

A Critical Analysis of Ümit Özdağ's X Posts within the Framework of the General Discourse of the Populist Radical Right

Ümit Özdağ'ın X Paylaşımlarının Popülist Radikal Sağın Genel Söylemi Çerçevesinde Eleştirel Analizi

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the posts made by Victory Party (Zafer Partisi / ZP) leader Ümit Özdağ from his personal account on the X platform with reference to some of the concepts that populist radical right ideology produces discourse around. In this context, the analysis of Özdağ's X posts within the framework of the general discourse of the populist radical right is important for understanding how the populist radical right discourse is reproduced locally. In this study, the method of critical discourse analysis was applied to discuss the ideological meaning of the discourses formed around the concepts. In particular, the concepts of immigrants/refugees, Islam and nation have been selected with reference to the discourses put forward by the populist radical right-wing movements on the rise in Europe, and Özdağ's X posts have been analysed through these concepts. The analysis has been conducted on the concepts of immigrants/refugees, Islam and nation. Özdağ's discourses largely overlap with the populist radical right ideology on migrants and refugees. However, Özdağ's discourse differs from the general discourse of the populist radical right on Islam and the nation at certain points. On the issue of Islam, Özdağ, unlike Western right-wing populists, criticises the cultural practices of Muslims rather than categorically rejecting Islam. By highlighting Turkish nationalism, Özdağ reproduces anti-immigrant discourses within this framework. While the populist radical right has recently produced discourse through civic nationalism rather than discourse based on ethnicity, some of Özdağ's X posts evoke ethnic nationalism.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Immigrants/Refugees, Islam, Populist Radical Right, Ümit Özdağ.

Öz

Bu çalışma Zafer Partisi (ZP) Genel Başkanı Ümit Özdağ'ın X platformundaki kişisel hesabından yapmış olduğu paylaşımları popülist radikal sağ ideolojinin üzerine söylem ürettiği bazı kavramları referans alarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Özdağ'ın X paylaşımlarının popülist radikal sağın genel söylemi çerçevesinde incelenmesi, popülist radikal sağ söylemin yerelde yeniden nasıl üretildiğinin anlaşılması açısından önemlidir. Belirlediğimiz kavramlar etrafında oluşturulan söylemlerin ideolojik anlamını tartışabilmek için bu çalışmada eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Özellikle Avrupa'da yükselişe geçen popülist radikal sağ hareketlerin ortaya koyduğu söylemler referans alınarak göçmenler/mülteciler, İslam ve ulus kavramları belirlenmiş ve Özdağ'ın X paylaşımları bu kavramlar üzerinden çözümlenmiştir. Özdağ'ın söylemleri, göçmenler ve mülteciler konusunda popülist radikal sağ ideolojisiyle büyük ölçüde örtüşmektedir; ancak İslam ve ulus konusunda popülist radikal sağın genel söyleminden belirli noktalarda ayrılmaktadır. Özdağ göçmen ve mülteci karşıtı söylemini tıpkı batılı muadilleri gibi özellikle kültürel, güvenlik ve ekonomik kaygılar üzerinden inşa etmektedir. İslam konusunda Özdağ, Batılı sağ popülistlerden farklı olarak İslam dinini kategorik olarak reddetmek yerine Müslümanların kültürel pratiklerini eleştirmektedir. Bu bağlamda Özdağ'ın İslam üzerine ürettiği söylemlerde "özcü (essentialist)" bir yaklaşım sergilediğini söylemek mümkündür. Son dönemde popülist radikal sağ genel olarak soy üzerinden söylem üretmek yerine "civic milliyetçilik" üzerinden söylem üretmeye dikkat ederken, Özdağ'ın bazı X paylaşımları soya dayalı milliyetçilik anlayışını çağrıştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Göçmenler/Mülteciler, İslam, Popülist Radikal Sağ, Ümit Özdağ.

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Article Info / Makale Bilgileri:

Received / Gönderim: 02.08.2024 Accepted / Kabul: 26.11.2024

To cite this article / Atf için:

Güzel, S. Ç., & Alışkan, Y. (2025). A critical analysis of Ümit Özdağ's X Posts within the framework of the general discourse of the populist radical right. *Curr Res Soc Sci*, 11(1), 128-147.

To link to this article / Bağlantı için:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.30613/curesosc.1527093>

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In the 21st century, populism has emerged as one of the most prominent subjects of academic interest, particularly in light of its rise in the Western world. After the 2008 global economic crisis, the precariousness created by the erosion of the welfare state in the lower middle class, the refugee problem, the sovereignty crisis in the EU, the Brexit process, the election of Trump as the President of the US, the rise of far-right parties in Western democracies and the increasing distancing of citizens from mainstream politics all point to the “age of populism”. As Moffitt says, it seems that we are living in populist times (Moffitt, 2016, p. 1). In particular, the fact that right-wing populism is gaining ground in the Western world and influencing mainstream politics strengthens concerns about liberal democracies. In other words, the ghost hovering over Europe this time is not socialism but the “ghost of populism” (Cox, 2017, p. 9).

Despite all these political effects, the academic definition of populism continues to be debated. This concept is classified under different categories such as ideology, strategy, discourse, political logic and political style (Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001; Hawkins, 2010; Laclau, 2005; Moffitt, 2016). Among these classifications, Mudde's definition of populism as a “thin centred ideology” (2004, p. 543) is, in our opinion, inclusive and functional as the “thin-centred” character of populism explains its flexibility and the nature of its articulation with other ideologies. Indeed, populism, which does not put forward a comprehensive and coherent ideological programme, can be articulated to any political context by adapting to full ideologies thanks to its “chameleon nature” (Stanley, 2008, p. 95-96; Taggart, 2004, p. 275). This answers the question of how both right-wing and left-wing versions of populism can exist at the same time. The common ground of all versions of populism is the sharp distinction between the people and the elites. According to Mudde (2004, p. 453), populism divides society into two opposing groups, “the pure people” and the “corrupt elite”, and argues that politics should reflect the *volonté générale* (general will).

The recent rise of anti-immigrant, nativist and authoritarian parties in the Western world, challenging the established order, has drawn attention to the populist radical right. Particularly in Europe, parties promising to fight migration and restore national sovereignty have dramatically increased their votes. In fact, populist radical right-wing parties can now be part of a coalition in their countries and even emerge as the first party in elections. For example, in the 2017 Austrian elections, the Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs / FPÖ), representing the populist radical right, formed a coalition with the centre-right Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei / ÖVP) and became a partner in the government (Halikiopoulou, 2019, p. 35). In Italy, the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia) came first in the 2022 general election with around 26 per cent of the vote and far-right leader Giorgia Meloni became Prime Minister (Kirby, 2022). Italy's other populist radical right-wing party, Lega (formerly Lega Nord / LN), has also been part of governing coalitions since 2018, with its leader Matteo Salvini currently serving as Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Infrastructure and Transport. Finally, in the Dutch general elections held on 22 November 2023, the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid / PVV), led by Geert Wilders, one of Europe's most famous populist radical rightists, became the first party. The party's winning 37 seats was seen as a development that would shake Dutch politics and create a shock across Europe (Kirby and Holligan, 2023).

