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A Conceptual Questioning From The Perspective Of The West's Relations With Turks: Justice

Batı'nın Türkler İle İlişkileri Perspektifinden Bir Kavram Sorgulaması: Adalet

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ABSTRACT

This study explores whether the West (European Union, the United States, and Russia) has acted justly in its relations with Türkiye and the Turkish people. Through a series of case studies, it has been demonstrated that one of the underlying reasons for the West's longstanding attitudes toward the Turks stems from the settlement and control of lands considered sacred by the West, by a people of a different religious background. Since the 19th century, Western powers have employed all means at their disposal to expel the Turks first from the Balkans and subsequently from Anatolia. In this context, Western support either explicit or through passive complicity was extended to the genocidal acts perpetrated by Greek and Armenian groups against the Turks. Similarly, the genocide committed by Serbian forces in the 1990s against the Bosniaks, whom they pejoratively referred to as 'Turks', occurred in full view of the Western world, which largely failed to intervene. In contemporary times, this attitude continues, as evidenced in the disputes over the 'Exclusive Economic Zone' in the Eastern Mediterranean. The West has consistently dismissed Türkiye's legitimate efforts to assert its rights in response to unilateral decisions made against it. In the case of Cyprus, Western actors remained silent during the massacres carried out by Greek forces on the island, aligning themselves with the Greek Cypriot side in pursuit of a Cyprus free of Turkish presence. Based on the findings of this study, a framework has been proposed for addressing the justice-related issues between Turks and the West. The identification of these long-standing grievances, along with the novel set of solutions presented herein is believed to contribute a significant degree of originality to the scholarly discourse on the subject.

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ÖZ

Bu çalışmada Batı'nın Türkiye ve Türkler ile olan ilişkilerinde adaleti gözetip gözetmedikleri vakalar üzerinden ortaya koyulmuştur. Batı kavramı içinde, 1800'lerden günümüze Avrupa'daki devletlerin, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD)'nin ve Rusya'nın Türklerle ve Türkiye ile ilgili meselelerde uyguladıkları veya uygulamaya çalıştıkları politikalar incelenmiştir. Batı'nın kutsal gördüğü toprakları kendi dinlerinden olmayan Türklerin ele geçirmesi ve yerleşmesi, Batı'nın Türklerle karşı tavırlarının bir sebebi olduğu görülmüştür. 19. yüzyıldan itibaren Türklerin önce Balkanlardan ardından Anadolu'dan atılması için her aşamada her faaliyeti Batı mübah görmüştür. Bu doğrultuda Yunanlıların ve Ermenilerin Türklerle yönelik soykırımların da arkasında durmuşlar hatta desteklemişlerdir. Sırpların Türk olarak adlandırıldığı soydaşları olan Müslüman Boşnaklara 1990'larda yaptıkları soykırım da Batı'nın gözü önünde gerçekleşmiştir. Günümüzde Akdeniz'de 'Münhasır Ekonomik Bölge' tartışmalarında olduğu gibi Türkiye'nin aleyhine alınan kararlar karşısında Türkiye'nin hakkını aramaya yönelik faaliyetlerini de kabul etmemektedirler. Osmanlı Devleti'nin etkinliğini kaybetmesiyle birlikte ortaya çıkan Kıbrıs Meselesinde, özellikle 20. yüzyılın ortalarında adadaki Rumların Türksüz Kıbrıs hedefi doğrultusunda işledikleri katliamlara Batı hem sessiz kalmışlar hem de Rumların yanında yer almıştır. Bu incelemelerin neticesinde Türklerin Batı ile adalet konusunda yaşadığı sorunların çözümü için öneri ortaya koyulmuştur. Bu çalışmada ele alınan, son yüz yılda Türklerin Batı ile yaşadığı sorunların tespiti ve çözüm önerilerinin ilk kez bir arada bulunması makaleye orijinallik kattığı düşünülmektedir.

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Introduction

Numerous definitions have been proposed regarding the concept of justice, which constitutes a central theme of this study. For the purposes of this article, justice is defined as a moral virtue aligned with the principles of equality and fairness, serving the continuity of both social and individual peace (Çağrıç, 1998, pp. 341-343). Concepts such as equality, liberty, and justice, which originate from the intellectual legacy of the 1789 French Revolution, initially spread across Europe and subsequently influenced political thought on a global scale. The revolution itself was largely driven by the perception that the French administration had failed to treat its citizens equitably in economic, social, and political domains (Kavık, 2024, pp. 59-64). From the mid-18th century onwards, the onset of the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain and soon spread to other parts of Europe, led to the widespread adoption of mass production. Consequently, European states increasingly sought access to raw materials and new markets for their manufactured goods. Paradoxically, while advocating for justice and equality, leading European powers, particularly France and Britain, engaged in aggressive colonial competition. These colonial ambitions were reflected in various forms, including direct occupation as in Africa, the co-optation of local rulers as observed in India, and the imposition of unequal treaties as exemplified by the case of the Ottoman Empire. A pertinent example is the 1838 Treaty of Baltalimanı between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, which effectively transformed the Ottoman economy into a dependency of British commercial interests (Aydin, 2021, pp. 105-106). By the late 19th century, colonialism had become a defining characteristic of nearly all major European powers, driven largely by their desire to project strength and secure global influence (Sunar, 2007, pp. 62-65).

The origins of the 'Eastern Question', which formally entered European diplomatic discourse following the 1815 Congress of Vienna, can be traced to historical antagonism toward the Turks, dating back to the Crusades. This concept encapsulated efforts to expel the Turks from Europe and reclaim territories under Ottoman control (Yalçın, 2015, pp. 81-82). Among the states actively engaged in this policy was Russia, which, in its pursuit of influence in the Balkans, promoted Pan-Slavism. Through this policy, Russia played a critical role in supporting the independence movements of various Balkan nations (Doğan, 2021, p. 134). Despite ethnic differences, Russia also extended its support to the Greeks, leveraging their shared adherence to Orthodox Christianity. This culminated in the establishment of Greek independence following the 1828–1829 Russo-Ottoman War (Kara, 2005, p. 120).

