist movement, and a discourse was developed that the nationalists transformed the cold prisons into a madrasa for themselves and that they continued to learn many things about the country, politics, struggle, and the cause here. Being from Taşmedreseli became an important adjective in later periods within the nationalist movement. However, it would be useful to remember that this title was institutionalized and associated by those who remained within the MHP as the center of the nationalist movement. In a sense, even if those who left the MHP were imprisoned and tortured, they continued to be respected because of their past, but in a sense, they could no longer use the title of Taşmedreseli. This is the result of the MHP's active use of institutionalization.

The concept has also been institutionalized through associations, and as a value of the nationalist movement, it has been ensured to live on as a value of the central institution.

In the post-coup period, after three years, attempts to transition to democracy began, but this attempt was limited to only three political parties allowed by the coup regime to participate in the elections. These three parties were the Halkçı Party, which was allowed to be established as a continuation of the leftist tradition; the Motherland Party, which was established as a classical liberal party; and the Nationalist Democracy Party, which was supported by the military and headed by General Turgut Sunalp. The order here is deliberately written in this way because there are claims in the literature that the MDP (Nationalist Democracy Party) was founded as a continuation of the right-wing tradition. However, the ideological representation of ANAP, which was seen as a surprise in the period in question, was the classical right, and the military was aware of this. It is a controversial issue how much of a surprise ANAP's winning the elections was for the coup administration.

In the 1983 elections, after the victory of the ANAP under the leadership of Turgut Özal, some of the names who had fought in the ranks of the nationalist movement before the 1980s took part in this party, and these names became known as "movers" within the ANAP. Although they acted with the thesis of creating a new "contemporary right" or claimed that they were trying to continue nationalist politics in other parties, the practical result here is the effort to include the nationalist base in ANAP. Although it is difficult to determine the extent of the support of the nationalist base for ANAP in these elections, opinions on this issue have frequently appeared in the literature. It has been argued that the negative attitude of the coup administration towards the nationalists gave birth to a new understanding of nationalism dominated by more civilian understandings instead of statism, and that this led some of the nationalists to ANAP. It was even argued that this was the result of the transformation of the pre-1980s anticommunist reaction into a civil reaction. At the 1985 ANAP congress, it was argued that nationalists had started to lose their power within the party and were being "tamed" in a sense. By 1987, there were discussions about allowing the reopening of the pre-1980 political parties, and the ANAP,

which was said to be practicing democratic and liberal politics, strongly opposed this and campaigned for a "no" campaign in the referendum. In fact, nationalists within the ANAP were active in the no campaign and "boasted" of the 66.7 percent no vote in Yozgat, one of the provinces where Turkish nationalists had received the highest number of votes before 1980, arguing that Türkeş was finished and that the new place for nationalists was the ANAP. However, the countrywide vote was in favor of "yes," albeit by a small margin, and elections were held the same year. This election can be interpreted as an election in which the debate between the Nationalist Work Party, which emerged as the party of the traditional nationalist base, and the nationalists within the ANAP over "who represents nationalism" reached its peak.[30]

While Türkeş was shaping the Nationalist Work Party as the continuation of the MHP, he brought educated, careerist names to the party showcase in order to open the party to the urban masses at the same time as this ideological emphasis. In this context, names such as Dr. Devlet Bahçeli, an academic at Gazi University's economics department, and Ali Güngör, who was prominent as a magazine and book publisher—names that had also played a role in the pre-'80 struggle—were appointed to important positions in the party. The party was acquiring an "urban and professional" appearance. This made the party more appealing to a wider audience, which was one of Türkeş's most important goals.[31]

In the election manifesto[32] prepared for the elections held shortly after Türkeş took the helm of the party, the title "The historical background to which the MÇP (Nationalist Work Party) is heir" clearly stated that the party was the continuation of the MHP. Beginning with the history of modern Turkish nationalism, the party clearly expressed an understanding that embraced the 1944 Turkism-Turanism trial and the struggle against communism in the 1970s. In the relevant declaration, the MÇP was defined as "the center of the idea of Turkish nationalism".

In the general elections of 1987, the first elections held under the leadership of Türkeş after the military coup, the party received 2.93 percent of the vote and failed to secure a parliamentary seat in any

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[30] Erdem, G. (1984). Ibid., pp. 142-156, 169.
[31] Bora & Can. (2019). Ibid., pp. 190, 194
[32] Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi 1987 Seçim Bildirgesi

electoral district due to the threshold. However, in the local elections held only two years later in 1989, it increased its vote share to 4.14 percent, showing that it would be one of the important elements of Turkish politics again and that it would regain its former momentum.

