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Devlet Bahçeli and ‘Far Right’ Politics in Turkey, 1999–2002

METİN HEPER & BAŞAK İNCE

In several Western European democracies one of the significant political developments of the post-1980 period was the emergence of a far right characterized by ethno-nationalism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and strong state.¹ The Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Öster Reich – FPÖ*) of Jörg Haider, the Belgian Flemish Bloc (*Vlaams Blok – VB*) of first Karel Dillen and later of Philip Dewinter and Gerolf Annemans, and the French National Front (*Front Nationale – FN*) of Jean Marie Le Pen are the obvious examples. The movements these parties have spearheaded display xenophobic tendencies. Le Pen, Dillen and Haider share a vision of ‘New Europe’ based on ‘racial’ exclusivity rather than democratic citizenship and equal rights for everyone.²

Most of the literature on far right parties in Europe portrays the history of either one far right party or far right parties in a single country. Only fairly recently have comparative studies about far right parties been undertaken.³ However, none of these studies has taken up the far right in Turkey. The present article purports to fill this vacuum.

A study of the far right in Turkey of 1999–2002 is particularly in order. In Europe, the far right as represented by political parties continued to evince in particular strong xenophobia and a certain degree of authoritarianism, both of which derive from its ethno-nationalistic tendencies. In Turkey the far-right as a political party has never subscribed to ethno-nationalism; from the 1980 onwards it started to rid itself of its authoritarianism and militancy; and, during the late 1990s, it became a respected member of the political establishment.

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) was a militant rightist party. It was often engaged in political violence ‘in order to ward off the communist threat’.⁴ At the time youth organizations with Turkist leanings, which had the self-designated mission of elevating the nation morally and making it stronger, proliferated and were engaged in armed conflict with the leftists.⁵ This bloody confrontation reached its peak in the late 1970s. In the process, a number of college professors, politicians, and journalists known as leftists lost their lives.⁶

The then leader of the MHP, Alparslan Türkeş, had in his youth toyed with the idea of ethno-nationalism. However, by the time he had formed the MHP in 1965, he had shed that particular inclination. At the time, Türkeş displayed authoritarian tendencies not only for dealing with ‘the communist threat’ effectively, but also for rendering Turkey a strong country in the shortest possible time.⁷

Following the 1980–83 military intervention, Türkeş began to shed his earlier political posture.⁸ In 1997 Türkeş died, and Bahçeli became the leader of the MHP. At the turn of the century, the MHP had become a respected member of the coalition government that was formed following the September 1999 national elections, and Bahçeli had become deputy prime minister. Bahçeli occupied that position until the 3 November 2002 national elections. At those elections the MHP as well as the other two parties of the coalition government (Democratic Left Party [*Demokratik Sol Parti* – DSP] and Motherland Party [*Anavatan Partisi* – ANAP]) and the main opposition party (True Path Party [*Doğru Yol Partisi* – DYP]) were not able to clear the hurdle of the 10 per cent electoral threshold and consequently failed to return members to parliament.⁹ Bahçeli reacted to the electoral failure of the MHP by stating that he was going to resign. However, upon intense pressure from party members he remained as the leader of the party, although he subsequently kept a low profile in politics.

We already have a number of studies on the new MHP, which invariably portray the past *as well as* present MHP as an ultra-nationalist political party and its leaders as having had and continuing to have far right views. These studies suggest that among other things both Türkeş and Bahçeli have had ethno-nationalist leanings.¹⁰ The present essay takes up this issue by focusing its attention on Bahçeli. A detailed study of Bahçeli as a person and as a politician is particularly important because the MHP has had virtually no autonomous life separate first from Türkeş and, during recent years, from Bahçeli. It is true that all political leaders in Turkey have a strong grip on their parties.¹¹ That hold has been particularly firm in the case of Bahçeli probably because he always had the difficult task of keeping at bay some remaining militant nationalists, particularly among the rank and file of the MHP.

Thus, below, first we take up Bahçeli's personality and its impact on his politics in general and his nationalism in particular. Secondly, we examine Bahçeli's politics and nationalism in order to gauge the extent to which they evince pro-system characteristics. In our discussion of Bahçeli's nationalism we at times draw attention to some contrasts between him and his counterparts in Austria, Belgium, and France. Finally, we suggest some explanations for the different configurations of the far right in Turkey and in some European countries.

Bahçeli comes from the large and well respected Fettahlioğlu family. For the family such traditional values as respect for elders have always been important. Bahçeli considers his brother, who is only a few years older than himself, as his 'father', a term used in Turkey to express respect towards older people.

There are strong ties among the members of the large Bahçeli family. The family estates are divided among the family members, yet they do not have separate deeds. Bahçeli appreciated the fact that, while he was attending high school in İstanbul, the members of the Fettahlioğlu family living in İstanbul invited him to their houses so that he could have home-cooked food.

In all probability because of his having been socialized into the value system prevalent in his close-knit family, Bahçeli values traditions and indigenous values in politics. He has a genuine affection as well as respect for people. He feels a great sense of responsibility towards them. Consequently, Bahçeli perceives the MHP as a centrist party, representing the whole nation and acting in its service. In his own

words, 'the MHP is a product of the Turkish nation's authentic and well-rooted values and preferences... It endeavours to safeguard the nation's moral and cultural values... It embraces the whole nation'.¹²

The Bahçeli family is well respected. The family members shun materialism, opportunism, selfishness and unprincipled behaviour, which in recent decades have become rather widespread in Turkish society and politics. One of Bahçeli's brothers once pointed out that their father held İsmet İnönü (prime minister in 1924–38, president in 1938–50, and again prime minister in 1961–64) in high esteem. The brother talked of İnönü as a symbol of honesty.¹³

Islam seems to be another source for the values the family holds dear. Bahçeli has often made reference to a Hadith, a saying of Prophet Muhammad: 'Islam equals good morality'.¹⁴ In his opinion, religious holidays are good opportunities to cement social solidarity, which, in his estimation, has both moral and socio-economic dimensions. Bahçeli distributed his salary as a fellowship to the needy students at the Academy of Economics and Commerce (later Gazi University) in Ankara, where he taught economics from 1982 until 1987. Later, he paid the salaries of some party functionaries out of his own pocket.

