

## **TURKISH POLITICAL PARTIES AND TURKISH NATIONALISM**

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### **Abstract**

This study will deal with the policies, discourses and actions of the Turkish political parties and their impacts on discourses of Turkish nationalism. This study will evaluate the nationalisms of the Republican People's Party (the RPP), the Nationalist Action Party (the NAP), and the Justice and Development Party (the JDP) of Turkey, especially during the first period of the JDP in power. Turkish nationalism has been represented by the RPP and the NAP. Nationalism of the NAP has been conservative, in that sense, the NAP supports traditional and Islamic values. The RPP has been the follower of the Kemalist principles. The Justice and Development Party (the JDP) pursues the necessities of the globalization process. It gives importance to internationalism, accession to the EU, integration with the global markets. Also, the JDP gives importance to Islamism and traditional values. Highlighting on some foreign policy issues as Iraq and Cyprus, changing attitudes of Turkish political parties will be explained. This study investigates different party discourses on those issues and tries to consider and evaluate Turkish nationalism of that era.

**Key words:** Nationalism, political parties, Iraq, Cyprus

**Jel Classification:** Z00

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Turkish nationalism has been represented by the Republican People's Party (the RPP) and the Nationalist Action Party (the NAP). The NAP has been a hierarchically organized party; it gives supremacy to the state over the individual. The NAP's ideology has been Turkish nationalism. Turkish nationalism of the NAP has been conservative, and the NAP has supported traditional and Islamic

values. The NAP identifies itself as the protector of the state. The RPP, on the other hand, identifies itself as Atatürk's party, follower and protector of the principles of Atatürk. It is noted that one of Atatürk's principles has been nationalism; therefore, the RPP has been the representative of Kemalist nationalism. The main aim of the party is to protect the secular, democratic Republic. The neo-nationalist movements were very influential between the years 2002 and 2007. The Justice and Development Party (the JDP), was presented as conservative globalist party, whereas the RPP and the NAP were considered as defensive nationalist parties. Both the RPP and the NAP have had negative attitudes towards globalization. It should be noted that both the RPP and the NAP built their policies on threats and fears coming from abroad and also from certain groups of the society. In that period, the JDP aimed to provide accession to the EU, and there has been an apparent tendency to integrate into the global markets. It has been stated that the JDP has been trying to implement democratization. In addition, the JDP also supports traditional values. It is obvious that the economic growth of the country contributed to the electoral success of the JDP (Öniş, 2009: 22-25, 36).

## **2. MAIN CRISES, 2002-2007**

The main dimensions of Turkish nationalism of that era could be defined by considering relations with the US, the accession process to the EU, new developments in Iraq, the Annan plan for Cyprus and the Republican meetings. Dealing with the Iraq War, it was alleged by many foreign policy experts that the absence of Turkish troops in Iraq diminished the power of Turkey influencing the new developments. Consequently, the refusal of the vote by the Turkish Parliament on 1 March 2003 aiming to allow US troops the use of Turkish territory for their invasion of Iraq eroded the relations between the US and Turkey. It is a striking fact that Iraqi Kurds became a rather important ally of the US. Moreover, the US soldiers arrested 11 Turkish Special Forces officers in the northern Iraq city of Suleymaniye. It was alleged that Turkish soldiers were suspected of planning the assassination of a local Kurdish politician. It is obvious this event was considered as disgraceful. Most importantly, there was a widespread belief among the Turkish people that the US tried to partition Iraq and moreover, she aimed to establish an independent Kurdish state in the north of the country (Grigoriadis, 2010: 56-58).

Evaluating the previous events, the US initiated a green crescent doctrine in the 1980s to contain communism with Islamism. Afterwards, the US tried to implement "moderate Islam" in the 1990s and lastly, it introduced the "Greater

Middle East” project. As a result, there has been widespread belief that the US had been trying to abolish the secular state structure of Turkey. In this context, the JDP was considered as a tool of the US, in accomplishment of this goal (Gürpınar, 2011: 196). It was known that Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited the US officials before they came to power and they met with the Jewish lobbies. Therefore, their governance was initially approved by the neo-cons (Uzgel, 2009: 20). The Greater Middle East Project aimed to establish democratic states in the Middle East with the help of Turkey and this was declared during the G-8 summit in June 2004 (Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, 2009: 389). During and after the Iraq war, the JDP demanded US assistance to help eliminate the PKK threat. The US was not willing to take military action against the PKK or let Turkey carry out a unilateral military strike against the PKK (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008: 82). Thereafter, anti-Americanism gained momentum among the Turkish public.

