

ANALYZING THE “LEADER COUNTRY” VISION OF THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT PARTY IN THE CONTEXT OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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“Türkiye’s magnificent position and spiritual accumulations make it possible for Türkiye to turn its face neither only to the East nor only to the West. Türkiye must center itself and face both the West and the East. This is the strategic vision inherited from the double-headed eagle on the flag of the Seljuk state looking in two directions to the Ottoman Empire and then to the Republic... However, this should not mean an imperialist aggression, but an attractive and respected understanding that seeks tranquility and justice, peace and equity. Our nationalism is not a primitive understanding that treats other nations with contempt and disdain. The infallible pendulum of repeating history may have swung away from us today. However, the eternal law will surely manifest and turn in our favor.” (MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli)¹

Introduction: MHP and Turkish Foreign Policy

As of 2024, there are 193 member states of the United Nations. Within this framework, it is evident that some island states with populations in the hundreds, along with China and India, are recognized as legally sovereign equals. However, the international system is not solely

¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech on the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of the MHP, 9 February 2009, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/40yilkitabi.pdf, p.53-54.

governed by norms; in many instances, legal frameworks are notably weak in the face of the principal determinants of the system. Indeed, the territorial size, demographic characteristics, and historical contexts of these states differ significantly, rendering direct comparisons problematic. The Turkish nation is dispersed across a vast geographical area and currently comprises seven independent states, alongside numerous autonomous republics, regions, and communities that may be categorized as distinct entities. Türkiye is viewed as a beacon of hope and inspiration for Turks worldwide in terms of all elements of national power. Beyond the states it has inherited, its cultural and historical wealth, combined with its unique geographical position, contributes to its distinctive identity, thereby complicating its international engagements. Nevertheless, to comprehend Türkiye's current position within the international system, it is essential to briefly revisit the Republican era, particularly regarding foreign policy.

The foreign policy of the Republic of Türkiye was shaped within the context of the political and economic conditions of its founding years, and its principles and priorities were established accordingly. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish War of Independence and the founder of the Republic, governed during a period referred to in the literature as the "interwar period." During this time, the principles of establishing bilateral relations with global states based on sovereign equality and mutual respect, as well as a commitment to full independence, regional cooperation, and a "peaceful foreign policy," were prominently articulated. This era was not characterized by unprincipled and aimless pacifism; rather, it was a time when Türkiye asserted its status as a member of the international community, adhering to its national laws. Within the framework of the political conditions of this period, the annexation of Hatay to Türkiye and the Montreux Convention's provisions should be regarded as significant achievements in foreign policy. The foreign policy pursued under İsmet İnönü, following Atatürk's death, was shaped amid the heightened tensions and substantial risks of the Second World War. Notably, Türkiye's prolonged neutrality in the war, despite considerable external pressures, is also recognized as a success of this period.

In the bipolar era, Türkiye became part of the Western Bloc at a stage considered the beginning of this period. Consequently, the determinism of the Cold War years in the foreign policies of global states

was also applicable to Türkiye. Until the 1990s, Türkiye experienced fluctuations due to tensions between the poles and was influenced by perceived threats from the Soviet Bloc, as well as global tensions such as the Missile Crisis and regional developments related to the Cyprus and Turkish-Greek issues.

Atatürk's foreign policy, which included bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and Iran, clearly demonstrated his awareness and concern for the Turks living in these countries. This policy was characterized by the conjunctural opportunities presented in the 1920s and 1930s and the power capacity of the new republic. However, Türkiye's foreign political agenda did not focus on the Turkish presence outside of Türkiye until nearly 1990. It is important to note that this issue did not rank highly among various foreign policy topics. Developments related to the Cyprus issue from the 1960s to the 1980s and the response to the oppression of Bulgarian Turks during the 1980s can be considered notable exceptions.

Since the 1990s, as in the rest of the world, there have been fundamental changes in the environment of Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye has been one of the states most closely associated with this new situation due to its physical and cultural proximity to the Caucasus and Central Asian regions, which became new arenas of struggle following the independence of the former Soviet Republics.

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the broader Nationalist Movement are based on idealistic foundations. In its most basic definition, the MHP is the political organization of the Turkish nationalists. There is a strong correlation between nationalism and foreign policy, as international relations are characterized by an ongoing struggle between nations for power and interests. Nationalists do not perceive their nation as "ordinary." They aspire for national goals to be embraced by the broader society. However, they strive to achieve this through rational means rather than sentimentality. The MHP has never excluded "power approaches," which are the determining factors in international relations, and acknowledges the "necessity of a correspondence between power and goals." In this context, it seeks to make sense of internal integrity, growth, development, and power projection within the immediate environment and national cultural geography based on realistic principles for future objectives.

Regardless of the specific context and interpretation of nationalism, it is evident that, in the modern world, nationalism plays a decisive role in the emergence and survival of states, which are fundamental components of the international system and the primary actors in international relations. It can be asserted that the MHP adopts a rational perspective, a view initially established by its founding leader, Alparslan Türkeş, and reflected in the policies of its current Chairman, Devlet Bahçeli. This perspective asserts that the age of nations—and thus the age of nation-states—is upon us, and there will be no fundamental change in this regard in the foreseeable future.

Upon careful analysis, it becomes apparent that the MHP's foreign policy agenda consistently precedes its domestic policy agenda. Often, Türkiye's political position and prestige on the global stage appear to take precedence over the domestic political interests of the MHP as a party. Issues such as Cyprus, relations with Greece, minority rights, Western Thrace, the Caucasus, Turkestan, the Arab-Israeli conflict, border security, terrorism, relations with the EU and the USA, and the interests of Turkish and related communities outside Türkiye, which are central to Turkish foreign policy, have always been integral to the MHP's agenda.

Since the Turanian ideal, embedded in the phenomenon of the Turkic world, represents the main goal of the Nationalist-Idealist (Milliyetçi/Ülkücü) Movement, issues related to the Turkic world have evoked the MHP and the Grey Wolves' Hearths not only in Türkiye but also globally. Even when the MHP was outside the government and the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT), it was regarded as a fundamental point of reference for various states and communities within the Turkic world, serving as a last fortress to which they could resort in difficult times.

The "Principle of Nationalism," which is the first principle in the Nine Lights concept proposed as a political doctrine by Alparslan Türkeş, the founding leader and "Grandfather" of the MHP, encompasses all dimensions of the concept of nation and outlines the means to exist and succeed as a "nation" in the international struggle. Türkeş articulates his perspective on nationalism as follows: *"It is not possible for a society devoid of a sense of nationalism to exhibit the characteristics of a nation. It is not possible for a community lacking a sense of nationalism and*

national consciousness to coexist. We observe that communities deprived of such feelings and consciousness cannot protect themselves against the slightest influence of external events; moreover, even without these external influences, they disintegrate autonomously and cease to exist as a community with distinct characteristics and goals." The phrases "unable to protect themselves against the slightest influence of external events" and "becoming a community with goals" are critically important in this context. It should not be regarded as natural for the members of a nation or the political and/or social groups representing them to agree on only limited issues; instead, they should strive to become a cohesive community with comprehensive goals. In this regard, the MHP and nationalist organizations have consistently emphasized the importance of education. Through both general and specialized educational activities, they have sought to ensure that the goals of the Turkish nation on a global scale are embraced by the entire nation, particularly by the youth.²

Alparslan Türkeş asserted that *"the goal of neo-colonialism is to push nations to despise themselves under the veil of realism."*³ He emphasized the spiritual dimension in the rise of nations, stating: *"The rise of a nation requires, first and foremost, the possession of high spiritual beliefs based on the love of humanity, being useful to people, and respecting human existence. Thinking of greatness and aspiring to greatness is an honorable path that will lead individuals and societies to happiness. The essence of greatness is spiritual greatness, a greatness of faith and love, as well as respect for facts and knowledge,"*⁴ he warned.

During the Cold War years, the overt and covert cooperation of the organized and armed left, both globally and in Türkiye, with states such as the USSR, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) led to efforts by their representatives in the academic and media spheres to portray the MHP and the Idealist Movement as being subject to foreign support. In an attempt to denigrate and discredit the struggle of the effective will against them, they resorted to the calumny of associating the Nationalist Movement with the USA and NATO.

² Alparslan Türkeş, 9 Işık, Ül-Kor Publications, İstanbul, 1987, p.88-95.

³ Alparslan Türkeş, Temel Görüşler, Dergâh Publications, (Çağdaş Türk Siyasi Düşüncesi Serisi), İstanbul, 1975, p.10.

⁴ Alparslan Türkeş, Temel Görüşler, Dergâh Publications, (Çağdaş Türk Siyasi Düşüncesi Serisi), İstanbul, 1975, p.9.

However, Alparslan Türkeş's assertion that "there is no need to copy Slavic Marxism or to embrace cold Anglo-Saxon capitalism"⁵ countered this narrative. Although Türkeş acknowledged that Türkiye's NATO membership was appropriate under the prevailing conditions of the day, he criticized the erroneous and incomplete evaluations of NATO membership made by foreign policymakers. He stated, "The most important issue in all alliances is to harmonize the mutual interests of the member states and to ensure good coordination and sincere cooperation. Strong states in alliances always try to drag their weaker allies in their own direction. In alliances, it is crucial that member states mutually trust each other and maintain this trust. To achieve this, responsibilities should be divided according to the means and capabilities of the members, and political powers should be distributed based on equality. In the military domain, powers should be assigned according to geographical regions. From the very inception of the NATO alliance, responsibilities have been assigned disproportionately, whereas political powers have been allocated according to the big state-small state paradigm."⁶ His words illustrate the realism in his perspective on this alliance. In this regard, we can conclude that the MHP maintained a rather pragmatic and technical approach to Türkiye's relations with NATO during the Cold War.

Although there are certain historical principles and tendencies specific to Türkiye's foreign policy, there have been interruptions, sometimes resulting from errors and at other times from the necessity to adapt to changes in the overarching characteristics of world politics. While the foreign policy pursued until the bipolar period was characterized by the consolidation of regional power, pioneering regional cooperation, and a commitment to full independence and stability, the bipolar period revealed a trajectory that largely overlapped with the dominant parameters of that era. This was a period of relative inactivity, a characteristic not unique to Türkiye.

Following the 1990s, Türkiye's pursuit of a multifaceted foreign policy became evident as it sought to enhance its influence and con-

⁵ Alparslan Türkeş, *Temel Görüşler*, Dergâh Publications, (Çağdaş Türk Siyasi Düşüncesi Serisi), İstanbul, 1975, p.35-36.

⁶ Alparslan Türkeş, *Temel Görüşler*, Dergâh Publications, (Çağdaş Türk Siyasi Düşüncesi Serisi), İstanbul, 1975, p. 285-286.

trol in the new era within the limits of its capabilities. Factors such as the risks arising from its geopolitical location and its proximity to the convergence and breaking points of various civilizational basins and/or geopolitical axes have resulted in minimal change in the fundamental security-based character of Turkish foreign policy. While allocating attention and resources to the ethnic and territorial conflicts in its immediate vicinity, Türkiye has also faced a significant domestic counterterrorism agenda, which has complicated the conduct of its foreign policy.