In politics, however, Bahçeli stays away from political populism and, therefore, from political patronage and clientelism. He avoids delivering goods and services to specific individuals and groups for the sole purpose of garnering votes and bringing those personally close to him to important posts unless they have the necessary qualifications. Bahçeli thinks public policies should be developed for the long-term interests of the country, and not for short-term political gain. As compared with other political parties in Turkey, while in power the MHP displayed moderation in appointing that party's supporters to posts in the higher echelons of the public bureaucracy.

Bahçeli is also a reserved person. Not unlike his aversion to populism, Bahçeli keeps his distance from people, including those he knows well. This type of behaviour on his part seems to be also the consequence of his modernistic approach to life. For instance, he does not like to be kissed on the cheeks by other men or to be touched on the arm by others during a conversation, both being usual behaviour among most people in Turkey. In contrast to Le Pen, who is viewed by many as a 'talented demagogue',¹⁵ Bahçeli does not try to appeal to people's feelings and emotions; he targets their intellect and logic.

Not unrelatedly, Bahçeli takes life seriously, perhaps too seriously. In politics one hardly sees him smiling, let alone laughing. He once said, 'I too laugh. However, it is not proper to smile or laugh when you discuss serious matters'.¹⁶ On public issues, he does not have informal conversations even with those cabinet ministers who have been his close friends for a long time.

Bahçeli has a Ph.D. in economics. He is a well-read as well as a contemplative person. His motto has always been 'science, contemplation, and belief'.¹⁷ He has a large personal library. He once advised some young members of the MHP to read *Das Kapital*, arguing that it is necessary to know leftist ideology even better than the leftists. Not unexpectedly, Bahçeli's happiest moments are when he is at home with his books. Probably for this reason and also because he is a modest person, Bahçeli keeps a low profile. Very few knew of him until Türkeş died. At the time, Bahçeli did not, for instance, appear on TV shows and press conferences.

As a contemplative person Bahçeli takes lessons from past events in general and from his own mistakes in particular. When on one occasion a party member was physically barred from placing his candidature for presidency (because the party opposed the member's running), Bahçeli said: 'it was a very unfortunate event. It should not have happened... We should now take measures so that such events would not repeat themselves in the future'.¹⁸

As a knowledgeable person, Bahçeli is open to change. Over the years, first he himself has gone through a significant mutation. He shaved his beard, and stopped using cigarette holders and carrying prayer beads – traditionally all have been symbols of the nationalists in Turkey. In his opinion, 'The MHP [too] is a link [not only] between yesterday and today, and [also] between today and tomorrow'.¹⁹ According to Bahçeli, 'Today's Turkey is not the Turkey of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s'.²⁰ The main theme of the November 2000 MHP Congress was 'Contract with the [New] Century'. It was significant that at the Congress the need to develop novel solutions to old problems was underlined. It was also pointed out that political movements that have strong roots and important missions should not mutate to become altogether different movements.²¹ Bahçeli justifies this stance by arguing that 'advanced nations [too]... reconcile their traditional and national values with new developments'.²²

It is not surprising that Bahçeli avoids polar views, which are by their nature difficult to change. In his opinion, 'politics is an art of establishing a link between what is ideal and what is possible'.²³ On the whole he adopts a middle-of-the-road approach to every issue. On the economy–democracy relationship, he thinks that 'economic growth is a prerequisite for Turkey to catch up with advanced countries. Yet equally important is to achieve this goal within a democratic system of government'.²⁴ Concerning the Islam–state confrontation in Turkey, Bahçeli disapproves of both those who have an inclination for political Islam (the efforts to make Islam shape public law and public policy) and those who bring limitations to the manner in which people wish to live their religion on a day-to-day basis.²⁵ On another ongoing conflict in that country – 'the one between the 'republicans' (who place virtually sole emphasis on the long-term interests of the country) and 'democrats' (who, on the contrary, put almost sole stress on particularistic interests) – Bahçeli again has a balanced approach. He once remarked: 'There cannot be a republic without democracy and a democracy without republic'.²⁶

On the last point Bahçeli was echoing Giovanni Sartori, who argued that democracy would be viable if there was a balance between its 'vertical' (political responsibility) and 'horizontal' (political participation) dimensions.²⁷ Accordingly, on the one hand, Bahçeli thinks that 'closing of political parties should be an exception rather than the rule'²⁸ and, on the other hand, he is of the opinion that 'no person and no institution, including political parties, should be able to commit an offence and get away with it'.²⁹

One may surmise that subscribing to high moral standards led Bahçeli to have an idealistic approach to politics. He once observed: 'For us political office is not a matter of life or death. Politics is not a competition to grab power for its own sake... Politics is a means of serving the country, and it should be carried out with a view to political ethics'.³⁰ In Bahçeli's list of priorities the country comes first, the party second, and his personal political fortune (a distant) third.

