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What Makes the Wolves Howl and What Are they Howling For?

ISTANBUL, Turkey

May, 1999

By Whitney Mason

It was around eleven o'clock on April 18, election night, when we heard the first car horns blaring through the normally quiet Ankara neighborhood. "Ach, it's *them*," said my friend Zenep, her face twisted with dismay. A left-leaning violinist, Zenep had watched all evening in stunned silence as television newscasters reported that the Nationalist Movement Party — in Turkish the *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* or MHP — was well on its way to a second-place finish in parliamentary elections. As the party's sympathizers continued to drag up and down the streets, Zenep remarked sourly: "This is what we have to look forward to for the next four years." The last time that night that I heard car horns and muffled chanting was after three in the morning.

Zenep was far from alone in being shocked by the MHP's success, or in thinking that it augured rule by hooligans. The 18.1 percent of the vote captured by the MHP more than doubled its 1995 result, before the death of the party's legendary founder and "*basbug*" or commandant, Alparslan Turkesh, and several points higher than party leaders dreamed of.

The MHP's success probably disturbed no one more than Bulent Ecevit, leader of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), which topped the polls with 22.1 percent of the vote. For a quarter century, Bulent Ecevit, a former student of Sanskrit, translator of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, poet, journalist, and Turkey's best approximation of a mainstream leftist, had been the arch-rival of MHP founder Turkesh.

By finishing first, Ecevit and the DSP earned a dubious invitation to cobble together a coalition government. In ordinary circumstances a coalition including the DSP and the MHP, representing the extreme poles of the Turkish political spectrum, would be unthinkable. These, however, were not usual circumstances. The party that had finished third, the Islamist *Fazilet* (Virtue) Party, could not be considered a potential coalition partner due to an array of stigmas — including a top prosecutor's vow to shut it down, and the army's open hostility. The center-right parties that finished fourth and fifth, Motherland and the True Path Party — had too few seats in parliament to give the DSP a majority government by themselves and they could not both be brought into a coalition because their leaders, Mesut Yilmaz and Tansu Ciller, hated one another. This made the inclusion of the MHP in a coalition almost inevitable; as the *Turkish Daily News* put it, "Hard to live with, harder to live without." As he agonized over his dismal alternatives, Ecevit made remarks about the MHP ranging from mildly positive to mildly negative.

Then, a month after the elections, Rahshan Ecevit, Bulent's wife and Vice

Chairman of the Democratic Left Party, launched a violent broadside against MHP. In the pages of *Milliyet* newspaper, Mrs. Ecevit said the people who bear the name "Turk" represent the descendents of the multinational Ottoman empire, not just those from Central Asia. But the MHP, she charged, identified Turks as descendents of the she-wolf Asena who, according to Turkish myth, had suckled their Central Asian forebears and accompanied them on their migration into Anatolia. Mrs. Ecevit said the MHP had spared no efforts in spreading this racist ideology and had even armed its supporters. She also reminded readers of the party's past mafia connections. "Is it so easy to forget all this?" she asked.

Not for millions of Turks old enough to remember the bloody, ideologically-charged chaos of the late 1970s. During those years, supporters of the MHP, known as the Gray Wolves, had operated as a right-wing gang whose running street battles with leftist rivals had cost some 5,000 lives and scarred several times as many. The first massacre took place in 1977 at a May Day celebration in Taksim Square, the main square of modern Istanbul. With thousands of people on hand to join in the first open celebration of the workers' holiday in 50 years, shots rang out — at least some of them from right-wing or police sharpshooters on rooftops. After the ensuing stampede a total of 37 people were dead.

Twelve people died and a thousand buildings were damaged in the next major clash, which erupted in the city of Sivas in September 1978 between members of the Sunni Muslim majority and the religiously heterodox (although generally Shi'ite) and politically secular Alevis. On the northern edge of the central Anatolian plateau, Sivas, write Hugh and Nicole Pope in *Turkey Unveiled*, "marks the frontier of an area where Sunni and Alevi communities live side by side in roughly even numbers and relations between the two are most volatile.

On the southeastern edge of this mixed Alevi-Sunni area lies Kahramanmaras. Three months after the Sivas riots, murders of Alevis blamed on Gray Wolves plunged Kahramanmaras into two days and nights of mayhem in which at least 107 people died and over a thousand were wounded.

"[General Kenan] Evren, then chief of the armed forces, tended to blame the right-wing MHP, as he did later when similar riots killed more than thirty people in the north Anatolian town of Chorum in May 1980," wrote the Papes. Evren, when he was president of the military government that took power after the 1980 coup, also admitted that security forces protected right-wing *ulkucu* (idealist) streetfighters, believing they were performing a patriotic service by fighting leftist youth believed to be supported by the Soviets. A raid on Turkesh's Ankara headquarters in June 1979 turned up guns and documents clearly implicating the party in the violence perpetrated

by the *ulkucu*. Evren, who called the MHP a 'wicked organization', noted that 'maybe they spilled less blood than the left, but they still shed it.'