Annan plan aimed to reunite Cyprus. It was initiated in 2002. The 2004 version of the plan was rejected by both Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders and a twin referendum was held on 24 April 2004. The Greek Cypriots rejected the plan in the referendum, Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, voted in favor of the plan. The Foundation Agreement of the Plan provided for the United Cyprus Republic, an independent and sovereign state with a single legal personality, and a federal government with two component states based on an indissoluble partnership. It was planned that the republic would be a member of both the UN and the EU. The proposed Republic of Cyprus would be a bi-communal state based on equal political representation of Turks and Greeks. As Hasgüler and Tüzünkan (2009) stated, the Turkish Cypriots supported the plan to end their isolation.

### **3. PARTY POLICIES**

In this study, reactions and discourses of the Republican Party, the Nationalist Action Party and the Justice and Development Party on Iraq crisis and Annan Plan will be elaborated.

#### **3.1 The Republican People’s Party and Turkish Nationalism**

It could be mentioned that the Turkish left had grown up with the seeds of Turkish nationalism. It is apparent that there has been a close link between the Turkish left, the Turkish state and the military (Belge, 2009:7). It is apparent that Kemalist nationalism, Kemalist *ulusçuluk*, was identified with anti-imperialism and national independence in the 1960s and 1970s. The main dimension of Kemalist nationalism has been secularism since the 1990s. In this context, it could be

alleged that it has opposed political Islam and it has had antagonistic attitudes towards minorities living Turkey (Bora, 1995:7).

Baykal stated on 30 June 2001 that “all the citizens of Turkey living in the east, in the south east, in the north, are all one and we are brothers”. He proposed that they could solve the problems of the Kurdish people by integrating them, not by separating them. The essential elements of the RPP ideology have been national independence, nation-state, secular republican values, and the principles of Atatürk. The RPP supports the universal principle of social democracy; an organized, productive and competitive market economy; a social state; and an honorable foreign policy (The RPP’s 30th Regular Convention Party Assembly Report, 2003, October 24).

The RPP has maintained that the three fundamental elements of the republic are the understanding of citizenship, secularism and the principle of “peace at home, peace abroad”. The RPP pointed out that the Lausanne Treaty should be protected. The unitary state structure was irrevocable. The Turkish republic was founded on the unitary state and the nation-state. The RPP maintained that the definition of nation in Turkey was never based on racism. There has been a respectable place for every person regardless of ethnic origins. The RPP referred to Cherkess, Georgians, Arabs, and Albanians and stated they were integral part within the Atatürkist nationalism. Briefly, the RPP stated that those who internalized Turkish citizenship and accepted it voluntarily, whatever their sub-ethnic identity, whether Kurd or another ethnicity, are all Turks. They are all equal before the law. There should not be any ethnic or sectarian identification between the state and the citizen. Every person should be able to live his ethnic identity freely. However, ethnic identity could not be converted into a constitutive part of Turkey’s political structure. Moreover, the RPP report maintained that Turkey should not be surrendered to tariqats, and Turkey should not be transformed into a moderate Islamic Republic (The RPP’s 31st RPP Regular Convention Party Assembly Report, November 19-20).

### **3.1.1 The Republican People’s Party and Iraq Crisis**

The opposition party, the RPP, opposed to the deployment of American troops into northern Iraq but supported the unilateral deployment of Turkish troops to the same area (Kaya, 2011:73). Önder Sav gave a speech in parliament on 1 March 2003. He warned the JDP government that if a single Turkish soldier was killed; neither they nor the constituents would forgive the government. He mentioned a slogan, “do not fear from the US, but fear God”. Erdoğan stated that they had

found the Iraq issue on their agenda when they came to power. Sav condemned the JDP and said that they fed the Iraq issue with the US's baby food. He stressed that international legitimacy for the Iraq war should have been implemented through the UN Security Council's decision, not with the decision given by the US or the UK. He pointed out that international conflicts could be solved through peaceful settlement of disputes. He stated that the investigations of the UN Arms Control Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency have been ongoing. Moreover, he repeated Wolfowitz's words: that "we could succeed with or without Turkey". He stated "let's see how they succeed without Turkey". He condemned the US's military and equipment deployment in the Iskenderun port. Sav warned the JDP that they should not support such a disgusting war and he advised them to change their decisions. Moreover, Sav stated that this decision related to the war in Iraq was illegitimate, and contrary to both international law and the Turkish constitutional law. He mentioned the 5-6 billion dollars of US credit which had been loaned to Turkey. He indicated that the government should not breach national and international law because of this credit. He urged the Parliament to not allow impinging on a Muslim country's independency, territorial integrity and natural resources". He concluded his speech by referring to Atatürk's famous words as "the American ships should go as they came", "*geldikleri gibi giderler*" (Sav, 2003, March 1).

