

# ORGANIZING OF TURKISH NATIONALISM IN RUSSIAN TERRITORY

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, the leading names, ideas, and rhetoric of Turkish nationalists organized in the territory of Russia in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and also their effects of nationalism and in Turkey has been investigated. Examining the activities of Turkists in Russia is very important because this nationalist organization has influenced the nationalists in Turkey in many aspects. When looking roughly at the Turkists in Russia, it is seen that they generally tried to spread their ideas through the press. In addition, some members of this group were also involved in active politics, and many of the important names were either arrested as a result of these activities or had to leave Russia. Many of those who left Russia also preferred to go to Anatolia. Some of these nationalist intellectuals even actively participated in the War of Independence and the establishment of the Republic and played important roles in the relations between the Soviet Union and Turkey during this period.

**Keywords:** 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Nationalism, Russia, Turk Nationalism

## **1. Turcology Studies and the Birth of Turkism**

Turcology studies investigating the history of Turks have a great role in the awakening of Turkishness awareness. In an environment where Islamism was losing its power in the Ottoman Empire, Turcology studies led to the formation of Turkishness awareness. Turcology studies first started in the West. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western states tried to take their relations with the East from the level of colonization and return them to multi-directional relations of sovereignty. For this purpose, in the West, information fields such as Sinology, Indology and Turcology have been established in order to collect information about Eastern societies and to use this information for their own interests (Karakas, 2012).

The researches carried out by Western Turcologists marked the early period of Turkism and enabled Turkism to gain a cultural meaning. The definition of the historical role of Turks in relation to the periods before accepting Islam in these studies has led to the exclusion of the process of Turks' identification with Islam. In the light of these studies, awareness of Turkishness and Turkism movements were not only influential among Ottoman Turks, but also affected Central Asian Turks living in Russia and Turkism movements started to emerge in this geography (Karakas, 2012: 62, 63). However, there were some differences between the Turkism movements that developed in the Ottoman lands and the Turkism movements that developed in Central Asia and the Russian lands. While Turkists in the Ottoman Empire tried to save the collapsing state with the help of Turkism with a state-centered approach, Turkists in Russia such as Ismail Gaspirali, Yusuf Akcura, Huseyinzade Ali Bey, Ahmet Agaoglu, Zeki Velidi Togan, tried to unite the whole Turkish in the world with a nation-based ideology instead of a state-centered perspective. While there was a state to be preserved for Turkists in the Ottoman Empire, cultural and political rights to be acquired for Turkists in Russia were at stake. Thus, the Turkists in Russia both brought a political dimension to the ideology of nationalism and initiated the ideology of Turanism, which also had expansionist goals under the influence of Pan-Slavist pressures (Oguz, 2012: 110, 115). Thus, the movement of nationalism in Russia, which started by emphasizing history and cultural characteristics, gradually gained a political character and turned into a Turkism movement.

## **2. The Birth and Organizing of Turkism in Russia**

Turks living in Russia started to come together with the effect of Turcology studies at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and create a national consciousness. In addition, in response to the intensification of Russia's Pan-Slavist policies with Tsar Alexander III, the Turks in Russia also formed a nationalist reflex among themselves (Oba, 1995: 142). In the beginning, Turkism emerged as a reaction to the Russian conquest policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia and an opposition movement against Pan-Slavism. Panislavist policies threatened the economic activities and cultural identities of Turks in Russia, especially Tatars and Azerbaijanis. One of the pioneers who contributed to the development of the Turkic movement in Russia is Ismail Gaspirali, a Crimean Tatar (Georgeon, 2009: 5). Gaspirali was born in 1851 in the city of Bahcesaray in Crimea. In 1883, he published the *Tercuman* newspaper, which aimed to establish unity among the Turks with the motto "Unity in language, at work, in opinion!". After opening schools that support this goal, he organized trips to Istanbul, Turkistan, Egypt and India to spread the style of education in these schools. He died in Bahcesaray in 1914 (Kushner, 1979: 177).

Ismail Gaspirali gave particular importance to education and aimed to awaken national feelings through education. In addition to Gaspirali, Yusuf Akcura, the author of the book is one of the leading names of Turkish nationalists in Russia. He was born in Simbir, a city on the west coast of the

Volga in 1879. After starting military school in Istanbul, he went to Kazan during summer holidays and met with Ismail Gaspıralı frequently (Oguz, 2012: 119, 120). During his visits to Russia, he realized that the Turks living under the rule of the Russians had a stronger national consciousness than the Istanbul Turks who lived in the capital of an independent and free state. These journeys made Akcura feel divided between the two dormitories and reinforced the idea of ensuring political unity between these two lands (Georgeon, 2005: 17). He died in Istanbul in 1935.

