

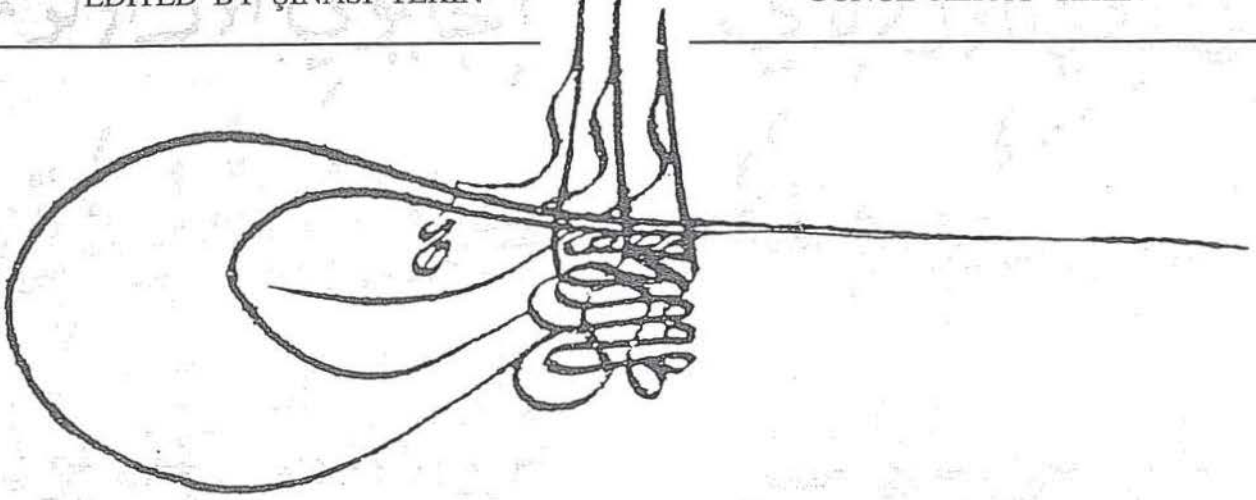
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ATSIZ AND TÜRKEŞ:  
A NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF PAN-TURKISM IN TURKEY

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Newly available materials throw some light on the inner workings of the Pan-Turkists in the Republic of Turkey and most particularly on the relations of two of the main exponents of Pan-Turkism there, Hüseyin Nihal Atsız and Alparslan Türkeş.

Atsız (1905-1975), a teacher, journalist and novelist, was since the 1930s an indefatigable campaigner for both cultural and political Pan-Turkism.<sup>1</sup> Later, during the Second World War, he challenged the Kemalist regime with a different kind of ideology -- a call for a Pan-Turk union, based on a common glorious past and aiming at the re-creation of a huge powerful state led by Turkey. The newspapers Atsız published, edited and wrote in were read by a small but elitist circle supporting his views, which were often colored by a racist approach, not unexpectedly echoing a claim to the superiority of the Turkish race, parallel to the Nazis' argument for the *Herrenvolk*. While several other Pan-Turk groups competed with Atsız and his newspapers,<sup>2</sup> he was often considered as the dean of Pan-Turkists in the 1930s and 1940s.

Türkeş (1917-1995), a younger contemporary of Atsız, was born in Nicosia to a family originating from Kayseri; he emigrated to Turkey in 1932 and soon chose a military career. According to his own evidence<sup>3</sup> and later that of his biographers,<sup>4</sup> he had been imbued with strong Pan-Turk sentiments since his schooldays and did not hesitate to share them with his military colleagues. However, due to the stringent regulations forbidding the military from intervening in politics, he could hardly meddle actively in what was then considered a controversial political issue. This was particularly true in the years of the Second World War, when Turkey, neutral through most of the war years, had to be doubly careful about taking sides in any Pan-Turk propaganda, since so many peoples of Turkic origins were living in the Soviet Union and some of them were fighting in or against its armies.

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1 For a general estimate of the man and his career, see the biography by Osman F. Sertkaya, *Hüseyin Nihal Atsız* (Ankara, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1987). Sina Akşin and others, *Türkiye tarihi, 5. Bugünkü Türkiye 1980-1995* (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1997), pp. 274-277.

2 Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (London: Christopher Hurst and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 88ff.

3 Alparslan Türkeş, *Türkeş'in anıları. Şahinlerin dansı*, ed. by Hulûsi Turgut (Istanbul: ABC Basın Ajansı Yayınları, 1995).