On the eve of the Balkan Wars, an alliance was established among Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire, despite existing territorial disputes such as those between Serbia and Montenegro over Albanian lands. Major powers, including Austria-Hungary and Russia, provided assurances that existing borders would remain unchanged if the Balkan states were defeated. Nevertheless, following the First Balkan War, Ottoman territories in the Balkans were partitioned at the London Conference (Yıldırım, 2012, p. 79). The Western powers regarded the 1918 Armistice of Mudros and the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres as instruments through which the objectives of the Eastern Question had finally been realized (Yalçın, 2015, p. 82). This episode is frequently cited as emblematic of the West's persistent failure to act justly in matters concerning the Turkish people.

The historical record demonstrates that in periods of unified Western opposition to the Turks, adverse outcomes for the Turkish and broader Islamic world have followed. Consequently, the study suggests that the only viable path to resisting such external pressure lies in fostering greater unity and cooperation among Turkic and Islamic states.

This article offers a critical examination of the past century of Turks–West relations, grounded in historical and contemporary case studies. It argues that the West, instead of

upholding the principles of universal justice, frequently prioritizes its strategic interests, often to the detriment of Turks. This perception, deeply rooted in Turkish public opinion, is supported by empirical evidence presented throughout the study. Nonetheless, the possibility remains that this perception may shift, should Western powers adopt a more equitable and principled stance in their dealings with Türkiye and the Turkish people.

The study evaluates both historical and present-day interactions between Turks and Western actors, revealing a recurring pattern of injustice. The argument is developed across twelve distinct case areas: 'Post-Mudros Occupations', 'Greek Atrocities in Post-Mudros Anatolia and the West's Approach', 'The Cyprus Question', 'What was done to Bosniaks in the Balkans in the 90s', 'What Armenians did to Azerbaijani Turks in the 90s', 'France's Approach to the Armenian Question Today', 'The Customs Union Signed with Europe in 1995', 'Türkiye's Withdrawal from the F-35 Fighter Jet Project', 'The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Dispute in the Mediterranean', 'Keeping Soldiers and Weapons on the Islands in the Eastern Aegean Issue', 'The PKK, Its Regional Extensions, and Western Support: A Critical Assessment of Türkiye's Security Concerns', 'FETÖ, Pastor Brunson Case, US Attitude on the Issue'. Through the analysis of these cases, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the justice-related challenges Turks faces in its relations with the West, while also offering policy-relevant insights grounded in historical experience.

Post-Mudros Occupations

Following the signing of the Armistice of Mudros by the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, the region of Zonguldak was occupied by French forces due to its substantial reserves of high-energy hard coal (Karakök, 2012, pp. 145-146). Concurrently, Britain seized control of oil-rich territories within the former Ottoman domain. In a strategic agreement, France ceded the Mosul region, located in present-day Northern Iraq, to Britain, while asserting its claims over Syria and Cilicia. This arrangement was justified by French Prime Minister Clemenceau, who highlighted the strategic significance of the Port of Iskenderun as the planned route for transporting Mosul's oil to Western markets. These occupations reflect a broader pattern in which the primary objective of the victorious Allied powers was to extract and transfer both subterranean and surface-level natural resources from the occupied territories for their own economic gain (Arslanyürek, 2020, p. 20). In accordance with international norms, the signing of an armistice signifies only a cessation of hostilities, not a formal transfer of sovereignty or territory. Any subsequent occupation or annexation must be explicitly stipulated in a post-armistice peace agreement. Therefore, the immediate occupations initiated by Britain and France following the Mudros Armistice stand in clear violation of this principle and serve as evidence of their disregard for legal norms and equitable treatment towards the Turks.

Greek Atrocities in Post-Mudros Anatolia and the West's Approach

In the aftermath of these events, certain Western political figures sought to legitimize the occupations by attributing mass violence to the Turks. Eleftherios Venizelos, former Prime Minister of Greece, who resigned following his party's defeat in the 1920 elections, claimed in a letter published in *The Times* on October 14, 1922, that between 1.5 and 2 million Greeks and Armenians had been massacred by the Turks in Anatolia. Similarly, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George asserted that since 1914, the Turks had been responsible for the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Armenians and 500,000 Greeks (Çilingir, 2017, p. 525). However, these claims were not substantiated by contemporary documentation or independent verification, leading to the interpretation that such statements were politically motivated attempts to justify the ongoing occupations and undermine the legitimacy of Turkish resistance.

Contrary to these allegations, a significant body of evidence suggests that atrocities were committed by the occupying Greek forces during and after their landing in Anatolia. One such instance occurred on May 15, 1919, shortly after the Mudros Armistice, when Greek troops, supported diplomatically and logistically by Britain, France, and the US, landed in Izmir. Upon their arrival, sporadic gunfire reportedly erupted, prompting the Greek forces to indiscriminately fire upon the governor's office, nearby barracks, adjacent streets, and surrounding buildings for approximately 45 minutes. Despite no return fire from Turkish troops stationed in the barracks, Greek soldiers proceeded to kill around 300 Turkish servicemen (Çukurova, 1987, pp. 461-464). In the meantime, many Turks from Izmir were killed. The government house was occupied by the Greek soldiers, and then all the people in the building were sent by saying 'Zito Venizelos/Long live Venizelos'. Greek soldiers distributed the weapons and ammunition in the barracks to the Greeks in the region. According to the testimony of a British resident named D. Forbes, who lives in Izmir, a Greek civilian attacked Turkish sailors on a watercraft on the beach with a gun. Greek troops shelled dwellings with Turkish inscriptions on them. The captain of the British Navy ship *Adventure* also stated that he was disgusted by the cruelty inflicted on the Turks by the Greek armed forces. In the report sent by the commander of the American ship named *Arizona* in Izmir to the Navy Commander in Istanbul;

Turkish prisoners were beaten and bayoneted to make them repeat Zito Venizelos. Heavy and thick logs were thrown at these prisoners by the Greeks on the roadside. Machine guns and pistols were fired from a Greek merchant ship and from houses. The wounded were killed by Greek soldiers and thrown into the sea. Their heads were kicked with boats before they were killed (Turan, 2018, pp. 113-115).