As an indication of the MHP's (and, for a time, the MÇP, which represented the same political line in Turkish politics) perspective on Turkish foreign policy, the following principles—emphasized by Alparslan Türkeş in both his writings and speeches—should be considered:

- Protection of independence and territorial integrity,
- Separation of mainstream politics from day-to-day politics,
- Concealment of overarching political objectives, with daily politics serving these objectives⁷

The late Alparslan Türkeş was the leader who drew significant attention to the events in Cyprus, one of the primary issues in Turkish foreign policy that had not received adequate focus within Türkiye. He highlighted the inappropriateness of timidity regarding this matter and foreign policy in general, maintaining the option of intervention to safeguard the rights and status arising from the London and Zurich Treaties.⁸ When the MHP entered the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT) during the 1991 General Elections in alliance with the Welfare Party and the Reformist Democracy Party, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was underway. Throughout his 19th term as a Member of Parliament, Türkeş closely monitored foreign policy developments, addressing the General Assembly and warning Turkish foreign policy decision-makers, MPs, Turkish public opinion, and

⁷ "Günlük Politika Ana Politikayı Unutturamaz", 18 MaY 1974, Speech at the Youth Conference in Ankara, Metin Turhan, Başbuğ Türkeş: Türklük-İslâmiyet-Bölücülük ve Diğer Konular Hakkında Konuşma, Mülâkat ve Sözleri, Kripto Publications, Ankara 2017, p.219.

⁸ See. 30th Meeting of 29.12.1965, 12th Meeting of 4.12.1967, Rasim Koç for the 35th meeting of 23.1.1969, Meclisteki Türkeş, Doğu Kütüphanesi, İstanbul 2007, p. 51-123.

the international community on numerous occasions. A review of his addresses from that period reveals that he frequently emphasized the Turkic World, the process of Soviet dissolution, the opportunities and responsibilities that arose for Türkiye, and the importance of the Turkish language.⁹

A dimension that should not be overlooked in the context of the MHP's principles and approach to foreign policy is its realism, which is not externally attributed to it. By this realism, we refer to rationality in political practice rather than political realism as a theory of international relations. The idealistic aspect of Turkish nationalism and the Nationalist Movement has often led to accusations of "sentimentalism," "hamaset," and "utopianism" from circles and political rivals who were unaware of the political activities and stance of the MÇP-MHP line. However, in practice, as a political party that nurtures idealism and strives for the adoption of national ideals, the MHP reflects these principles in its slogans and symbols. It follows a course that evaluates available data, aligns its power with its goals, and supports governments unconditionally in their actions on national issues. In this vein, the MHP has also been the party that most sharply criticizes insensitivities and mistakes regarding national issues and has warned the authorities.

Foreign Policy Perspective of MHP under the Leadership of Devlet Bahçeli

Alparslan Türkeş, the Grandfather of the Turkish World and one of the most significant leaders of Turkish political life in the 20th century, passed away on April 4, 1997. Following the 5th Extraordinary Congress on July 6, 1997, Devlet Bahçeli, who had served at various times as Secretary General, Deputy Chairman, Central Executive Committee Member, Central Decision-Making Committee Member, and Chief Advisor to the Chairman, became the leader of the MHP.

Foreign policy has been of vital importance in Devlet Bahçeli's political philosophy. His nearly identical phrase, "*First my country and my nation, then my party and me,*" clearly indicates that Türkiye's place and status within the family of nations and the Turkish nation's standing in the global community are prioritized above all else.

⁹ Rasim Koç, *Meclisteki Türkeş*, Doğu Kütüphanesi, İstanbul 2007, p. 242.

MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli has defined two very important and completely unique symbolic goals concerning foreign policy since he assumed the chairmanship. One of these two interconnected symbols is 2023 and the other is “Leading Türkiye”. “Leading country” was pronounced by Devlet Bahçeli on the second anniversary of the death of the late Alparslan Türkeş.¹⁰ In a statement dated May 1, 1999, Devlet Bahçeli, in response to comments on whether the MHP had changed or not, stated that *“our goal of becoming an effective and respected country in the world has not changed”*, thus pointing to the importance of Turkish Foreign Policy and the ideal of “Leader Türkiye” for the MHP.¹¹

Devlet Bahçeli’s understanding of foreign policy is also rational, cool-headed and skeptical, rather than the “hamasas” and “excitement” that have long characterized the MHP and the Nationalist Movement in the media and significant segments of the public. According to Devlet Bahçeli, *“International relations are not the realm of excessive optimism or pessimism, contrary to the air pumped into public opinion by insensitive circles. Exaggerating and expressing positive or negative views in a negotiation process will not result in anything other than weakness. Any kind of projectionism that does not take into account both the experiences of the Turkish nation and the whole of humanity, as well as the dynamics of the age and the coordinates of international strategy, will be nothing more than “wishful thinking”. Therefore, it will hinder, not support, Türkiye’s development dynamism.”*¹²

In evaluating the formation of the 57th government, established following the general elections held on April 18, 1999, Devlet Bahçeli identified foreign policy as the foremost of the MHP’s three primary perspectives, with the economy as the second and political preferences and social expectations as the third. Regarding foreign policy, which was emphasized by the Chairman and presented as the first priority,

¹⁰ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Commemoration Speech of Başbuğ Alparslan Türkeş on April 4, 1999, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/971/index.html

¹¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the Meeting of the Central Committee, Central Executive Committee and Members of Parliament on May 1, 1999 http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/962/index.html

¹² MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s press statement dated March 5, 2002, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/223/index.html

the increasing significance of Eurasian geopolitics, particularly the recent developments surrounding Türkiye, was highlighted.¹³

As Deputy Prime Minister in the 57th Government, Devlet Bahçeli shared the responsibility for addressing chronic economic and social problems. This relevant period begins with the last year of the 20th century, signifying a shared responsibility for a government that guided Türkiye into the 21st century. The late 1990s and early 2000s were characterized by a global discourse in which any article in the social sciences would typically commence with the term “globalization.” The prevailing set of values viewed globalization as an inevitable phenomenon, treating politics as a process that must adhere to its established rules, which were presumed to exist. This perspective suggested the evaporation of borders, proclaimed the contempt for, and even the dissolution of, nation-states, and posited that regional economic integrations and the acceptance of the political dominance of multinational corporations were not only beneficial but also obligatory.

MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, while fulfilling his responsibilities in governing the country, has also sought to address and explain the debates surrounding globalization in a more rational manner. His following words are quite clear in this regard: *“We regret to see that some pencil-wielders, who have failed to be objective, are criticizing the MHP’s position in this process, using the recent economic difficulties as an excuse. These individuals, who cannot accurately interpret globalization and believe that everything national and domestic will be abandoned in its wake, unfortunately do not understand the realities of this country and the world. It should not be forgotten that the competition between nations and states does not disappear with globalization; rather, globalization has altered the axis and content of this competition.”*¹⁴

Conflicts and inequalities around the world play a fundamental role in MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s view of the globalization process. As we entered the 21st century, in a speech where he expressed the

¹³ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s GNAT Group speech on June 8, 1999, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/972/index.html

¹⁴ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the Kocayayla Turkmen Assembly on July 22, 2001, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/299/index.html

general economic and political situation in the world, he stated the following: *“On the one hand, there is the dizzying pace of technological development and economic enrichment, and on the other, the reality of increasing misery, turmoil and ethnic strife. In addition, the middle classes, the social guarantors of democratic stability, are shrinking all over the world, inequalities are becoming more pronounced, and ecological disasters are reaching unlimited dimensions. In other words, our world is becoming a troubled sphere of conflicts and antagonisms rather than a stage for the spread of prosperity and happiness. One part of the world is condemned to a position of producing and marketing technology, culture and value, and therefore of governing, while the other large part is constantly receiving and being governed.”*¹⁵

Yet, it is evident that there are some differences in approach with the other partners of the coalition of which it is a member. In a 2002 report prepared for the US Congress, the 57th Government in Türkiye was described as follows: *“The government’s demanding workload has exposed sharp differences between the ideologically incompatible coalition partners. The DSP is traditionally statist but probably no longer; it is now nationalist. The MHP is a party on the right and fiercely nationalist, while the ANAP is centrist, market-oriented, and notoriously corrupt. Bahçeli and Yılmaz are diametrically opposed regarding the changes related to EU accession. Bahçeli is skeptical about the impact on national sovereignty, while Yılmaz advocates for swift action.”*¹⁶ This report to the US Congress, intended as a briefing note for administrators, seems to have aimed to be succinct and to the point.

The approach to some of the main issues of Turkish foreign policy in the 2000s is rich with examples demonstrating that Devlet Bahçeli and the MHP acted on principles and prioritized Türkiye. The first of these issues is relations with the EU, which was presented as the foundational framework of Turkish foreign policy at the beginning of this period.

The MHP is the party of a political movement – the Nationalist-Idealist Movement – rooted in the ideas of unity and solidarity of the Turk-

¹⁵ Speech by MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli at the Opening Ceremony of the Academic Year of Gazi University on October 5, 1999, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/969/index.html

¹⁶ Carol Migdalovitz, “Turkey: Issues for U.S. Policy”, Report for Congress, 22.05.2002, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL31429.html>

ish nation, the Turkish world, and the elevation of the Turkish nation in this regard. In this respect, full membership in the EU has not been a priority or indispensable for the MHP. However, the transformation of the EU full membership perspective into a state policy with general consensus among the foreign policy, security, and economic institutions of the state affects all political parties and segments of society.

Amid concerns about the internal and external manipulation of the full membership process, as well as the adoption and implementation of developments detrimental to Türkiye within this context, the MHP can be seen as having a cautiously positive attitude toward EU policy, especially during the period when it was in government. However, particularly since 2003, the EU's approach to Türkiye—especially regarding the Cyprus Problem, minorities, local languages, and local governments—has been perceived as a means of “political transformation” of Türkiye. This led the MHP to articulate appropriate responses on behalf of the nation and to closely monitor the issue, akin to a shadow cabinet.