The RPP supported the idea that Turkey should not be on the war front or the battle field. The RPP supported that Turkey should launch its forces in Northern Iraq. In addition, the RPP stated that the party was right in rejecting the 1 March note. The RPP declared that the party supported the US war against terror. Nevertheless, the party condemned the US because they did not neutralize the PKK/KADEK terrorists. Most importantly, it was expressed that the US's policies on Iraq were contrary to the national interests of Turkey. The RPP alleged that there had been no legitimacy of Iraq War according to international law. The RPP's report explained that only the self-defense of a country could justify a war. Moreover, the UN should decide on the legitimacy of a war. As a result of this, there were no such conditions and it was expressed that the Iraq War was illegitimate. The RPP presented that the US and UK had become invading countries. The RPP noted that, in dealing with the Iraq issue, the US had tried to loan 8.5 billion dollars of credit to Turkey. Addressing the solution of the Iraq issue, the RPP stated they would give importance to national security, honor and national interests, international principles and international cooperation (The RPP's 30th Regular Convention Report, 2003, October 24, pp.54-58). After the

refusal of the note, the General Vice President of the RPP, İnal Batu maintained, it had become apparent that Turkey was not a banana republic, and Turkey rejected bargaining for credit (Cumhuriyet, 2003, March 3.).

Prior to the “hood event”, it was declared by the US officials and experts that there was no need for stationing of Turkish soldiers’ in Northern Iraq. In that sense, they stated that there was no threat of migration, or the effectiveness of the PKK terrorism. Moreover, it was added there was no threat against the Turkmens. The Turkish state had aimed to strengthen the Turkmens and moreover, wanted to control the political events in Northern Iraq. Furthermore, the obstruction of the PKK activities was the main goal. The US, on the other hand, demanded that Turkey cease arming the Turkmens and provide general amnesty for the PKK militants (Birand, 2003, July 8). The RPP severely criticized the “hood event”. Baykal stated that the honor of Turkish people was flagrantly violated and that the honor of the Turkish Armed Forces was injured. Baykal demanded that the US should apologize. Moreover, Baykal condemned the JDP that it did not behave appropriately according to the Parliament’s decision taken on 1 March 2003. Baykal maintained this decision was honorable and respectable. He alleged that the world community understood the value of this decision. It was declared by Baykal that “Turkey should reasonably adjust its foreign policy by not betraying the alliances, but should consider its national interests”. Baykal asked if it was true that the US was keeping touch with the authorities of the KADEK and the PKK (Baykal, 2003, July 8).

### **3.1.2 The Republican People’s Party and the Annan Plan**

Deniz Baykal stated “the supporters of the Annan plan were defeated in the Cyprus elections” (Hürriyet, 2003, December 16). Baykal alleged that the Annan Plan posed many serious problems both for Turkey’s position in the Eastern Mediterranean and the future of Cyprus. (Hürriyet, 2004, April 22). He alleged that the Annan Plan would convert the island into a Greek Cypriot (Rum) island within 20 years (Radikal, 2003, December 19).

The RPP condemned the Minister of Foreign Policy as the “last person on earth to call the Turkish armed forces stationed in Cyprus an occupying force should be the Turkish foreign Minister”. It was mentioned that the JDP had been denying 30 years of history, and refusing to protect the security interests of both Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. The RPP declared that they would not allow one-sided concessions to be given in this national case. The party would pursue a powerful struggle to protect the interests of Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. The RPP

accepted one state in Cyprus, having a sole international legal identity. It was mentioned that the RPP who supported this legal entity should comprise bi-zonal, bi-communal, equal sovereign state (The RPP's 30th Regular Convention report, 2003, 24 October: 61).