True to his word, while in office Bahçeli has displayed a principled conduct in political life. When his party came second in the 1999 general elections, some members of parliament from other political parties wished to join the MHP. Despite the fact that such transfers to his party would have resulted in the MHP commanding the largest number of deputies in parliament and in Bahçeli becoming prime minister, he refused the offers right away. He pointed out that he could not act against the preferences of the electorate.³¹ Later, Bahçeli acquiesced to the changing of horses in mid-stream only when it would not significantly promote the fortunes of his party; even then he insisted that those who wish to join the MHP should demonstrate that they have fully internalized the MHP philosophy.³² Bahçeli has done his best to keep his promises to the people. One of those promises was to fully punish Abdullah Öcalan who for years orchestrated the PKK (*Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan*) terror in Turkey. Thus, although he has been not against the lifting of the death penalty in Turkey in the foreseeable future, he has been adamant that the death sentence given to Öcalan by the court should be carried out.³³

In Bahçeli's view, principled conduct in political life is dependent upon acting in conformity with well-established rules. He thinks such conformity would make the accomplishment of a mission possible. On one occasion, at a meeting of the leaders of the 1999–2002 coalition government it was decided that the provision for the death penalty should be removed from the Criminal Code, but not immediately. Then Mesut Yılmaz, the other deputy prime minister in the coalition government, who at the time was responsible for European Union affairs, insisted that the provision in question should be abrogated at once. Bahçeli immediately opposed it; he invited Yılmaz to respect the decision made earlier by the coalition leaders and not waver from it for political gain. One can note other examples of Bahçeli's principled conduct in politics. For instance, he did not sign critical documents whenever he served in the capacity of acting prime minister (for instance, when the prime minister was out of the country). Similarly he asked the MHP parliamentarians not to tender bids for public contracts. Before the 1999 national elections, when the party was in dire need of money and some businessmen offered help, Bahçeli immediately rejected them.

While Bahçeli insisted that politics should be conducted in conformity with well-established rules, he was at the same time ready to compromise if the long-term interest of the country warranted it. He placed emphasis on the politics of harmony, and shunned polar views. In all probability as a reaction to recent conflict-ridden decades in Turkey he once declared: 'Turkey does not want conflict'.³⁴ Bahçeli pointed out that the first priority of the MHP in politics was dialogue and consensus. He referred to the post-1999 general election coalition government that his party joined as a 'government of compromise and reform' (*uzlaşma ve atılım hükümeti*). When some of the rank-and-file members in the MHP criticized him for acting in an overly conciliatory manner towards other coalition partners, he offered the following thoughts:

For the long-term interests of the country we as members of a coalition government have to put up with each other. Where you have a coalition government none of the parties in that government can pursue policies that only it favours. Thorny issues would be resolved and we would have an effective

government only if we can manage to meet at some common ground that all of us can live with.³⁵

Bahçeli's readiness to compromise came out quite clearly in how he conducted himself in the Öcalan case. As noted, in principle Bahçeli has always been against the death penalty. However, he did not immediately support the removal of the related Article 125 of the Turkish Criminal Code. It was because during the 1999 election campaign he had promised the people that should Öcalan be captured and the courts sentence him to death his party would vote for the execution of that penalty when the case came to parliament for the approval of the sentence. Later Öcalan was captured and sentenced to capital punishment. The case was in the hands of the European Court of Human Rights. At the same time Turkey faced the critical decision of whether or not it was going to strike out the death penalty from the Criminal Code. Its removal from the Criminal Code had been set by the European Union as one of the preconditions for Turkey's full accession to the Union. Bahçeli has extricated himself from this difficult situation by notifying his coalition partners that the MHP would continue to oppose the amendment when it is taken up by parliament; however, if the amendment is adopted by the votes of the other coalition members as well as those of the opposition the MHP would not terminate the coalition.³⁶

If for Bahçeli compromise was impossible, rather than causing a deadlock and thus creating immobility in government, he preferred to place the issue on the back-burner. He acted in this manner concerning, for instance, the long-simmering headscarf issue. In Turkey, the headscarf is banned in public buildings, including the universities. This is because it is considered a symbol of political Islam. The military, in particular, tends towards this view. Because of his respect for people's religious preferences and aspirations, Bahçeli has not looked on the ban sympathetically. Yet, for the sake of maintaining political stability in the country he has not insisted on the immediate removal of the ban. In fact, he asked a female MHP deputy, Ms. Nesrin Ünal, to take off her headscarf when attending plenary sessions in parliament. Ms. Ünal complied. In line with the emphasis he places on harmony Bahçeli also came up with the following advice to the cabinet ministers from his party: 'Always act in a courteous manner to others; do not allow others to make you act in a manner you would later regret; think twice before saying something that you may later regret; never act on the spur of the moment; ignore criticism and even vicious attacks; do not argue with others in public'.³⁷

As Bahçeli values the politics of harmony and therefore consensus, according to him coalition governments should be formed by those parties which are most agreed on the nature of the important problems the country faces and on the broad outlines of the policies to deal with those problems. He has expressed this preference by pointing out that he is 'for a coalition of *principles*, and not for a coalition of [any odd set of] *political parties*'.³⁸ He does not hesitate to dismiss cabinet ministers from the MHP if, in his opinion, they disrupt the smooth functioning of the government. One example here was the case of Mr. Enis Öksüz, the then minister of transport, who made no effort to find common ground with Mr. Kemal Derviş, then minister of state responsible for the economy, on the privatization of the Turkish Telecommunications Agency.

According to Bahçeli, political competition should primarily revolve around 'policy' and not 'politics' (the latter defined as activities aimed at capturing and

maintaining political office). He thinks that in Turkey on the whole the reverse obtains. He has argued that in Turkey democracy is a 'speech democracy'; politicians do not study and debate issues carefully in order to find the best solutions to them.³⁹

Bahçeli thinks that the political parties in opposition also have a responsibility to suggest alternative policies for solving the problems the country faces. This is, of course, what opposition parties do in established democracies. In Turkey, however, this particular view of Bahçeli comes out as a novel idea because in that country political parties in opposition usually strongly criticize each and every government policy and then turn around and ask people to 'try themselves', without presenting their own alternative policies and without explaining why their policies are better than the ones the government pursues. Bahçeli thinks the political strategy adopted by the opposition parties in Turkey is political opportunism *par excellence*. In his opinion, 'Drawing lessons from constructive criticism is a characteristic of politics based on virtue and of responsible statesmanship'.⁴⁰