The Welfare Party (RP), which received 7.16 percent of the votes in the 1987 elections, and the MÇP, which received 2.93 percent of the votes, entered the 1991 general elections under the name of the Welfare Party by allying with the Reformist Democracy Party, of which Aykut Edibali was the chairman, in order to overcome the ten percent national threshold. The essence of the election campaign of the alliance was formed by a nationalist-conservative language. While the Welfare Party members emphasized the slogan "Believers united", the MÇP members on the Welfare Party lists used the slogans "Türkiye, a leader in the Turkish century" and "Votes for Welfare, Natinalist-Idealist to Parliament". In the post-election parliamentary arithmetic, the RP gained a total of 62 deputies, 19 of whom later returned to the MÇP. Afterward, efforts were initiated to form a DYP-SHP coalition government as a compromise government, and MÇP leader Türkeş suggested a vote of confidence in this government on the grounds that the country needed a compromise, especially in the face of the separatist threat. However, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu and 3 of his friends chose not to participate in the vote, which can be said to be the political beginning of the process of breaking the ties and the departure of these names from the party. In political language, they opposed the vote of confidence, especially citing the presence of HEP deputies within the SHP. However, it is worth remembering that the HEP deputies left the SHP after a short period of time, in addition, the SHP, which was split in September 1992, lost power and the MÇP, which gave the vote of confidence to the coalition, started to gain strength. So much so that some even nicknamed this government as the 3rd Nationalist Front government.[33]

However, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu and his friends preferred to leave the MÇP due to the reasons discussed above and the current issues of the period and founded the Great Unity Party. This separation was mostly criticized and accused of "betrayal" and "falling into the trick of sects and religious community groups" by the mass that remained

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[33] Bora & Can, Devlet ve Kuzgun. pp. 21, 27-28.

in the MÇP and later represented the center of the nationalist-idealist movement as the MHP. But, of course, there were various voices and comments.[34] Later, a law was passed regarding the re-establishment of political parties that were closed by the September 12 regime, and attempts were initiated to rename the MÇP as the MHP.

When it came to the 1995 general elections, the MHP reached its highest vote percentage in history with 8.18%, but due to the country's electoral threshold, it couldn't secure any parliamentary seats. Considering the processes leading up to the '95 elections and the election results, one of the key factors contributing to the success of the MHP was undoubtedly the strength of the party's institutional identity and history, along with its influence on the traditional voter base. However, another crucial reason was the acceptance and appreciation of Türkeş's portrayal as a "moderate and responsible leader" during that period. Amidst the escalating PKK terrorism in the 1990s, the rhetoric emphasizing the necessity for a responsible statesman image, and the nationalists' call for abstaining from any violent actions, represent the clearest example of this. The mainstream ideology of Turkish nationalism, which forms the roots of the Idealist movement, has always rejected racism and exclusivism, prioritizing the exaltation of Turkishness rather than belittling other nations, aiming to make the nation prosperous and the state strong. Therefore, the policies of the MHP regarding this issue have generally developed along these lines. However, during periods of rising terrorism, the language of the MHP has also become harsher.

The latter half of the 1990s was marked by discussions surrounding the postmodern coup known in political history as the February 28th process, which occurred during the coalition government formed after the 1995 elections by the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi). This period can be summarized as a process where the military evaluated the policies of the Welfare Party as Islamist activities, issued a memorandum, and pressured the government to resign. While the aforementioned period is undoubtedly a separate research topic on its own, the difficulties experienced by women wearing headscarves and the campaigns conducted with

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[34] Bora & Can, Devlet ve Kuzgun, pp. 68-69.

an understanding that could be characterized as militant secularism encapsulate the essence of the latter half of the 1990s. During this time, the MHP, as a party with Islamic sensitivities, became one of the parties whose stance was most eagerly awaited by society. Throughout this period, the MHP emphasized its unconditional commitment to republican values and Atatürk's principles on every occasion. However, it also attempted to adopt a political discourse that opposed combating the values of conservative individuals under the guise of Kemalism.

Another crucial aspect that must be noted about the end of the 1990s, which holds great significance for nationalists, is the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This event was important for both world history and Turkish nationalists for two reasons. Firstly, it marked the complete loss of influence of communism in practice, which was one of the defining points and the biggest battleground for the nationalist movement before the 1980s. This led to two debates. The first was the claim that with the end of communism, the main reason for the existence of the nationalist movement had disappeared, and with the addition of Türkeş's passing, it was argued that the MHP would cease to exist. The second was the claim that the MHP's line would now become capitalist like all other ideological structures and at best would turn into a form of liberal nationalism. However, neither of these claims materialized, as the existence of the MHP and the nationalist movement was not contingent upon the end of communism but was instead a struggle within a temporal context against communism.. Moreover, nationalism is a distinct ideological path that diverges from liberalism or socialism not only in Türkiye but also worldwide, and its existence or absence is independent of the presence of these two ideologies.

The second critical importance of the dissolution of the USSR for nationalists is, of course, the attainment of independence by the Turks living within the Soviet Union. The fact that Turks who are not independent, which the MHP has constantly emphasized since its establishment, have now obtained independent states has led to a more pronounced emphasis on the Turan ideal at a higher level and has found even more resonance in newer generations. This has not only strengthened the rhetoric of the Nationalist Movement Party and increased its credibility but has also led other political parties to approach this discourse.

Bahçeli Period

One of the most significant turning points in the political history of the Nationalist Movement Party is undoubtedly the death of its founding leader, Alparslan Türkeş. Moreover, since it was quite challenging to determine who would lead the party after such a leader and remain in that position permanently, a difficult process awaited the MHP following the death of the "başbuğ." The period of Devlet Bahçeli's presidency, who succeeded Türkeş as the party's leader, holds great importance in the political history of the party. Therefore, the events from the 1997 congress to the centenary of the Republic must be discussed and analyzed in order. The period in question and its events are, of course, the subject of a much larger study; however, here we will attempt to provide a brief narrative of the political history and highlight some of the main characteristics of the MHP during the Bahçeli era.