Overwhelming circumstantial evidence appears to corroborate General Evren's assertion of police collusion with the MHP in the 70s. Turkesh spent nearly two years and eight months as a deputy prime minister in governments led by Suleyman Demirel, who is now the president. Of 40,000 police at the time, 19,000 were unionized; of these 17,000 belonged to the right-wing union and just 2,000 to the left. Police and Gray Wolves were often seen supporting one another in street clashes. Collaboration with the police also paved the way for the MHP to become a mafia-like organization engaged in a wide variety of criminal activities.

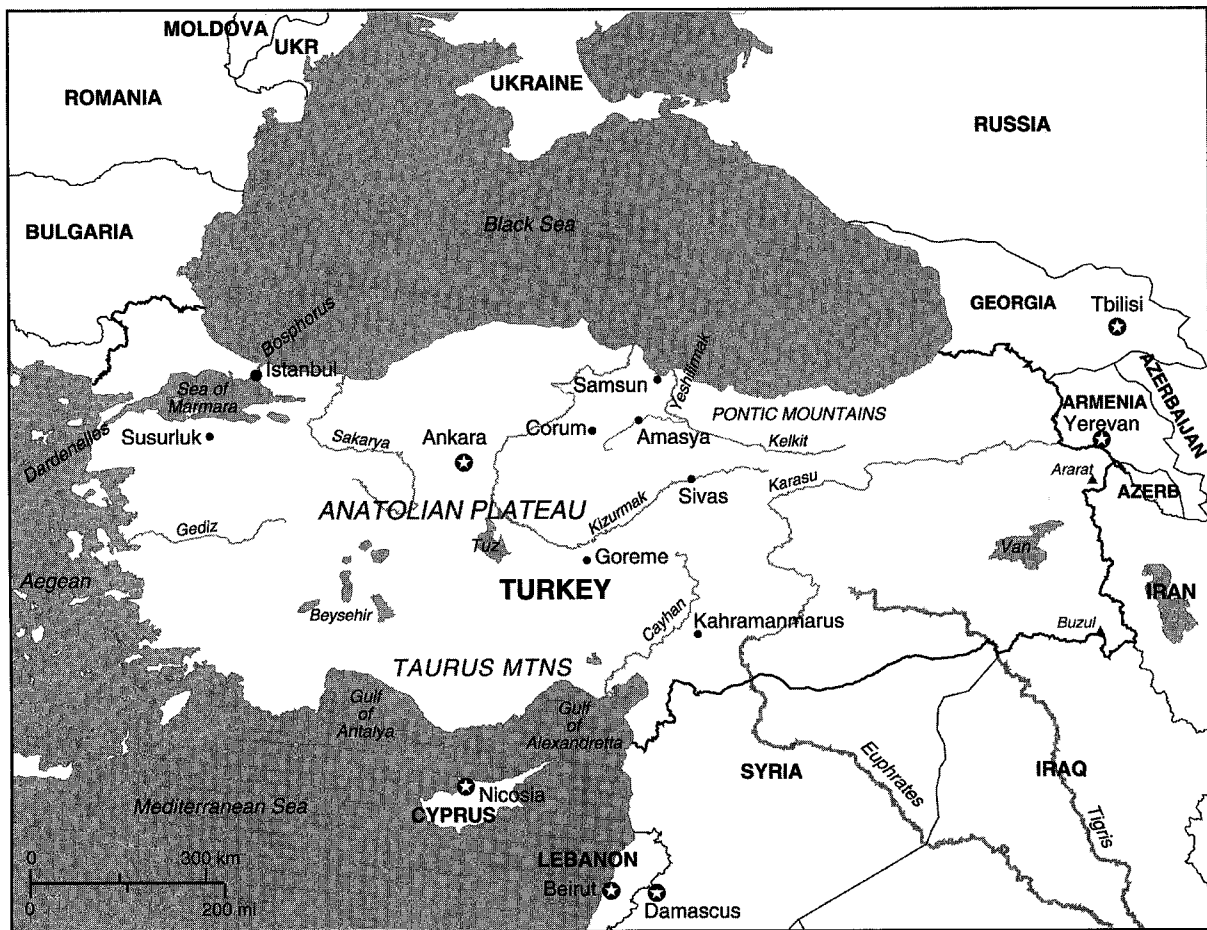
An MHP supporter I know told me that just a few years ago, when he was active in trying to clean up the party's image, he heard that drug dealers were telling bar owners in Ankara that they'd better not interfere with the pushers' business because they were affiliated with the MHP and, by extension, with the police. Furious that drug dealers were besmirching the party, he and a dozen or so like-minded Wolves ambushed the drug dealers in a bar and beat them up. That evening he received a phone call from a senior party official, summoning him to his office. Those drug dealers were good party men, the official told him; never lay a hand on them again. According to my source, the leader of the drug dealers he confronted is now an MHP Member of Parliament.