In retrospect, we can assert that the MHP was almost the only critical voice in the political arena between 2004 and 2010 and perhaps the only center that seriously addressed these issues. This period was highly turbulent in terms of Europe and Türkiye-EU relations, marked by numerous haphazard steps. During this time, the political landscape was accompanied by debates on identity that do not exist in Türkiye, peculiar attempts to define “Turkishness,” an intensifying wave of insults and attacks against Islam and Turkishness in Europe, and extensive conspiracy cases against the institutions of the Turkish state. The MHP maintained its position and stance on these debates and issues without deviation and reacted whenever necessary.¹⁷

¹⁷ See, among other examples, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Written Press Statement Evaluating the Recent Political and Social Developments in Our Country, which includes issues regarding the black propaganda and campaign launched against institutions and state organs on the pretext of the events in Şemdinli, 19 March 2006, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/99/index.html; Written Press Statement by Devlet Bahçeli on the provocations and mass actions that have gained momentum in our country in recent days, in addition to the issues related to the provocations and uprising rehearsals in Nowruz and the “Turkishness” debate, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/97/index.html

During the period when it was a partner in government, the MHP frequently discussed the EU issue in its various committees and units, and this topic was included in many party texts and speeches by the Chairman. The following points are noteworthy in the MHP's approach to the EU during this period:

- MHP does not reject Türkiye's EU membership in principle.
- He draws attention to the fact that Türkiye's full membership in the EU is increasingly becoming a state policy.
- He evaluates that EU membership is ultimately in the hands and authority of the EU, and therefore indexing everything to it carries significant risks.
- He is cautious about the harmonization laws, etc. expected from Türkiye in the process of full membership.
- It has openly rejected the EU's approach to terrorist organizations and their activities and Türkiye's approach to the fight against terrorism and has tried to make the EU side empathize with Türkiye on this issue.
- In its relations with the EU, Türkiye has demonstrated that Türkiye has certain vested rights and opportunities from the EU and that these should be pursued for the benefit of the country.
- He emphasized that Türkiye's EU membership is not/can not be like the EU membership of any other state and that the EU side is well aware of this fact.¹⁸

On November 8, 2000, the MHP harshly criticized and warned against the Accession Partnership Document. On November 15, 2000, the EU Parliament discussed and approved the report on Türkiye. Devlet Bahçeli described both documents as "legitimizing ethnic discrimi-

¹⁸ See on this subject Dr. Devlet Bahçeli, "Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Hayal ve Gerçek", Türkiye ve Siyaset Dergisi Vol.9-10, July-October 2002, p.5-12. Dr. Esat Öz, "Türkiye'nin AB Üyeliği, Perspektif Zaafları ve Tartışma Ahlakı", Türkiye ve Siyaset Dergisi Vol.9-10, July-October 2002, p.13-18. MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's 6th Ordinary Grand Congress Speech on November 5, 2000, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/322/index.html, Dr. Devlet Bahçeli, "Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Kırılma Noktaları", Türkiye ve Siyaset Dergisi Vol.7, March-April 2002, p.5-12 Doç. Dr. Kürşat Eser (MHP Aksaray MP. Turkey-EU PABSEC Co-Chair) "Kıbrıs Meselesi ve Türkiye-AB İlişkileri", Türkiye ve Siyaset Dergisi Vol.7, March-April 2002, p.19-23. Devlet Bahçeli, Türkiye'nin AB Üyeliği ve MHP, Ankara 2002, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/turkiyeab.pdf

nation, prejudiced, horizonless, and meaningless.” The MHP assessed that the spring mood the EU had created in relations with Türkiye in 1999 was being deliberately set back in a negative direction in 2000.

On November 21, 2000, in a press statement made by Chairman Devlet Bahçeli after the formation of the new council of the MHP, he stated that “...a European Parliament that only yesterday rejected the so-called Armenian genocide allegations suddenly changed its mind and attempted to hold the Turkish nation and state to account. As a very interesting ‘coincidence,’ this approach of the European Parliament has also been accepted by the parliaments of the member states of the Union. This is one of the irresponsible and prejudiced approaches that has no logical explanation whatsoever.”¹⁹ These statements highlight the rejection of the EU’s famous ‘double standard.’

One of the items on the foreign policy agenda in the early 2000s was the EU’s efforts to utilize NATO capabilities. This issue, which was based on the construction of a Common European Security and Defense Policy and the project of an Emergency Response Force to carry out the Petersberg missions dating back to 1992, entered a new phase with the 1999 Helsinki Summit. Since then, EU-NATO contacts have increased, and 11 EU member states, which are also NATO allies, have requested the use of NATO capabilities in the operations of the Emergency Response Force. This situation is detrimental to NATO and non-EU member states such as Türkiye. The problem lies in Türkiye’s contribution to a force in which it is not involved in the decision-making mechanism.²⁰ This issue, which has technical dimensions and is critically important for Turkish foreign policy, did not escape the attention of the MHP and was brought to the agenda by Devlet Bahçeli in June 2001.²¹

Even after November 3, 2002, when it was in opposition, the MHP attempted to evaluate the criticisms originating from Europe, consider-

¹⁹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Press Statement after the Organization of the New Council November 21, 2000, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/317/index.html

²⁰ Burak Tangör, *Avrupa Birliği Güvenlik ve Savunma Politikasının Gelişimi*, Seçkin Publication, Ankara 2009, p.140-149.

²¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the MHP 6th Regional Consultation Meeting in Kayseri on June 9, 2001, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/290/index.html

ing both their justified and unjustified aspects. However, it was never satisfied with the way its government was cornered by European states or the EU as an institution. The MHP made it clear in advance that it would position itself on the side of the state against such actions to the extent possible. One of the most striking recent examples of this was the hostile attitude towards Turkish politicians and statesmen in the Netherlands and some other EU member states in 2017. Following the Dutch response to Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, the Turkish Minister of Family and Social Policies, and the cancellation of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's visit, the MHP displayed national solidarity with the government. It met with Cemal Çetin, the Chairman of the European Turkish Federation, the umbrella organization of Nationalist-Idealist Europeans Turks, secured the support of its members in Europe, and even announced in a press release that they had decided to stage a sit-in. Additionally, it addressed the issue in another press statement dated March 12, titled "Towards the Netherlands' Abusive Attitudes and Policies," in which it criticized the Netherlands in strong terms.²²

On the other hand, when the Final Declaration of the European Council Summit held in Brussels on December 16-17, 2004, included the statement that negotiations with Türkiye would start on October 3, 2005, there was a great sense of triumph and celebration in Türkiye. However, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli declared that "this date was an empty date, used as a tool to pave the way for new unfair demands from Türkiye, and that in reality, there was no serious positive development."²³ Subsequent events have shown how correct he was.

In 2005, 2006, and 2007, the Cyprus issue emerged as a key determinant of Türkiye-EU relations, as the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) became a full member of the EU in 2004 under the name of Cyprus, in violation of EU law. In this respect, the MHP's stance on EU issues primarily focused on the Cyprus issue. However, regarding Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which was

²² MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Press Statement on the Netherlands' Offensive Attitudes and Policies, http://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/4230/index.html

²³ Text of the Press Conference of MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli on the Results of the EU Brussels Summit December 21, 2004, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/172/index.html

subjected to intense and deliberate discussion in 2008 due to pressures and demands from the EU, as well as issues related to Turkish-Greek relations, the Patriarchate and the Seminary, the exclusion of community foundations from legal control, and many other topics, the MHP frequently warned or criticized the government with detailed explanations in dozens of group speeches.²⁴

To demonstrate the foreign policy approach of the MHP under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli, it is essential to examine the phenomenon of the Turkic World, which holds a special place in the intellectual foundations and goals of this party and movement. As the successor leader of the MHP, the most significant legacy of Alparslan Türkeş, Devlet Bahçeli has dedicated attention and resources to the ideal of unity among the Turkic World, cooperation among Turkic states, and addressing the social, political, and economic situations of Turkic communities, as well as human rights violations and freedoms affecting related communities with a shared perspective and sensitivity. He has acted in accordance with the changing international conditions compared to the Cold War period, aiming to ensure that the issues of the Turkic World occupy a rightful place in Türkiye's foreign policy priorities. He closely monitored developments in the North Caucasus and the Balkans, which flared up again at the end of the 1990s, before he became a government partner, and endeavored to keep these issues on the agenda through public statements.

The Turkic World has been an exclusive topic in all election manifestos of the MHP since 1999.²⁵ Each manifesto includes commitments to establish organizations such as the "Turkic World Science and Technology Database," the "Turkic World Scientific and Technological Co-

²⁴ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the GNAT Group Meeting, 29 January 2018, http://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/426/index.html, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the GNAT Group Meeting, 19 February 2018, http://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/431/index.html

²⁵ See. Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Seçim Beyannamesi: Lider Türkiye'ye Doğru, Ankara, 1999, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Seçim Beyannamesi: Türkiye'nin Onurlu Geleceği, Ankara, 2002, MHP 22 Temmuz 2007 Seçim Beyannamesi, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Seçim Beyannamesi: 2023'e Doğru Yükselen Ülke Türkiye Sözleşmesi, Ankara, 2011, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Seçim Beyannamesi: Toplumsal Onarım ve Huzurlu Gelecek, Ankara, Haziran 2015, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Seçim Beyannamesi: Huzurlu ve Güvenli Gelecek, Ankara, Kasım 2015.

operation Center," and the "Turkic World General Council." Likewise, the establishment of a "Ministry of the Turkic World" has been prioritized among the MHP's commitments and goals. These initiatives reflect the MHP's desire to institutionalize the Turkic World as extensively as possible, including in other Turkic states and even among non-independent communities.

The MHP has also been very sensitive to the developments in the Balkan lands, which the Ottoman Empire took under its control before a significant part of Anatolia. Issues related to the Turkish presence in Bulgaria and Greece, and the struggles in Bosnia and Kosovo were the main items on the MHP agenda in the 1990s. In this context, the Kosovo War, which lasted from February 1998 to June 1999, was also an important issue on Devlet Bahçeli's agenda. While the elections of April 18, 1999, had not yet taken place and the MHP was not yet in the 57th government, Devlet Bahçeli pointed out the increasingly tense dimension of the Kosovo conflict with the following words: *"Another important agenda item of recent times in the field of foreign policy is the Kosovo problem. This issue, which actually has a long history, has come to the forefront after the resolution of the Bosnia and Herzegovina problem, albeit to a certain extent. Serbian forces continue to show their ugly face at every opportunity they get. The attitude of Western countries towards this protection has not been sincere and moral enough."*²⁶

The MHP supported Türkiye's participation as a route for the Caspian Basin energy resources to reach the world, Turkish state and private sector companies' initiatives in priority sectors such as energy and construction in the states of this region, and within this framework, it supported Türkiye to pursue a more active policy in the race for energy transmission lines. What is different is that the MHP perceives this issue not only from the perspective of economic gains but also with the goal of Turkish unity. Moreover, it read the geopolitical developments in the region within the framework of reducing the dependence of these states on Moscow and/or other centers and strengthening their sovereignty. This was deemed necessary for the rapprochement and integration of the Caucasus and Turkestan with Türkiye The Baku-Ceyhan

²⁶ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's press statement dated February 8, 1999, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/971/index.html

Oil Pipeline, which was put on the agenda in 1993 during the reign of Ebulfez Elchibey and concretized with the “Treaty of the Century” signed in 1994 during the reign of Heydar Aliyev, after remaining on paper for many years, started to be realized as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline with the support of US President Bill Clinton at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in November 1999.²⁷ The foundation of the line was laid on September 17, 2002, in the Sangjal region of Azerbaijan by then Presidents Ahmet Necdet Sezer, Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev, and it was inaugurated in May 2005.²⁸ Recognizing that Türkiye should give a special place to Azerbaijan and TANAP in its energy policy, MHP included the “Turkish Energy Trade Union” project, which it attributes an important function in the production and transfer of Caspian energy resources, in its manifesto for the 2015 General Elections.²⁹