Bahçeli also wishes to see politics revolve around competing policies about everyday problems rather than around 'high politics', that is, the issues concerning the political regime itself and its basic priorities. Just as Dankwart A. Rustow suggested more than three decades ago,⁴¹ Bahçeli too is of the opinion that consensus on matters that properly belong to 'high politics' is a prerequisite for a healthily functioning democracy. Being a moralist, an intellectual and an honest person, Bahçeli thinks Turkish politics and democracy suffer from low intellectual levels of political actors, political corruption and the lack of principled conduct in politics. According to him, under the circumstances, politics in Turkey does not turn out to be a competition to solve problems and thus serve the country. Thus Bahçeli argues that 'there is a need for national concordance (*milli uzlaşma*) on a democratic republic, social justice, the rule of law, and a secular state that acts as the guardian of the freedom of conscience as well as of Turkey's unitary state structure and territorial integrity'.⁴² Also according to Bahçeli, 'in contemporary democracies [such issues as] cultural and ethnic differences among the people is no longer the stuff of political conflict. Today, democracy has left behind political cleavages based on religion, sect, and race. Presently one comes across in democracies a careful balance between conflict and consensus'.⁴³

Just as was the case during the single-party years in Turkey (1923–45), during the following multi-party period, too, 'cultural' rather than 'functional cleavages' continued to be salient. The controversies among the political elite, as well as the intelligentsia, about secularism versus Islam, hard ideologies on the right and the left, the proper role of the military in politics, and the issue of the state versus civil society continued to dominate politics and, at times, led to the military taking power into its own hands. Even today, the Turkish military's influence in politics is far beyond the role militaries in established democracies play. Bahçeli too has pointed to this particular characteristic of Turkish politics and has expressed his dissatisfaction with it:

Past events, beliefs, ethnic sensitivities, and current political and ideological conflict continue to be the primary weapons that politicians [in this country] frequently brandish against each other. This leads to an overlap between ethnic and cultural fault lines on the one hand and political cleavage and conflict on the other.⁴⁴

It must be for this reason that Bahçeli calls on the political elite in Turkey to leave behind their 'old blood feuds'.⁴⁵

As a nationalist, Bahçeli has a longing for a prosperous Turkey that can effectively provide for its external security in the face of threats posed by most of its neighbours in the unstable Balkans and the Middle East. He envisions a Turkey that can successfully compete in the globalized international markets. According to Bahçeli, however, in order to attain such strength and prosperity Turkey should first substitute 'normal politics'⁴⁶ for high politics. He thus calls for a consensus amongst the political elite on constitutional issues and on the basic priorities of the state as well as on democratic principles. Bahçeli hopes the said elite would focus their attention exclusively on such currently pressing problems in Turkey as the overhauling of the economy (so that the country will not again face severe economic crises like the ones it encountered in November 2000 and February 2001) and the accession of Turkey to the EU as a full member.

Bahçeli's nationalism is based on neither 'race, nor ethnicity, nor imperialism'. His nationalism derives from measured patriotism. Consequently, the November 2000 MHP Congress condemned irredentist-ethnic nationalism. Bahçeli opposes even the term 'nationalism', preferring 'national' because in his view while the former is an exclusive, thus a discriminatory term, the latter is an inclusive, thus a non-discriminatory term.⁴⁷ The 2000 Programme of the MHP defined nation as a social entity with (1) a will to live together, (2) a feeling of common fate and common future, and (3) a belief that in the community of nations each nation has a *sui generis* identity.

Thus, while Bahçeli subscribes to cultural nationalism, i.e. those who essentially share a common culture make a nation, Le Pen and Belgium's Flemish Bloc have tended towards ethno-nationalism. For Le Pen, belonging to the French nation is marked by 'linear descent'.⁴⁸ According to the Flemish Bloc, the nation is defined as a group of people that share, among other things, an 'ethnic origin'.⁴⁹ In contrast, Bahçeli once stated: 'It is not important which particular identity the [Kurdish] people in the southeast [of Turkey] feel they belong to. What is important is that they should think that Turkey is indispensable for them'.⁵⁰ Concerning this issue, on one occasion he also quoted from Sufi mystic poet Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207–73): 'Not those who speak the same language but those who share the same culture and mission would get along well!'⁵¹

There is a sharp contrast between Bahçeli's attitude towards (what would usually be considered as) the 'other' and that of Le Pen who had once said, 'I prefer my daughters to my cousins, my cousins to my neighbours, and my neighbours to strangers',⁵² and who on another occasion had even stated that the gas chambers during the Second World War were nothing more than a detail of history.⁵³ Le Pen's anti-Semitic discourse is criticized even in his own party.⁵⁴ Le Pen calls for a 'France for the French' because of his hatred for immigrants.⁵⁵ Not unlike Le Pen, Haider too had no sympathy towards those of non-Austrian ethnic descent. According to him, threats to national unity were no longer the 'Slavic barbarians or Jews, but immigrants'.⁵⁶ The Belgian Flemish Bloc has adopted a similar line towards non-Flemings. According to the party, in the ethnic hierarchy in Belgium the Flemings

were on top. Immediately below them were Dutchmen and Dutch South Africans. Then came assimilated Flemings of Brussels, Wallonia and French Flanders. European foreigners followed these groups. At the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy were the non-European foreigners.⁵⁷

In contrast, Bahçeli does not insist on having an ethnically homogenous Turkish nation. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, a group of rightist intellectuals in Turkey argued that the country did not have distinct ethnic groups, and that the Kurds were no more than 'mountain Turks' (who lived in the highlands in south-eastern Turkey) and who had forgotten their earlier Turkish ethnic identity.⁵⁸ Then, as noted, for a while Tūrkeş too had toyed with the idea of ethnic nationalism by claiming that those with a different accent could not be considered as Turks. Bahçeli's views are far removed from such 'ethnic parentheses' in the Turkish political evolution. He argues that 'every country evinces a mosaic of cultures though in different degrees. What is required is that those who belong to one of those cultures should feel themselves as also belonging to the larger political entity and demonstrate loyalty to that entity. The state in its turn should not try to eliminate distinct cultures'.⁵⁹

Not only does Bahçeli take the mosaic of cultures in a country as a fact of life, but he also welcomes it: 'We consider regional and traditional differences in our country as the richness of our national life'.⁶⁰ Consequently, he has no prejudices towards those with a different cultural identity: 'It does not disturb us if one calls a Kurd a "Kurd". We have Kurds in the MHP, too. We are against using the term "Turk" in a discriminatory manner. We ourselves do not use it in that sense. For us the term "Turk" is a nominal term for people living in this country. It is an all embracing concept'.⁶¹ Bahçeli takes the term 'Turk' as a *reference*, not as a *definition*.