Suspensions about the MHP's involvement in mafia activities were reinforced the next year when a car crash near the town of Susurluk on the Aegean coast killed a right-wing assassin named Abdullah Catli, who had been riding with a chief of police and an MP from Tansu Ciller's True Path party.

After Turkesh's death in 1997, the reins of the MHP were taken up by a soft-spoken but dogmatically nationalist economics professor named Devlet Bahceli. In the 1999 election campaign Bahceli had repeatedly sworn that the MHP no longer had any links to organized crime or corruption and had renounced political violence.

The question for Ecevit and other wary Turks was: Had the MHP really changed or was it still a dangerous wolf in sheep's clothing?

Post-election maps showed the MHP's stronghold to be a broad strip of territory running through the heart of the country from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Since one of the truer ways to judge politicians in a democratic system is by their constituencies, I decided to tour Turkey's heartland to meet face-to-face with some of the Turks who had finally secured for the Gray Wolves a place at the feast.



AMASYA

Accompanying me on what for them would be an off-beat vacation were Canadian journalist Julie Barlowe and Brett Jones, a protection officer with the UN High Commission for Refugees in Croatia. In Ankara we rented a Tofas, the prototypical Turkish economy sedan, and struck out northeast for the five hour drive to Amasya.

Amasya's tradition of civic pride goes back millennia. The Greek geographer Strabo was born in Amasya in 64 BC, when it was capital of the Pontic kingdom ruled by descendants of a Persian noble who escaped to the mountains in the fourth century BC. Strabo describes the town's spectacular setting thus:

My city is situated in a large deep valley, through which flows the Iris River. Both by human foresight and by nature it is an admirably devised city, since it can at the same time afford the advantage of both a city and a fortress; for it is a high and precipitous rock, which descends abruptly to the river, and has on one side the edge of the river where the city is settled and the other the wall that runs up on either side to the peaks. The peaks are two in number, are unified with one another by nature, and are magnificently towered. Within this circuit are both the palaces and monuments of the kings. . . And two bridges have been built over the river, one

from the city to the suburbs and the other from the suburbs to the outside territory...[which] is beautifully adapted to habitation.

At the foot of the mountain housing the tombs and topped by the fortress sat a group of men drinking tea. I asked them to direct us to the fortress. By way of answer one of the men jumped up and beckoned to us to follow him. As we began briskly traversing a rocky face along a narrow track, our guide introduced himself as Shahin — which means “peregrine falcon” and happened to be the name of the model of car we were driving. A former commando now working as a baker in his native Amasya, Shahin was built like a fire hydrant and wore the rather loony, anxious-to-please expression of a golden retriever.

The fortress afforded views of all of Amasya's tidy streets and well-maintained buildings compactly set along both sides of the Yeshilirmak River. Shahin pointed out two clean-lined gray edifices in the final stages of construction on the hillsides across the river. One would house classrooms of a university extension and the other would be a hospital. Both looked to me like ultra-modern prisons. At the edge of town far to the left stood a gleaming white structure of several stories that looked like it had just been uprooted from a science fiction movie set, by far the most impressive modern building on Amasya's skyline; it was the police station. With Strabo

in mind, a hack surveying this landscape might be tempted to say that Amasya had had a fortress mentality for 2,000 years.

In his famous biography of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey's founding father, Lord Kinross writes of Amasya:

"This was a place well fitted to become the cradle of a Nationalist Revolution. Throughout a long and distinguished history it had shown a consistent spirit of independence. Saved from the Mongol occupation, it had been for a while the Ottoman capital and after the capture of Constantinople the tradition persisted that the heir to the Sultanate should receive his education in Amasya and serve as its governor."

"It was a place isolated from the outside world, but the center of a world of its own; a Moslem city as holy in its aspect as Brusa, with its wealth of mosques and tombs and religious buildings, but free in its remoteness and its pure Islamic traditions from the domination of the Sultanate and its crippling reactionary influence. It was a city, as Kemal had expected and soon confirmed, which looked to the future, not to the past."