The MHP is in favor of “institutional integration” in the cooperation among Turkic states and communities and this is based on the intellectual foundations of the party. It is strongly opposed to the idea of the integration of Turkic states and communities being considered as hamasic, unrealistic, irrational or too difficult. Devlet Bahçeli criticized such approaches with the following words: *“We find it difficult to understand those who approve of Europe’s efforts to achieve great integration in every aspect, despite the existence of very different cultural and social conditions and serious historical problems between them, and who belittle the cooperation and solidarity efforts of the Turkic World.”*³⁰

Following his visit to Kazakhstan on March 18-22, 2002 in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli shared some of his contacts and observations in the Parliamentary Group of his party. In this context, he emphasized the importance of Kazakhstan for Türkiye with the following words: *“Taking into account the geopolitical and geostrategic advantages of both Türkiye and Kazakhstan shows what*

²⁷ Shahana Sariyeva, Azerbaijan-Turkish Relations (1992-2012): Common Interests and Solidarity, Unpublished Master Thesis, International Hellenic University, 2012, p.10

²⁸ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/sezer-inaugurates-btc-pipeline-38733072>

²⁹ 7 Haziran 2015 Seçim Beyannamesi: Toplumsal Onarım ve Huzurlu Gelecek, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhpweb/MHP_Secim_Beyannamesi_2015_tam.pdf

³⁰ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s speech to the GNAT on March 28, 2000, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/346/index.html

a broad horizon there is for us. The development of an integrated cooperation system in investment, production and marketing processes between Türkiye, a natural and historical bridge between East and West, and Kazakhstan, one of the most important countries of Asia, is of great importance and value for the prosperity and stability of both our countries and Eurasia. For all these reasons, an important point that I have emphasized both in bilateral meetings and in the presence of our businessmen and sector representatives is that, despite these facts and developments, we consider the distance that our country has taken in its relations with Kazakhstan as positive, but insufficient. As a matter of fact, during our meeting with the esteemed President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, this issue was also emphasized sensitively. Mr. Nazarbayev agreed with us that trade and economic relations between the two countries can be further developed."³¹ Indeed, as an experienced and realistic Turkestan leader, Nazarbayev's success in making his country the host of the solution to important international crises/problems (Türkiye-Russia Crisis, Astana process in the Syrian problem, solution of the Caspian Status problem, etc.), his activity in the Turkic Council and its affiliated organizations coincided with Devlet Bahçeli's observations about Kazakhstan.

It should be noted that Azerbaijan has an important and privileged place for the MHP. The MHP and the Nationalist Movement have a special place for the people living in this country and geography, where the closest relations can be developed at the state and society level in the post-Soviet independent Turkic World. The historical contributions of Azerbaijani intellectuals such as Ahmed Agaoglu and Ali Bey Huseynzade to the development of Turkish nationalism, from Ziya Gokalp's idea of Oghuz Unity, play a major role in this. In addition, Azerbaijan's geopolitically valuable position between Türkiye and the Turkic World is also among the factors. In this respect, the legacy of Türkes's ideas and ideals on Azerbaijan has been continued by Devlet Bahçeli. In general, the fact that Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations have turned into a state policy has created smooth and high-momentum relations in every field until the great crisis in 2009. However, with the plans, pressures and demands of the EU and the US, as the nor-

³¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's GNAT Group speech on March 26, 2002, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/228/index.html

malization of Türkiye-Armenia relations and the policy of opening the borders approached, the damage that the Armenian diaspora and the Dashnaksütyun party could not have caused if they had worked together for a hundred years began to be created between the two brotherly states. Five years before the signing of the Zurich Protocols in 2009, which stipulated the opening of diplomatic missions and the opening of border gates between Türkiye and Armenia, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli pointed out in 2004 that the government of the time was *"rehearsing the opening of border gates rather than making efforts to liberate the occupied Azerbaijani territories."*³² In September 2009, he commented on the preparations of then President Abdullah Gül to visit Armenia as part of the attempts to bring Ankara and Yerevan closer through a bizarre process called "football diplomacy" and stated that *"it is understood that the preparations for the President's visit to Yerevan on the pretext of a national match have reached an advanced stage"* and noted that *"the biggest obstacle to the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia is Armenian policies based on hostility towards Türkiye."*³³

On October 10, 2009, when the Zurich protocols were signed, the MHP expressed the clearest reaction and evaluated the protocols in the context of international law and Türkiye's interests. MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli, stating that *"the protocols register the submission to unlawful Armenian demands", draws attention to the following points: "The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries depends on the mutual recognition of borders and territorial integrity, and the determination of the principles that will guide the relations as concrete obligations, not in a general and abstract plan. Armenia's military occupation of about one-fifth of the territory of friendly and brotherly Azerbaijan still continues. The process is contrary to Türkiye's national interests and lacks legal and political legitimacy due to these defects. MHP will defend to the end that diplomatic relations cannot be established unless Armenia changes its hostile policies and practices that question Türkiye's territorial integrity and that the border will not be opened until the occupation of Azerbaijani lands ends."*³⁴

³² Text of the Press Conference of MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli, 9 June 2004 http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/159/index.html

³³ <https://www.haberler.com/bahceli-den-gul-un-ermenistan-ziyaretine-tepki-haberi/>

³⁴ MHP Chairman Mr. Devlet Bahçeli's written press statement on relations with Armenia, 3 September 2009, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/719/index.html

Following the clashes in Karabakh in April 2016, Devlet Bahçeli devoted a significant part of his group speech on April 5, 2016, to Azerbaijan, stating that “MHP strongly stands by its Azerbaijani compatriots, no matter where they end up” and exclaimed that “Karabakh is as Turkish as Kars and is the homeland of the Turk!”³⁵ On February 28, 2017, in his Group Meeting speech, Devlet Bahçeli reassessed the tensions in the region and the clashes of April 2016 and called on Armenia to leave Azerbaijani territories without any conditions.³⁶

The MHP’s interest in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria, two of Türkiye’s most important neighbors, is well known to the public. It can be said that without the MHP and Turkish nationalists, the Turkish presence in these two Middle Eastern countries, and in the entire Middle East, would have become a community that would have disappeared, unknown to Türkiye. The MHP has always closely followed the developments in the region through its deputies from provinces such as Mersin, Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa, as well as its provincial and district organizations in these provinces. The MHP has endeavored not to leave the existence and future of the Turkmens of the Bayır and Bucak regions in Syria, and the Turkmens living in the line stretching from Tal Afar to Kifri and Mendeli in Iraq, at the mercy of third powers, and Devlet Bahçeli himself has repeatedly received Turkmen representatives in his office, listened to their problems and expectations and tried to ensure that the necessary actions were taken.

MHP, which carefully followed the developments after the second US intervention in Iraq in 2003, stated that “*The Iraqi Provisional Administrative Law, which was adopted for the future political structure of Iraq, determined the basic principles on which the new constitution to be prepared after the transfer of the administration to civilians would be based, and with this law, it was decided to establish a loose federation based on the ethnic basis in Iraq, and the geographical division of the federation to be composed of three regions, He warned that the borders of the Kurdish Federated Region were drawn in a way to include Turkmens and that with this arrangement, the political and legal infrastructure for the establishment of an independent*

³⁵ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s GNAT Group speech on April 5, 2016, http://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/4052/index.html

³⁶ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s GNAT Group speech on February 28, 2017, http://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/4219/index.html

*Kurdish state in the future was completed, while Turkmens were reduced to the status of a marginal minority.*³⁷

The Turkmen city of Tal Afar, which had been ousted by the US military operations against Tal Afar in early September 2004, was brought to the political agenda for the first time by MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli. Bahçeli warned the government by drawing attention to Barzani's statement "We are ready to fight to protect Kirkuk's Kurdish identity". After the MHP drew attention to the issue, Abdullah Gül, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, held a meeting with Colin Powell and "conveyed Türkiye's concerns about the harm to the civilian population".³⁸ Of course, although some attempts have been made to mitigate the situation, the wrong policies pursued in the aforementioned period will continue after the "Arab Spring" process, and the Turkmen population's presence, security of life, welfare and peace will be completely harmed.

In January 2005, in a comprehensive press statement on the elections held in Iraq, attention was drawn to issues such as the transfer of population to Kirkuk from outside, the Peshmerga elements' de facto control over Turkmen settlements, the PKK's alliance with Barzani and Talabani, and the US's patronage of all these, and it was determined that the government left these issues to their own devices. It was also declared that Anatolian Turks would never allow the destruction of Iraqi Turkmens.³⁹

The Cyprus issue is also seen as a "National Cause" for the MHP. The MHP's sensitivity towards Cyprus dates back to the CKMP period. As a person who was born in Cyprus, Alparslan Türkeş took the issues of the Turkish Cypriots very seriously and this issue was included in all foreign policy documents and declarations of the MHP. It is clear that the Cyprus issue has a "responsibility" aspect for the MHP in terms of the continuation of Alparslan Türkeş's political legacy. For this reason,

37 Text of MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the FMC Meeting (Kızılcahamam- Patalya Hotel Facilities) May 8, 2004, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/156/index.html

38 Türkmen Uyarısı, Sabah, 11 September 2004, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2004/09/11/gnd101.html>

39 Press Statement by Devlet Bahçeli on the Elections in Iraq, 28 January 2005, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/144/index.html

it is not overlooked that the issue was brought up at every opportunity in the MHP's TBMM group. During Devlet Bahçeli's chairmanship, this sensitivity was meticulously maintained. This was due to the fact that Cyprus was always one of the topics on the agenda of the 1997 and 1999 EU Summits when Türkiye's candidacy was on the agenda. Regarding the Cyprus problem, in 1999, when he was a partner in the government and the late Denktaş was in indirect talks in New York, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli made a very critical observation and exclaimed that *"in some parts of the world, a policy of forced separation and fragmentation was being pursued, while in other parts, a policy of insistent unification was being pursued, that the Western World had been insisting on its policy of not recognizing Northern Cyprus for a quarter of a century, that Denktaş's attitude was honorable and correct, and his theses were the theses of the great Turkish nation."*

According to MHP, it is clear that denying the existing bi-communal, bi-state structure in Cyprus and accepting one side as the sole interlocutor will not serve peace and stability. There is no doubt that it is the representatives of the Turkish Cypriot people who have demonstrated goodwill in the indirect Cyprus talks held so far and who desire a just and lasting solution to the problem. However, despite this, it has always been the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that has been blamed for the conflict and cornered.