The Congress Process in the MHP and the Party's Rise to Power

The shock of Türkeş's sudden death was mitigated by the necessity for the party to appoint a new chairman, and this process initiated a normalization that intensified over time. Although this may seem contradictory, the congress process can be characterized in this manner because, while the initial shock was eventually overcome, the normalization led to a hardening of the debates regarding who would become the new general chairman.

On May 18, the first dispute between Tuğrul Türkeş (Alparslan Türkeş's son) and the other candidates occurred during the election for the chairmanship of the council. Talip Kaban, supported by the other candidates, won the council chairmanship against Turgut Altınok, who was backed by Tuğrul Türkeş. In the first round of voting at the congress, Tuğrul Türkeş received 412 votes, Devlet Bahçeli 359, Ramiz Ongun 231, Enis Öksüz 104, Muharrem Şemsek 80, and İbrahim Çiftçi 13 votes, leading to a second round of voting for the presidency. Azmi Karamahmutoğlu, then President of the Ülkü Ocakları, took to the podium and declared their support for Tuğrul Türkeş, stating they would not accept any alternative. He claimed this stance "initiated illegality" in his own words, and his instruction to the youth of the Ülkü Ocakları to disperse the congress hall has become a significant

"stain on the image" of the MHP's political history. At this point, it is important to note that the party's ordinary congress was scheduled for November, approximately six months later, meaning that a chairman would effectively be elected for this interim period during the May congress. The postponed congress was held on July 7 under intense security measures. Between May 18 and July 7, there was evidently an intense lobbying process among the candidates. A significant development during this time was the change of mind of Muharrem Şemsek, one of the candidates who had united under the banner of Devlet Bahçeli against Tuğrul Türkeş. Şemsek, who received 80 votes in the first round, announced his support for Tuğrul Türkeş in the second round, leading a large portion of his supporters to vote for Türkeş. The results of the second round reflect the sum of these alliances. In the second congress, Devlet Bahçeli received 697 votes, while Tuğrul Türkeş received 487 votes, resulting in Bahçeli becoming the second president of the MHP. Bahçeli, who would lead the party until the ordinary congress in November, faced significant challenges ahead. Indeed, there were whispers that even Ramiz Ongun, who had previously supported him, was preparing to compete against Bahçeli, rather than Tuğrul Türkeş, in the November congress. This speculation was confirmed in the ordinary congress held on November 23rd, where Tuğrul Türkeş, Devlet Bahçeli, Ramiz Ongun, and Salih Gökçe ran against each other. In the first round of voting, Bahçeli came in first with 579 votes, while Tuğrul Türkeş received 472, Ongun 173, and Gökçe 11 votes. In the second round, some supporters of Ramiz Ongun, who announced he would not withdraw from the race, voted for Bahçeli, resulting in Devlet Bahçeli being re-elected as president with 671 votes, thus concluding the presidential race within the MHP. While various factors contributed to this outcome, the primary reasons for Devlet Bahçeli's election as president of the MHP included his connection to the grassroots of the party, his familiarity with the delegates, his ability to navigate the internal balances within the party, and his status as a respected figure in MHP history, often referred to as a "teacher."[35]

Bahçeli, who emerged victorious from the congress, is a well-known figure in the nationalist movement. Before 1980, he joined the nationalist movement and founded the Ülkü Ocakları at the Ankara Academy

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[35] Bora & Can. (2004). Ibid., pp. 391- 401.

of Economic and Commercial Sciences, where he later worked as an academic, and ending the dominance of leftist-socialist organizations at the institution. After starting as an assistant at the same faculty, Bahçeli established numerous professional organizations aimed at bringing nationalist academics together. This academy was later transformed into Gazi University's Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and was known as the "Academy" both in the academic community and in the nationalist movement. The Association of Nationalist Finance and Economists (ÜMİD-BİR) and the Association of Assistants of University Academies and Colleges (ÜNAY) were among the professional organizations Bahçeli founded. In 1987, Bahçeli resigned from his university position upon Türkeş's call and entered active politics as the Secretary General of the Nationalist Work Party. In the aftermath of the coup, Bahçeli played an important role in meeting the needs of imprisoned nationalists, which contributed to his recognition within the nationalist movement.

First, Bahçeli has endeavored to maintain the ideological core of the party both during his candidacy for the congress and throughout his presidency. At this point, he particularly emphasized Alparslan Türkeş's doctrine of the Nine Lights. He consistently highlighted Türkeş's legacy and framed the party's understanding of nationalism in a manner that aligns more closely with cultural and, at times, civilian perspectives, considering the prominent dynamics of the periods in which Turkey found itself. Overall, he continued to define the MHP's identity around the Nine Lights Doctrine.[36]

The party's definition of the nation and its understanding of nationalism have also maintained their classical line. Bahçeli emphasized an approach that explicitly rejects racism and defines nationalism and democracy as "two key concepts of human pluralism and solidarity." He stressed that it is indispensable for democratic life that the constituent elements of the nation live together in peace, regardless of origin, sect, or profession.[37]

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[36] Opçin Kıdal, A. (2020). Continuity and Change in the Ideology of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), 1965-2015: From Alparslan Türkeş to Devlet Bahçeli. Bilkent Üniversitesi Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Doktora Tezi. pp. 167.
[37] Bahçeli, D. 1997, 2000, "21. Yüzyıl ve 2023 Türkiye Vizyonu MHP Büyük Kurultay Konuşmaları" pp. 39, 60, 94.