Following the Greek occupation of Izmir, Greek military units and irregular armed groups engaged in widespread violence targeting the local Turkish population. According to eyewitness reports and historical accounts, Greek soldiers systematically identified Turkish households, carried out raids, and executed individuals who resisted (Köylü, 2017, p. 154). Villages surrounding Izmir, where Turks constituted the majority, were also subjected to coordinated attacks. These attacks typically began with the looting of homes, followed by arson and, in many cases, the killing of male inhabitants. The demographic impact of World War I had left many of these villages with a diminished male population, which rendered them particularly vulnerable to such incursions (Turan, 2018, pp. 116-118). Fifteen days after the occupation of Izmir, the extent of the violence continued to surface. Numerous corpses were recovered from the sea, including the chained bodies of three Turkish policemen found washed ashore (Çukurova, 1987, pp. 461-172). These findings underscored the brutality with which the Greek forces carried out their occupation.

In another part of Anatolia, Greek forces aimed to establish a Pontic Greek state in the eastern Black Sea region. According to American archival records, approximately 25,000 Greek individuals were transferred to the area for this purpose. Armed Greek bands formed in the region engaged in acts of violence and intimidation against the local Muslim population. Despite the scale of these events, reports of such atrocities were conspicuously absent from most Western documentation. However, Admiral Bristol's reports did acknowledge the occurrence of Greek-perpetrated violence in Anatolia. The American archives, while noting certain developments, did not record any information regarding British support for Greek military operations, nor did they detail the systematic abuses committed by Greek forces (Öksüz & Köse, 2017, pp. 219-230). As reports of massacres and atrocities gained international attention, global public opinion began to focus more intently on the issue. After the Armistice of Mudros, numerous homes belonging to Muslims in and around Izmir were looted by occupying Greek forces. Women were subjected to sexual violence, and civilians were threatened with death should they attempt to report the abuses. In this context, it is noteworthy that Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Izmir is reported to have described the killing of Turks as a

sacred act. Testimonies from both American and British officials documented these incidents. A commission of inquiry established by the Allied Powers to investigate the situation in Anatolia also confirmed the atrocities. However, due to political pressure from Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, the final report was withheld from public release on the grounds that its findings could harm Greek diplomatic interests (Dinçel, 2023, pp. 1205-1208). This suppression of evidence further reinforced the perception that Western powers failed to uphold principles of justice in their approach to Turkish grievances.

The violations were not limited to Western Anatolia. Following the Mudros Armistice, Greek forces also sought to assert control over Eastern Thrace by securing key transportation infrastructure, particularly railway lines. During this period, Greek armed groups engaged in violent actions, including the targeted killing of Turkish security personnel and civil officials. One notable incident involved the ambush and execution of a Turkish prosecutor traveling from Keşan to İpsala with his family. In another case, a Christian religious official in the region was stoned to death, and several Turkish civilians were brutally killed with axes. Reports indicate that between 40 and 50 individuals had their arms severed and valuables confiscated. The Mufti of Hayrabolu was subjected to public humiliation, being dragged by his feet and physically assaulted in front of local residents. Women were reportedly tortured using fire, while in the village of Madıra near Babaeski, seven men were beaten to death and ten women were executed. The village was also shelled during the attack. In surrounding areas, numerous Turks were killed using saws and other means of torture (Törel, 2012, pp. 242-248).

Between March and June 1921, the Adapazarı region remained under Greek military occupation for approximately four months. During this period, Greek forces inflicted extensive destruction on the area, reportedly demolishing structures across nearly seventy villages and neighborhoods. A large portion of the male population was executed, while some individuals deemed potentially useful were taken captive. Numerous women were subjected to sexual violence (Türkmen, 1999, pp. 1013-1032).

Arnold J. Toynbee undertook an investigation in Anatolia in 1921. He was accompanied by his wife, Rosalind Toynbee. Mrs Toynbee took notes during her investigations in and around Yalova on 24 and 25 May 1921 (Çufalı, 1998, pp. 33-34). In May 1921, the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee conducted a field investigation in Anatolia, accompanied by his wife, Rosalind Toynbee. Her notes, taken during their visit to Yalova and its surroundings on 24–25 May, provide significant insight into the situation on the ground. According to her account, a Greek officer openly showed the bodies of those he had executed to M. Gehri, the representative of the International Red Cross. When Gehri inquired about the reasons for the killings, the officer reportedly stated that he believed it was 'better to kill' (Toynbee, 1922, p. 286). It has been recorded that approximately 5,500 Muslims were killed in the Gemlik region in just six weeks, and that the local Muslim population decreased by three-quarters (Çufalı, 1998, p. 35). Greek officers showed Toynbee the bodies of three murdered women to justify their actions and lied that they were Greek women killed by Turks, even though they were Turkish. Mrs Toynbee stated that she was very sure that the women were Turkish (Toynbee, 1922, pp. 300-301).

Following the launch of the Great Offensive on 26 August 1922, the Greek army, in retreat, implemented a scorched-earth policy. As they withdrew, Greek units reportedly destroyed agricultural lands, set fire to settlements, and carried out massacres against the Muslim civilian population (Üçüncü, 2022, p. 85). In a telegram dated 31 August 1922, then-Prime Minister Hüseyin Rauf Orbay informed the US High Commissioner that Greek forces had set Muslim neighborhoods ablaze and massacred villagers during their withdrawal from Afyonkarahisar. In Ulucak village, women and children were among those targeted and killed. Further documentation from the US National Archives confirms that, during the Battle of

Dumlupınar, the villages of Hamamköy and Taşköy were torched, and many of their inhabitants were executed (Dinçel, 2023, p. 1222). These reports were corroborated by the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, Sir Horace Rumbold, who acknowledged the veracity of Turkish complaints regarding Greek atrocities during the retreat. The League of Nations Council, while recognizing these violations, expressed concern that such documentation might later be used by Türkiye to justify reprisals against Christian communities. Nonetheless, the Greek forces were expelled from Anatolia without further escalation (Çilingir, 2017, p. 538).