The MHP has always maintained that the path to lasting peace and stability in Cyprus lies through a just and honorable settlement and that an approach that ignores the bi-communal and bi-state structure is tantamount to an approach that does not want a lasting and just solution. It is also the MHP that has frequently expressed that the EU administration should envision a lasting peace based on the consent of the two communities, as required by the glorified European values, and that it is not possible to stand by and watch policies and approaches that could return the Turkish Cypriot people to the painful and dark period of pre-1974.⁴⁰

40 See as an example. MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the MHP 6th Regional Consultation Meeting in Kayseri on June 9, 2001, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/290/index.html, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the 12th Erciyes Victory Congress on August 4, 2001, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/301/index.html

The MHP has continued to address the Cyprus issue with a national responsibility and determination to fight even in its most difficult days. It is known that MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli made a press statement exclusively on Cyprus even immediately after the November 3, 2002 elections, when he remained below the 10% threshold and outside the Parliament. In this statement, it was stated that the MHP, whose determination and resolve to defend Türkiye's interests under all circumstances was not affected in any way even though it remained outside the Parliament, would fulfill the requirements of this responsibility in the future as well. On January 22, 2003, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli paid a visit to the TRNC and held consultations with the late President Rauf Denktaş and gave the message that the MHP would stand by him and the people of the TRNC. During the process of the GCASC's accession to the EU on behalf of the whole of Cyprus, the MHP warned the government of the time and criticized the EU for this mistake at the expense of violating its own law.⁴¹

One of the most important contributions of the MHP to prevent the violation of Türkiye's and the Turkish side's rights in the Cyprus problem was the famous "additional protocol" signed between Türkiye and the EU Commission on July 29, 2005 during the British EU Presidency. In particular, it was only thanks to the MHP's warnings and objections that this protocol, which allowed the GCASC to benefit from Turkish ports, prevented Türkiye from recognizing the GCASC as the state representing the whole of Cyprus. The declaration text issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with this additional protocol, although not satisfactory for the MHP, was meaningful in terms of preventing future steps to be taken on this issue.

It should also be noted that the MHP has never hesitated to show open and decisive support to those in power, regardless of their political identities, in the face of planned steps such as attacks, humiliation, agitation, etc. directed against Türkiye by other actors in the international system. Alparslan Türkeş's stance during the MSP-CHP, DYP,

⁴¹ Press Conference by Devlet Bahçeli on the EU's Double Standard on Iraq and Cyprus, 16 April 2003 http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/191/index.html. At this meeting, the AKP Government was also warned that "the attitude that should have been shown at the Copenhagen Summit on December 12, 2002 should at least now be shown by not attending the meeting in Athens".

ANAP governments or Erbakan-Ecevit, Demirel, Özal eras and Devlet Bahçeli's foreign policy stance during the AK Party governments represent the same national sensitivity. We can recall the Cyprus Peace Operation and the persecution of Bulgarian Turks from the past. Devlet Bahçeli took a similar stance during a period of fierce and bitter political rivalry between the AK Party and the MHP. Regarding the incident that took place in Davos on January 29, 2009 and entered our foreign policy literature as the "One Minute"⁴² crisis, the MHP Chairman stated that *"The style and approach of the session leader and the President of Israel towards the Prime Minister, who was representing the Republic of Türkiye, was an example of arrogance that our beloved nation could never accept"* and that *"Prime Minister Erdoğan's reactions, which we believe he showed on behalf of our beloved nation, were justified, legitimate and appropriate, even if the methods were debatable"*. Bahçeli also shared with the public his hope that *"his stance in defense of the rights of the oppressed Palestinians, his words that he will continue to stand upright and his subsequent reference to Atatürk's struggle are an optimistic sign that the Prime Minister is going through a positive process of change and transformation."*⁴³

Another example of this attitude was demonstrated in the crisis that started with the downing of the Russian jet. On November 24, 2015, Türkiye and Russia experienced one of the most important crises of our recent history when the Russian Federation's SU-24 fighter jet was shot down after violating Turkish airspace in the Yayladağ region of Hatay. The mutual understanding and cooperation between the two countries in the fields of economy, energy, Black Sea and security, which had not lost its momentum despite many tensions since the 1990s, entered a serious crisis. It is known that Türkiye and Russia had been on completely different sides in their Syria policies until that day and that they were, roughly speaking, two separate states behind the warring sides in terms of elements on the ground. Despite this, until the afore-

⁴² Recep Erdogan storms out of Davos after clash with Israeli president over Gaza, The Guardian, 30 January 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/30/turkish-prime-minister-gaza-davos> Erdoğan'dan Davos'ta One Minute Çıkışı, <https://www.dunyabulteni.net/tarihte-bugun/tarihte-bugun-erdogan-dan-davosta-one-minute-cikisi-h194810.html>

⁴³ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's written press statement on "The controversy in Davos and the attitude of the Prime Minister", 31 January 2009, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/563/index.html

mentioned incident, there had never been a direct confrontation between the two states. This incident was interpreted as a military blow to Moscow in the post-Cold War era, and the first military response of a NATO member to the Russian armed forces. In addition to harsh words and threats from Russia against Türkiye, a number of sanctions that were put into practice in a short period of time, Türkiye's response was also in question.⁴⁴ In this case, the MHP declared that it would "support the AKP government, reserving all rights of criticism".⁴⁵ In a written press statement on the issue, Devlet Bahçeli stated that "the growing cycle of hostility and crisis between Türkiye and the Russian Federation, which has spread to different areas and circles, will not benefit anyone, that the issue is a supra-party issue, that it would be a futile effort to intimidate Türkiye, to force it to make concessions, to make it shrink and to break away from its legitimate line."⁴⁶

Principles of Devlet Bahçeli's "Leader Country" Vision

First of all, it is necessary to look at the copyright issue of the phrases "2023" and "Leading Country/Türkiye", which are frequently uttered by various political figures in Turkish politics today. Of course, 2023 as a number refers to the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Türkiye. However, Devlet Bahçeli was the first in Turkish political life to approach the 100th anniversary of the Republic as a national interim goal.

First, in 1995, Devlet Bahçeli, in his article "National Goals and Priorities for the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Republic of Türkiye" in the *Milliyetçi Çizgi* newspaper, made some assessments 28 years in advance on what needed to be done for Türkiye to become a leader in its region and enter the second century prosperous and strong.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Türkiye-Rusya Uçak Krizi 10 Günde Neler Yaşandı, 4 December 2015, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/12/151204_rusya_krizin_10_gunu

⁴⁵ Devlet Bahçeli'den Düşürülen Rus Uçağına İlişkin Açıklama, 26 November 2015, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/devletbahceliden-dusurulen-rus-ucagina-iliskin-aciklama,jHl8shRo4ECOzEhv1tX7qQ>

⁴⁶ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's written press statement on the "Downing of the SU-24 Fighter Jet of the Russian Federation and the Developments", 26 November 2015,

⁴⁷ Devlet Bahçeli, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin 100. Kuruluş Yıldönümü İçin Millî Hedef ve Öncelikler", *Milliyetçi Çizgi*, 11 January 1995.

Then, in 1997, Devlet Bahçeli made the following statements in his speech at the opening of the MHP's 5th Ordinary Grand Assembly:

"Dear Fellow Countrymen: As you are well aware, the principles and goals of the Nationalist Movement regarding long-term strategies are clear. We are people who already feel the excitement of becoming a "leading country" in the medium term and a "superpower" in the long term, and believe wholeheartedly that this is possible. Why should Türkiye not enter the year 2023, when we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of our Republic, as a "leading country" and 2053, when we will celebrate the 600th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul by Mehmet the Conqueror, as a "superpower"? Why shouldn't Türkiye lead the Black Sea Economic Cooperation as well as the economic, political and military organizations to be established with the Turkic Republics?"⁴⁸

Subsequently, in 1998, he wrote an article for the 21st Century Special Issue of Yeni Türkiye magazine titled "Leading Country Strategy for a Strong Türkiye of the 21st Century: Its Importance and Outlines" in 1998. Likewise, in this article, he pointed out the keys to be ready for 2023 and to become a leading power in the 21st century. In 2000, he is also known to have pointed to the goal of a "Leader Country" in his speeches at various MHP Group Meetings. For example, in one of these speeches, he said: *"It is inevitable that a Türkiye that revises and renews its education and justice system, utilizes public resources appropriately and starts to improve the quality of public services will reach the level the country deserves. Thus, a leading economy, a leading state, a leading society, in short, a leading country will cease to be a goal in the near future and will become a beautiful reality. Türkiye, located at the heart of Eurasia, will then become the pole star of this geography and humanity."⁴⁹* In his 6th MHP Congress Opening Speech dated November 5, 2000, which was also published in English translation, Bahçeli stated that no power could stop Turkish

⁴⁸ Devlet Bahçeli, 21. Yüzyıl ve 2023 Türkiye Vizyonu, In Expanded 2nd Edition, "MHP 5. Olağan Büyük Kurultay Açılış Konuşması, 23 November 1997, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhp2007/kitaplar/21yy2023turkiyevizyonu.pdf, p.26

⁴⁹ Devlet Bahçeli, Hoşgörü ve Uzlaşma İkliminde Türkiye, içinde "Speech on April 18, 2000 at the MHP Group Meeting in the GNAT", p.152. https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhp2007/kitaplar/hosgoruikliminde.pdf

nationalists from marching towards the goal of “leading country” by growing bigger and more united every day.⁵⁰

According to Devlet Bahçeli, foreign policy has some fundamental constants. There cannot be a foreign policy approach based solely on “worrying about one’s own shortcomings” and being in a constant state of “defense”. Likewise, our foreign policy cannot be realized on a ground that will constantly provide other foreign policy actors with influence. State seriousness and the protection of national interests are the main priorities of foreign policy. The first thing that everyone should understand is that foreign policy cannot be conducted solely from a position of “accountability” and “defense”, and the main way to prevent this is not to set any limits on the areas of national interest and influence. Narrowing the borders of these spheres does not make it easier to define medium and long-term foreign policy strategies and goals; on the contrary, it makes it difficult and impossible for Türkiye to properly utilize the opportunities and effective strategic trump cards that come its way.⁵¹

In its accounting of the period when it was a partner in the 57th government, the MHP, while describing the search for recovery by sitting down with the IMF in the difficult economic conditions the country was in as a “necessity”, underlined that the issue was that it should not be perceived as a condemnation. In a 2003 party publication with a foreword by Devlet Bahçeli, it is stated that “*the MHP has never allowed the coercion and impositions of globalization on Türkiye to turn into condemnation, even under coalition conditions.*”⁵²

Under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli, the MHP has repeatedly pointed out that the 21st century should be an age of humanity, not a new age of barbarism, and has explained the risk of this age of barbarism in terms of income inequalities, inequalities of opportunity, terrorist incidents, and global environmental and health problems.⁵³

⁵⁰ Devlet Bahçeli, “A Look At The New Age: Observations, Critiques, and Suggestions”, Ankara, 2000, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/aloo-katthenewage.pdf, p.72, 79.

⁵¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s GNAT Group speech on April 16, 2002, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/233/index.html

⁵² Yeni Bir Dünya Yeni Bir Türkiye İçin Büyük Buluşma, Ankara 2003, MHP Publications, p.58.