In both the 1999 election manifesto[38] and the party program published in 2000[39], the party defines the nation as "a social whole that has the desire and will to live together on the ground offered by a common history, the feeling of sharing a common destiny in the historical process, and the belief that it has its own unique characteristics and identity in the community of nations carrying the ideal of the future." Nationalism, on the other hand, is defined as "a set of ideas and sensitivities aiming to develop the consciousness of belonging to the social reality called the nation and accepting its distinctive characteristics as the basic reference in interpreting the world and events."

With these definitions, it can be said that the MHP's understanding of nation and nationalism at the beginning of the 21st century reflects a traditional approach that emphasizes consciousness of belonging, common history, and distinctive characteristics and identity. However, the important difference here is that the uniqueness of the nation is emphasized more strongly. This is one of the manifestations of an understanding of nationalism—which can also be called postmodern nationalism[40], although the theoretical discussion is not the focus of this text—that has the ability to adapt to the era on the threshold of the 21st century, especially during a period when the emphasis on difference and diversity of postmodernism has begun to strengthen.

Additionally, it should be considered in the context of the debates on the content of nationalism that arose as a reflex against the rising PKK terrorism in the 1990s. Even during this period, the MHP institutionally distanced itself from an exclusionary and aggressive understanding of nationalism. As Opçin Kıdal points out[41], Bahçeli, like his predecessor, has endeavored to produce politics based not on an ethnic group or identity, but on opposition to the PKK.

With 17.98 percent of the vote and 129 deputies in the 1999 elections, the MHP not only achieved the highest vote share and number of deputies in its history but also became the second party and a partner

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[38] Lider Türkiye'ye Doğru Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Seçim Beyannamesi, 18 Nisan 1999, pp. 28.
[39] Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Parti Programı, 5 Kasım 2000, pp. 8
[40] Çelik, H.B. (2023). Postmodern Milliyetçilik: Millet ve Milliyetçilikten Milletler ve Milliyetçiliklere. Ankara: Cedit Neşriyat
[41] Opçin Kıdal, A. (2020). Ibid., pp. 184.

in the government for the first time. In fact, after the elections, there were discussions about forming a "right-wing coalition" with Bahçeli as prime minister. However, for several reasons, an alternative scenario emerged. The first of these was that the authority to form a government would first be given to Bülent Ecevit, the leader of the first party, the Democratic Left Party, who could potentially agree with other parties in the parliament. In other words, there was a possibility of an environment in which the MHP could be sidelined. Another reason was the belief that a coalition with the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) would not be long-lasting due to the tense political atmosphere stemming from the February 28th process and the strong military tutelage still in place. The DSP-MHP-ANAP (Motherland Party) coalition government was formed with the belief that a coalition of three parties with different views would contribute to social reconciliation and, above all, fulfill the expectation of the MHP base to be in power.

This government came to an end with the decision to hold early elections in 2002 due to the Marmara Earthquake, one of the most devastating earthquakes in history, followed by the September 11 attacks, pressures on the government in international relations, and the continuation of the chaotic economic environment of the 1990s, which transformed into a crisis. However, it is important to note that this government lasted for approximately 3.5 years, making it the longest coalition government in the history of the Republic. Additionally, Bahçeli's "compatible partner" attitude during both the formation of the coalition and its longevity received occasional support from the media and other party politicians. For example, Cem Karaca, a member of the CHP, wrote a letter[42] expressing his appreciation and respect for Bahçeli's stance. Nevertheless, Bahçeli's approach was criticized, particularly by right-wing opposition parties.

In the November 3, 2002 general elections, all parties that had exceeded the threshold in the previous elections, including those in the coalition government established in 1999, fell below the threshold. The Justice and Development Party, with 34 percent of the vote, won 363 parliamentary seats, while the Republican People's Party, with

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[42] http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2002/03/07/p09.html

19 percent of the vote, secured 178 parliamentary seats. As a result, a two-party parliamentary dynamic emerged, allowing the Justice and Development Party to form a government independently.

The evaluation of the 2002 election results from the MHP's perspective requires a slight departure from this general picture. While the MHP experienced a setback compared to the 1999 elections, this failure did not lead to an expectation of collapse when viewed in relation to the other coalition partners. In the 2002 elections, the MHP received 8.3 percent of the vote—slightly below the threshold—while the DSP received only 1.2 percent and the ANAP garnered 5.1 percent. Consequently, the MHP emerged from the elections with relatively little damage compared to its coalition partners. This is significant because, while the DSP and ANAP transformed into "signboard parties" in the subsequent period, the MHP recovered and has maintained its presence in Parliament in all elections to date.

The period between 2002 and 2007 can be viewed as a phase of recovery for the MHP. Immediately after the 2002 elections, Devlet Bahçeli, the chairman of the MHP, announced his decision to resign, taking full responsibility for the party's failure and stating that he would not run for re-election. However, in response to Bahçeli's announcement, there were intense reactions from the party's grassroots urging him to remain. On October 12, 2003, under this pressure, Bahçeli decided to run for the congress and was re-elected president in the first round with 688 votes. Among the other candidates, Ramiz Ongun received 300 votes, Koray Aydın received 137 votes, and Aytekin Yıldırım received 2 votes. Having renewed his strength within the movement in this way, Bahçeli delivered a pointed speech at the congress in which he strongly criticized the government, conveying the message that he would first restore the party and then transform it into a formidable and effective opposition force.