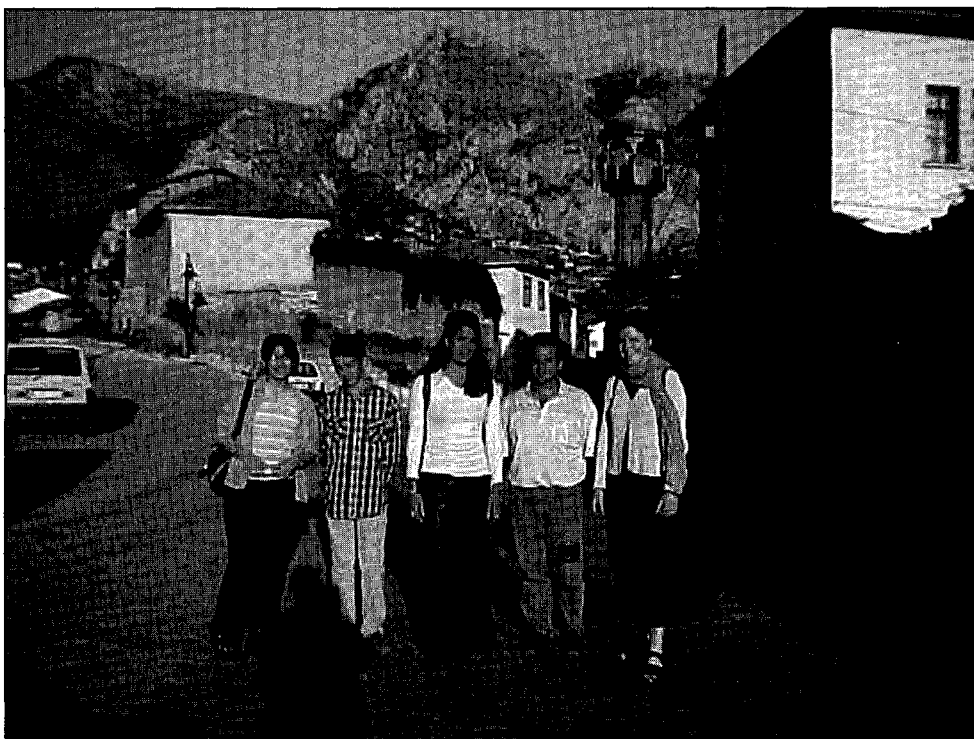
It was here, on the 21st of June 1919, that Ataturk issued his declaration of independence from the government of the Sultan that was then dominated by European powers.

"Citizens of Amasya," he declaimed, "what are you waiting for? . . . If the enemy tries to land in Samsun,

we must pull on our peasant shoes, we must withdraw to the mountains, we must defend the country to the last rock. If it is the will of God that we be defeated, we must set fire to all our homes, to all our property; we must lay the country in ruins and leave it an empty desert. Citizens of Amasya, let us all together swear an oath that we shall do this." The citizens declared that they awaited his orders.

As we rested among the ruins of the fortress, I asked Shahin which party he'd voted for. The MHP, of course, he said. Why "of course"? I asked. Because, said Shahin, beaming with enthusiasm, all the young people in Amasya had voted for the MHP. He gave me the wolf sign I'd seen so many times since the elections, a closed fist with the pinky and index fingers sticking forward like wolf's ears. Then he taught me the "secret" handshake: instead of wrapping all four fingers under the other person's hand, one splits the fingers so that the index and middle finger grasp the top of the wrist. The Gray Wolves' greeting is completed by butting foreheads, first one side then the other, like a cross between a European good-bye kiss and a challenge from a mountain goat.

Again I asked Shahin why he supported the MHP and he repeated that all the young people in Amasya supported them. According to a survey by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 70 percent of MHP supporters are men, most of them eligible to vote for the first time in 1999. An overwhelming majority are working. They are emphatic about terrorism, which they expect the state to prevent. Their other top priorities include fighting cor-



Our Feliniesque reporting team in Amasya: Chagri, Nihan, Brett, Shahin, Julie



Amasya Mayor Huseyin Bas with the Vice-Governor and constituents Nihan and Chagri.

ruption and establishing social unity and peace. Compared to DSP supporters, MHP voters tend to be very satisfied with their own lives and optimistic about the future.

When I asked a third time which of the MHP's particular policies or qualities had earned his allegiance, he looked confused and muttered again that all the young people liked the MHP. Our political conversation had reached a dead end very quickly. Brightening, Shahin asked what football team I rooted for in the US. Though I haven't really followed them for years, I said the Seattle Seahawks. Radiating the same retriever-like ardor as when he'd declared himself a Gray Wolf, Shahin said he supported Galatasaraj, an Istanbul club that's Turkey's number one team. Later in the day, after repeatedly failing to come up with any reasons for supporting the MHP, Shahin readily agreed to my suggestion that he supported the MHP for exactly the same reasons he supported Galatasaraj — i.e., because his friends did.

After a tortuous climb down the mountain we were all hungry. Wanting to thank him for guiding us and still hoping to learn more about why young people in Amasya liked the MHP, I invited Shahin to join us for lunch and with joshing encouragement from his friends he shyly accepted.

Since with my still-limited Turkish we couldn't have a satisfying conversation with anyone, I stopped by a tourism information booth on the river to ask whether the person manning it knew anyone who could work as an interpreter. She made a couple of phone calls and told

us an interpreter was on his way. Ten minutes later two children on the cusp of adolescence arrived, a girl named Nihan and a bizarrely effeminate boy named Chagri. Both were finishing their third year of English at Amasya's university-preparatory "*Anadolu*" or Anatolian school. Looking bashfully down at the ground, they offered to help me as interpreters.