⁵³ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the Congress organized by the Austrian Turkish Federation on May 19, 2002, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/239/index.html

According to Bahçeli, “...no political power, regardless of the duration of its term in office, has the luxury of making mistakes in the field of foreign policy, especially with regard to our national sensitivities and national causes. Again, no one has the right and privilege to use foreign policy for party interests in domestic politics or to sacrifice it to political vendettas.”⁵⁴

In one of his addresses in 2003, Devlet Bahçeli stated that he could not tolerate seeing Türkiye as an actor in the orbit of other states and that he was uncomfortable with the current international order: “Today, the Turkish nation is faced with one of the most important decisions of its history. Those who are seeking a path in the orbit of the US or the EU, detached from Türkiye’s own history and identity, are those who see Türkiye’s existence on these lands as unnecessary and have allied themselves with other projects. In the face of these, Türkiye has the obligation to realize a new breakthrough in these lands with a new civilization and a new understanding of morality, both by comprehending the developments in the world and by evaluating the crises that we say lie at the depths of Western civilization.”⁵⁵

Before the 2007 elections, in his speech at the meeting where the MHP’s election manifesto was introduced, Devlet Bahçeli stated his party’s goals:

“A policy is being implemented to ensure that our country becomes a credible power in its region and a global leader in 2023...”, “... Our vision is to make our country a leading country in 2023 by ensuring its economic, social, cultural and technological development with the understanding of a new civilization and a new world order centered on Türkiye. ...”, “... Our aim is to raise our country to the position of a leading country that produces at world standards, shares its income fairly, secures human rights and freedoms, ensures transformation into an information society, improves the quality of life of the society, is globally influential and is one of the top 10 countries in the world in economy.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the FMC Meeting, 4 January 2003, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/175/index.html

⁵⁵ Yeni Bir Dünya Yeni Bir Türkiye İçin Büyük Buluşma, Ankara 2003, MHP Publications, p.61.

⁵⁶ Devlet Bahçeli, Tek Başına MHP: 22 Temmuz 2007 Seçim Beyannamesi Tanıtım Toplantısı, p.13-14. https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhp2007/kitaplar/2007secbeytantopkonusma.pdf

From this point of view, it is necessary to see that Bahçeli's goal of "Leading Country Türkiye" is also based on a vision of civilization and includes principles and aspirations such as justice, freedom, prosperity and quality production.

The Nationalist Movement Party's party program titled "Towards the Future", which was announced on November 8, 2009, includes the following assessments of Türkiye's geopolitics:

"...In order to be among the leading countries, an effective foreign policy that takes into account the geographical, strategic and geopolitical position of our country, including contributions to regional and international peace, will be pursued... Our Party, which will act with state seriousness, style and understanding in foreign policy, will ensure that Türkiye, which is located at the center of Eurasian geopolitics, which is the strategic focus of the 21st century, will be a strong, respected, influential country in world politics and international relations, whose friendship is sought and whose friendship is trusted... Türkiye will make use of the opportunities offered by being at the center of Eurasian geopolitics with a strategic vision and will implement economic cooperation projects in order to ensure and maintain peace and stability in the countries of the region. The cognate and related communities outside Türkiye will be dealt with closely within the framework of international law and the principles guiding inter-state relations, and the necessary institutional cooperation structures will be established first..."

"...With the sensitivity and participation to be created with the consciousness of Greater and Leader Türkiye, first of all, it will realize a paradigm shift by enabling the creation of a new intellectual environment in the face of the decaying and decaying Western civilization... The second important step of the strategy to be followed should be to base the intellectual and cultural dialogue on a solid ground and to develop the political and economic cooperation opportunities of this civil dynamism in this great region by organizing a large organization in Eurasia, especially among non-governmental organizations. Politics constitutes the third link of the strategy that will prepare the rise of a new civilization understanding with the goal of an equitable global order and the structure of intellectual,

cultural and organic civil organizations to be formed around the Türkiye-centered Eurasian perspective."⁵⁷

In fact, the ideal of Leader Türkiye put forward by the MHP under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli is closely linked to the search for an order that would mobilize for the elimination of turmoil, war, destruction, hunger and injustice in various geographies of the world, that would not act with double standards and that would aim to establish peace. This can be seen in all of Devlet Bahçeli's comments on the globalization debates that became widespread in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For instance, in his statements at the OSCE Summit held in Istanbul in November 1999, the last major international summit of the 20th century, he declared that "*serious steps should be taken to minimize the consequences of the globalization process to the detriment of poor and developing countries*".⁵⁸ At the beginning of the 21st century, the MHP sees the dominant hegemony in the international system as an order that needs to change and considers Türkiye as a power that can be the leader/leading country of this change. As a matter of fact, Bahçeli made the following assessment for Milliyet newspaper in 2000:

*"The current global balance of power exhibits a sensitivity limited to its interests, especially in the face of massacres in the Turkish-Islamic geography. All this shows us the inadequacy of the existing global and regional alliance structures and therefore the need for a new global solidarity and cooperation effort. It should be kept in mind that global stability and peace in this great region stretching from the Balkans to the Caucasus, from the Middle East to Central Asia can only be built with a solid cooperation and solidarity effort of the Turkish-Islamic geography."*⁵⁹

In 2001, Devlet Bahçeli, again setting off one of the first flares of the questioning of globalization that would later become widespread, said the following: "*The most obvious indication of the possibility of global polarization was the traditional 'World Economic Forum' held in Davos*

⁵⁷ Yeni Bir Dünya Yeni Bir Türkiye İçin Büyük Buluşma, Ankara 2003, MHP Publications, p.80.

⁵⁸ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's GNAT Group speech on November 16, 1999, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/976/index.html

⁵⁹ Devlet Bahçeli, "Bir Dönüm Noktasında Geleceğe Bakmak", Milliyet, 2000. https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhp2007/kitaplar/yenicaginesiginde.pdf s.59

*and the 'World Social Forum' held in Porto Alegre, Brazil on the same dates. These two platforms are of great symbolic importance, even if they do not have serious social and political repercussions. As a result, a common opinion emerged that globalization is an inevitable process, but that it leads to new inequalities and injustices, the effects of which are becoming increasingly visible. The general conclusion that we, as Türkiye, should draw from this is that in order not to get lost in the labyrinths of the globalization process, we should grasp the basic dynamics of the new era and prevent it from leading to social destruction. To this end, it is essential to contribute to the development of a new awareness and effort of international responsibility."*⁶⁰

Bahçeli, who also holds a PhD in Economics, made the following remarks on global injustice in a speech in the Netherlands: *"The frightening imbalance in the world income distribution causes antipathy and sometimes even hatred towards developed countries in a significant part of the world. It seems essential for the future of humanity that the developed countries of the world join hands and find solutions to eliminate global injustice. Because, unfortunately, it is not possible to say that humanity is happy and peaceful enough in this process in which it accesses and consumes more information more quickly, benefits more from technological opportunities and lives a more comfortable life compared to the past. Today, at the point where humanity has arrived, there is an obligation to address global problems and dilemmas with a new understanding and approach, especially in developed Western countries."*⁶¹

Although the MHP has a questioning approach to globalization, it has not remained insensitive to problems of a global nature; on the contrary, it has played a pioneering role in their pursuit. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli has drawn attention to such issues as the Far East Asian crises shaking the world economy, the ozone depletion threatening the entire ecosystem, and the realization that terrorism has the potential to take on a global character. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli has also declared that all countries must unite around "global commons" and strengthen the grounds for solidarity and dialogue in this regard, in addition to

⁶⁰ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's speech to the GNAT on February 13, 2001, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/270/index.html

⁶¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the 4th Grand Assembly of the Dutch Turkish Federation January 5, 2002, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/214/index.html

their own “national goals and interests”. In this context, he underlined that global poverty, stability, ecological balance and terrorism are the four main issues and problem areas of importance in this respect.⁶² In a speech he delivered at the European Turkish Federation, Devlet Bahçeli stated that “*the line of development that Western civilization has reached today has not eliminated the need for human solidarity and moral norms, on the contrary, it has increased it, and that the hypocritical attitudes towards the 2003 Iraq War have clearly demonstrated this, and that the common values and future of humanity should not be sacrificed to new sharing fights.*”⁶³

The MHP did not believe that democracy, human rights and interdependence, which were the dominant discourses in global politics at the beginning of the 21st century, were universal principles or a set of principles that the great powers sincerely practiced/wanted to be practiced, and therefore, that conflicts contrary to this flow would disappear in the near future. Instead, he pointed to the importance and validity of these phenomena on the one hand, but on the other hand, he found that conflicts of interest and alliances, which constitute the basic dynamic of international relations, remain important and that there is no serious evidence that this structure will disappear.⁶⁴

The second US-led military intervention and invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a phase in which critical issues such as international law, weapons of mass destruction and legitimacy were debated. In fact, it caused a serious difference of opinion both within the US and among the US allies, especially the French-German duo and some other EU states. It was in this environment, while the US intervention in Iraq was still in progress and the full inflammation of the crime and act of occupation had not yet been revealed, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli sent a very clear message to the world with the following words: “*It must not be forgotten that a ‘globalization model’ in which developed countries and big*

⁶² MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s GNAT Group speech on January 15, 2001
http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/216/index.html

⁶³ MHP c Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the European Turkish Federation Congress on April 12, 2003, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/190/index.html

⁶⁴ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s GNAT Group speech on November 23, 1999,
http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/977/index.html

*powers set the rules and other states and nations have no say has no chance of success. The lure of tactical victories and attempts at relative enrichment must not lead us to ignore the common values and interests of humanity. Today, the primary task of all humanity, especially the countries that make up the "coalition of war", is to quickly heal the wounds of the Iraqi people on the one hand, and to prevent the Middle East from becoming a stage for new conflicts and polarizations on the other. In this context, the turmoil and chaos in Iraq must end as soon as possible."*⁶⁵

In 2011, during the election process amid the turmoil of FETÖ plots, the MHP prepared an election manifesto of approximately 200 pages and shared it with the Turkish nation and the world public opinion. The statements in this declaration draw attention to the shortcomings and intentions of the dominant trend in the world and the damage it has caused and could cause, especially on nation-states. In this respect, the following paragraph in the introduction is quite striking:

*"Acting with the superiority provided by technological and economic dominance, global powers have tended to threaten the national state structure by scratching ethnic identities and weakening national identity. In the face of the global attack, societies whose minimum commonalities have weakened, who cannot form a harmonious social cohesion ground, and who cannot produce common decisions and solutions have faced the loss of their national resistance fortresses one by one. Especially in regions where ethnic and religious fragility is dominant, tyranny in the name of democracy, injustice and murder in the name of the rule of law, torture and cruel behavior in the name of human rights have been seen to prevail; the formation of fragmented structures with multiple identities, multiple cultures, multiple languages and multiple laws has been triggered and fueled by creating a chaotic and confrontational environment by disrupting public order in the target countries."*⁶⁶

⁶⁵ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli's Speech at the European Turkish Federation Congress on April 12, 2003, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/190/index.html

⁶⁶ Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 2011 Seçim Beyannamesi: 2023'e Doğru Yükselen Ülke Türkiye Sözleşmesi, Ankara 2011, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhp2007/kitaplar/MHP_2011_SecimBeyannamesi.pdf

“Leader Türkiye” as a Power to Change the Global Order

As can be seen from the above examples, MHP Leader Devlet Bahçeli does not use the expression and ideal of “Leader Türkiye” randomly in order to incite his own base and the general public to enthusiasm and fervor, but refers to this concept persistently and within a plan. Moreover, it is understood that he does not see this ideal as a final destination, but rather as an intermediate goal, such as Türkiye becoming a regional leader/regional power in 2023.