Bahçeli devoted a significant portion of his congress speech to the rise of globalization trends and the discussion of nationalism and national identities. He stated: "Today, in the face of global domination, the flag of freedom and individuality is waving on the walls of nationalism." He emphasized that the globalist ideological axis aims to establish a colonial empire.

The MHP entered the 2007 general elections with a declaration[43] that adhered to its classical ideological line, remaining uncompromising on issues such as Cyprus, the EU, and the fight against terrorism. It rejected both the militant interpretation of secularism and the misuse of religious arguments concerning the headscarf-secularism debate. In the 2007 elections, the MHP received over 14 percent of the vote, securing 71 parliamentary seats and successfully returning to parliament. This election was significant for the MHP not only because it exceeded the electoral threshold in Central Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia—its classical base—but also in Western provinces such as Aydın and Uşak, where it garnered around 20 percent of the vote. In addition to maintaining its classical base, the MHP began to attract substantial support from more urbanized voters in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions, largely due to its opposition to the Justice and Development Party and its strong stance against the government's policies on issues such as Cyprus and the EU.

The main topic of discussion immediately following the elections was the presidential elections, which was reflected in the media as the "367 crisis" because the Justice and Development Party (AKP) did not reach 367 deputies according to the election results. However, when the MHP announced that it would nominate its own candidate for the presidential elections and participate in parliamentary sessions, the crisis was, in a sense, resolved, and Abdullah Gül, the candidate of the Justice and Development Party, was elected as the 11th President with 339 votes. This was perceived as a move that reinforced the MHP's, and especially Bahçeli's, image as a "responsible statesman" by a segment of the public, while also causing "disappointment," particularly among new Western voters. However, subsequent developments have further strengthened the MHP in these regions, and its role as a pioneer of Turkish democracy is now generally accepted.

After 2007, processes such as "democratization," "the opening-solution process," and "the Ergenekon-Balyoz trials" increased the tension between the opposition and the government incrementally. Moreover, the influence of the Gülen sect, which was deeply embedded within

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[43] MHP 22 Temmuz 2007 Seçim Beyannamesi Milli Duruş ve Kararlılık Belgesi, pp. 19, 28-29, 117-120.

the state apparatus, began to rise. In 2010, a referendum was held to change the structure of the judiciary. The date of September 12 was selected for this referendum, and the propaganda centered around the notion that military tutelage, particularly from those who executed the military coup of September 12, would be challenged. During this process, the MHP campaigned for a "no" vote alongside the Republican People's Party (CHP), resulting in intense criticism from certain segments of the party's base. The referendum yielded a yes vote of nearly 58 percent, and the post-referendum period ushered in a process characterized by an increasing discourse on combating tutelage and the ascendance of the Fethullahist organization in particular.

Against this backdrop, the 2011 general elections were preceded by the release of videotape footage concerning the private lives of Deniz Baykal, the CHP chairman, and ten senior executives of the MHP. These tape operations, orchestrated by the Gülenist organization as a retaliatory measure against the opposition that criticized its activities, forced Baykal to resign as CHP chairman and compelled MHP executives to leave the party. Furthermore, numerous news reports—particularly from media outlets aligned with the Gülenist structure—were published, asserting that the MHP would fall below the electoral threshold.[44] Ultimately, the 2011 elections represented a scenario in which the MHP was significantly affected by the operations of the Fethullahist organization. Subsequently, it was revealed that the Fethullahist organization was an international terrorist entity attempting to usurp control of the state, a characterization that would later be included in the decisions of the National Security Council (MGK).

In the 2011 elections, the MHP comfortably surpassed the electoral threshold, receiving 13 percent of the vote and securing 53 parliamentary seats. Compared to the 2007 elections, this result reflects a slight nationwide decline; however, when considering the regional distribution of the vote percentages, it can be asserted that the MHP maintained its traditional base. In certain cities in Central Anatolia, there was a 3-4 point decline, but there were also increases in other cities. During this period, as in the 1995 elections, claims emerged that the party experienced both an electoral shift and an ideological transfor-

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[44] https://www.shaber3.com/gundem/MHP-baraj-altina-gidiyor-CHP/453264/

mation. However, the election results indicate otherwise. The most significant indicator regarding the 2011 election results for the MHP was the party's ability to retain the Western votes it had garnered in the previous election. Furthermore, the party's capacity to sustain its vote share in other traditional constituencies can be interpreted as a reaction to the videotape operations directed against the party.