The refugee crisis in Europe is one of the most important reasons for the rise of right-wing populism. In 2015, hundreds of thousands of people from different countries, mostly from Syria, entered the European Union (EU) countries fleeing from countries in conflict and the refugee crisis erupted (BBC, 2016; Hayes and Dudek, 2019, p. 31). Around 1.2 million people sought asylum in EU countries this year (Eurostat, 2024). This humanitarian crisis and similar incidents cause populist radical right-wing

parties to further politicise the issue of migration and gain the support of protest voters. Therefore, it is possible to say that the discourse of populist right-wing parties that emphasise anti-immigrant sentiments and the anti-immigrant sentiments of citizens mutually reinforce each other (Santi-Amantini, 2022, p. 106).

The migrant/refugee issue, which has shaped European politics and deeply shaken the established order, has become one of the most important topics of politics in Turkey. Especially in the process that started with the Syrian Civil War, Turkey's 'open door' policy has increased the number of refugees. Afterwards, people of various nationalities who entered the country illegally increased the social, economic and cultural concerns of the residents and caused a social reaction similar to that in Europe (Medyascope, 2023; Semerci-Uyan, 2020). However, it should be noted that this social reaction did not emerge immediately in a surprising manner. Although Turkey has been hosting the largest number of refugees worldwide since 2011, the refugee issue has not been a decisive issue in domestic politics for a long time (Sert and Daniş, 2021). However, antagonisms between the two communities have increased over time. Studies have shown that tensions between Syrian refugees and Turkish society tripled in the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 (International Crisis Group, 2018). Moreover, some videos circulated on social media in 2022 played an important role in the mass mobilisation of the reaction not only against Syrian refugees but also against irregular migrants. These videos showing alleged Afghan and Pakistani nationals recording women in Turkey with their mobile phones and showing that migrants entering the country illegally cross the border easily brought the migrant issue to the centre of the political agenda (Altundağ and Esin, 2024). As a result, according to public opinion data, 86 per cent of Turkish citizens want refugees and migrants to be sent home (cited in Secen et al., 2024, p. 421).

It is possible to say that there was no political party in Turkey that based its main political discourse on the refugee and migrant problem until August 2021. On that date, Özdağ, a nationalist academic and politician, founded the ZP. Özdağ's party is in many ways similar to anti-immigrant parties in Europe, as its main political discourse is based on anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiments (Saylan and Aknur, 2023, p. 271). It can be argued that Özdağ, who comes from a nationalist political tradition and has been a politician in the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi / MHP) for a long time, fills a "political vacuum" in Turkey, which has been experiencing a refugee crisis since 2011, by adopting a European-style anti-immigrant/anti-refugee political discourse. Indeed, although anti-refugee and anti-irregular migration is an issue that cuts horizontally across many segments of society in Turkey, no political party (especially the centre parties) other than ZP has systematically brought this issue to the political agenda (Altundağ and Esin, 2024). However, the ZP fell far behind its European counterparts in terms of the votes it received in the elections, one general and one local.ⁱ On the other hand, it should be noted that Özdağ adopted an anti-immigrant political discourse while he was in the Good Party (İyi Parti / İYİP) before founding ZP.ⁱⁱ

This study aims to frame Özdağ's political discourse on refugees and irregular migrants based on the populist radical right ideology in Europe. For this comparison, Özdağ's posts on his X account were taken as data. The reason for this is the critical role of social media in the dissemination of populist discourse as well as ensuring data integrity. In this context, it is possible to argue that platforms such as X are a stage on which the personality of influential leaders is constructed, as well as a functional tool for the dissemination of information, the selection of topics, interaction, and propaganda (Pérez-Curiel, 2020, p. 175).

Literature Review

Populist Radical Right

We have stated above that populism divides society into two antagonistic groups of “pure people” and “corrupt elites” and argues that politics should reflect the will of the people. Most of the research on populism shows that right-wing and left-wing populist parties put forward a discourse that is anti-elitist and claims to represent the people (Otjes and Louwerse, 2015). However, one of the main elements that clearly distinguishes right-wing populism is that it produces discourse and politics based on anti-immigrant sentiments. In fact, according to Mudde, anti-immigrant attitude is a characteristic of the populist radical right rather than populism (Mudde, 2007). The issue of migration and refugees is usually addressed by right-wing politicians in the context of security threat, cultural threat and economic threat. In order to maintain the “imagined” homogeneity of the nation and its economic prosperity, “others” from outside are excluded. Since populist radical right-wing parties strongly embrace the immigration issue, some scholars refer to them simply as anti-immigration parties (Fennema, 1997; Van der Brug et al., 2005). The main factor motivating anti-immigration is nativism. According to Mudde (2007, p. 19), nativism, which is the main characteristic of the populist radical right, argues that only the indigenous group (the nation) should live within the state and that non-indigenous elements (people and ideas) pose a threat to the homogenous nation-state. According to this perspective, the indigenous people and their culture must be protected against the enemies of the nation. According to Stavrakakis et al. the discourse of populist radical right-wing parties corresponds to a narrative that emphasises the centrality and supremacy of the nation and nationalism by foregrounding the antagonism between a homogenous ethnic community and its ethno-cultural other (Stavrakakis et al., 2017, p. 421).

In fact, populism and nationalism are different concepts despite their often-overlapping characteristics. First, the basic distinction between “us and them” in populism refers to pure people and elites. In nationalism, this distinction corresponds to the nation and non-nationals. In other words, the priority is to protect the sovereignty, interests and identity of the nation against “external elements” that do not belong to that nation. Therefore, it cannot be said that nationalism is an anti-elite ideology like populism. On the contrary, nationalism is often an ideology driven by elites (Varshney, 2021, p. 131). However, when we talk about contemporary populism, it is seen that populism and nationalism are intertwined. The first reason for this is that the nation-state is still the dominant political unit in democratic political representation and thus populism usually operates within a national context (De Cleen, 2017). Secondly, nationalism in practice is often compatible with populist movements. Right-wing populist movements in particular aim to consolidate the population around a national identity and scapegoat “others”, mainstream media, lawyers, academics and LGBT people who pose a “threat” to the nation's identity (Liberties, 2021).