Huseyinzade Ali Bey, who first introduced the idea of Turan, which means the unification of all Turks, and later chose his surname as Turan and generally operates in the field of media, is an important figure for Turkists living in Russia. Huseyinzade Ali Bey was born in 1864 in Baku, Azerbaijan. He moved to Istanbul in 1890 and enrolled in the Military Medical Faculty (Ulken, 1979: 261, 262). In 1892, while he was a student at the Faculty of Medicine in Istanbul, he wrote the famous Turan poem that would earn him his surname. Huseyinzade Ali Bey, who returned from Istanbul to Baku in 1894, claimed that Turks were a whole in his articles in the publications he served, and also argued that the Turks needed modern sciences. The motto of “becoming Turkish, becoming Islam, becoming European”, which he suggested to Muslim Turkish communities, was supported by Turkists such as Ziya Gokalp and Ahmet Agaoglu (Garasova, 2004: 313). Ali Bey, who came to Istanbul in 1910 after the Young Turks came to power, participated in the opening of the Turk Ocagi and Turk Yurdu magazine (Dogan, 2010: 95). He died in Istanbul in 1941.

In addition to journalism, Ahmet Agaoglu, who fought for nationalism by founding an armed organization called Fedai and fled to Anatolia in order to escape from the pursuit of the Russian government, is another important Turkish nationalist. Agaoglu continued his activities even after he moved to Anatolia and played a role in the establishment of Turk Ocagi and Turk Yurdu magazine. He was born in 1869 in the city of Shusha in Azerbaijan. Agaoglu, who returned from Paris, where he went for education, to Azerbaijan in 1894, wrote several articles in newspapers aiming to defend the rights of Turks and Muslims (Oz, 2009: 1796). Agaoglu settled in Istanbul after a while to escape from the Russian government and died in Istanbul in 1939.

Zeki Velidi Togan contributed to Turkism, especially by researching the history and literature of Turks. At the same time, Togan, who also took part in active politics, defended the idea of federation after the February 1917 Revolution in Russia and served as a minister in the Turkic republics that declared their autonomy. Zeki Velidi Togan was born in 1890 in the province of Istlitamak in Bashkortostan. In his work titled Turkish and Tatar History, published in 1912, Togan argued that all Turks come from the same ancestry. This argument later became very popular in the nationalist movement in Turkey (Soysal, 2009a: 489). Togan, who also participated in active politics, attended the All-Russian Muslims Congress in Moscow in May 1917 and defended the idea of a federation there. Togan became the Minister of the Interior and War of Bashkortostan, whose autonomy was declared later (Togan, 2012: 131). He was judged in the case of Racism-Turanism in 1944 and was sentenced to 10 years in prison, but was released from prison in October 1945 by remaining in prison for fifteen months (Soysal, 2009b: 492). Togan died in Istanbul in 1970.

When looking roughly at the Turkists in Russia, it is seen that they generally try to spread their ideas through the press. In addition, some members of this group were also involved in active politics, and many of the important names were either arrested as a result of these activities or had to leave Russia. Many of those who left Russia also preferred to cross to Anatolia. The organizational success of Turkists in Russia has been closely tied to Russia's internal and external conjuncture. As Russia showed signs of weakening, Turkic activities also intensified. For example, Yusuf Akcura wrote the book “Three Styles of Politics”, which is considered to be the basic book of Turkism, in

March 1904, a few weeks after the Russian navy was attacked in Port Arthur. This situation should not be seen as a coincidence. At a time when Russia was weak, Turkist hopes rose (Georgeon, 2009: 82). Following the defeat of Russia against Japan and the 1905 Revolution, the work of the Turkist movement in Russia has also accelerated. Russia started the Trans-Siberian Railway project connecting Moscow to the Sea of Japan in 1891 in line with the expansionist policy it followed in the Far East, and completed a significant part of this railway network in 1904. Meanwhile, in 1898, the Russians occupied the peninsula of Laodun and Port-Arthur port in China and reached the China Sea. Japan, on the other hand, carried out a sudden raid on Port-Arthur on February 8, 1904, in order to stop the Russian army. The Japanese, despised by the Russians, defeated the Russian navy and landed soldiers and defeated the Russians in the ground war. Russia could not send its military units and war materials in the homeland to the Far East and was defeated by the Japanese (Kurat, 1948: 369, 370). When the Baltic Navy, which traveled 33 thousand kilometers through Africa to the Far East, was also destroyed by the Japanese, internal turmoil began in Russia (Vernadsky, 2011: 297, 298). Anti-war strikes and socialist rallies that spread to many cities compelled the Russian government to end the war and peace was achieved between the parties on 23 August 1905. The defeat of Russia by Japan, which was much smaller than itself, shook the prestige of the Tsarist government both worldwide and within Russia. This war also sparked the 1905 Revolution (Kurat, 1948: 371).