Most of the experts who follow Turkish foreign policy from inside and outside categorize Türkiye as a “Medium-Sized State”, “Pivot State”, “Emerging Power”, “Regional Power” and so on. However, few would argue that it is a regional leader. What does “leadership” entail as a foreign policy role? This question can be answered by looking at two key concepts in the definition of power in international politics: “influence” and “control”. If “leading country” refers to being a regional power, Türkiye has until recently been less ambitious in terms of controlling and/or influencing the decisions of actors other than itself. Deterrence over its neighbors is something different. This kind of deterrence can at times be the case even for non-powerful states. However, the ability to utilize both the soft and hard elements of power and thus influence the opinions or decisions of other actors has become more visible in the last 5-6 years of Turkish foreign policy. Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, the South Caucasus, the Black Sea basin, the Balkans and Turkestan are significant in this regard. So, what is the relationship between this point and the slogan of the MHP and its Chairman Devlet Bahçeli, “Leader Türkiye”? What changes will a region led by Türkiye bring about in world politics? What is the goal of the MHP and Devlet Bahçeli for the world after 2023?

An examination of the MHP’s printed publications and the texts of Devlet Bahçeli’s speeches on various occasions reveals the answers to these questions. First of all, the issue of how to achieve the ideal of Leader Türkiye has always been on the MHP’s agenda. For example, in his historic speech at the MHP’s 9th Ordinary Grand Assembly, which was held with great enthusiasm, Devlet Bahçeli, in the following words, points out the path to the goal of a “leader country”, and indicates the stages he has categorized in his mind for Türkiye and its spiritual foundations:

“It will pass through a depth of vision that can correctly read the developments in the world, a spiritual maturity that analyzes the moral and value crisis experienced by humanity, a questioning perspective that sees how the labor, values and resources of oppressed societies are exploited, a sense of justice that interprets humanity not as a competitor but as a means of blessed sharing of God’s trust, and the sprouting among us of a composition that will consist of reason, patience, vision, knowledge, attention and love. The path to be set out with these principles will first lead us to Türkiye as a Leader Country in 2023, the 100th anniversary of our Republic. That is our belief. Then, it will lead us to Super Power Türkiye in 2053, the 600th anniversary of the Conquest of Istanbul, which opened an era. This is our ideal.”⁶⁷

As can be seen from the above statements, the MHP sees humanity as a whole that deserves equitable sharing and believes that this can be realized under Türkiye’s leadership. Pointing to the 100th anniversary of the Republic means that this goal will be pursued within the framework of the principles and principles of the Republic and that democracy will not be compromised. In this respect, it is hoped that Türkiye will be an example for both the Eastern and Western worlds. The reference to the Conquest of Istanbul and the 600th anniversary of the Conquest is a reference to the global approach of Turkish states throughout history. Thus, it points to the fact that Türkiye, having attained the status of a superpower, is essential for the liberation of oppressed nations and the construction of a more equitable international system. So, what does this power projection, in other words, a world led by Türkiye and the Turkish nation, promise to humanity? The following statements in Devlet Bahçeli’s thank you a message to the book “Peace of Humanity”, which was edited by Prof. Dr. Ahmed Güner Sayar and includes chapters by expert academics from various fields, reveal that the MHP considers the destruction of “human beings” by the complex problems the world is facing as an important issue that needs to be solved:

⁶⁷ Sonsuza Kadar Var Ol Türkiye! Text of MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the Opening of MHP’s 9th Ordinary Grand Congress, p.62. https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/sonsuzakadar_varolurturkiye_9kurultay.pdf

“...Personally, I have always seen human well-being as the foundation of intellectual and political work. I sincerely believed that Turkish nationalism and Turkish nationalists have such a historical and humanitarian responsibility.”⁶⁸

In its manifesto prepared for the June 7, 2015 elections, the MHP once again shared its vision of a “Leader Country” with the public. These elections took place at a time when the Presidential Government System and the People’s Alliance did not yet exist. Until then, the MHP had declared that the government had not done what it needed to do to reach Türkiye’s 2023 targets and that there had been a serious waste of time, and that it was approaching the issue with an 8-year plan. The declaration stated that “Following the ‘Repair, Integration and Breakthrough’ period between 2015-2019, Türkiye will become a regional power and a global actor in 2023, and an effective power and a leading country on a global scale in economic, social, political, technological and strategic fields in 2053, and will make this sustainable”⁶⁹ the developments following the July 15 betrayal and the Turkish nation’s strong response showed that the MHP acted with patience and prudence to compensate for these lost years. Indeed, some decisive foreign policy steps taken in 2016 and especially in 2018 have contributed greatly to making up for lost time.

Devlet Bahçeli does not see Türkiye’s problems as confined to Türkiye and, aware that politics is a whole, he frequently reveals the global connections of domestic troubles in his publications and addresses. As a matter of fact, he affirms that the MHP considers the construction of a new civilization as a necessity in the following sentences: *“Launching a civilization movement is first and foremost about achieving a change in mentality. Since it is understood that there is nowhere to be achieved with the current civilization, it is necessary for the cadres who will make this change to come together first, and for a new human-centered enlightenment based on justice and solidarity. The first strategic orientation of this approach, which will raise a new ‘age of consciousness’ that rejects ethnocentrism, western ex-*

⁶⁸ Ahmed Güner Sayar, *İnsanlığın Huzuru*, (ed.) İlyas Topsakal and Özgün Burak Kaymakçı, Ötüken Publications, İstanbul 2021, p.8

⁶⁹ Toplumsal Onarım ve Huzurlu Gelecek: Bizimle Yürü Türkiye, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 7 Haziran 2015 Seçim Beyannamesi, p.32, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhpweb/secimbeyannamesi2015/MHP_Secim_Beyannamesi_2015_tam.pdf

pansionism and imperialism, and proposes an ethic of coexistence and respect for all national cultures and beings, is to bring together those who will develop this understanding on a common ground.”⁷⁰

The current injustices in the established UN system, which President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has questioned in recent years with the phrase “The World is Bigger than Five” and which he wishes to be questioned, were expressed by Devlet Bahçeli as early as 2006. In his 2006 speech at the MHP Ankara Provincial Congress, he said: *“The United Nations has lost its character as a global institution, has become insufficient in terms of peace and security, and issues so-called peace resolutions to the world with a security council under the guidance of America. The United Nations has lost its quality. It has lost its quality of being a global institution. It is not sufficient for peace and security. Either the United Nations must have these characteristics, or it must erase its place and position and the nations of the world must be formed under the leadership of a new institution in line with the realities of the 21st century. It should not think about the future of world peace under the guidance of another nation.”* Bahçeli makes an important observation and criticism of the global political situation.⁷¹

Published in 2022 as a publication of the MHP, “The Turkish Belt: Türkiye’s Grand Strategy”, which was published in 2022 as a publication of the MHP, Devlet Bahçeli writes: *“At a time when humanity thirsts for peace and tranquility, and longs for stability and security, the strategic region described and defined as the Turkish Belt is of a quality that will support the just, humanitarian and conscientious developments that humanity hopes for and even seeks with a candle, and is of a scale that will stand out as an attraction... Turkishness is the manifestation and monumentalization of an ore of civilization, a wealth of history and culture in the existence of the nation, and its encompassing with common sense and morality”* is stated.⁷² This work is an MHP-centered strategic plan that aims to ensure Türkiye’s position among global actors in the 21st century, centered on the Turkic World, and to ensure that the region called the Turkic Belt is kept

⁷⁰ Yeni Bir Dünya Yeni Bir Türkiye İçin Büyük Buluşma, Ankara 2003, MHP Publications, p.80.

⁷¹ MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli’s Speech at the MHP Ankara Provincial Congress July 16, 2006, http://mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/genel_baskan/konusma/83/index.html

⁷² İzzet Ulvi Yöner, İlyas Topsakal, Türk Kuşağı: Türkiye’nin Büyük Stratejisi, Ötüken Publications, İstanbul 2022, p.7-8.

away from the influences and interventions of other actors, and that it is whole and strong.

In the MHP's Declaration for the May 14, 2023 Parliamentary General Elections, the expression "Leading Country" appears in 37 different places. Since the year 2023, where the bar had been set in previous years, has been reached, the year 2033, as the next stage of this goal, is also included in this text for the first time. Accordingly, the MHP's goal is *"to perceive and interpret the era in Turkish with a vision that is aware of the dynamics of Türkiye and the world, and to build Türkiye, the global power of the future. In this framework, our "2033 Vision", which sets out our medium-term goals, envisages that Türkiye will be a political, military and economic power that establishes order and stability in its region in 2033. Our long-term strategic goal is to ensure that Türkiye, which will stand out as one of the most effective actors in the global system, will be recognized as a 'Leader Country and Super Power' by the whole world in 2053."*

Conclusion: Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Direction of "Leader Country": 2016 - 2023

Those who closely monitor Turkish foreign policy have observed significant changes in Türkiye's main foreign policy issues, particularly after 2016. While Devlet Bahçeli has consistently provided unwavering national support to the incumbent governments when Türkiye is targeted by actors in the international system, he has sharply criticized the foreign policy pursued until 2015-2016. Numerous examples, such as the Cyprus issue, the Annan Plan, negotiations with the EU, the Zurich protocols regarding the opening of borders with Armenia, policies towards Iraq and Syria, and the fight against international terrorism, highlight this shift. During the periods when these issues were prominent, Bahçeli frequently stated that achieving the goal of "Leading Country Türkiye," which he has advocated since the 1990s, was becoming increasingly difficult and that time was being wasted. In this context, as 2023 reached, a new era began along the axis of consensus formed within the framework of democracy and national will following the July 15 FETO coup attempt.