However, it is difficult to say that all populist movements are nationalist. Left-wing populism in particular takes a class approach, seeing “the pure people” as the entire lower classes in opposition to the capital-owning elites, and does not tend to create an antagonistic mobilisation towards foreigners and immigrants. It is therefore important to emphasise the difference between right-wing and left-wing populism. Whereas left-wing populism, as in the case of Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, produces politics based on a vertical opposition between elites and the people, the nativism that characterises right-wing populism is built on a horizontal opposition between the nation and “dangerous others” (foreigners, immigrants, religious minorities, etc.) (Bonikowski et al., 2019, p. 74). “Dangerous others” are seen as groups that are favoured by the elites against the people or even used by the elites in conspiracies against the people. Similarly, while the sharp opposition to globalisation seen in the left

populist movements in South America has a class character, in the populist radical right, which is gaining strength in Europe and the USA, this opposition turns into a xenophobic reaction.

Populist radical right movements divide the domestic community into “in-group” and “out-group”. The in-group corresponds to the “people”, the “real members of the nation”, and they alone should have access to the collective goods of the state. Foreigners and immigrants do not belong to the “people”. For this reason, right-wing populism takes a hard line on immigration, arguing that immigration should be restricted. According to this perspective, the people does not consist of “all the poor” as in left-wing populism, but of the “whole nation”. Thus, in the right-wing version of populism, the distinction between populism and nationalism becomes rather amorphous. Right-wing populists put forward a strong rhetoric that the nation must re-establish its sovereignty and argue that foreigners should be excluded from the national pact and should not share in collective goods (Halikiopoulou, 2019, p. 40).

The success of the populist radical right-wing movements in the West is based on their sophisticated and functional use of nationalism. Far-right parties, which in the past could easily be labelled as racist and marginalised, have succeeded in gaining mass appeal as the spokespersons for the economic and security concerns raised by the phenomenon of migration. In doing so, they introduced a new discourse based on civic nationalism, emphasising a vision of citizenship. They promoted a nativist agenda by grounding the distinction between “us” and “the other” on cultural and religious, rather than racial, grounds (Mudde, 2017, p. 4). This made it easier and legitimised the exclusion of “others” and enabled populist radical right-wing parties to increasingly gain the capacity to influence and direct “mainstream politics”. Thus, they both increased their vote rates significantly and enabled mainstream political parties to adopt a similar political stance and discourse on issues such as migration (Halikiopoulou, 2019, p. 46). As a result, populist radical right parties have succeeded in many countries in Europe by building their populist narratives on national sovereignty and nationalism.

Method

In this study, we analysed selected X posts shared by ZP Chairman Özdağ using critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis suggests that there is a strong relationship between social practice and language. It states that ideology is linked to power relations in society and that these relations are expressed as discourse through language (Fairclough, 1995). In addition, discourse mediates the formation of ideologies and the production of prejudices against outgroups (Dijk, 1990). Therefore, it can be said that critical discourse analysis is a functional method in analysing populist radical right discourse.

Özdağ’s official X account is @umitozdog, was the primary source of data for our analysis. We focused on Özdağ’s X posts specifically examining themes central to populist radical right discourse. Through discourse analysis of these posts, we identified their connections to populist radical right ideology. In selecting these themes, we considered key issues emphasised in the existing literature on right-wing populism and categorised them under relevant subheadings (Fuchs, 2020; Engesser et al., 2016). In other words, we analysed Özdağ’s X posts within the framework of migrants/refugees, Islam and nation, key issues on the agenda of the rising populist radical right in Europe and on central to its discourse.ⁱⁱⁱ

X allows a maximum of 3200 posts to be viewed retrospectively, which has posed a limitation for this study. The data collection process concluded on 1 February 2023. As a result, we examined 3200 X posts shared by Özdağ between 16 January 2022 and 1 February 2023, selecting examples that best fit the themes we identified. We applied the critical discourse analysis method to the selected X posts, evaluating Özdağ’s political stance within the broader framework of the rising populist radical right in

the West. However, it is important to note that this study does not aim to conduct a comparative analysis of X posts. Thus, while X posts serve as the primary data for Özdağ's ideas on the identified themes, they will not be the sole data source when providing examples related to the intellectual framework of the populist radical right.

Although our study incorporates quantitative data, we believe that an approach, primarily based on textual analysis, provides a deeper understanding of the subject. All the X posts analysed in this study were published after the establishment of ZP. Given that Özdağ's political stance, which aligns with the populist radical right in the West, became more pronounced after founding the ZP and that the party's core policies largely reflect themes of contemporary right-wing populism, the data collection period can be deemed appropriate for the objectives of this study.^{iv}

This study aims to evaluate Özdağ's political perspective by examining his X posts, focusing the functional role of political communication through digital media. Indeed, social media offer many possibilities for optimising propaganda and provide a more direct and personal channel of communication with potential audiences (Ernst et al., 2017). Social media allows users to communicate directly with each other. Thanks to its multi-centre structure, it has eliminated the threshold gatekeeper and allowed the message to be delivered directly to the target audience. Thus, it became easier for Özdağ and similar right-wing populist leaders to reach the public. Indeed, in his VOX-Pol Year in Review for 2018, Conway observed that the appearance of the far right on online platforms was very strong and growing in 2018 (Conway, 2019, p. 11). In this context, we used X posts as research data to examine the similarities or differences between Özdağ's political discourse and the populist radical right's discourse across specific themes. This method enables us to achieve a holistic perspective.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Özdağ's X Posts in the Context of Some Concepts of Populist Radical Right Ideology

In this section, Özdağ's discourses on X will be analysed through the themes of immigration, Islam and nation, while examining the political ideological background underlying these discourses. The followers reactions to Özdağ's X posts are particularly striking highlighting the potential of populist radical right discourse to channel social anger towards refugees and migrants in Turkey. A total of 3200 X posts by Özdağ spanning from 16 January 2022 to 1 February 2023 were downloaded to an Excel file. From these, the top 10 posts, related to immigration/refuges, Islam and nation, with the highest number of likes are listed in Table 1.

When we look at the ranking of the most liked posts, the first one is a post on immigration that Özdağ shared as a result of a polemic with Soyly. The second most liked post by Özdağ includes a video link. The video depicts an individual, allegedly a refugee, secretly photographing a Turkish woman, who then reacts strongly. Özdağ shared this video on his X account, captioned with the note "I kiss your eyes". The third most liked post, features a video in which a Syrian-born individual, who acquired Turkish citizenship, criticises Özdağ. Özdağ responds to this video. The fourth post shares a video. The video features a refugee who gets between two young people who like each other on the subway. This situation is presented in a humorous way. In fifth post, Özdağ criticises Syrians for taking the driving licence exam in Mersin in their native language. The sixth post includes a video. The video features a speaker claiming to smuggle refugees to Europe. The seventh post shows Özdağ criticising to refugees for receiving education in Turkey. The eighth post features Özdağ reaction to the detention of the director of the documentary Silent Invasion. The ninth post alleges that a refugee harassed a child. The tenth post, accompanied by a video, implies that refugees struggle to adapt to city life and disrupt the environment.