As we were eating lunch, the architect who owned the *pension* where we were staying dropped by with some suggestions of people to talk with about the MHP. From his longish hair, I would have guessed he would voted for the DSP or even a more left-wing party on the fringe. But the architect said that he too had voted for the MHP because he considered it the only force that could stop the Islamist Virtue Party. Before rushing back to the *pension* to work on plans for restoring Amasya's historic buildings, he promised to try to arrange a meeting with the city's MHP mayor.

As we sat sipping tea 40 minutes later we received our summons. Ranging in age from 13 to 31, Julie, Brett, Shahin, Nihan Chagri and I looked like we'd just stepped out of a Fellini film. Our team's composition appeared to surprise no one at city hall. We were greeted in a room full of men by a man who introduced himself as the mayor's "special pen," an Ottoman term referring to an administrator's top assistant. Minutes later the six of us were ushered into the mayor's office and seated on couches in a horseshoe around the mayor's desk. A modern-day chamberlain then doused our hands with lemon cologne, offered us chocolates and finally four kinds of cigarettes in packs neatly opened on a silver platter. De-

spite these regal trappings, the mayor himself, Huseyin Bas, had the sad, baggy face of Elmer Fudd. Demonstrating his clear understanding of political priorities, the mayor politely ignored us at first and asked the kids who their fathers were and what they did for a living. Nihan said her dad was head of the tourism office and Chagri's had a shop. "Excellent, excellent," said the mayor. "Be sure to give them my regards."

The mayor, I had been told, belonged to the Alevi minority. Before I'd left for Amasya several journalists and academics had told me they thought that an important impetus for nationalism in the heartland was the hostility between the region's large number of Shi'ite Alevis and the Sunni Muslim majority. As soon as we arrived in town this explanation had been repeated by the night manager of the pension where we stayed, himself an Alevi.

Bas dismissed his being an Alevi as an irrelevance. In '71 Bas became a student of MHP Founder Alparslan Turkes. The *basbug*, the mayor said, taught him to understand his country and to love it. Turkes taught him that Turks were hard-working but needed better technology. Turkes was not another Hitler as some in Europe allege, the mayor declared, apropos of nothing; he was a second Ataturk.

Bas said the MHP owes no one any apology for the blood it shed in the 70s; foreign countries — including Bulgaria, Greece, the Soviet Union — were trying to take over Turkey by arming leftist youth groups and training them to act as a fifth column. Bas wasn't surprised by the attack by Rahshan Ecevit. "In the seventies Ecevit was working for *Dev Genc* (Revolutionary Youth) and obviously she hasn't changed her stripes," he said.

In the 21st Century Turkey must be a superpower like the U.S., U.K., Japan and France, said Bas; and the MHP had been the only party that inspired in young people the belief that Turkey could be such a great country. "The MHP loves this country and loves the Turkish flag," he declared, as if neatly summing up the party's platform. Perhaps in response to a quizzical look on my face — which he mistakenly took to mean I didn't understand what he was getting at — Bas asked rhetorically: "You love your flag, right?" Ignoring my non-committal expression he repeated his question several times. Exasperated that I wouldn't play along and say that yes, I treasured the U.S. flag, he finally declared, "Well we love our flag too."

The next moment the mayor turned petulant. Why, he asked, was I was reporting only on the MHP? Turkish journalists would never single out any U.S. party for special scrutiny. I said that his concern rested on two erroneous assumptions. First, if Ross Perot's party had placed second in the general elections, Turkish journalists would certainly have reported heavily on it. And second, I had already reported on Fazilet and would report on other