4 Such as Cavid Ersen, *Başbuğ* (Istanbul: Sinan Yayınevi, 1976).

One does not know much about early connections between Atsız and Türkeş, but these were shaped within Pan-Turk circles. In his memoirs,<sup>5</sup> Türkeş acknowledged that he had been influenced in his youth by Atsız's articles and poetry. On a more personal level, as a *lycee* pupil Türkeş repeatedly visited Atsız's home in Istanbul; later, during his military service, he met Atsız whenever he came to Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> According to Türkeş's own evidence, there was a "Turanian" (i.e., a Pan-Turk) circle in the military forces at the time,<sup>7</sup> of which he may well have been a member.

Atsız and Türkeş reappear together in what was considered, then and later, as a watershed by Pan-Turkists in Turkey -- the anti-Communist demonstrations in Istanbul and Ankara on 3 May 1944, held in defiance of the prevailing martial law. Pan-Turk slogans were in evidence, protesting the deportation of Tatars and other Turkic groups in the Soviet Union. The leaders of the demonstration were arrested, tried and found guilty of subversion; then the verdict was quashed on appeal. Atsız and Türkeş were in the dock together, with some others, and Türkeş later wrote an entire book on these events.<sup>8</sup>

Two decades later, in August 1965, Türkeş, by then a civilian, was elected chairman of the Republican Peasants' Nation party, whose name he later changed into Nationalist Action Party.<sup>9</sup> True to his ideals, Türkeş injected a large dose of Pan-Turkism into the party's ideology, consistently upholding the cause of Turkic peoples in the Communist states, as well as in Greece, Iraq, Iran and elsewhere. This gained him the support of Pan-Turkists, who, while not very numerous in Turkey at the time, were dedicated and articulate. Later, at some point in the 1970s, however, one notes a break between Türkeş and organized Pan-Turk groups, the reason for which was in some doubt until recently.

Historians of Pan-Turkism in Turkey can now refer to Türkeş's own account of this rupture.<sup>10</sup> As Türkeş tells it, Atsız was boasting that it was he, Atsız, who was actually leading the Nationalist Action Party -- a claim rejected by Türkeş. Moreover, in 1971, Atsız published some articles reemphasizing his well-known racist theories ("superiority of the Turkish race") and attacking Islam (which he perceived as inferior to Shamanism). Türkeş, as chairman of a small political party interested in improving its public image, wrote to Atsız, distancing himself from the latter's opinions. The dates of the letters are not given in Türkeş's account, but they must have been sent in 1972 or 1973, when the 1973 parliamentary elections were drawing near.

The rift between the two and their respective supporters deepened and Türkeş did not even attend Atsız's funeral on 11 December 1975. Meanwhile, although leading a tiny group of only three members in the National Assembly, Türkeş had become Deputy Prime-Minister in early 1975, thanks to the quirks of coalition arithmetics, serving in this capacity for two-

5 *Sabah* daily, 18 June 1994.

6 *Türkeş'in anıları*, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

7 *Sabah*, 19 June 1994.

8 Alparslan Türkeş, *1944 milliyetçilik olayı* (Istanbul: Yayılcık Matbaası, 1968). See also Muammer Taylak, *27 Mayıs ve Türkiye* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1976).

9 On whose history and fortunes cf. Mustafa Çalik, *Siyasî kültür ve sosyolojisinin bazı kavramları açısından MHP hareketi'nin kaynakları ve gelişimi (1965-1980)* (Ankara: Cedit Neşriyat, 1995). Jacob M. Landau, "The Nationalist Action Party in Turkey," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17, no. 4: 1982, pp. 587-606.

10 *Türkeş'in anıları*, *op. cit.*, pp. 409-419.

and-a-half years. As such, he must have recoiled from displaying any public identification with one of the most extreme exponents of Pan-Turk racist chauvinism. Although never giving up his Pan-Turk convictions, Türkeş had become somewhat more moderate in his speeches and writings whenever he referred to External Turks. As a Deputy Prime Minister, he had to exercise caution not to create diplomatic incidents with states in which Turks were living.

In a parallel way, without renouncing secularism or attacking it, Türkeş exhibited an increased respect for Islam in Turkey. In the parliamentary elections of 1977 he obtained the reward of almost doubling his party's percentage of the vote from 3.4% to 6.4% and an increase of the NAP contingent in the National Assembly from 3 seats to 16. While a direct connection to the break with the Pan-Turkists of Atsız and to the rapprochement to Islam cannot be established with certainty, it may well have had a part in improving the more moderate image Türkeş's party was attempting to create, particularly when it was a partner in coalition governments.