Table 1*Top 10 X Posts by Özdağ on Refugees/Migrants, Islam and Nation*

	Contents of Tweets	Favorites	Retweets
1	In defence of refugees, Soyly said “we came here from the steppes of Mongolia”. Sülü, did we come as refugees? Did Byzantium give us refugee status? If Sultan Alpaslan were alive, he would beat you with a dogwood. The Ministry of Internal Affairs does not deserve this ignorance.	145000	12000
2	I kiss your eyes. https://x.com/umitozdog/status/1524479306189135876	118000	6000
3	Ahmet Hamo, you came from Syria. You got citizenship against the law. Are you going to teach us how to do politics now? I promise, I will cancel your illegal citizenship and send you on the first voyage of Zafer Tourism in seat number 1. https://x.com/umitozdog/status/1522192639348678657	115000	11000
4	I'll let you be the judge. But that's the way it is. It's a pity. https://t.co/KQ84uoW5hG	95000	11000
5	Syrians took the driving licence test in Mersin/Erdemli yesterday. Syrians took the test in Arabic and Turks took the test in Turkish. Moreover, the Syrians who took the test in Arabic have Turkish citizenship. When did Turkey become bilingual? What are you doing?	93000	12000
6	I'll hire you at Zafer Tourism. 😊 https://t.co/APcUBXK7Wu	86000	7000
7	Whether you are a graduate or not, we have reserved seat 1-A for you on the Zafer Turizm Damascus journey. It will be a pleasant journey. Promise... https://t.co/TVTOOPFogw	79000	5000
8	Hande Karacasu, who made the documentary #SilentInvasion, was detained by the police and taken to Sakarya Provincial Security Directorate. While those who tell about the threats against Turkey are detained, those who conspire against our country are rewarded. Hande Karacasu is not alone.	73000	10000
9	Last night in Esenyurt, a Syrian forcibly dragged a 10-year-old boy into the courtyard of a mosque and harassed him. The imam who came out from Isha prayer saw the harassment and saved the child. He locked the harasser in a room and reported to the police. Ebubekir Sofuoğlu is your religious brother.	70000	7000
10	Now, when we tell this asshole to “go to your homeland”, are we racist? No way. Anyone who says “stay” is a traitor. https://x.com/umitozdog/status/1563217132489302018	68000	7000

Refugees and Migrants

One of the most fundamental political discourses of the populist radical right is the opposition to migrants and refugees. Using a nationalist rhetoric, politicians representing the populist radical right argue that “others” are the source of many socioeconomic and sociocultural problems in the country and scapegoat them (Wodak, 2015; Rydgren, 2002). According to them, ordinary people are in danger of losing not only their economic well-being but also their cultural and ethnic identity due to irregular and uncontrolled migration. Right-wing populists in Europe generally present a harsh political discourse by opposing immigration from the Islamic world for cultural reasons and the financial support of undocumented migrants from the government for economic reasons. In this context, they see the population as a nation in a position of power against “external enemies”, including foreigners (Gandesha, 2018, p. 63), and adopt “welfare chauvinism”, advocating the restriction of social benefits to natives (Muis and Immerzeel, 2016, p. 6).

The recent anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiments of the populist radical right are to a large extent directly related to a categorical exclusion of Muslim identity. The cultural practices of Muslims, as well as the attacks in the West by terrorist organisations claiming to represent Islam, have made migration, culture and religion the central issues of politics. Thus, right-wing populists took advantage of the increasing interest in the phenomenon of migration, transformed it into a cultural issue and succeeded in bringing the “culturalised immigration debate” to the centre of political discourse (Yilmaz, 2012, p. 376). The fact that the discriminatory discourse is constructed culturally rather than biologically has increased the influence of the populist radical right on mainstream politics and made it necessary for mass parties to produce exclusionary policies towards “others/foreigners”. However, many scholars have described this situation as a new form of racism in cultural clothing, namely “cultural racism” (Modood, 2005; Wren, 2001).

The populist radical right generally produces discourse on refugees/migrants based on the above-mentioned concerns. The idea that refugees/immigrants will create a burden on the economies of the countries they move to and that the natives, who should benefit from social rights, will not be able to access some services due to foreigners is one of the most commonly used arguments of the populist radical right in the context of anti-immigration. According to Alice Weidel, co-leader of the German populist radical right party AfD, Angela Merkel's refugee policy is destroying the welfare state. Open borders and a sustainable welfare state cannot go together (Weidel, 2017). Marine Le Pen, the best-known representative of right-wing populism in France, has also claimed that refugees and migrants are an economic burden on the French people. According to Le Pen, it is a wrong policy to import unemployment by taking in immigrants when there are 7 million unemployed, 9 million poor and one in three French people cannot get proper healthcare because they cannot afford it (Le Pen, 2016). Riikka Purra, leader of the Finns Party, emphasized the disadvantage of natives in benefiting from the welfare state by stating that it is very easy for immigrants and difficult for Finns to live on benefits as part of the welfare system in Finland (Purra, 2023).

Right-wing populists commonly mention cultural, demographic and security concerns in their opposition to refugees/migrants. They argue that people from non-Western and “unstable” regions will damage European culture. Heinze-Christian Strache, former leader of the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), states that their common goal is “...the preservation of the historically indigenous identity of the European people, who are in the grip of unbridled mass migration from culturally alien regions...” (Strache, 2014). He drew attention to the “cultural threat” posed by immigration not coming from Western countries. According to PVV leader Geert Wilders, one of the most iconic right-wing populist figures in the Netherlands, migrants are a major security threat to Europe and the Netherlands. Wilders stated that ISIS terrorists among Syrian refugees fleeing to Europe threaten them like a ticking time

bomb (Wilders, 2015). He also argues that non-Western refugees - mostly Muslims - are over-represented in crime statistics. Refugees, two-thirds of whom are young men, make Dutch women feel insecure (Wilders, 2013; Wilders, 2015). Matteo Salvini, the leader of Lega Nord, one of Italy's populist radical right parties, aims to improve the economy in order to encourage Italians to have children. Salvini has expressed demographic concerns, saying that he “does not want to think about replacing 10 million Italians with 10 million immigrants” (Salvini, 2021).

The main backbone of Özdağ's political discourse, especially after he founded ZP, is anti-immigrant/anti-refugee discourse like European populist radical right-wing politicians. When his posts on this issue are analyzed, it is seen that he emphasizes economic, cultural and security concerns towards immigrants and refugees similar to European right-wing populists. Selected examples from Özdağ's related posts are as follows.