However, in the 2011 elections, the Justice and Development Party achieved significant success by increasing its vote share to over 49 percent, winning 327 parliamentary seats, and returning to power independently. The ruling party, which emerged from the elections stronger with a record number of votes, placed the resolution process on the national agenda in the subsequent period and formed a "Wise People Committee" to communicate it to the public. While the resolution process was ongoing, in 2013, relations between the Fethullahist organization and the government began to deteriorate, as reflected in public opinion through debates concerning the closure of private educational institutions. Later that year, bribery and corruption operations were launched against four government ministers on December 17 and 25.[45]

The investigations conducted by public officials affiliated with the Gülenist organization marked the official beginning of the "war" between the government and the Gülenist organization, which had established a parallel state structure within the state. One minister involved was dismissed, and three others resigned. However, a parliamentary vote rejected the proposal to refer the ministers to the Supreme Court. In early 2014, the interception and search of National Intelligence Organization (MIT) trucks heading to Syria in Hatay and Adana escalated the conflict, leading to the characterization of the parallel structure as an espionage organization and a network of betrayal.[46] In February of the same year, an audio recording allegedly belonging to the prime minister was posted on the internet, claiming that he had instructed his son to conceal billions of liras at home. The release of various audio recordings on the internet, most of which were related to corruption, continued, resulting in a "tape" era in Turkish politics. However, it is important to note that such secret recordings had previously been used

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[45] https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/904362-iste-gozaltina-alinan-isimler
[46] https://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/mit-tirlari-boyle-durduruldu

to undermine the CHP and MHP. In 2015, some members of the judiciary associated with the parallel structure were dismissed from their positions due to the theft of exam questions and irregularities committed by this structure, particularly within the judiciary. It should also be noted that some of these individuals were prosecutors in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases.

After four years marked by significant events, the general elections held in June 2015 were the first elections since 2002 in which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) failed to secure power independently. The MHP, which received 16 percent of the vote—the second highest percentage in its history—and won 80 parliamentary seats, was undoubtedly the "determinant party."

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who took the helm of the Justice and Development Party after Erdoğan's election as president, lost his first election as the party's leader, which caused controversy within the party. On the evening of the elections, Devlet Bahçeli[47], the president of the MHP, stated that a coalition formed by the other parties in the parliament was more likely, considering the ongoing solution process, and that the MHP was ready to assume the role of opposition in this case. However, it should be noted that Bahçeli stated that the MHP would form a coalition if the solution process was ended, the first four articles of the constitution were no longer up for discussion, corruption was tackled and prevented, and the separation of powers was preserved. However, in his later statements, he stated that these were not accepted and that the possibility of a coalition had disappeared.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who assumed leadership of the Justice and Development Party after Erdoğan's election as president, lost his first election as the party leader, leading to controversy within the party. On the evening of the elections, Devlet Bahçeli, the president of the MHP, indicated that a coalition formed by other parties in parliament was more likely, considering the ongoing solution process, and that the MHP was prepared to assume the role of opposition in this context. However, it is important to note that Bahçeli asserted that the MHP would consider forming a coalition only if the solution process was terminated, the first four articles of the constitution were no longer sub-

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[47] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqSWnu1rNNg

ject to discussion, corruption was addressed and prevented, and the separation of powers was maintained.[48] In his subsequent statements, he remarked that these conditions were not accepted and that the possibility of a coalition had vanished.

As a result of the failure to form a coalition government, elections were held again on November 1, 2015, and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) won 49.5 percent of the vote, becoming the sole ruling party. It is important to note that between the two elections, the PKK resumed its attacks, and terrorist acts escalated. In these elections, the MHP secured 40 parliamentary seats with 11.9 percent of the vote. While there are various reasons for this result, the two most prominent ones are the label of "maladaptive party" attached to the MHP by public opinion and the concerns of insecurity and instability stemming from the conflict environment.

Following the decline in the MHP's votes, an opposition bloc began to form against the party leadership, which announced that the party would hold an ordinary congress in 2018. Former Iğdır MP Sinan Oğan, former Istanbul MP and former deputy chairperson of the parliamentary group Meral Akşener, former Trabzon MP Koray Aydın, and Ümit Özdağ, who served as deputy chairperson and MP during the election process, called for an extraordinary congress and announced their candidacy for the presidency. The four candidates, who began to act together, started to collect signatures from delegates for a statute convention and then an extraordinary congress, and the process was taken to the judiciary. During this period—recalling the pre-election debates—discussions about the dominance of the parallel state structure in the judiciary and the interference of this structure in the MHP's congress process merged. Different courts issued various rulings, and when the Supreme Court of Appeals decided to hold a congress, the MHP headquarters decided to hold a congress on July 10. However, the opposition argued that the headquarters had no such authority and that the commission formed by the Court of Cassation would take the party to the convention and announced that the convention would be held on June 19. The convention was convened; the headquarters de-

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[48] https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/iste-mhpnin-koalisyon-icin-4-sarti-29828006

clared that it did not recognize the convention and took the matter to the judiciary. Eventually, the Ankara 3rd Civil Court of First Instance annulled the convention, and the opposition initiated the process of forming a new party. This process culminated in October 2017 with the establishment of the Good Party (İyi Parti), with Meral Akşener as its chairperson, along with the participation of MPs İsmail Ok, Nuri Okutan, and Yusuf Halaçoğlu, who had been expelled from the MHP, as well as opposition presidential candidates Koray Aydın and Ümit Özdağ.