Not unexpectedly, Bahçeli does not think a political party should represent only one distinct ethnic group. While deputy prime minister, Bahçeli had cordial relations with the Kurdish oriented People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi* – HADEP). In September 2000, he visited the local headquarters of the party in Diyarbakır (the most important city in the south-east) and applauded a speech made by the HADEP mayor of the city. When he was asked why he had approved of the mayor's speech, Bahçeli responded by saying that the mayor was for a unitary state.⁶²

The goal the MHP pursues today is that of elevating Turkey to the level of contemporary civilization. Earlier, by adopting the idea of the so-called 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis', the MHP had taken Islamic morality and virtue as one of the critical elements that would provide the necessary impetus for that transition to take place. Presently, the MHP places less emphasis on Islam. Bahçeli perceives nationalism as adequate to 'inject idealism and enthusiasm to the project of rendering Turkey a leading country in the twenty-first century'.⁶³

Bahçeli's nationalism has a human face. According to Bahçeli, nationalism should be complemented by democracy that, in his view, would 'foster respect for different views and ideas and [thus] make a significant contribution to social peace and harmony'.⁶⁴ On the other hand, at least from 2000 onwards, the reference to the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was replaced by the discourse of 'moral and humanitarian concerns... that form the premise on which Turkish nationalism has been built'.⁶⁵

Bahçeli's nationalism has also been open to the outside world. As he put it, 'If there is a national state, there would be a national identity; if there is a national identity there would be nationalism. However, this would not mean Turkish

nationalism turning inward'.⁶⁶ Bahçeli's MHP states that 'Turkey should adopt universal values'.⁶⁷ The party perceives globalization as an indispensable fact of life and thus, at least in principle, has no qualms about it: 'One can no longer ignore and even belittle the phenomenon of globalization that manifests itself as the free movement of capital, financial and technological innovations, competitive markets, and open society'.⁶⁸ In Bahçeli's opinion, globalization is not alien to the MHP philosophy:

Our nationalism underlines the equality of nations, cooperation among them, and global justice... The motto of our nationalism is 'Live and Let Live'; thus, our national ideals would induce us to make contributions to the goals derived from the emerging global values. The MHP supports every project that would bring peace and happiness to the Turkish nation and the whole of humanity.⁶⁹

Anxious to create a more prosperous Turkey, Bahçeli thinks the Turkish economy should be fully integrated with the world economy. He once pointed out that amongst the largest 500 companies in the world there are only two Turkish companies, and that their numbers should increase.

Bahçeli is of the opinion that 'Turkey's accession to the EU [as a full member] will be more meaningful and significant than that of several other countries'.⁷⁰ Here Bahçeli must have in mind the fact that Turkey has a western leaning that harks back to the end of the eighteenth century,⁷¹ and it is as a consequence of this that Turkey is the only Muslim country that has adopted democracy as a way of life.

In contrast to Bahçeli's hope that Turkey will soon become a full member of the EU, Le Pen and Haider have reservations concerning the EU. In 1991, the French National Front perceived European integration as a danger for France. At the time, it stated that 'the Europe of Brussels is constructed around an institutional framework inspired by the American federal model that would lead to the disappearance of the sovereign states and peoples'.⁷² Upon the adoption of the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty the party turned aggressively anti-European and opposed the economic and political integration of Europe. It believed in 'French France in a European Europe' and campaigned against both Maastricht and the Euro.⁷³ In Austria, the Freedom Party has been the forerunner in the populist opposition to the increasing central power of Brussels and to the introduction of a common currency.⁷⁴

Although Bahçeli thinks Turkey should adapt itself to the emerging values of globalization, in his view Turkey should not allow the latter development to have an adverse effect on the country: 'Turkey should integrate with the globalizing world without sacrificing national and moral values'.⁷⁵ This is because while on the one hand Bahçeli upholds peace, humanitarian values, modernity, democracy and freedom of speech, on the other hand he stresses the importance of national sovereignty, loyalty to nationally sacred objects, vigilance concerning internal and external security threats, and thus national unity.

Not unlike Bahçeli, Le Pen wishes France to safeguard its cultural identity in the face of European integration.⁷⁶ However, unlike Bahçeli Le Pen does not reconcile his views on this matter with the requisites of democracy. His National Front rejects libertarian values in political matters while Le Pen himself has strong authoritarian tendencies.⁷⁷

Bahçeli thinks that humanity would live in peace and harmony if the relations among nations were based on global justice. He observes that:

It would be misleading to perceive the movement of capital, financial and technological innovations, competitive markets, and open society as the final stage of human destiny and global Right. Globalization in its present form needs to be complemented by the emergence of a new morality... Globalization as an ideal would be fully realized if it displays respect towards national and moral values and if it does not disrupt stable democracies by having disorienting effects upon the social contexts on which those democracies are based.⁷⁸

Bahçeli thinks that some foreign countries' efforts to promote Kurdish national aspirations would work against the efforts to consolidate democracy in Turkey. It would lead to the emergence of a new cultural cleavage, which would be difficult to resolve by democratic means. Such thinking on his part leads Bahçeli to adopt a critical attitude towards western countries in general and the EU countries in particular. He argues that even those countries that have established democracies and thus do not experience regional problems on the scale and severity that Turkey has faced during recent decades, approach ethnic problems with a view to civic nationalism and equality before the law. He therefore finds it difficult to understand why those same countries insist that Turkey should grant minority rights to some of its citizens. Bahçeli finds this preoccupation on the part of the said countries unacceptable because, he says, for years Turkey faced subversive terror, which in economic terms alone dealt the country an enormous blow. He thinks the EU should make a definitive distinction between terrorism and human rights. This is what on one occasion he stated on this issue: 'The EU should not tie Turkey's accession to the Union as a full member to a murderer [Öcalan]. They should not display a double standard concerning terrorism, which is looked upon in all international legal charters as an act against humanity... In short, the EU should refrain from engaging in unjust behaviour against the Turks'.⁷⁹