Refugees and Migrants as an Economic Burden

The cost of living is rising. But why?

1- 13 million refugees and illegals have arrived in our country. These people have increased the demand for housing, transportation, health and food.

2- 17 billion dollars in aid to refugees and foreign countries every year

3- Production is completely finished.

Solution @ZaferPartisi

In post X above, Özdağ attributes the price increases to “others” with a reductionist discourse by saying that the entire reason for the inflation in Turkey is the refugees and irregular migrants in the country. He presents a discourse that tries to render invisible the causes of the inflationary trend stemming from internal and external dynamics. Even if one accepts that the share of refugees and irregular migrants in price increases is marginal, holding them solely responsible for inflation aims to channel the public's negative feelings about the high cost of living towards “outsiders”. Simplifying complex problems is one of the basic elements of populist politics (Liberties, 2021). Özdağ's evaluation of inflation, which is based on many parameters, only on refugees and irregular migrants reflects the simplistic politics of populism aimed at creating antagonism. However, it reproduces the right-wing populist discourse that sees refugees and migrants as scapegoats in the context of unfavorable economic conditions in Turkey.

I wish you had also met the needs of 80 million Turkish citizens. People are hungry and unemployed. In 10 years, our country had a current account deficit of 134 billion dollars. 80 billion dollars of this is the money spent on Syrians. Zafer Party will come, refugees will leave.

In the context of “welfare chauvinism”, one of the most frequently used arguments of the populist radical right is that refugees and migrants benefit from the opportunities provided by the welfare state. Özdağ emphasizes that this situation is to the disadvantage of Turkish citizens by quoting Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar's statement “we are meeting the needs of 9 million Syrians”. Özdağ attributes a large part of Turkey's current account deficit to Syrian refugees and criticizes the mobilization of welfare state practices for refugees. He argues that only “real members of the nation” should have the right to access the collective goods of the state. Indeed, according to right-wing populists, foreigners should be excluded from the national pact and should not share in collective goods (Halikiopoulou, 2019, p. 40). According to this perspective, the opportunities provided by the welfare state to refugees/immigrants are to the disadvantage of natives and these opportunities should be allocated to citizens of the country. In this X post, Özdağ repeated the discourse of the populist radical

right that only natives should benefit from the goods and services of the state in the context of social aid to refugees in Turkey. This perspective, which we can express as the reproduction of nativist discourse through economic sharing, overlaps with the populist radical right discourse in Europe.

Refugees and Migrants as a “Cultural Threat”

Great Turkish Nation, due to over 4 million refugees and fugitives, the most important urban culture of our civilization has been destroyed in Istanbul. Istanbul has become the center of many criminal organizations, especially drugs.

#ZaferPartisi

#Patriarchal Alliance

#The Moment is Coming

In the X post above, Özdağ expressed his sociocultural concerns about refugees and irregular migrants. This post was shared together with a video of Özdağ giving a speech. In the video, Özdağ states that refugees and fugitives are destroying Istanbul's urban culture and that a degenerate and impersonal style dominates Istanbul's life. While he is making this speech, a part of the screen shows photographs of women with “many children”, who appear to be foreign nationals, and two Middle Easterners lying on the floor in a closed space in their local clothes, taking off their slippers. There are also photographs of shops in Istanbul with Arabic signs. According to Özdağ, refugees and irregular migrants have destroyed the civilised appearance of Istanbul with their lifestyle. The ideology and discourse of populist radical right parties is based on opposition to immigration, multiculturalism and multi-ethnicism (Rydgren, 2008, p. 739). Özdağ's emphasis on “foreigners destroying civilisation” overlaps with this ideology and discourse. According to him, refugees and irregular migrants “threaten” the culture of the host country with their lifestyle, clothing and social life. Another issue emphasised by Özdağ in this post is related to security. He claims that Istanbul has become the centre of international drug organisations. However, he did not express whether this claim is directly related to refugees and irregular migrants.

Refugees and Migrants as a Security Threat

Dear brother

Many families like yours have been forced to leave their homes and cities because of the security threat posed by refugees.

We promise to the great Turkish nation,

In the @ZaferPartisi government, there will not be a single refugee and fugitive in Turkey!...

Özdağ shared this X post together with a video of a taxi driver. In the video, the taxi driver states that he supports Özdağ's discourse and political line. He also states that he is from Kilis, one of the places where Syrian refugees live in large numbers, and that his elderly mother is afraid of going to Kilis due to the security threat posed by refugees. A taxi driver who claims that Syrians killed several old women living in Kilis demands Özdağ to publicise this. In Rydgren's article analysing the reasons for voting for radical right parties in six countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Norway), he states that local people mostly believe that refugees or immigrants will increase crime rates and this causes them to sympathise with the radical right (Rydgren, 2008, p. 754). Therefore, petty crimes committed or potentially committed by outsider groups are highlighted by the populist radical

right and all refugees/migrants are criminalized. Özdağ dramatically expressed these concerns of the taxi driver from Kilis and drew attention to the security threat posed by refugees and irregular migrants.

Security is on high alert.

There is intelligence that Syrian groups and Arab terrorist organizations will cause major incidents. We warned for years, yet you allowed the field to be plowed. There are two centres responsible for every terrorist attack; the terrorist organization and the AK Party.

The security issue, which is one of the themes in which migration is securitised, covers both individual crimes and terrorism (Innes, 2010). In this context, it is possible to say that the transfer of terrorism in Syria to Turkey is a concrete concern. As a matter of fact, some of the terrorist attacks in Turkey are caused by the unstable conflict environment in Syria and Iraq (Kadıoğlu, 2020). Instability and uncontrolled migration in Turkey's neighbouring countries have posed a real security threat to the country. Refugees are seen as potential threats during periods of increased terrorist acts, and social media is one of the most suitable environments for spreading this view. Indeed, refugees were portrayed as potential terrorists and criminals on Twitter (X) after the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 (Siapera et al., 2018). In this context, it is possible to say that the same trend is observed in Turkey, which has been subjected to much more terrorist attacks than France in the same period. In the studies on the subject, it is stated that a large part of the Turkish society sees Syrian refugees as a source of crime and terror (Ekici, 2019, p.709). Özdağ's X post aims to reinforce the negative perception towards Syrian refugees and in this respect, it is in line with the political discourse of populist radical right movements in Europe.