The systematic nature of these acts, including massacres, torture, rape, and the intentional destruction of civilian settlements, indicates that the underlying objective was not solely military but also demographic. These actions aimed to drastically reduce the Turkish population in the occupied territories, resettle Greek populations, and ultimately annex these areas into Greece (Yılmaz, 2024, p. 6). Similar patterns of violence were documented in other regions such as Aydın, Balıkesir, and İnegöl (Bostancı, 2021, pp. 52-81; Sunay, 2021, pp. 1-37; Yetik, 2016, pp. 107-120). It is particularly noteworthy that these operations were often conducted with the support, or at least the acquiescence, of local Greek and Armenian communities, who had previously coexisted with the Turks for centuries. Despite the severity of the actions undertaken, Greece continued to enjoy diplomatic support from Western powers, particularly the United Kingdom (UK). This persistent political alignment, in the face of such atrocities, reinforces the perception that Western powers did not approach matters concerning Turks with impartiality or adherence to the principle of justice.

Cyprus Issue

Cyprus came under Ottoman sovereignty in 1517 and was officially incorporated into the empire in 1571 following its conquest. However, in the aftermath of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, the administration of the island was temporarily transferred to the UK as part of a strategic agreement. During the First World War, Britain formally annexed Cyprus, thereby detaching it from the Ottoman political structure. Following this development, the idea of Enosis, or the union of Cyprus with Greece, began to gain significant traction among Greek Cypriots (Kılıçoğlu, 2022, p. 1).

By the 1950s, this aspiration for union transformed into organized violence, with the formation of the EOKA terrorist organization by Greek Cypriots. EOKA initiated a campaign of terror and massacres targeting Turkish Cypriots, which led to Türkiye's increased involvement in the issue. As a result of negotiations involving the UK, Greece, and Türkiye, the Republic of Cyprus was established in 1960, based on the Zurich and London Agreements signed in 1959. These agreements designated Türkiye, Greece, and the UK as guarantor powers to ensure the constitutional order and bi-communal structure of the new republic (Geniş, 2021, pp. 232-252).

Despite these arrangements, Greek Cypriot aggression against the Turkish population continued. The events of December 1963, commonly known as Bloody Christmas, marked a significant escalation in the conflict, during which hundreds of Turkish Cypriots lost their lives. One of the most tragic incidents of this period was the killing of the wife and three children of Dr. Nihat İlhan, Chief Physician of the Turkish Cypriot Forces Regiment, who were murdered in the bathtub of their home where they had sought refuge (Keser, 2011, pp. 95-101). In response to these atrocities, Türkiye considered military intervention. However, on 5 June 1964, the US sent a diplomatic note to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, which later became known as the 'Johnson Letter'. In a letter sent during the period known as the 'Cold War', it was emphasized that American-supplied weapons could not be used in Turkish operation without US approval, and warned that NATO might not support Türkiye in the event of Soviet response. Türkiye was

unable to carry out an operation in Cyprus due to this warning (Alptekin & Özer, 2020, pp. 287-288).

The Turkish Cypriot Administration was established on 27 December 1967 due to the terror applied by the Greek Cypriots to the Turks in Cyprus. Tensions escalated further in the early 1970s. Although Greek Cypriot leader Archbishop Makarios acknowledged Enosis as a long-term goal, he advocated a more gradual approach. This stance angered the military junta in Greece, which, in 1972, demanded that Makarios dismiss Cypriot officials who opposed immediate union with Greece. Makarios refused the proposal and publicly held the Greek junta, particularly President General Gizikis, responsible for escalating tensions on the island.

On 15 July 1974, the Greek military regime, with backing from the US, orchestrated a coup in Cyprus and removed Makarios from power. The coup raised legitimate concerns in Türkiye that the island would be annexed by Greece. In line with its rights as a guarantor power under the Zurich and London Agreements, Türkiye launched a military intervention on 20 July 1974 to prevent the island's unilateral annexation and to protect the Turkish Cypriot population (Kılıoğlu, 2022, pp. 3-8; Yılmaz, 2017, pp.88-94).

Following Türkiye's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was proclaimed in 1975 as a transitional political structure. This entity later evolved into the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), formally declared on 15 November 1983. In the subsequent decades, numerous diplomatic initiatives were launched to resolve the island's long-standing division. One of the most significant initiatives was the plan proposed in 2002 by then United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan, commonly known as the *Annan Plan*. Presented to both Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities on 11 November 2002, the plan proposed the establishment of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal republic as a reunified state. A crucial component of the plan was that, if accepted by both parties, the unified Cyprus would be granted full European Union membership (Dinçer, 2019, pp. 61-64). Despite the fact that it was the Greek Cypriot side that rejected the Annan Plan in the 2004 referendum, the European Union proceeded to admit the Greek Cypriot Administration into the Union on 1 May 2004, treating it as the sole legitimate authority representing the entire island. This decision effectively rewarded the side that had obstructed a UN-backed reunification initiative, thereby undermining the efforts toward a comprehensive and negotiated settlement. The acceptance of the Greek Cypriot Administration, despite its rejection of the UN plan, has been perceived by many observers as a political concession that contradicts the principles of fairness and impartiality in international diplomacy.

On 15 July 2024, marking the 50th anniversary of Türkiye's military intervention in Cyprus, Greek Defence Minister Nikos Dendias referred to the presence of Turkish troops on the island as an 'occupation' during his official visit to the Greek Cypriot Administration (Hellenic Republic Ministry of National Defence, 2024). This characterization, however, overlooks a crucial historical reality: since the 1974 intervention, which was carried out under the guarantor rights granted by the Zurich and London Agreements, no massacres or large-scale violence have been perpetrated against the Turkish Cypriot population. On the contrary, the island has enjoyed a relatively stable and peaceful environment in the north, in stark contrast to the period preceding the intervention, during which Turkish Cypriots were subjected to systematic violence and displacement. This enduring peace challenges the prevailing narrative often adopted by certain Western actors, and suggests that Türkiye's intervention played a stabilizing role rather than constituting an act of aggression.