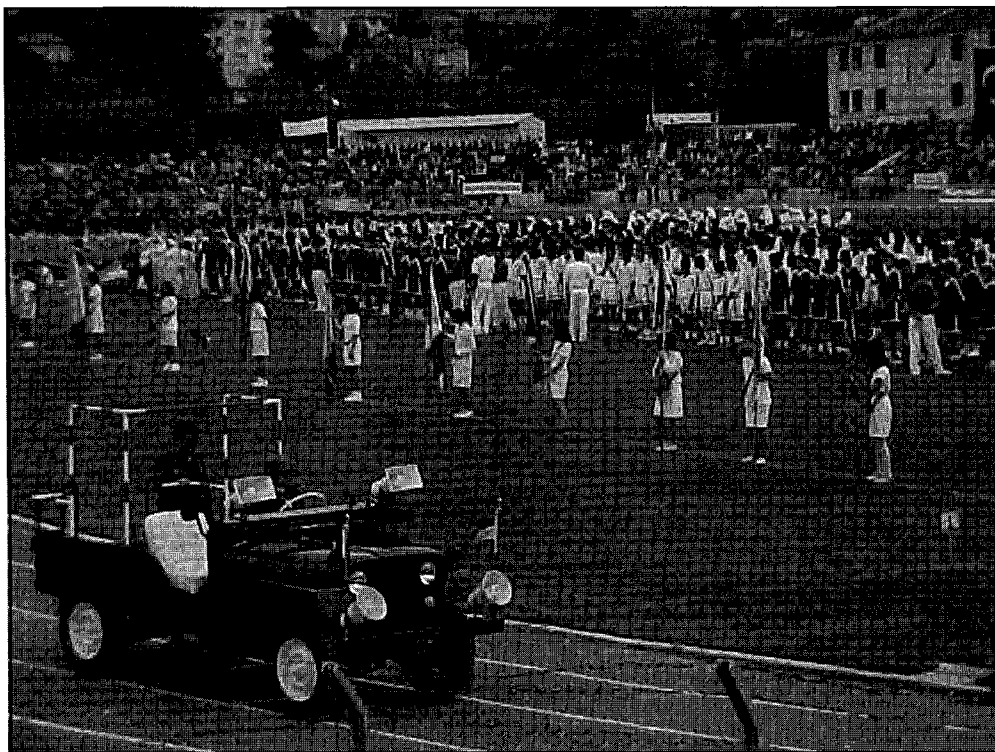
parties in the future. This explanation calmed him immediately and he invited me to proceed with my questions.

Though unemployment in Amasya was just 8 percent, the average annual income for a family of four is just \$2,100. The mayor said Turkey must raise its economic level, especially among the poorest. The MHP's goal is to reverse the growing disparity of income levels by liberalizing the economy, with the private sector as the main engine of growth rather than the state, as had been the case under former prime minister Turgut Ozal.

Having fully recovered from his pique at the thought that I was discriminating against the MHP, Bas began asking whether we'd seen all of Amasya's wonderful sights. Walking to the window, he pointed out the spotlights on the tombs of the Pontic kings carved into the hillside. The lights were the mayor's initiative and he asked everyone what they thought. They were beautiful, we said. Had we seen the other important sites? I confessed that we hadn't had time to take in all the town had to offer. I mentioned, though, that we'd love to go to a hamam, the traditional Turkish bath. He picked up the phone and a moment later told us that the central hamam, usually open in the evenings only for men, would make an exception for Julie, Brett and me at 11 that evening.

At 8:30 the next morning, Nihan and Chagri picked us up at the *pension* to take us to the city stadium for celebrations of a national holiday celebrating both Ataturk and youth. The bleachers were packed with people of all ages. Wearing brightly colored t-shirts and sweat pants, the flower of Amasya's youth — all the upperclassmen from the city's highschools — marched into the stadium in loose formation and took up positions on the field. The morning was overcast and unseasonably cool and the kids stamped in place and hugged themselves to keep warm as two speakers, a man and a woman, took turns extolling Ataturk's virtues and his love for the young people of Turkey. Though Nihan and Chagri were more interested in watching the shivering teenagers, Chagri obliged me by translating bits of the speeches. "Oh they're just saying Ataturk was the greatest man in the world"; or later, "Now they're saying Ataturk really loved the youth of Turkey and said that they should be prepared to sacrifice anything to save the nation." The words seemed to mean little to Chagri — or, to judge from the volume of chatting all around us, to most other people in the stadium.

"The official nationalism dominates the public sphere, but it cannot be said to derive its vitality from popular support or mass enthusiasm," writes nationalism expert Tanil Bora who has contributed articles to a number of respected political periodical and books in Turkey. "In fact, its phraseology and symbolic discourse turn into vacuous and ceremonial routine." Perhaps the most significant aspect of official nationalism is that it anchors



Celebrating Ataturk Youth Day in Amasya

the center of the political spectrum far to the right of most countries' so that very few Turks will hesitate to call themselves nationalists of one stripe or another.

This official cult of Ataturk and the state, grown banal and tired through repetition over 75 years, represents only the first of three strains of nationalism identified by Bora. The second is what he calls "liberal nationalism", which embraces capitalism and westernization. With boundless self-confidence in Turks' capacities, liberal nationalists envisage Turkey soon taking its rightful place among the world's most powerful and affluent nations — not by presenting an alternative paradigm, but by beating the West at its own game. "The openness of the urban upper-middle-class youth to the world, its inclination to worldly pleasures, its computer-literacy and knowledge of English, both attributes of the 'information society'," writes Bora, "are sanctified as the values of the 'New Turk'." The MHP has tried to co-opt this strain of nationalism: before the last elections the party published guidelines on how members should behave, dress, and groom themselves in a way calculated not to offend or alarm more educated and urbanized voters.