Islam

Islamophobia is one of the main political discourses shared by right-wing populist movements in the West. They have tried to construct the image of Muslims as potential terrorists by instrumentalising the fear of terrorism, especially in the context of the 9/11 attacks, Al Qaida and ISIS (Fuchs, 2020, p. 16). Anti-Islamism is directly linked to the refugee issue, as most of the refugees travelling to Europe are fleeing countries where Islamic beliefs and culture are dominant. This opposition to Islam is often categorical and ontological. In other words, right-wing populists in the West emphasise the incompatibility of the basic sources of Islam and the culture it creates with European culture. They claim that this belief therefore threatens Western civilisation as a whole. In this context, they use vulgar and marginalising language to discuss the issue of Islam on the grounds of a "clash of civilisations". For example, according to Wilders, Islam is the antithesis of Judeo-Christian values (Kaya and Tecmen, 2019, p. 56). He stated that he has a problem with Islamic culture, tradition and ideology, although not with Muslims, and argued that the Quran should be banned because it incites violence (Wilders, 2008; Wilders, 2010). Other representatives of the populist radical right in Europe have similar views. In fact, the AfD's 2017 election programme stated that Islam does not belong in Germany and that the existence of Islam poses a threat to the state, society and the values of Germany (AfD, 2017, p. 48). Like the AfD, the FPÖ emphasised that Islam is not part of their country and argued that this religion sees the world as a battlefield until all humanity becomes Muslim (FPÖ, 2013; FPÖ, 2017).

It can be said that Özdağ's views on Islam have overlapping and diverging aspects with the European populist radical right. First of all, since Özdağ is a politician with a *Ülkücü* background, it is expected that he sees Islam as an important element in his system of values. Because, although this ideology is basically based on Turkish nationalism, it has made Islam one of the fundamental values of its doctrine.^v In addition, Özdağ's belonging to the religion of Islam is also confirmed by his own statements (Yurt Gazetesi TV, 2023). Therefore, unlike European right-wing populist politicians, Özdağ does not have a categorical and ontological opposition to Islam. However, he evaluates Islam from a more

“essentialist” perspective. Özdağ shared a video from his X account, which appears to be a section of the education given to children under Taliban rule, and interpreted this video as follows:

Artificial intelligence, quantum computers, spacewalks on the one hand, and what you see on the other. Yes, the West is imperialist, but imperialism is not the only culprit. It is the reactionary mentality that keeps Muslim people slaves of the age. The surrender of a religion whose first commandment is READ to a nomadic mentality.

In this post, Özdağ states that although there have been significant developments in the field of science and technology worldwide, the Islamic world has not been able to catch up with modern education and therefore has lagged behind the West. He criticises the people of Islam by saying that Muslims do not question their own mentality due to their helplessness in the face of the West and that their archaic point of view has made them slaves of the age. However, as can be seen, the criticism here is not directed against the Islamic religion. Özdağ reminded the command to “read” in the first verse of the Quran and stated that the problem is not in Islam but in Muslims. According to him, the religion of Islam essentially encourages progress and development, but the culture of the people who adopt this religion prevents development. In the aforementioned post, Özdağ differs from Western right-wing populists and attributes underdevelopment to Muslims, not to the doctrines of Islam. It is possible to find traces of an essentialist approach towards Islam here. According to him, the Islam that Muslims apply to their lives is not “true Islam” because a religion whose first verse of its holy book says “read” encourages catching up with the age, not bigotry.

The context in which Özdağ presents a parallel discourse with Western right-wing populists on Islam is “radical Islam”. He emphasized at the highest level that salafi jihadism, especially ISIS, is an imminent and existential threat, especially in connection with the security problem posed by the Syrian Civil War in Turkey. It can be argued that the terrorist attacks of ISIS, which carried out its first serious action in Turkey in Reyhanlı in 2013 and continued until 2017, strengthened Özdağ's discourse that directly concretises jihadist terrorism through refugees. Özdağ shared the following post in relation to a video clip he quoted from his X account named “Mülteci Gündemi”.

He doesn't like Turkey. Soon he will start working to fix it. Why do Salafist gangs want refugees to stay? Because refugees constitute the human resources of Salafist gangs. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

In this post, Özdağ shared a video of an Afghan journalist named Sunatullah Saadat, who made a video to criticise Tanju Özcan, the mayor of Bolu, for his policies and discourse against refugees; however, Saadat used expressions targeting the secular lifestyle in Turkey rather than criticising Özcan. Özdağ drew attention to the Salafist threat through this video.^{vi} In the aforementioned video, Saadat claimed that young people in Turkey were adopting an “immoral lifestyle” and called it “cultural degradation”, which drew public reaction.^{vii} Saadat's targeting of certain life practices, especially through women's bodies, facilitated Özdağ's production of a discourse containing implications that overlap the mentality of refugees and Salafist jihadists. In this X post, Özdağ states that Salafist gangs see refugees as human resources. The critical point here is that he also implies that the worldviews of salafist/jihadist groups that use terrorism as a method and refugees are similar. He thinks that refugees who think that the lifestyle in Turkey is “immoral” and “un-Islamic” will mobilise on the side of terrorist organisations if they decide to change this condition.

In another X post, Özdağ emphasised the “danger of the political regime created by refugees” through a video featuring a Moroccan man who again targeted the secular lifestyle. The person in the video tells a woman working in a supermarket in Istanbul that selling alcohol is a sin. He also says that she should cover her head in accordance with Islam. Meanwhile, another woman who intervened in the incident

asked the man where he was from (he replied that he was Moroccan) and reminded him that they lived in the Republic of Turkey and that there was democracy in this country. She continued to talk to the Moroccan person and expressed her reaction by saying “who works where and what they do is none of your business...If you are uncomfortable with me being here, you don't live in this country, you should go to Morocco and live there”. Özdağ's post on the subject is as follows.

These are our better days. If the Turkish people do not authorise the Zafer Party to “Send them away” in the June 2023 elections, Chechen, Syrian, Moroccan, Afghan, Iraqi, in short, all Salafist jihadists will take to the streets with the desire to establish a caliphate in Turkey. It is time for Zafer.

In this post, Özdağ essentially emphasises that foreigners from underdeveloped Muslim countries pose a potential threat to Turkey's political regime and secular lifestyle. He tries to legitimise this view through individual foreigners who see the social and political order in Turkey as “un-Islamic”. He argues that the only way to protect the Republic and democracy from the caliphate is to expel all refugees and irregular migrants. This discourse overlaps with the discourse of Western right-wing populists towards Muslim immigrants.