Similarly, on 6 November 2024, during the 11th Summit of the Organisation of Turkic States held in Bishkek, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus President Ersin Tatar participated as an observer. In response, Josep Borrell, the European Union's High Representative for

Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, issued a statement describing this participation as an 'attempt to legitimise the formation of Turkish Cypriot separatists' (Euro News, 2024). However, it was the Greek Cypriot side that rejected the Annan plan in 2004, which included the proposal for a unified federal state. The Turkish side agreed. It is therefore clear that the separatist formation here is not the TRNC. In this respect, it is once again clear that the West is not being fair in its relations with Turks.

What Happened to Bosniaks in the Balkans in the 1990s

The Bosnian War, which began in April 1992 and concluded with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995, witnessed systematic acts of genocide perpetrated by Serb forces against the Bosniak population, particularly in eastern Bosnia (Semercioğlu, 2017, p. 1342). One of the most tragic episodes of this period occurred in Srebrenica, where Bosniaks resisted Serbian aggression. Prior to the conflict, the population of Srebrenica was approximately ten thousand; however, due to the influx of Muslim refugees fleeing surrounding areas, this number rose to around sixty thousand. Many of those who sought refuge were forced to endure the harsh winter conditions without proper shelter or access to adequate nutrition (Dikici, 2005, p. 136).

Although UN peacekeepers were present in the area, the Serbs were the dominant force (Semercioğlu, 2017, p. 1347). In several instances, food and water provided through aid convoys were allegedly poisoned by Serb forces. Moreover, there are disturbing accounts indicating that some UN personnel in Srebrenica exploited the vulnerability of Bosniak women, allegedly demanding sexual favors in exchange for basic necessities (Dikici, 2005, pp. 136-137).

While the Serbs attacked the town with the resources of the Yugoslav army, the Muslim Bosnians were able to resist with limited resources due to the arms embargo (Alp, 2017, p. 158). In 1993, the UN Security Council declared six regions, including Srebrenica, as 'safe zones'. Following this declaration, Dutch peacekeepers arrived in Srebrenica and collected weapons from Bosniak defenders, citing the demilitarized status of the area. However, the Serbs were allowed to retain their arms, creating a severe imbalance and leaving the Bosniaks vulnerable (Ayhan, 2020, p. 164). In the face of the genocide of the unarmed Muslim Bosniaks by the Serbs, the Peacekeeping Force could only watch (Dikici, 2005, pp. 141).

The French Commander of the Peacekeeping Force, General Bernard Janvier, prevented the aerial intervention to the region to stop the genocide. On 6 July 1995, the Serbs, under the command of Mladic, subjected the Bosniaks who took refuge in the Peacekeeping Force to heavy artillery fire. When the Serbs attacked again four days later on 10 July, Colonel Karremans, the Dutch Commander in Srebrenica, requested air support from NATO, but the French Janvier again refused (Ayhan, 2020, pp. 165-166). On 11 July 1995, Serbs led by Serb Commander Ratko Mladic entered Srebrenica. At this time, they did not encounter any resistance from the Dutch soldiers who were the UN Peacekeeping Force in the region (Dikici, 2005, pp. 142-143). Subsequently, one of the gravest atrocities in post World War II Europe unfolded. Approximately 25,000 Bosniaks attempted to flee to the UN base in the nearby village of Potočari. Only about 6,000 were admitted into the compound. In a highly controversial act, the Dutch soldiers forcibly removed these individuals from the camp and handed them over to Serb forces. Although the Serbs promised that no harm would come to those who surrendered, more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were executed between 11 and 17 July 1995. In total, it is estimated that approximately 12,000 Bosniaks were systematically killed during this phase of the war (Alp, 2017, pp. 153-156). As can be seen, there was a Turkophobia among the Serbs. It is understood that there was also Turkish-Muslim enmity among the Western-dominated powers that did not prevent them. Disturbingly, while carrying out the massacres, Serb forces

were reported to have shouted slogans such as ‘We do not want Turks,’ equating Islam with Turkish identity (Dikici, 2005, p. 155). This reflects a deeply rooted historical hostility, or Turkophobia, within certain segments of the Serbian population, shaped by centuries of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. Moreover, the passivity or complicity of Western-led international institutions during the genocide has led to criticism that such sentiments may have found resonance, or at the very least, were not countered with the necessary resolve.

Although the Dayton Peace Agreement is often credited with ending the violence in Bosnia, scholarly evaluations have suggested that the agreement’s structure impedes long-term stability. Rather than fostering unity and integration, the accord institutionalized ethnic divisions, thereby obstructing social cohesion and hindering Bosnia and Herzegovina’s path to European Union membership (Bati & Tunbul, 2020, pp.79-80). In light of these developments, it becomes apparent that Western actors, through both action and inaction, failed to uphold the principles of justice and impartiality not only toward the Bosniak population but also toward communities identified with Turkish-Muslim heritage. The selective application of international norms in this context reflects a broader pattern of asymmetry in the West’s treatment of Turks and related populations.

What Armenians Did to Azerbaijani Turks in the 90s

On 25 February 1992, Armenian forces launched a large-scale assault on the town of Khojaly with the objective of gaining full control over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, with the exception of Shusha. This operation was carried out with the support of a regiment from the Russian Army stationed in the region. As a result of the attack, 613 Azerbaijani Turks lost their lives, including 63 children, 106 women, and 70 elderly individuals. Additionally, 76 of the 487 Azerbaijani Turks who were seriously wounded were identified as children. Moreover, over 150 individuals were reported missing, and 1275 people were taken prisoner. These figures are based on official Azerbaijani records; however, according to various unofficial sources, the number of those killed may have reached 1300, and more than 1000 people were wounded (Arslan, 2022, pp. 522-523). Despite the scale and nature of the violence, the individuals responsible for the atrocities committed in Khojaly have not been subjected to prosecution before international courts, nor have they been held accountable by any international legal mechanism (Mustafayev, 2011, p. 38). The absence of judicial measures in response to the Khojaly Massacre has raised significant concerns about the impartiality and consistency of the international community, particularly Western institutions, in addressing crimes committed against Turkic populations. The absence of international legal consequences in such a case contributes to the perception that justice is not applied equitably when victims are from certain ethnic or national backgrounds. From this perspective, the response to the Khojaly tragedy illustrates a broader pattern of selective justice and highlights the failure of the international system to respond effectively to grave human rights violations committed against Turks.