The views of Bahçeli's MHP on Turkey's foreign policy rest on the principles of justice, political equality and mutual protection of national interests. Until the early 1990s the MHP had kept its distance from the EU. Since then the party has adopted a closer but cautious policy towards the EU. Bahçeli concludes that in its relations with the Union Turkey should adopt a middle-of-the-road approach: He emphatically points out that 'Turkey should neither terminate its ties with the West, nor should it be a slave of the West'.⁸⁰

In the 2002 presidential elections in France, all other parties formed an alliance to stop Le Pen's National Front. Following the 1999 national elections in Austria, Haider was forced by the EU to resign. And following the 1999 national and 2000 local elections in Belgium other political parties did not wish to form a coalition government with the Flemish Bloc. In contrast, in the wake of the 1999 national elections in Turkey, the MHP joined a coalition with a democratic leftist party (DSP) and a liberal rightist political party (ANAP), and Bahçeli became deputy prime minister. It is true that in the Öcalan case and Turkey-EU relations Bahçeli and the MHP policies were coloured by nationalism; however, the nationalism in question was not ethno-nationalism; it was again a nationalism based on patriotism.

Why have the far right in such countries as Austria, Belgium and France continued to evince strong signs of ethno-nationalism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and strong state while concerning the 'far right' in Turkey racism and xenophobia were never on the agenda and ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism were no more than 'parentheses' in its evolution from the 1960s to the present so that Bahçeli could render the MHP a dignified member of the Turkish polity? Here it should be remembered that while in the Europe of the nineteenth century nationalism flourished, in the Ottoman Empire nationalism remained an alien concept until the end of the century. During that time people in the Ottoman Empire identified themselves either as Muslims or non-Muslims, not as Turks and non-Turks. Europeans, not Turks, first used the term 'Turk'.⁸¹ Furthermore, given the fact that Ottomans at the time were preoccupied with salvaging what was left of their empire, the nationalism that emerged towards the end of the century was a defensive nationalism, aiming at creating a new Turk with self-confidence and good training; it was not one that would have led Turks to look down upon 'the others'. Consequently, the nationalism in question drew upon patriotism rather than ethnicity.

During the Republican period (from 1923 to the present), by attributing the demise of the Ottoman Empire to the opposition of Islam to modernizing reforms the founders of the Republic initiated a cognitive revolution that aimed at substituting a secular nation for a religious community.⁸² The ultimate goal behind building the *nation-state* in question was that of creating a new Turk who would think logically, i.e. s/he would no longer take her/his cues from 'dogmas of Islam'. The pep-motto of this defensive modernization project was, 'Oh Turk! Be proud of yourself, have self-confidence, and work hard' (*Türk! Öğün, güven, çalış*), again implying a yearning for self-improvement rather than bragging. In any case, the cardinal policy of the new Republic was 'peace at home and peace abroad'. It is true that another pep-motto of the modernization project was 'A Turk equals all other nationals put together' (*Bir Türk dünya'ya bedeldir*). However, the motto in question simply meant, 'You too can do it'. Again there was an effort to promote patriotism, without any reference to ethno-nationalism.⁸³

It was under those circumstances that the MHP of the 1970s was engaged in a life and death struggle against 'communists'; however, the party has not taken a hostile stance against Kurds. This was because patriotism rather than ethno-nationalism informed the MHP discourse and praxis too. Consequently, during recent decades, with communism gradually ceasing to be a threat, the MHP started to shed its authoritarianism too and thus further adapted itself to Turkey's democratic political system.

Immigration has recently been the main cause of population growth in Europe. In 2002 there were 19 million non-national people living in Europe, accounting for 5.1 per cent of the population.⁸⁴ In most European countries this has led to fear of the future, heightened political insecurity, extreme differences in wealth and opportunity combined with a high employment rate. Hostility to immigration has pushed some political leaders in Europe to the far right.

Since the 1980s, there have also been large migration flows to Turkey. However, the migrants in question generally came from countries that had earlier been under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and they were generally Muslims. For these reasons their arrival in Turkey has not caused hostility towards them. There was also

migration to Turkey from such regions as the Middle East (predominantly Iraq and Iran), Asia (e.g., Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), and Africa (e.g., Congo, Nigeria and Somalia). Nevertheless, the latter were transit migrants, their aim being to reach European countries.⁸⁵ As such their arrival in Turkey has not caused hostility and hatred among Turks either. For these reasons, unlike most of the European countries, immigration is not conceived as a major threat to national unity in Turkey.

It is true that Turkey has had a strong state tradition. However, the strong state in Turkey was not supposed to act on behalf of any social or political group. Rather, it was expected to see to it that the long-term interest of the community was not overlooked.⁸⁶

In an environment where ethno-nationalism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and a state acting on behalf of specific social or political group were largely absent there was no reason for a political leader to adopt them as her/his goals. This was even less probable if the leader was one like Bahçeli who is known for his high moral standards, a balanced approach to politics, and for his avoidance of polar and utopian views. In Bahçeli, we come across neither Le Pen's demagoguery, love of rhetoric, intolerance towards change⁸⁷ and despotic tendencies bordering on anti-Semitism⁸⁸ nor Haider's right-wing extremism leading to neo-Nazism, populism and inclination towards totalitarianism.⁸⁹

All in all, in recent decades while in some European countries the 'far right' emerged as a reaction of some political leaders towards immigration and displayed an inclination towards ethno-nationalism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and 'strong state', in Turkey 'far right' tendencies on the part of some political leaders developed in response to communism, and it evinced patriotism. Turkey received immigrants, but they were not seen by political leaders as a threat because those who stayed on were not ethnically alien and those who were not ethnically alien did not stay on. In Turkey even if those immigrants who stayed on were seen as a threat there was no suitable context for the 'far right' to show a tendency towards ethno-nationalism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and 'strong state'. Similarly, in contrast to the characteristics of the leaders of the 'far right' in Austria, Belgium and France, the personality of Bahçeli in Turkey would not have allowed the development of a 'far right' as in those other countries.