Nation

As we have mentioned in the literature section, populist radical right-wing movements are able to gain power through the anger in the public by creating enemies through the opposition of us and them in order to create a space for themselves in the field of politics. In particular, Europe-based populist radical right-wing movements produce a discourse of civic nationalism on the basis of citizenship instead of ethnic belonging and attempt to justify their negative discourses against immigrants with the cultural incompatibility they claim to exist between “outsiders” and “natives”. Populist radical right-wing parties in Europe take a political stance based on opposition to immigrants who they claim are incompatible with the local culture (Halikiopoulou, 2019; Wilders, 2015; Strache, 2014). In parallel to this, the programme of the ZP founded by Özdağ does not carry ethnic overtones. There are statements in the programme stating that it is sufficient to be a citizen in order to belong to the Turkish nation. The Turkish Nation, whose borders are drawn in the ZP's programme, is defined as “everyone who is bound to the Turkish Nation by the bond of citizenship is part of the Turkish Nation. No discrimination can be made on the basis of concepts such as sub-social groups, ethnic origin, beliefs and sects, political views, especially sexual discrimination” (Zafer Party, 2021). However, in some of Özdağ's X posts that are the subject of this study, he has gone beyond the “civic nationalism” that the European populist radical right has recently put forward. It is possible to say that some expressions containing “ethnic implications” have been used in these posts.

ZP defines itself as a Turkish Nationalist along the lines of Atatürk (Zafer Party, 2021). In this context, it seems that ZP is distant from the definition of the nation with a Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Özdağ's response to IYI Party MP Yavuz Ağralıoğlu's statement ‘Why should we call the non-Muslim Turk a human being?’ on X is important in terms of deepening the nation debates.

How does this mind explain 4000 years of pre-Islamic Turkish history?

What does it say about the Christian Gagauzians?

Are Muslim Turks who sided with the Sultan in the War of Independence Turks or Orthodox Turks who sided with Mustafa Kemal? There is definitely something wrong with the enemies of Atatürk.

Özdağ does not limit the definition of the Turkish nation to Muslim Turkishness. As can be seen in the posts above, the definition of Turkishness is extended beyond the boundaries of belief and includes the pre-Islamic period. In the example given with reference to Mustafa Kemal, it is stated that Orthodox Turks who supported Mustafa Kemal during the national struggle were more “Turkish” than Muslim Turks who supported the Sultan. In this sense, for Özdağ, the identity of Turkishness is registered with the attitude towards the national liberation war. In this example, the identity of Turkishness stands out as a superior identity that transcends Muslim identity.

Özdağ's reaction to the activities organised in Arabic language in some schools in another X post also contains ethnic implications. The reaction is not limited to Arabic language; Özdağ also reacted to the clothes worn by Syrian refugees as Arab clothes.

The Minister of National Education went to Atatürk High School, one of the best high schools in Ankara, and organised Arabic activities in Arabic clothes under the name of integration. We will not integrate. If you want to integrate so much, go to Syria.

Although the definition of the Turkish Nation in the ZP Programme does not include an expression based on ethnic origin, Özdağ's reactions to Arab culture in the X post above are striking. The problem here goes beyond the reactions against irregular migration policies. By using the concepts of Arabic language and clothes in these posts, Özdağ creates the impression that his discomfort is not limited to refugees and irregular migrants, but more generally, he is uncomfortable with the core of Arab culture in general. In this sense, Özdağ's reaction created through language and dress is based on the thesis of the absolute incompatibility of two different and incompatible cultures. We have also previously stated that right-wing populist political parties in Europe generally define anti-immigrant sentiments through cultural differences and define their national belonging through cultural values rather than a biological basis (Mudde, 2017, p. 4). In this X-post by Özdağ, the Arabic language and the clothes considered to belong to the Arabic culture are considered as “dangerous others” or “out-group” in terms of Turkish culture. In particular, whether citizens of the Republic of Turkey who identify themselves as Arabs in terms of their ethnic origin are considered part of the Turkish Nation or not becomes ambiguous in the context of this debate. Arabs who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey face the danger of being seen as “other” or “out-group” by Özdağ. This reaction is not limited to the Arabic language and ethnic dress.

6 million Syrians, 1.750 million Afghans, 2 million Negroes etc. flooded the country. The cost is \$100 billion. ISIS is organised. Ghettos are formed. Agents are on the prowl. Weapons are everywhere. You think it's a joke. You're dragging a country into the worst disaster it can suffer. The Victory Party won't allow it.

Özdağ expresses his reactions against refugees by stating their nationality and even their skin colour. His categorisation of refugees on the basis of biological differences differs from the discourse of European populist radical right politicians on cultural differences. The definition of “negro” used to distinguish African refugees from refugees belonging to other nations shows that he also discriminates on the basis of “racial” differences. We have stated above that populist radical right parties in Europe prefer not to discriminate on the basis of biological differences in order to avoid accusations of racism. Populist radical right movements therefore integrate anti-immigrant sentiments into the discourse of cultural incompatibility in order to organise social anger and dissatisfaction. Özdağ's resorting to a distinction based on skin colour along with cultural differences shows that he sometimes makes a racial categorisation. Özdağ also associates Afghan and African refugees with ISIS and accuses them of being spies in the same X-post. There may be structures among refugees that have connections with jihadist groups, but labelling refugees as a whole as ISIS-affiliated makes refugees an open target.

The X post shared by Özdağ regarding Uyghur Turks is quite remarkable. As we have mentioned before, in the ZP Programme, the Turkish Nation is defined on the basis of the basic principle of the bond of citizenship. People who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey are recognised as members of the Turkish Nation, regardless of their ethnic, sexual or religious identity. At this point, instead of being an identity belonging to an ethnic group, Turkish identity is expressed as a supra-identity of all ethnic groups living in Turkey. However, Özdağ's approach towards Uyghur Turks who are not citizens of the Republic of Turkey differs from his approach towards other refugees. Özdağ reacted in X to the police teams intervening in the demonstration of Uyghur Turks in front of the Consulate of the People's Republic of China in Istanbul.

The aggressive attitude used by this police chief against the Uyghur Turks in Turkey, who are resisting the Chinese oppression regime in a quiet, calm, honourable and painful way, is not the attitude of TURKISH police.

Indeed, the other police officers showed with their body language that they were not on the side of the police chief.

Uyghur Turks are not citizens of the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, the police threaten to deport the demonstrators (Diken, 2022). Özdağ's reaction to Uyghur Turks, who are in the position of refugees, is different from his reaction to Syrians, Afghans, Africans, Ukrainians and Russians. He used positive discourses such as “silent, calm, honourable and painfully resisting” when referring to Uyghur Turks. This approach is based on the view of Turks living in different parts of the world as cognates. Özdağ comes from the *Ülkücü Movement* as a political tradition. It seems that the Turan ideal, which was frequently expressed by the *Ülkücü Movement* for a period of time, still continues to have an impact on Özdağ.^{viii} The definition of the Turkish nation in the ZP's programme, which is based on citizenship and avoids ethnic overtones, contradicts this X reference. Özdağ, who does not see Uyghur Turks in Turkey as a danger, makes a distinction between refugees based on their ascendancy. As we mentioned before, Özdağ sees Afghan, Syrian and African refugees as a threat to the unity of the country with his X posts. Here, it is clear that the main difference that distinguishes Uyghurs from the above-mentioned refugees and irregular migrants is a sense of belonging based on lineage. Özdağ, who sees people of all other nationalities as a threat to the Turkish Nation, does not see Uyghurs as a threat even if they are not citizens of the Republic of Turkey, since he considers them as natural members (in-group) of the Turkish Nation. At this point, despite the discourse of the populist radical right, which makes distinctions based on culture, Özdağ's nationalism is sometimes based on ethno-nationalism.