In the aftermath of the November 2015 elections, the struggle between the Fethullahist organization and the government continued to intensify. July 2016 witnessed one of the most critical nights in Turkish history. The Fethullahist organization within the military attempted to take over the government due to a combination of factors, including the Justice and Development Party's electoral victory and the escalating conflict with the Fethullahist structure, the absence of leadership change within the MHP, and Bahçeli's consistent stance toward the organization. On the night of July 15th, Fethullahist soldiers attempted a military coup, which involved the closure of the Bosphorus Bridge, the bombing of the Special Forces Command, the bombing of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the seizure of TRT, the reading of the coup declaration, and the arrest of the Chief of General Staff. The President of the Republic subsequently called on the public to go to city squares to resist the coup plotters during a midnight television broadcast. Some time before this event, Devlet Bahçeli issued a statement rejecting the coup attempt, affirming support for the government and the national will, and emphasizing the necessity of protecting democracy and national sovereignty.

The coup attempt failed primarily due to the non-Gülenist soldiers in the army not participating in the coup. Although the Chief of General Staff was imprisoned, it did not disrupt the chain of command. The uncompromising rejection of the coup attempt by the President and Devlet Bahçeli, along with their declaration that they would not "bow down," and the fact that the nation took to the streets at the President's call to stand up against the coup plotters and "lay down in front of the tanks" were crucial factors in this failure. However, it was noted that even the following morning, some coup plotters bombed civil-

ians gathered around the presidency to protest against the coup. On the night of the coup attempt, 259 individuals lost their lives while resisting the coup plotters, and thousands were injured. After the failed coup attempt, a meeting was convened in the Parliament, which had been bombed by the coup plotters, resulting in a declaration issued with the signatures of all party groups in the legislature. Notably, Bahçeli was the first leader to make a statement from headquarters, with the lights on throughout the night. He called the Prime Minister, and when he could not reach him, he left a note for his personal staff and issued a statement condemning the coup, all while the fates of the Prime Minister and President remained uncertain. This response was highly regarded by both the nationalist community and the general public. Additionally, it was observed that many of those who took to the streets at the President's call made the Grey Wolf (Bozkurt) sign. A physical solidarity emerged between the two parties and communities against the Fethullahist terrorist organization, which later evolved into a political alliance. July 15th, characterized as an invasion attempt involving physical bombings, ultimately transformed this organization into a terrorist group, now referred to as FETÖ.

The Nationalist Movement Party has contended that a genuine fight against FETÖ and similar structures can only be achieved through a comprehensive reform of Türkiye's governance structure. This reform should involve a change in the "system of government" that enhances the country's democracy and aligns the governance system with contemporary cultural and historical characteristics. In 2017, a constitutional amendment aimed at replacing the parliamentary system with a "presidential government system" was put to a referendum and passed with 51.5 percent of the vote. In April 2018, Bahçeli called for early elections, asserting that Türkiye faced significant internal and external threats both in the struggle against FETÖ and in light of international developments. Consequently, Türkiye went to the polls in June 2018. The Justice and Development Party, the Nationalist Movement Party, and the Grand Union Party (BBP) participated in these elections—the first time the new system was implemented—as the Cumhur İttifakı (People's Alliance). The BBP's chairman ran as a candidate on the Justice and Development Party list, and the MHP secured 49 parliamentary seats with 11 percent of the vote. The People's Alliance achieved

344 parliamentary seats in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), which qualified it to legislate. Erdoğan, the alliance's presidential candidate, won 52 percent of the vote and was elected president in the first round.

In this process, the Nationalist Movement Party made significant contributions to the formation of the presidential government system without becoming a formal partner in the government. By supporting its alliance partner, the MHP has continued to demonstrate this support at an even higher level, particularly in foreign policy and the fight against terrorism domestically. Following the 2018 elections, the MHP announced that it had no demands for any ministries or other positions.

By supporting the government during the 100th anniversary of the Republic to achieve the goal of "leading country Türkiye," which the party has emphasized for many years, the MHP had the opportunity to clarify to its voters and the public that this support was not merely pragmatic but a national issue. Examples of this include: making Hagia Sophia a mosque and opening it for worship; ending the Armenian occupation of Karabakh while Türkiye plays an active role in this process; increasing investments in the defense industry and becoming one of the most important countries in the world, particularly in the production of unmanned aerial vehicles; continuing the fight against terrorism without compromise and conducting operations in Syria; gaining a foothold on sovereignty in the Mediterranean by signing an exclusive economic zone agreement with Libya; adopting a foreign policy centered on a two-state solution in Cyprus and the recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus by the international community; and preventing discussions about Turkish identity and the nation-state.

At the outset of the centenary of the Republic, two major earthquakes, measuring 7.7 and 7.6 on the Richter scale, centered in Kahramanmaraş and affecting 11 provinces, proved devastating for Türkiye and its citizens. More than 50,000 people lost their lives, and over 33,000 buildings were either destroyed or deemed at risk of destruction, resulting in significant psychological and economic challenges for the country. When the devastating effects of the earthquakes were combined with the other aforementioned factors, the dynamics of the

elections scheduled for the centenary year of the Republic also shifted. The MHP entered the 2023 elections as part of the People's Alliance, securing 10 percent of the votes and 50 parliamentary seats.

One of the most significant aspects of the 2023 elections, both for the MHP and for Turkish political life, is the failure of polling predictions. With the exception of one or two polling firms, nearly all indicated that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the candidate of the Millet Alliance, was ahead—most even suggested that he would win in the first round—and projected that the MHP would receive only about half of its actual vote share. In reality, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan garnered 49.5 percent of the votes in the first round, while Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu received 45 percent and Sinan Oğan, the other candidate, obtained 5 percent. Thus, contrary to the polls, Erdoğan narrowly missed winning the election in the first round and finished ahead of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. In the second round, he was re-elected as president with 52 percent of the vote.