As far as Bahçeli and to some extent mature Türkeş were concerned, the so-called 'far right' in Turkey displayed very little of the far right leanings that one comes across in some political leaders in Europe. The only dimension on which Türkeş in particular and to a less extent Bahçeli resembled some political leaders in Europe was authoritarianism. Türkeş had for some time toyed with the idea of authoritarianism; however, that was for the sake of warding off the 'threat of communism'. Bahçeli too had to resort to authoritarianism, but only to suppress the militancy of the rank and file in the MHP. It is true that both leaders had second thoughts about 'the ulterior motives of the EU for Turkey'; however, in principle both leaders had a European vocation.

Turning to the MHP itself, under the leadership of both Türkeş and in particular under Bahçeli the party gained strong pro-system credentials. Some rank-and-file in the party continue to have far right tendencies; however, so far Bahçeli has been able to prevent them from surfacing and creating a threat to Turkey's national unity and democracy.

Notes

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1. On this definition of 'far right', we draw upon C. Mudde, 'The War of Words: Defining the Extreme Right Family', *West European Politics*, Vol.19, No.2 (April 1996), pp.225–48.
2. G. Harris, *The Dark Side of Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p.78.
3. Inter alia, see H.G. Betz, *Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); H. Kitschelt and A. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995); C. Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
4. J.M. Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), Chapter 6; H. Poulton, *Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic: Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent* (London: Hurst, 1997), particularly pp.145–63.
5. The MHP took over some existing youth organizations and set up new ones. The members of these organizations called themselves commandos (*komandalar*). Many were trained in three main camps near Ankara, İstanbul and İzmir, Turkey's largest three cities, others in training camps located elsewhere. The daily schedule in these camps were as follows: prayer, two hours of physical training (including judo, wrestling and boxing), breakfast, reading period, lunch, two more hours of physical training (as above plus rope-walking and wall-scaling), prayer, long marches and sports, prayer, dinner and lectures (on the essence of nationalism, as opposed to communism). There were rumours that the youths were also instructed in the use of fire-arms; these were categorically denied by the party. See, Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, pp.214–15.
6. A.N. Çağlar, 'The Greywolves as a Metaphor', in A. Finkel and N. Sirman (eds.), *Turkish State, Turkish Society* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.85–6. In their turn, the left was first engaged in such anti-western and anti-capitalist activities as kidnapping American soldiers and major corporate figures and later aimed at causing chaos and demoralization in order to create a climate in which an authoritarian regime would be welcomed by the masses as the saviour of the nation. See F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.163–4.
7. J.M. Landau, 'The Nationalist Action Party in Turkey', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.17, No.4 (1982), pp.587–606; E. Burak Arıkan, 'The Programme of the Nationalist Action Party: An Iron Hand in a Velvet Glove', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.34, No.4 (1998), pp.120–34.
8. See below.
9. The failure of the government parties at the polls was basically the result of high employment and inflation; the failure of the main opposition party to get elected was due to its leadership problems.
10. See, inter alia, Arıkan, 'The Programme of the Nationalist Action Party: An Iron Hand in a Velvet Glove'; B. Aras and G. Baçık, 'The Nationalist Action Party and Turkish Politics', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.6, No.4 (Winter 2000), pp.48–64; and S. Tepe, 'Kemalism, Islamism, and the Nationalist Action Party', *Turkish Studies*, Vol.1, No.2 (Autumn 2000), pp.59–72.
11. M. Heper and S. Sayarı (eds.), *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).
12. Quoted in A. Tekin, *Milliyetçi Hareket'te Devlet Bahçeli Dönemi* (Ankara: Tutibay Yayınları, 2000), pp.76–7.
13. On İsmet İnönü's moral integrity, see M. Heper, *İsmet İnönü: The Making of a Turkish Statesman* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), Chapter 3.
14. M. Grubu, *Kutlu İktidar Yürüyüşü* (Ankara: Tutibay Yayınları, 1997), p.58.
15. P. Davies, *Extreme Right in France. 1789 to the Present: From Maistre to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.221.
16. *Hürriyet* (İstanbul daily), 21 June 1999.
17. D. Bahçeli, *Milliyetçi Hareket ve Türkiye'nin Geleceği* (İstanbul: Hareket, 1998).
18. *Milliyet* (İstanbul daily), 5 June 2000.
19. D. Bahçeli, *Yeni Çağa Bakış: Eleştiriler, Tespitler ve Öneriler* (Ankara: MHP, 2000), p.1.
20. Tekin, *Milliyetçi Hareket'te Devlet Bahçeli Dönemi*, p.170.
21. Bahçeli, *Yeni Çağa Bakış*, p.59.