France's Approach to the Armenian Question Today

The final declaration adopted at the Lisbon Summit of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1996 called for the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding Azerbaijani territories. The declaration further emphasised the necessity of enabling the return of displaced Azerbaijani persons to their original homes (Yılmaz, 2023, p. 22).

More than two decades later, on 19 September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a military operation aimed at restoring full sovereignty over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The operation concluded successfully within 24 hours, resulting in the reintegration of the territory into Azerbaijan’s internationally recognised borders. However, in a statement issued shortly thereafter, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the Azerbaijani operation as

'illegal' and 'immoral,' and condemned it in the strongest terms. Subsequently, on 3 October 2023, then-French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna visited Armenia in a show of diplomatic support. During her visit, she posted a photograph of Mount Ararat, a geographical landmark situated within the sovereign territory of Türkiye, on her social media account, accompanying the image with a message stating that she had returned 'to Armenia'. (Küçükaksu, 2023). This act was widely interpreted as an implicit endorsement of irredentist claims, as it symbolically associated a prominent Turkish territory with Armenia. Such reactions by France to Azerbaijan's efforts to restore control over its own internationally recognised territory, and the symbolic gestures made during diplomatic visits, reveal an evident inconsistency in the application of international legal and normative standards. These developments have reinforced perceptions that certain Western powers, particularly France, maintain a biased stance in their approach toward the Turkish and Turkic world, often disregarding the principles of territorial integrity and state sovereignty when it pertains to Turks or its allies.

Customs Union Signed with Europe in 1995

Although the primary aim of the agreement establishing the Customs Union between Türkiye and the European Union was to initiate a broader process of integration that would ultimately facilitate Türkiye's accession to the EU, this objective remains unfulfilled. Despite the prolonged duration of the Customs Union, the existing framework continues to generate structural disadvantages for Türkiye. One of the most significant issues is the persistence of road transport quotas, which hinder Türkiye's ability to benefit fully from the Customs Union. Furthermore, Türkiye, not being an EU member state, is excluded from the decision-making mechanisms that govern the customs framework, despite being obliged to comply with its outcomes. Although Türkiye has repeatedly called for an update of the Customs Union agreement to address these asymmetries and inefficiencies, the EU has not taken any concrete steps in response to these requests (Ağzitemiz, 2024, pp. 875-880). This ongoing situation underscores the asymmetrical nature of Türkiye-EU relations and suggests that the European Union continues to prioritise its own strategic and economic interests in its engagement with Turks, rather than promoting a balanced and equitable partnership.

Türkiye's Exclusion from the F-35 Fighter Project

In 2001, the F-35 fifth-generation fighter jet program was initiated as a multinational project involving nine partner countries: the US, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Türkiye, Canada, Australia, Norway, and Denmark. These countries were granted rights related to the production, development, and sale of the aircraft (Ermiş, 2021, p. 465).

However, a significant disagreement arose between Türkiye and the US concerning long-range air defense systems. The US did not approve Türkiye's requests to purchase systems such as the Patriot, prompting Türkiye to meet its defense needs by acquiring the Russian-made S-400 Air Defense System. The delivery of the S-400 systems began in July 2019. Following this, Türkiye was removed from the F-35 program by the US under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). This marked the first time that CAATSA sanctions were imposed on a NATO member state (Şen & Yaşa, 2024, p. 326).

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the decision in an official statement released on the day of the announcement (Republic Of Türkiye Ministry Of Affairs, 2020). The justification offered by the US for Türkiye's exclusion from the program was the potential risk of sensitive F-35 technologies being exposed to Russia through the integration of the S-400 system. However, this justification has been criticized, particularly because Greece, a NATO member operating Russian-made S-300 air defense systems, has continued to receive deliveries of F-35 aircraft. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has also pointed out that India, another country that procured the S-400 system, was not subjected to similar sanctions (BBC

News Türkçe, 2022). These developments have led to widespread perceptions within Türkiye that the country is being treated inconsistently compared to others under similar circumstances. From this perspective, the differential application of sanctions suggests that the US, and more broadly the West, does not maintain an even-handed approach in its relations with Turks.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Dispute in the Mediterranean

The concept of the continental shelf is inherently tied to the landmass of a coastal state and derives from its sovereignty over that territory. In contrast, the establishment of an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) requires an explicit declaration by the coastal state, and overlapping claims may arise when multiple states assert jurisdiction over the same maritime area (Akkuş, 2023, p. 177).

In recent years, oil and natural gas exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean have intensified disputes concerning EEZ claims. A significant factor contributing to these tensions is the recognition of the Greek Cypriot Administration as the sole representative of Cyprus by Western countries and Greece, while the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) remains unrecognized. As a result, the argument has been advanced that Türkiye has no legal basis to assert EEZ rights around the island of Cyprus. This stance has led to ongoing disputes between Türkiye, Greece, and several EU member states. Greece's agreements on EEZ with the Greek Cypriot Administration and Egypt, together with similar agreements signed by the Greek Cypriot Administration with Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon, are widely perceived in Türkiye as strategic efforts to restrict Turkish maritime access in both the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean (Tuncer & Altınsoy, 2020, pp. 21-38).

In response to these developments, Türkiye signed a maritime boundary delimitation agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord on 27 November 2019 (Alper, 2020, p. 36). The agreement was also notified to the UN and it was ensured that it was heard by the whole world. This agreement was accepted by the UN with the signature of the UN Secretary-General on September 30, 2020.