Conclusion

In this study, some of the political discourses shared by ZP Chairman Özdağ on X have been evaluated by considering the general discourses of the European populist radical right. X posts have been analysed using discourse analysis method. The posts have been categorised under the themes of refugees/immigrants, Islam and nation. Özdağ has expressed views on refugees and migrants that align with the populist radical right perspective. For instance, Özdağ directly attributed the recent inflation in Turkey to refugees and irregular migrants and overlooking other variables. In line with the “welfare chauvinism” of the populist radical right, Özdağ argued that a significant portion of Turkey's current account deficit stems from financial support provided to refugees. He also perceived the diverse cultures of refugees and irregular migrants as a threat to Turkish civilisation. By emphasising the “criminal potential” of refugees, Özdağ largely associated security issues with “outsiders.” Nativism, a core element of the populist radical right, asserts that the “out-group” poses a fundamental threat to the nation state. This movement also advocates a political stance asserting that only the native group should reside

within the country's borders. In this context, Özdağ clearly places nativism at the centre of his political discourse.

In the analysed X posts, Özdağ's views on Islam exhibit both similarities to and differences from the European populist right. Similarities primarily involve concerns over the security threat posed by "radical Islam" and the risk to "secular" and "civilised" life. Özdağ argues that the ideological influence of jihadist terrorist groups, particularly ISIS, has spread significantly in Turkey, a situation exacerbated by the mass migration caused by the Syrian civil war. He asserts that terrorist groups recruit potential members from these migrant populations. In line with the European populist radical right, Özdağ highlights the terrorist potential of jihadist and Salafist ideologies and the threat they pose to the secular lifestyle. However, Özdağ departs from the mainstream populist radical right's discourse on Islam by adopting a different perspective on its essence. While populist right-wing leaders in Europe frequently portray Islam as inherently "anti-civilisation" and reject it categorically, Özdağ adopts an essentialist perspective. He argues for a distinction between "true Islam" and "radical Islam". Özdağ's "essentialist" stance on Islam appears closely tied to his political and cultural identity. As a politician in a predominantly Muslim country, his approach contrasts with the European populist radical right. Although he advocates for a secular and Kemalist political order, Özdağ's *ülküü* ideological roots regard Islam as one of the country's foundational values. Moreover, as a self-identified Muslim, his position on Islam differs significantly from the European populist radical right's discourse.

Lastly, we compared some of Özdağ's views shared on platform X with the general discourses of the European radical populist right, particularly regarding the concept of "nation." One of the key elements distinguishing the populist radical right from the extreme right of the past is its emphasis on civic nationalism, which is based on shared values of citizenship rather than direct ethnic distinctions. In this context, the populist radical right-wing discourse defines "others" not on biological grounds but based on cultural and religious differences. Because this new perspective cannot be labelled as racist, it has enabled right-wing populist discourse to exert significant influence on mainstream politics. This shift has also legitimised right-wing populist discourse in the political arena. However, although the ZP programme, founded by Özdağ, partially defines an "inclusive" nation, certain X posts reflect ideas that fall outside a civic nationalist perspective, deviating from the recent trend in populist radical right discourse. As a result, Özdağ has reproduced the populist radical right discourse, which has gained increasing global influence, to align with Turkey's unique conditions. Although Özdağ identifies anti-immigrant, anti-refugee sentiments and nativism as the key elements of his political discourse, our analysis of X posts also reveals traces of his nationalist past. The posts also demonstrate nuances that consider Turkey's social codes and highlight distinctions Europe's radical populist right-wing parties. In fact, Özdağ's essentialist stance on Islam and occasional ethnic emphases, occasional exceptional, diverge from the recent discourse of the populist radical right.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

Author Contributions

The first author wrote the literature review. Both authors contributed equally to the collection and interpretation of data, methodology and conclusion.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

ⁱ ZP received approximately 2.2 per cent of the votes in the 2023 general elections and 1.7 per cent in the 2024 local elections.

ⁱⁱ See. Özdağ's speech in the Parliament on 2018, November 29 on behalf of İYİP, https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/genel_kurul.cl_getir?pEid=73505

ⁱⁱⁱ The issues on the agenda of the populist radical right are of course much broader and cannot be limited to three topics. However, the themes appropriate to the context of this study are “refugees/migrants”, “Islam” and “nation”.

^{iv} In the ZP programme, the issue of migrants and refugee is emphasised many times. See <https://zaferpartisi.org.tr/parti-programi/>

^v Alparslan Türkeş, the absolute leader of the *Ülkücü* ideology, moved the Republican Peasant Nation Party, of which he was the chairman, to a more conservative line at the 1969 Adana Congress. The name of the party was changed to the Nationalist Movement Party at this congress, which is regarded as an important stage in the process of incorporating Islam into the *Ülkücü* ideology as an element reinforcing Turkishness. The *Ülkücü* Movement, which undertook the “mission of fighting communism” under the conditions of the Cold War, gained the support of the Sunni conservative masses in Central and Eastern Anatolia by strengthening its Islamic discourse at the end of the 1970s. Therefore, it is possible to say that Islam was one of the fundamental elements of the *Ülkücü* Movement. For detailed information, see Tanıl Bora and Kemal Can. *Devlet Ocak Dergâh: 12 Eylül'den 1990'lara Ülkücü Hareket*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

^{vi} In the aforementioned video, Saadat stated that Turkish youth show their bodies for money on a website called Bigolive, that no one prays despite the fact that there are many mosques in Turkey, and argued that this is a “cultural degradation”. See <https://twitter.com/SiginmaciGundem/status/1424442670550855681>

^{vii} This incident was met with reaction on social media and the prosecutor's office filed a lawsuit against Saadat for up to six years in prison for his statements in the video (Sözcü, 2022).

^{viii} Turan is the idea of bringing Turks living in different nation states together under an umbrella. The idea of Turan can contain different nationalist tendencies. Especially as interpreted by Nihal Atsız, the idea of Turan is interpreted as the unity of people with the same origin. In this sense, Atsız accepts ethnicity or the Turkish race as the dominant element of Turan instead of the nationalist understanding characterised as a Turkish-Islamic synthesis (Bölükbaşı, 2018, 50).