22. Ibid.
23. D. Bahçeli, 'Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme ve Anayasa Reformu', *Türkiye ve Siyaset*, No.3 (July–August 2001), p.5.
24. D. Bahçeli, 'Kriz Sürecinde Demokrasi ve Sağduyunun Önemi', *Türkiye ve Siyaset*, No.2 (May–June 2001), p.7.
25. D. Bahçeli, *Gündemi Oluşturan Sorunlar ve MHP* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2000), p.75.
26. M. Heper, 'Başkalaşmadan Değişen Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi', *Türkiye Günlüğü*, No.55 (March–April 1999), p.19.
27. G. Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1987).
28. A. Tekin, *Milliyetçi Hareket'te Devlet Bahçeli Dönemi* (Ankara: Tutibay Yayınları, 2000), p.196.
29. Ibid.
30. *Hürriyet*, 24 April 2002.
31. *Sabah* (İstanbul daily), 27 June 2001.
32. *Sabah*, 3 March 2002.
33. In general, Bahçeli has not been a vindictive politician. Some of those who in the past had opposed Bahçeli, for instance by supporting Tuğrul Türkeş when the latter's father Alparslan Türkeş died, were made members of the MHP by Bahçeli. However, in the case of Öcalan, Bahçeli thought his death sentence should be carried out because he was responsible for the death of the sons of so many people in Turkey, for whom, as we have already noted, he has great sympathy and affection. On how this issue was later resolved, see below.
34. D. Bahçeli, *Hoşgörü ve Uzlaşma İkliminde Türkiye* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2000), p.7.
35. *Milliyet*, 19 July 1999.
36. *Hürriyet*, 8 June 2002.
37. *Sabah*, 23 January 2000 and 27 January 2002.
38. *Sabah*, 27 June 2001.
39. D. Bahçeli, 'İktidar ve Muhalefet İlişkileri ve Meclis Çalışmaları', *Türkiye ve Siyaset*, No.1 (March–April 2001), p.7.
40. Ibid., p.8.
41. D.A. Rustow, 'Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.2, No.3 (1970), pp.337–63.
42. D. Bahçeli, *Yeni Çağın Eşiğinde Türkiye ve Dünya* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2000), p.50.
43. Ibid., p.21.
44. D. Bahçeli, *Sorumluluk Kültürü* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2001), p.41.
45. Bahçeli, *Milliyetçi Hareket ve Türkiye'nin Geleceği*, p.55.
46. Bahçeli, *Siyasette İlke Ekonomide Kararlılık* (Ankara: MHP, n.d.), p.128.
47. The MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Programı* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2000), p.8.
48. M. Vaughan, 'The Extreme Right in France: Le Penisme or the Politics of Fear', in L. Cheles, R. Ferguson and M. Vaughan (eds.), *Far Right in Western and Eastern Europe* (London: Longman, 1995), p.224.
49. M. Swyngedouw, 'The Extreme Right in Belgium: Of a Non-Existent Front National and an Omnipresent Vlaams Blok', in H.G. Betz and S. Immerfall (eds.), *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies* (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), p.64.
50. M. Nihat and E. Cemiloğlu, *Türk Siyasi Hayatında Milliyetçi Hareket: Tarihi Gelişim, Partileşme ve İdeoloji* (Ankara: Turkuaz Ajans, 1995), p.128.
51. Grubu, *Kutlu İktidar Yürüyüşü*, p.31.
52. Harris, *The Dark Side of Europe*, p.64.
53. Davies, *The Extreme Right in France*, p.136.
54. N. Mayer, 'The French National Front', in Betz and Immerfall (eds.), *The New Politics of the Right*, p.23.
55. Harris, *The Dark Side of Europe*, p.72.
56. M. Riedlsperg, 'The Freedom Party of Austria: From Protest to Radical Right Populism', in Betz and Immerfall (eds.), *New Politics of Radical*, p.31.
57. Swyngedouw, 'The Extreme Right in Belgium', p.63.
58. G.G. Erdoğan, 'The Case of Racism-Turanism: Turkism During Single-Party Period. A Radical Variant of Turkish Nationalism' (Ph.D. thesis, Boğaziçi University, 1990).
59. D. Bahçeli, 'Milliyetçilik ve Küreselleşme', *Türkiye ve Siyaset*, No.5 (November–December 2001), p.11.

60. Bahçeli, *Yeni Çağa Bakış*, p.55.
61. *Hürriyet*, 21 June 1999.
62. Bahçeli, *Yeni Çağa Bakış*, p.55.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Nihat and Cemiloğlu, *Türk Siyasi Hayatında Milliyetçi Hareket*, p.12.
67. The MHP, *Türk Siyasetinde Yozlaşma ve Arayış Sürecinde Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2002), pp.49–50.
68. The MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Programı* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2000), p.28.
69. Ibid., pp.29–30.
70. D. Bahçeli, *Son Gelişmeler Işığında Türkiye'nin AB Üyeliği ve Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi: Temel Yaklaşım Biçimimiz ve Görüşlerimiz* (Ankara: MHP Genel Merkezi, 2002), p.14.
71. M. Heper, 'Political Culture as a Dimension of Compatibility', in M. Heper, A. Öncü and H. Kramer (eds.), *Turkey and the West: Changing Political and Cultural Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993).
72. Davies, *The Extreme Right in France*, p.138.
73. Ibid.
74. Riedlsperg, 'The Freedom Party of Austria', p.32.
75. D. Bahçeli, 'Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Kırılma Noktaları', *Türkiye ve Siyaset*, No.7 (March–April 2002), p.7.
76. Davies, *The Extreme Right in France*, p.138.
77. Mayer, 'The French National Front', p.23.
78. *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 3 Kasım 2002 Seçim Beyannamesi: Türkiye'nin Onurlu Geleceği* (Ankara: MHP, 2002), pp.1–4.
79. Bahçeli, 'Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Kırılma Noktaları', pp.6–7.
80. Ibid., p.9.
81. R. Davison, 'Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire', in W.V. Haddad and W. Ochsenwald (eds.), *Nationalism in a Non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977).
82. See Ş. Mardin, 'Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.2, No.3 (1971), pp.197–211.
83. On the patriotism and nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, see Ş. Mardin, 'Patriotism and Nationalism on Turkey', in R. Michener (ed.), *Nationality, Patriotism, and Nationality* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Paragon House, 1993).
84. See the Report, 'The Social Situation in the European Union, 2002', at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2002/jun/inbrief_en.pdf
84. A. İçduygu, *Irregular Migration in Turkey* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2003), pp.17–18.
86. M. Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey* (Walkington, UK: The Eothen Press, 1985).
87. Vaughan, 'The Extreme Right in France', p.22.
88. Mayer, 'The French National Front', p.23.
89. Riedlsperg, 'The Freedom Party of Austria', pp.3, 34, 37.