### **3.2 The Nationalist Action Party and Turkish Nationalism**

The Nationalist Action Party (the NAP) opposed to communism in the 1970s and 1980s. The NAP internalized the Turkish-Islam synthesis and had close ties with the Hearth of Enlightened, Aydınlar Ocağı in the 1970s. In this context, it is important to note that the NAP gave importance to national culture, not the Turkish race. Arıkan maintained that the NAP tried to motivate conservative constituents of central and eastern Anatolia against communism with the Turkish-Islam synthesis in the 1970s. Moreover, it opposed the PKK in the 1980s, and it considered the globalization process, the PKK, and the EU as enemies and threats to the integrity of the Turkish state in the 2000s. The NAP tried not to have conflicts with the secular state structure in the 2000s (Arıkan, 2008: 6-7, 15-18, 38-39).

#### **3.2.1 The Nationalist Action Party and Iraq Crisis**

Bahçeli criticized on February 27, 2003 that the negotiation and bargaining process pursued between the US and Turkey over Iraq. He stated that government's attitudes had jeopardized the international image of Turkey. Referring to the promised US credit, he emphasized that Turkish strategic support could not be bought and sold. Bahçeli emphasized that the peaceful solutions were not exhausted, yet. Moreover, he mentioned that international legitimacy for the Iraq War had not been provided.

The government's note on Iraq was called in. Bahçeli severely criticized the government's note on Iraq. Bahçeli mentioned that launching foreign troops in Turkey and sending Turkish troops abroad were put on the same note. The international legitimacy principle had not been provided. Moreover, he stated that the people's reasonable reaction to the deployment of foreign troops in Turkey was not removed. Moreover, he maintained that the JDP government considered Cyprus a national burden, nevertheless, the US's military intervention on Iraq was presented as national interest and responsibility of the state. Bahçeli stated that this was a serious dilemma (Bahçeli, 2003, March 4). Bahçeli regarded that the Turkish foreign policy under the governance of the JDP had been converted into a submissive and weak foreign policy (Bahçeli, 2003, March 7). Bahçeli advised multi-dimensional preparations to obstruct any threat to Turkish national interest,

such as the emergence of the puppet state in Northern Iraq and the protection of Turkmens (Bahçeli, 2003, March 9).

The NAP severely condemned both the US government and the JDP government on the hood event. Bahçeli stated that Turkish forces should be settled in Northern Iraq because there was a terrorist threat. Bahçeli expressed his concerns regarding the immediate release of Turkish soldiers. Moreover, he stated that the US should apologize for this event. He pointed out that the JDP government again presented its submissive and unpatriotic behavior regarding the developments in Iraq. Bahçeli was suspicious of the JDP government's policies concerning the lives of Turkish soldiers. Bahçeli warned that the JDP gave more importance to the lives of the American soldiers during the Iraq War. Bahçeli demanded that the JDP should vehemently condemn the US and the JDP should apologize from Turkish nation for their party's misinformation and insensitiveness on the issue (Bahçeli, 2003, July 6).

### **3.2.1 The Nationalist Action Party and the Annan Plan**

The NAP published a report on Cyprus in February 2003. It was called as the *Kıbrıs Gerçeği ve Annan Planı*, The Reality of Cyprus and the Annan Plan. The NAP's report presented that the JDP considered Cyprus as a national burden, and moreover, that the JDP had applied *ver-kurtulcu*, give and get rid of policies (p.1).

Bahçeli alleged on March 1, 2003 that the main aim of the Annan Plan was to provide the accession of the Greek Cypriot Republic to the EU as the representative of the whole island. Bahçeli stressed the JDP had submissive policies, and an allergy to national causes and moreover, sought international approval. Bahçeli repeated that the Cyprus issue was considered as national burden by the JDP government. Bahçeli proposed that Turkey should support the Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic economically and politically. Denktaş should be supported on every level.

The Cyprus issue was considered as an issue related to the survival of the Turkish state. It was presented that the security of Cyprus could not be separated from the security of Turkey. In this context, Turkish Cypriots, being the founding community, having equal rights and equal sovereignty, should preserve their national entity and national identity under the guarantorship of Turkey. Therefore, the Annan plan was considered as a project aiming to establish the republic of the 1960s. It was alleged that this plan comprised unfair articles for the Turkish side and Turkish Cypriots would be forced to give up their lands and migrate. It was proposed that this plan was not based on the establishment of a new cooperation



arena, having two sovereign and equal founding communities and states. The campaign against Denktaş was criticized severely, and Bahçeli stated that anyone who demanded a Cyprus without Denktaş and a solution without Denktaş has demanded a Turkish Cypriot without national identity. Denktaş was considered as a national hero both for Turkish Cypriots and Turkey. Bahçeli condemned the time limit given by the UN and the attempts to solve the issue according to the EU schedule (Bahçeli, January 23, 2003).