Despite this overture, the core of the MHP belongs to the tradition Bora describes as "radical Turkish nationalism." Beginning in the 1940s with pan-Turkism, the desire to unite all the ethnically Turkic people of Anatolia and Central Asia, radical Turkish nationalism has vacillated between cultural chauvinism and outright racism.

During the seventies, the focus of nationalist feeling

shifted to Islam. Today, though, Islam has yielded its central role to a revived romantic pan-Turkism. MHP supporters again identify themselves as Gray Wolves, with greeting one another the wolf sign and club handshakes.

Bora suggests that the MHP has relegated Islam to secondary importance because non-nationalistic Islamism has become a rival ideology both within Turkey and the region. Nationalists are suspicious of Arab countries' financial support for the Islamist Virtue Party. Many Turks also worry about Virtue's popularity among Kurds in the Southeast, where for the past 15 years the army has battled Kurdish separatists.

Brett and Julie and I said good-bye to the kids and headed to a downtown restaurant for a quick bite before heading further east. Since two of us were women we naturally had to sit in the claustrophobically low-ceilinged upstairs dining room reserved for "families". For two hours we drove through bright green hills that reminded me of home in the Pacific Northwest. Though it was mid-May, the gentle rain that was falling as we set out from Amasya turned to fog and snow as we crossed mountains outside Sivas, site of the most spectacular nationalist attack in recent years.

SIVAS

In July 1993 intellectuals gathered in this ancient town for a festival honoring a medieval Alevi poet. Among the guests was satirist Aziz Nesin, a leftist who is one of the country's most outspoken critics of the conservatism

of the Turkish masses. Among other outrageous statements, Nesin has claimed that “60 percent of Turkish people are thick-headed”, referring to the fact that most Turks support repressive and reactionary governments. With this sort of rhetoric it was easy for conservatives to paint Nesin as “an enemy of the people.” On his arrival in Sivas Nesin made an inflammatory speech that was reported in the papers the next day, which happened to be a Friday, the day devout Muslims go to the mosque. Frenzied with indignation, a mob of worshippers surrounded the hotel where the intellectuals had taken refuge. Crying “Allahu Akbar” (“God is great”) someone set fire to the hotel; flames and smoke killed 37 people.

Why had this religious and nationalist populism reached such a lethal pitch on the verge of the third millennium? One reason is globalization. The borders of the Turkish Republic, founded after Atatürk’s armies had driven out foreign occupiers that threatened the very existence of the state, were sacrosanct throughout the Cold War. With the collapse of the bipolar world order, border adjustments and localized conflict have again become conceivable. Human rights have assumed much more importance in the foreign-policy agendas of the U.S. and Europe, while transnational commerce and finance has undermined the economic prerogatives of the state. Bora argues that these challenges are seen by many Turks as only the latest in a series of mortal threats to the nation stretching from the Crusades to the European powers’ attempts to dispose of the Ottoman territories with no regard for Turkish interests.

The revived feeling that most of the world is hostile

to Turkey has been especially troubling, according to Bora, because it slammed shut a brief window of almost giddy self-confidence and optimism. Turkey entered the 90s buoyed by robust economic growth, the prospect of membership in the European Union and the hope that Turkey might become a valued bridge between Europe and the newly independent Turkic republics of Central Asia. President Turgut Ozal predicted that “the 21st Century would be the century of the Turks.”

This optimism began to unravel during the Gulf War. The creation of a Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq fueled Kurdish separatism inside Turkey and created resentment that the U.S. took Turkish loyalty for granted. The slowness of military interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, compared to Iraq and Somalia for instance, reinforced nationalist suspicions that the new world order represented not a heightened regard for human life — particularly those of Muslims in the former Ottoman world — but a less constrained pursuit of national interests. As this realization dawned on Turks, two of the prizes with which they had entered the nineties evaporated: the economy slumped and the Turkic republics showed little enthusiasm for a close alignment with their ethnic cousins in Turkey.

Forty minutes outside Sivas, in the sort of sparsely inhabited country loosely described as “the middle of nowhere”, my cell phone rang. It was an editor in New York saying that an essay I’d e-mailed a week before had never arrived. He needed it ASAP. I told him I’d do my best. We drove straight to a hotel we found in our guidebook, I copied my essay to a computer diskette and asked



Gray Wolves in the Sivas ulkuocagi spontaneously making their wolf sign

the guy at the reception desk whether by any crazy chance there was an internet café nearby. Lo and behold, there was one right across the street. Dodging a couple of horse-drawn wagons, I ran across the road and found the café. With the help of the friendly staff, a few minutes later my latest thoughts on the war in Kosovo had arrived, in digitalized form, in the editor's office in New York. Sivas didn't seem so remote after all.