Conclusion

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) can be considered one of the ideological currents aimed at preserving the state during the late Ottoman period, as well as a successor to a third way between the Kemalist-left and liberal-right approaches in the Republican era. In constructing this path, there have certainly been numerous points of rupture, differences in current political discourse, and ideological articulations. However, it is evident that the MHP consistently prioritizes the ideology of Turkish nationalism. The party has pursued politics while preserving this ideological core, striving to keep developments and changes within everyday politics free from it. Although coalitions, alliances, and oppositions have shifted within active politics, the party has worked through its affiliated organizations to ensure that new generations remain closely associated with nationalism, endeavoring to keep this entirely outside the realm of known pragmatic politics. Indeed, one of the most important reasons for the party's survival and its current strength and position in Turkish political life—unlike its contemporaries—is this focus. Beyond being merely a political party, the MHP continues to ideologically represent the nationalist-idealist movement, including its affiliated but independent organizations and masses, thereby ensuring a "classic base" and a significant share of the vote.

To elaborate, Turkish nationalism, which initially aimed to rescue the empire and later sought to establish a modern nation-state on the remaining territory, continues to coexist with the concept of idealism in the Republican era, which incorporates the notions of culture, tradition, and religion. The MHP has maintained its status as an "ideology party," prioritizing the preservation of this representation above all political gains. Indeed, some perspectives suggest that this identity has hindered the party's ability to come to power. However, both leaders in the party's history have endeavored to preserve the ideological core while formulating policies.

At this point, it would be useful to summarize the main theme regarding the articulationist nature or "flexibility" of nationalism, which is frequently emphasized in this text. It should not be overlooked that these expressions, often perceived as having a pejorative connotation in the literature and by nationalist groups, are actually the characteristics of nationalism that enable it to maintain its effectiveness and determinism. In fact, this characteristic elevates nationalism beyond being merely a sentiment or ideology to which people turn in times of crisis. When considered alongside Billig's concept of banal nationalism[49], it becomes evident that nationalism, which permeates every aspect of life and daily existence, owes its persistence in part to this everydayness and flexibility, both collectively and individually. The MHP strives to safeguard the ideological infrastructure and sentiment to strengthen this determinism of nationalism. As nationalism is reinforced, the party consolidates its position and continuity in Turkish political life. However, a political party's engagement in daily politics while preserving its ideological core and articulating its ideology in response to changing circumstances is a distinct process that deserves separate examination.

Another prominent feature of the party is its brand value, which is created through its "icons." Notably, the party's emblem, featuring three crescents, evokes Ottoman history and holds significant value in the historical memory of society. This sentiment is similarly reflected in the use of the bozkurt symbol in the emblem of Ülkü Ocakları, the youth organization of the movement. The bozkurt symbol, which

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[49] Billig, M. (2002). Banal Milliyetçilik. İstanbul: Gelenek Yayıncılık.

references ancient Turkish history and embodies the consciousness of Turkish identity by evoking historical heroism, is particularly effective in attracting young people to the MHP.

The party has produced not only institutional symbols but also iconic discourses and symbols—transcending mere syllogism—derived from Turkish history and national traditions, reflecting its ideological background. For instance, the God Mountains, symbolizing the Turkestan region, and the Hira Mountains, which hold significance for the Islamic world, define the Turkish nation as "Turkish as the God Mountains and Muslim as the Hira Mountains." Additionally, the slogan "Guiding Koran, Target Turan" has become iconic and transcends generations. The discourse surrounding "Turkish pride and consciousness, Islamic morality and virtue" has almost become a formula, closely associated with the nationalist-idealist movement, and continues to manifest in the training of the Ülkü Ocaks as well as in the speeches and statements of party officials.

One of the most important features of the party in Turkish political life is its view of the state. It should be noted that the primary aim of the nationalist tradition during the imperial period was to ensure the survival of the state and prevent territorial losses. Furthermore, in the republican period, the concept of state wisdom has gained increasing importance within this tradition. It can be said that the nationalist movement identifies its raison d'être with two key elements: the Turkish nation and the survival of the Turkish state. This notion of "statism" takes on additional significance when compared to other ideologies in the country. Specifically, while the statism of political Islamists came to an end on February 28, and the statism of Kemalism ended with the Justice and Development Party, the nationalists' "loyalty" remained steadfast despite the persecution faced during the September 12 administration.

The party's view of the concept of the nation, much like its view of the state, does not change according to actual developments. In this text, the party's definition of the nation and its approach to nationalism are explained based on both ideological texts and party programs. It is important to note that the party emphasizes protecting existing nationalism, which can be characterized as protectionist nationalism[50], rather

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[50] Çelik, H.B. (2023). Ibid.

than adopting an exclusionary or aggressive stance. Additionally, its definition of the nation—centered on culture, tradition, and history—is positively received by the public. This positive response is evident in the party's presence and influence over more than half a century. The party has consistently defined its ideology as "a bridge between the Republic and the Ottoman Empire" and "a bridge between Islam and Turkishness."[51]

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