Notably, in 2010, the European Union commissioned a map prepared by two experts from the University of Seville that delineated European maritime jurisdiction areas. The Greek Cypriot Administration used this map as a basis for its own EEZ claims. These claims have been supported by both the EU and the US. In this context, the EU imposed sanctions on two Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) officials on 11 November 2019, in response to Türkiye's hydrocarbon exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, on 12 December 2019, the European Council declared that the Türkiye–Libya maritime agreement lacked legal validity on the grounds that it violated the sovereign rights of third parties and contravened the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Consequently, Türkiye was formally warned by the EU. Additionally, the US has expressed strong support for Israel, which has entered into an energy exploration agreement with the Greek Cypriot Administration (Mira, 2022, pp. 18-32).

The 2010 EU-endorsed maritime map demonstrates that the maritime space envisioned for Türkiye significantly restricts its access beyond its immediate coastlines. While Türkiye's maritime delimitation agreement with Libya has been criticized as unlawful for allegedly infringing on the rights of third states, such criticism appears inconsistent with the broader regional context. From Türkiye's perspective, the current stance of Western actors reflects a lack of impartiality and a tendency to support a maritime order that disproportionately limits Turkish interests in the region.

The Question of Keeping Soldiers and Weapons on the Islands of the Eastern Aegean

The status of the Eastern Aegean Islands has long been a subject of contention, particularly due to their geographical proximity to the Turkish mainland. Under the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and the Paris Peace Treaty (1947), these islands were ceded to Greece on the condition that they remain unarmed and demilitarized (Pazarıcı, 1988, pp. 151-153).

Türkiye accepted their transfer on this basis, emphasizing the importance of their non-militarized status for regional stability. However, the emergence of the Cyprus issue in the 1950s marked a turning point. From that period onward, Greece gradually began to deploy military assets on the islands in question. This trend has continued into the present day, with the militarization process reportedly receiving support from the US, a NATO ally of Türkiye. In response to these developments, Türkiye submitted an official complaint to the UN on 13 July 2021, asserting that Greece's actions constituted a breach of the relevant international agreements. Furthermore, on 26 September 2022, Türkiye issued formal diplomatic notes of protest to both Greece and the US via its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Gülgezen & Hüseyinoğlu, 2024, pp. 159-172). These ongoing developments suggest a disregard for the legal framework established by international treaties. From Türkiye's perspective, the ongoing militarization of the Eastern Aegean Islands, despite treaty obligations and repeated objections from Ankara, reflects an asymmetrical approach by Western actors. In particular, the backing of these actions by the US raises concerns regarding the consistency and fairness of allied commitments within the NATO framework and broader international law.

The PKK, Its Regional Extensions, and Western Support: A Critical Assessment of Türkiye's Security Concerns

Established in 1978, the PKK began its first armed attacks within the borders of Türkiye in 1984. In the following years, its affiliated structures in Syria, Iraq, and Iran were consolidated under the umbrella of the Koma Civakên Kurdistan (KCK) in 2005. The Syrian wing of this organization, the YPG (People's Protection Units), was formed in 2003. Following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 and the rise of ISIS in 2015, the YPG emerged as a key actor in the region, receiving substantial support, particularly in the form of weapons and ammunition, from the US. During this period, the YPG not only consolidated its control over northern Syria but also carried out demographic changes. Arab and Turkmen communities in the region were reportedly displaced, and the area came under the firm control of the YPG, which positioned itself as the dominant power among the local Kurdish population (Gürbüz, 2021, pp. 901-902). Although the PYD (Democratic Union Party) and its armed wing, the YPG (People's Protection Units), operate under different names than the PKK, they maintain close ideological and organizational ties with it. Despite efforts, particularly by Western actors such as the US, to portray these entities as distinct from the PKK, the structural and functional connections between them have been evident since their establishment. The cooperation between the PYD/YPG and the PKK serves to reinforce separatist agendas and has contributed to the perpetuation of instability in the region. The consistent political and military support provided to these groups by some Western states has further complicated regional security dynamics and Türkiye's counter-terrorism efforts (Şahin & İrdem, 2017, pp. 22-23).

In 2016, the YPG publicly stated that approximately 300 US military personnel were providing direct support to their operations. By 2017, it was reported that nearly 5,000 members of the US Special Forces, along with approximately 200 personnel from the French Special Forces, were operating in coordination with the YPG. In addition to these formal military units, a significant number of foreign mercenaries were also reportedly active in the region, providing various forms of support to the YPG. According to a 2018 statement released by the US

Department of Defense (Pentagon), the operational expenses of 5,508 contracted personnel in Iraq and Syria were being covered. Furthermore, until the launch of Türkiye's Operation Peace Spring in 2019, the US supplied the YPG with thousands of truckloads of military equipment. These shipments included a substantial quantity of anti-tank missiles and several hundred armored vehicles (Gürbüz, 2021, pp. 911-914). The delivery of advanced anti-tank systems to the YPG, which has been justified on the grounds of combating ISIS, raises significant strategic concerns. Given that ISIS does not operate with armored units requiring such weaponry, the provision of these systems suggests an alternative purpose, potentially directed against Türkiye. The sustained military assistance and training provided by the US, a NATO ally, to the YPG, widely considered the Syrian branch of the PKK, have had direct implications for Türkiye's national security. The PKK, designated as a terrorist organization by both Türkiye and several international actors, has been involved in violent attacks against Turkish security forces for decades. A notable example of such aggression occurred on 23 October 2024, when the PKK targeted Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), a critical institution within Türkiye's defense sector responsible for the production of UAVs and other strategic platforms that have previously weakened the organization's operational capabilities.

This situation invites a broader comparative perspective: if a terrorist organization were to emerge along the borders of the US and routinely target American citizens, institutions, and military personnel, it is difficult to envisage any tolerance, let alone material support, being extended to such a group by other states. The idea that third-party nations would offer arms and logistical backing to such an entity, while simultaneously stationing their troops in the region to shield it from counterterrorism operations, would be inconceivable. Yet, in the case of Türkiye, this scenario is not hypothetical but rather an ongoing reality. Accordingly, this dynamic reinforces the perception that Western powers, particularly the US, adopt a double standard in their approach to security partnerships and counterterrorism when it comes to Turks.