The Russian-Japanese War of 1904-1905 destroyed both Russia's economy and the government's authority (Kurat, 1948: 378, 379). In Russia, almost every segment of the society is in a state of motion during this period: the workers are constantly on strike demanding political reforms, while the peasants frequently revolt and burn the houses of the landlords and even kill them (Vernadsky, 2011: 327, 328). On January 22, 1905, 140 thousand workers marched towards the Winter Palace. Police and soldiers opened fire on the workers in the large square in front of the palace, and nearly a thousand people were killed in this attack. The bloody suppression of this march by the Tsar had a profound effect among the people and the day in question began to be known as Bloody Sunday among the people. Strikes started all over Russia in order to protest Bloody Sunday (Kurat, 1948: 380, 381). The government, trying to ease the environment, decided to convene the Duma, which functions as an advisory council without legislative power, on 19 August 1905. Upon this situation, which did not satisfy anyone, a general strike was called, waters and electricity were cut off in the country, and railways stopped. In many places, local committees (Soviets) were established to play an important role in the 1917 Revolution. On October 30, the government announced a series of reform packages such as granting democratic voting rights and guaranteeing fundamental rights in order to prevent the revolutionary movement. However, this package did not have an effect on socialist organizations and the strikes continued. The majority of the people, who were satisfied with the reform package, did not support the irreconcilable attitude of the revolutionaries, and the state took the control again. Soviet organizations were disbanded and riots were suppressed by force (Vernadsky, 2011: 329, 330).

The Ottoman-Russian war that started in 1914 increased the hopes of the Turkists in Russia. A few years later, Turkist activities were revived during the 1917 Revolution. A short-lived Azerbaijan Republic was established in 1918 (Georgeon, 2009: 6, 82).

During the 1905 Revolution, the Turks did not participate in an open uprising, they only organized some small demonstrations against the bad attitudes of local governments (Zenkovsky, 1983: 39). Until that period, the only Turkish newspaper in Russia was *Tercuman*, which started its publication life in 1883, half of it in Russian and half in Turkish. However, thanks to the freedom of press that came with the 1905 Revolution, Turkists started to publish many Turkish newspapers and

magazines (Devlet, 1985: 16). The Turkists in the city of Kazan led this movement. The first Turkish newspaper was published in October 1905 under the name Kazan Informant. Turkish newspapers in Orenburg, Ufa, Astrakhan, Uralsk, Baku and Petersburg followed that newspaper. Turkists have started to organize not only in the field of the press, but also to express their political demands, most of which are related to cultural activities. Leaders of the Turkist movement such as Yusuf Akcura and Ismail Gaspirali met in St. Petersburg on April 8, 1905 and decided to hold a congress called the General Congress of Muslims in Russia (The Turks at Russia used to use "Muslim" title at that period). They determined that the best place and time for this congress was the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair established on Idil in July and August (Kurat, 1948: 390). This fair has had an important place in terms of the commercial activities of Muslims in Russia. Traders from the East and Europe come to this fair; the merchants who met here exchanged both goods and ideas. Turkists thought that it would be possible to gather a large delegation here during the fair, and even if the congress was not allowed, they would find the opportunity to come together (Devlet, 1985: 90). The manager of the hotel, where the Turkists were planning to hold the congress on August 28, 1905, did not allow the congress to be held in the hotel building; Thereupon, the participants chartered a ship on the pretext of traveling on the Oka River and organized their congress here. As a result of this congress, some decisions that were not very brave and did not go forward were taken (Zenkovsky, 1983: 36, 37):

- 1) Muslims in Russia must form a union.
- 2) Cooperation with progressive groups of Russia can be made to implement some political, economic and social reforms.
- 3) Muslims and Russian people should be given equal rights.
- 4) A constitutional monarchy should be established based on the relative representation of nations.
- 5) Freedom of religion and press should be ensured.
- 6) Private property should not be touched.

The General Congress of Muslims of Russia and the decisions taken in this congress can be considered as an indication that the Turks in Russia have started to operate in the political field (Kurat, 1948: 391). Turkish nationalists, who organized quite actively in Russian territory, also had close relations with the nationalists in Turkey.

### **3. Conclusion**

To summarize, the Turkist group in Russia has made important contributions to Turkism. These people who came to Anatolia for various reasons before the foundation of the Republic played an important role in introducing Turkism to the Ottoman Empire. Russian origin Turkists such as Yusuf Akcura, Ahmet Agaoglu and Huseyinzade Ali Bey fled from Russia after 1908 and settled in the Ottoman Empire in order to study and had close relations with the Unionists. These intellectuals also actively participated in the establishment of the Republic and played an important role in maintaining relations with the Soviet Union during the War of Independence and in the first years of the Republic. The ideas of these intellectuals continued to influence the nationalists later.

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