To illustrate concrete examples, it is appropriate to begin with Syria. In this country, the most pressing issue of the period, a policy that prioritized the overthrow of the Damascus regime was replaced by one

focusing on urgent border security and the destruction of the terrorist corridor. Operation Euphrates Shield, launched on August 24, 2016, marked the first significant indicator of this change in the Syrian arena. The operation lasted until March 2017 (approximately seven months), during which the area between the Syrian cities of Azaz and Jarabulus was cleared of both the PYD terrorist organization and ISIS. At a time when the Turkish Armed Forces were still reeling from a coup attempt and hostile actors were active against Türkiye, this operation established control over an area as deep as the city of Manbij. The target of the operation, Manbij, has been protected from Türkiye's intervention both by the United States and the terrorist elements under its protection, as well as by Russia, which entered the field to support the Assad regime. Nevertheless, this new and relatively safe area represented the first successful attempt to sever the PYD terrorist corridor west of the Euphrates. In December 2016, through a joint proposal from Russia and Türkiye, Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, was identified as a new venue for international talks aimed at resolving the Syrian conflict. These talks, which included the Syrian opposition and the Syrian state while excluding the PYD and SDF, commenced shortly thereafter and yielded significant results. Consequently, Turkish military checkpoints were established in Idlib starting in October 2017, with Turkish troops deployed there. On January 20, 2018, Operation Olive Branch targeted Afrin and its surroundings, occupied by the PYD terrorist organization seeking access to the Mediterranean, and full control was achieved in just two months. Türkiye also laid the groundwork to provide social services, such as basic health care, transportation, and communication, in a short timeframe. In October 2019, Operation Peace Spring was initiated in the western part of the area east of the Euphrates River, which had been under the control of the terrorist organization until then. The primary objective of the operation was once again to eliminate the project of encircling Türkiye. As a result, the area south of the Ceylanpınar-Akçakale line, encompassing the provinces of Rasulayn and Tel Abyad and the area between them, came under the control of Türkiye and its allied forces. It is important to note that all these operations occurred despite criticism and diplomatic counterattacks from numerous regional and extra-regional actors, including the United States, Iraq, Iran, France, and Saudi Arabia. With Operation Peace Spring, control

was established over approximately 600 settlements and a total area of 4,800 square kilometers, effectively preventing the ethnic cleansing operations that the terrorist organization attempted in that region.

Examining developments regarding Iraq further highlights the shift in foreign policy. The Turkish Armed Forces have conducted effective operations deep within northern Iraq, reminiscent of operations from the 1990s, the last of which was Operation Sun in 2008. A military presence was demonstrated both in areas under the responsibility of the Iraqi central government and in regions controlled by the KRG. However, the most significant event at this juncture was the independence referendum announced by the KRG for September 25, 2017. Türkiye, including President Erdoğan, issued stern warnings at the highest levels against this referendum initiative, which the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) had previously cautioned against, issuing historic warnings months earlier. Although Ankara urged Barzani and the KRG administration to abandon the referendum decision, the holding of the referendum and the announcement of its results compelled Türkiye to adopt a more explicit counter-policy. On September 25, the Iraqi Parliament decided that “the government should deploy a military force to protect the security of citizens in Kirkuk and other disputed areas.” Consequently, preparations were made for an operation toward Kirkuk, which Türkiye supported. On October 15, 2017, military forces loyal to the Baghdad government took control of Kirkuk Airport, K1 Military Base, and the Kirkuk Governorate, removing the KRG flag in Kirkuk. In response, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement affirming that it “carefully followed the operation of the Iraqi army forces of the Iraqi central government to restore constitutional sovereignty in Kirkuk, which has been the homeland of Turks for centuries after the illegal KRG referendum” and welcomed the Iraqi government’s declaration that elements of the PKK terrorist organization would not be tolerated in Kirkuk and that their mobilization would be considered a declaration of war. Following these developments, from 2018 to 2023, the Turkish army’s operations against the PKK terrorist organization within Iraq became more effective, deeper, and more permanent.

The situation in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean, which had not been a primary focus until recently but has become a central topic

of Turkish foreign policy since 2020, further exemplifies this transformation. Following the overthrow of the Gaddafi administration in Libya during the Arab Spring, the country descended into civil war. In this large North African nation, whose oil resources attract foreign actors, the risk of de facto division into four or five regions emerged. Türkiye recognized the Government of National Accord, the UN-recognized legitimate government at the center of the power struggle, and swiftly moved to contribute to establishing peace and stability in Libya. In this context, at the invitation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of the Libyan Presidential Council, Fayyaz Sarraj, along with Foreign Minister Siyala and Interior Minister Fethi Bashagha, paid an official visit to Türkiye from November 26 to 28, 2019. During the talks in Istanbul, discussions focused on finding a solution to the crisis in Libya and enhancing bilateral relations. During the visit, the “Memorandum of Understanding on Security and Military Cooperation” was signed to establish a legal basis for security and military cooperation between the two countries, as well as the “Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas” aimed at protecting the rights of both countries arising from international law. The “Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction” was ratified by the GNAT on December 5, 2019, and the “Memorandum of Understanding on Security and Military Cooperation” on December 21, 2019. Through this Memorandum of Understanding, Türkiye provided a robust legal and political response to policies of exclusion and isolation in the Mediterranean.

With the agreement signed with Libya, Türkiye established a continental shelf/maritime boundary agreement with a Mediterranean littoral country for the first time, apart from the TRNC. This agreement effectively countered political and economic initiatives aimed at isolating and encircling Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean. A legal and legitimate basis for their rights in the Mediterranean was established for both countries. The MoU clarified the western borders of Türkiye’s maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean. With this agreement, Türkiye demonstrated its intent to prevent any fait accompli in the region. Furthermore, the Memorandum preempted possible Greek-Egyptian and Greek-GCASC agreements that would infringe on the rights of both countries. Such agreements would have

reduced Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction from 186,000 square kilometers to 41,000 square kilometers. Türkiye has rejected maximalist and uncompromising Greek-Greek claims attempting to assign a maritime jurisdiction area to a small island like Meis that is 4,000 times its actual surface area. This agreement may prompt other countries in the region to reassess their agreements with the SCGA and revise their legal arguments accordingly. Türkiye renewed its call for dialogue with all littoral states except the SCGA, demonstrating to the international community that it acts in accordance with international law, maritime law, and diplomacy.

Another significant indicator of the transformation in foreign policy is the transition from the Turkic Council to the Organization of Turkic States. Although Türkiye and the Turkic states have been collaborating for possible grounds for 30 years, the Turkic Council, or the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, founded during the summit held in Ankara in 1992 and officially established in 2009 with the Nakhchivan Treaty, has significantly contributed to advancing relations. While Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan were founding members, the number of full members increased to five with Uzbekistan's accession in 2019, and Hungary gained observer status. The Turkic Council was officially renamed the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) at the 8th Summit in November 2021. The 2021 summit declaration marked the organization's evolution into a more functional and effective regional entity. The Council of Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States convened in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, under the theme "Green Technologies and Smart Cities in the Digital Age." At this summit, which attracted significant attention from international media, the name of the Council of Turkic Speaking States was officially changed to the Organization of Turkic States. Consequently, there is now no issue in using the term "Turkic state" for these nations, both at the academic and political levels. This summit produced a comprehensive 121-point final declaration.

Additionally, a document titled "Vision of the Turkic World 2040" was adopted by the participating states. In the first subheading of the Declaration concerning foreign policy and security issues, the members affirmed their solidarity with the Turkish Cypriot people and supported their participation in CIS activities. They also endorsed the

constitutional amendments in Kyrgyzstan and the peaceful resolution of issues along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. The declaration advocated for an inclusive and representative political system in Afghanistan that safeguards fundamental human rights, provided economic assistance to Afghanistan, and promoted cooperation in combating terrorism, extremism, discrimination, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

In the section on Economic and Sectoral Cooperation, it was stated that the relevant ministries of member states would expedite the establishment of the Turkish Investment Fund and eliminate quantitative restrictions and non-tariff measures among the member states. Furthermore, the members welcomed Kazakhstan's invitation to join the "TURANSEZ" special economic zone to be established in Turkestan, aiming to enhance economic cooperation and connectivity among Turkic states, including the Caspian Trans-Caspian International East-West Central Corridor. Notably, this marks the first instance of the term "Turan" appearing in an international cooperation document. New issues such as food supply and security, renewable energy, and interconnectivity in energy projects were also highlighted in this chapter. The "Caspian Trans-Caspian International East-West Central Corridor" is referenced seven times within the declaration.

In conclusion, the meetings of the heads of state and government of Turkic states in the 1990s, characterized as cultural celebrations, underwent a significant transformation with the establishment and operationalization of the Turkic Council (TCC) and its evolution into the Organization of Turkic States. Substantial progress has been achieved in the Turkic world regarding institutionalization, inter-state cooperation, and the creation of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation processes.

As Turkey approaches the 100th anniversary of the Republic, one of the most notable and globally recognized achievements of its foreign policy has occurred in the South Caucasus. The occupation of Karabakh by Armenia, ongoing since 1992, was largely resolved in 44 days due to the operation launched by Azerbaijan in September 2020. Azerbaijan, which restored the integrity of its territory at the cost of nearly 3,000 martyrs, received explicit and robust support from Türkiye during this process. At the outset of the conflict, Türkiye declared its readiness to intervene should a third party become involved, supplied UAVs and

UCAVs to Azerbaijan, and asserted its preparedness to provide any requested support at all levels, including from the President, Foreign Minister, and Minister of National Defense.

With the ceasefire declaration signed on November 9-10, 2020, under Russian mediation, the war concluded, and Azerbaijan regained control over settlements such as Shusha, Lachin, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Zangilan, Jabrayil, and Hadrut. It was agreed that Russian peacekeepers would be stationed in the region for five years, and Turkish military units would conduct a monitoring mission there. Azerbaijan subsequently initiated rapid demining, construction, and reconstruction efforts in the liberated regions. Although Armenia endeavored to meet the requirements of the ceasefire declaration by opening all lines of communication and transportation, it struggled to accept the defeat, evaded responsibilities outlined in the agreement, and continued provocations along the border and contact lines. Consequently, in September 2023, Azerbaijan conducted an operation in the region under the oversight of Russian peacekeepers, successfully securing independence in all of its territories, including Khankendi, Khojaly, and Khojavend.

Azerbaijan, as a key player in the Turkic world, serves as Türkiye's gateway to Central Asian Turkism. The conclusion of the nearly 30-year Armenian occupation of Karabakh, supported by Türkiye and bolstered by the exceptional success of the Azerbaijani military, suggests a promising future for the Turkic world. The liberation of Azerbaijani lands has facilitated the unification of the Turkic world, which shares a common vision and purpose, both ideologically and physically. The establishment of a *de facto* connection to Nakhchivan through the Zangezur Corridor, a result of Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War, represents a significant link between Türkiye and the Turkic world. This historical opportunity and strategic achievement will play a crucial role in shaping Türkiye's objectives and policies towards the Turkic world.

Considering the progress made in the fight against terrorism, the successful mediation efforts, and the establishment of the "grain corridor" during the Russia-Ukraine War, alongside the removal of the Eastmed project from the Eastern Mediterranean agenda and Türkiye's normalization processes with various actors, it is evident that foreign

policy has gained substantial momentum and direction compared to the pre-2016 period. In these developments, the role of Devlet Bahçeli and the MHP in supporting the President and the government of the Republic of Türkiye, based on the principle of “we love this country for nothing,” is significant. From this perspective, it becomes apparent that Türkiye has successfully navigated 2023 and is acting in national consensus towards its objectives for 2053 and 2071.

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