The rhetoric of the JDP, “deadlock is not the solution” was considered as submissive policy by the NAP. Bahçeli declared that the plans for the Karpaz peninsula should be terminated (Bahçeli, March 7, 2003) and he accused both the JDP and some politicians of Northern Cyprus that they were attempting to realize Enosis step by step (Bahçeli, 2003, June 26).

After the rejection of the plan by the Greek Cypriots, Bahçeli stated that this unfortunate page of history was closed. The JDP’s war against Denktaş was articulated many times. It was stated the EU membership provided for the refusal of Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots. The NAP demanded the removal of sanctions applied to the Northern Cyprus (Bahçeli, 2004, April 27)

### **3.3 The Justice and Development Party and Turkish Nationalism**

The conservative ideology in Turkey has had close links with nationalism and state centrism. Nonetheless, as Uzgel (2009:23) indicated, although the JDP has used the resources and power of the state, it did not bless the state and applied neo-liberal politics. The religious entrepreneurial class that was flourished in the Özal’s era supported the JDP. In that sense, the JDP has benefitted from the language of modernity. Moreover, the accession process with the EU would be beneficial for the JDP (Rabasa &Larrabee, 2008: 51-52).

Prime Minister Erdoğan tried to justify constitutional citizenship and he stated that the first red line of the party was the rejection of nationalism based on ethnic origins. He asserted that Turks would express their Turkishness and the Kurds would express their Kurdishness and he declared that citizenship of the Republic of Turkey was the foremost identity for all of us (Zaman, 2005, November 22, cited in Taşkın, 2009:137).

#### **3.3.1 The Justice and Development Party and Iraq Crisis**

Erdoğan pointed out that if the note of 1 March 2003 was refused, the massacre of Halepçe could be repeated in Mosul and Kirkuk. Moreover, he threatened his MPs by saying that they were guided by other party leaders, implying Erbakan. He

forced his MPs to approve the note by emphasizing that if the note was refused, they would take radical economic precautions, they would limit the expenses and impose new taxes. Moreover, Erdoğan indicated that if Turkey did not go to war in Iraq, the losses in Iraq would increase. Furthermore, he stated that according to the Turkish armed forces, Turkey could not prevent the war. In this context, the JDP expressed war would allow Turkey to be one of the actors having a word on the future of Iraq (Erdoğan, 2003, March 1). It is important to note that Erdoğan was trying to persuade his MPs that Turkey would ease the burden of the US and therefore, Turkey would not be obliged to apply a heavier economic package.

The Hood Event, 4 July 2003 was called an awful and inappropriate event by Erdoğan. He stated that “all the necessary steps were taken and all the necessary things were said”. However, he emphasized that governance of the state should be done reasonably; it was not to be accomplished with instant emotions (Erdoğan, 2003, July 10). Erdoğan stressed that the Süleymaniye crisis was solved with diplomatic intervention, and he identified this event as “unfortunate”. He hoped, after those events, these two allies, Turkey and the US would not behave with erroneous intelligence He maintained that, being allies, they should acquire intelligence directly from each other (Erdoğan, 2003, July 9). Moreover, there were demands on military operations that should be held against the PKK. However, Erdoğan told a group of journalists that “there is no reason to carry out an operation against the PKK if they are not attacking” (Cemal, 2006, October, 1).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study is an attempt to analyze and understand nationalisms of Turkish political parties, namely the RPP, the NAP and the JDP by referring to Iraq issue and the Annan plan. The RPP, opposed the deployment of American troops into northern Iraq but supported the unilateral deployment of Turkish troops to the same area. It is obvious that the RPP’s discourses on rejection of deployment revealed anti-Americanism. Both the NAP and the RPP condemned the US and the JDP government on Iraq issue. Dealing with the hood event, they highlighted that national dignity was jeopardized. Both parties stated that this decision related to the war in Iraq was illegitimate, and contrary to both international law and the Turkish constitutional law. They condemned the government of taking loans from the US. Moreover, both were suspicious of the JDP government’s policies concerning the lives of Turkish soldiers. Dealing with the Annan plan, both the RPP and the NAP, pointed out that the security of Cyprus could not be separated from the security of Turkey. Annan was interpreted as unfair and the campaign against Denктаş was criticized severely. The JDP, on the other hand, supported

the Iraqi intervention with the US and also supported the Annan plan. Investigating those issues, having different understanding of nationalism, the RPP and the NAP followed the similar policies and discourses towards Iraq issue and Annan plan.

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