FETÖ, Pastor Brunson Case, US Attitude on the Issue

The coup attempt orchestrated by the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) on July 15, 2016, was successfully thwarted. In the subsequent legal proceedings, statements provided by witnesses indicated a connection between American pastor Andrew Craig Brunson, who was residing in Izmir at the time, and FETÖ. Brunson was arrested on December 9, 2016, with a 35-year prison sentence being sought. The indictment alleged that Brunson also had ties to several politically significant incidents in Türkiye, including the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the Kobani demonstrations in 2014, the Suruç bombing in 2015, and the trench warfare episodes that occurred in Türkiye's eastern and southeastern regions between August 2015 and March 2016. The release of Andrew Craig Brunson was formally demanded by then-President of the US, Donald Trump. President Trump publicly stated that Türkiye would face severe economic repercussions should the request be denied, implying that the Turkish economy could be destabilized. Subsequently, the US imposed targeted sanctions on Türkiye's Ministers of Interior and Justice in response to Brunson's continued detention (Akkaş et al., 2019, pp. 2247-2248).

Following the US' request for the release of Andrew Craig Brunson, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan proposed a potential exchange involving Fethullah Gülen, the leader of the FETÖ organization residing in the US. However, this proposal was rejected by American authorities. Brunson was subsequently convicted on charges of 'knowingly and willingly aiding FETÖ' and sentenced to three years, one month, and fifteen days of imprisonment. In July 2018, after approximately nineteen months in custody, his sentence was converted to house arrest. Ultimately, in October of the same year, approximately twenty-two months after his initial detention, Brunson was released (Yılmaz, 2022, p. 62). In the course of an official visit to the US on behalf of Halkbank, Türkiye's state-owned financial institution, Deputy General

Manager Mehmet Hakan Atilla traveled to New York on 23 March 2017. Upon completing his duties and preparing to return to Türkiye on 27 March 2017 via JFK Airport, Atilla was detained by US authorities and subsequently imprisoned. He was accused of allegedly facilitating the circumvention of US sanctions imposed on Iran. Following legal proceedings, a US federal court sentenced him to 32 months of imprisonment on 16 May 2018. Atilla was released on 19 July 2019, after serving 28 months of his sentence (BBC News Türkçe, 2019).

The timing of Mehmet Hakan Atilla's arrest during his official visit to the US has raised questions regarding a potential correlation with the detention of Pastor Andrew Brunson in Türkiye. Despite Türkiye's repeated formal requests for the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, who is widely regarded by Turkish authorities as the mastermind behind the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, the US has not provided an affirmative response. Furthermore, individuals alleged to have been affiliated with the coup attempt and who subsequently sought refuge in the US have not been returned to Türkiye through extradition mechanisms. These developments have contributed to the emergence of a perception within Turkish public and political discourse that implies a certain degree of tolerance or even implicit support by the US toward the FETÖ organization. From this perspective, the broader conduct of Western actors, particularly the US, is often viewed as lacking in impartiality and fairness in their bilateral relations with Turks.

Conclusion

Although conceptions of justice may vary across regions, cultures, and societies, this study adopts a normative definition of justice as *a moral virtue that necessitates fair and equitable conduct*. Historically, it has been observed that the Ottoman Empire was subjected to unjust treatment by Western powers, particularly during periods of relative weakness. Similarly, in the post-imperial era, the Republic of Türkiye has encountered comparable instances of injustice in its interactions with the West, suggesting a continuity in the asymmetrical nature of these relations. It has been determined that this unjust attitude was directed not only at Türkiye but also at Turks in general and other Muslim Ottoman peoples, such as the Bosniac, whom the West associated with Turkish identity.

This study has reached the conclusion that Türkiye has historically been subjected to structural injustices in its relations with Western powers. An analysis of the last century reveals a consistent pattern of Western support for various ethnic and political groups, including Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, often to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire and, subsequently, the Republic of Türkiye. These interventions have manifested across political, economic, social, and military domains, and appear to have been motivated predominantly by the strategic interests of Western states.

Over time, such interventions have had a measurable impact on public perceptions within Türkiye. Historical events such as the mass killings of Turks and Bosnians in the Balkans, Anatolia, Cyprus, Bosnia, and Azerbaijan, many of which occurred with either tacit or explicit support from Western actors, have contributed to a deepening sense of alienation from the West among the Turkish public. Contemporary developments further reinforce this perception. For instance, the continued support provided by certain Western states, particularly the United States and some European Union members, to the PKK and its affiliated structures, despite their official designation as terrorist organizations, sustains widespread distrust and skepticism within Turkish society.

In examining specific cases, contradictions in Western policies become apparent. One notable instance involves the EU's 2010 maritime jurisdiction map, which significantly limits Türkiye's access to international waters. In response, Türkiye signed a maritime delimitation agreement with Libya in 2019. However, the EU rejected this agreement on the grounds that it allegedly violated the sovereign rights of third states, an argument that is viewed by many in

Türkiye as inconsistent, particularly in light of the EU's previous positions regarding similar maritime claims advanced by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration.

The broader conclusion drawn from these patterns is that expectations of equitable treatment from Western actors may be unrealistic in the absence of significant structural shifts in power dynamics. Within this context, the idea of establishing a more assertive geopolitical posture gains prominence. It is suggested that a Türkiye with the capacity to exert significant influence at the international level in political, economic, and military terms would be better positioned to demand equitable treatment.

Moreover, it is proposed that such a transformation cannot occur in isolation. The formation of strategic alliances, particularly through mechanisms such as an Islamic Union, a Turkic Union, or a broader Turkish-Islamic cooperation framework, is seen as essential. These alliances could serve as a counterbalance to existing Western blocs, not only enhancing regional autonomy but also contributing to a more pluralistic and just international order.

Ultimately, the findings of this study support the view that power and unity are prerequisites for achieving justice on the international stage. The pursuit of cooperation among states and communities that share grievances regarding Western-dominated global governance may contribute to the emergence of a more balanced international system, in which the interests and rights of all actors, including Turks and the broader Turkish-Islamic world, are acknowledged and respected.

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