Along with the guy who'd helped me with the computer and a friend of his, a poet who gave Julie and me a copy of his first volume of verse, we celebrated the successful transmission with glasses of tea. When I mentioned that I was looking for an interpreter for a few hours of intensive work the next morning, someone got on the phone and in a few minutes said he'd found an English teacher who was available. The poet offered to lead us the "short distance" to the language school on the other side of town where we would meet the teacher and make plans for the next morning. After half an hour of brisk walking we'd covered a couple of miles and learned that a young poet with no car probably isn't the most reliable judge of distances. It was another mile or so back in the direction from which we'd come to reach a restaurant that served alcohol. Over a dinner of grilled lamb, beef and chicken washed down with beer, the teacher, a family man with a decorous manner named Husnu, explained that he'd also voted for the MHP. His reason, which we heard repeatedly during our trip, was that all the other conservative parties had been discredited by corruption and incompetence.

After dinner we all — our group now numbering five including the teacher and the poet — repaired to the disco downstairs. The good-sized crowd was about evenly divided between men and women, all of whom were of course uncovered. When we'd been sitting at our table for an hour or so a tall, dark-haired heavy-set young woman approached Julie and asked us to join her and her friends. Before we had time to sit down with them, they were pulling us onto the dance floor. Julie and I amused them with exaggerated versions of western dancing and they tried to teach us how dance to Turkish music by immobilizing our hips and liberating our arms and hands. Julie seemed to manage it; my hips proved incorrigible. But our new friends complimented every attempt, however clumsy, and we were happy guests when we finally said good-night to the teacher and the poet at around 3 in the chilly morning.

Husnu appeared promptly at eight the next morning to take Julie and me to Sivas's most famous pastry shop for a meeting with Gokhan, an active member of the local *ulkuocagi* or "idealist hearth." In the 1970s the MHP founded the idealist hearths across the country in order to promote its brand of nationalism, particularly among high-school and university students of provincial origin.

Our guide to the *ulkuocagi*, Gokhan, said that like us

he was feeling a bit befogged by a late night that included a lot of *raki*, Turkey's potent, anise-flavored liquor. He modestly conceded Husnu's description of him as a big man about town. He had a rather spectacular head-start: no fewer than 12 of Gokhan's relatives had been elected to parliament on the MHP ticket. (It's not just the Islamists who have big families.) Little wonder, then, that he went to the *ulkuocagi* office every evening after work to talk politics. Gokhan didn't go in for secret handshake or head-butting himself and said many other Gray Wolves are also getting away from such puerile practices.

Though an active participant, Gokhan clearly belonged to the group's elite: he volunteered that the *ulkuocagi* generally evangelized among "ignorant, illiterate" young people. The *ulkuocagi* conducted seminars targeted at high school and university teachers devoted to topics including "Turkey's enemies — past and present," and "foreign protests against Turkey." Gokhan said he valued the *ulkuocagi* for the solidarity among members and their love of country. Asked how he felt about Islam, Gokhan said he saw "Islam as a way of belief, nationalism as a way of life." While observing the rules of Islam more in the breach, he felt his main duty was to improve the welfare of his countrymen.

The first thing we saw inside the door of the *ulkuocagi* was a pile of shabby shoes on a threadbare, pea-colored carpet. As in Turkish homes, members don't wear shoes in the club. There were no lights on and there may well have been no electricity. Considering this was a pillar of the second most powerful party in the country, the office was surprisingly dingy. The walls of the main meeting room were lined with photos of "martyrs" killed in the 70s. As we entered, several teenage boys melted diffidently before us, revealing a mustachioed older man, probably in his late 30s. Ilias Gul greeted us with the proprietorial air of the skipper of a fishing boat. Gul was a physics teacher visiting from a small town near Sivas; though he was a guest at this branch of the *ulkuocagi*, as the oldest man the younger men showed him a fawning deference.

With all the younger members crowded around him like wolf cubs around their mother, Gul gave me a knowing smile. "You Americans understand the MHP better than Turks," he said, explaining his belief that for years the organization has been widely studied as a bulwark against communism. The MHP, said Gul, was formed in 1964, the year after Turkish returned from his exile in India. Its purpose was to counteract a leftist guerrilla force being trained and indoctrinated by the Soviets. Though Gul was sure the MHP enjoyed full American support during the Cold War, he said the party was now anxious to prove it wasn't a U.S. tool.

Gul was convinced that if the MHP and Gray Wolves hadn't fought as fiercely as they did in the 70s that Turkey would be communist today. He was proud of the

struggle. His only regret was that instead of being celebrated for its heroic efforts, the MHP had been reviled and punished. Gul said that the Gray Wolves were still ready to go anywhere any time to defend fellow (ethnically) Turkic people. He claimed 5,000 Turks had fought against Armenians in Karabakh.

Gul explained MHP's recent electoral success by the fact that all the other parties had been tried and found wanting. Gul said the Islamist Virtue Party was not substantially different from the MHP but had the disadvantage of being opposed by the army. Pinned to the wall near the door of the club was a mimeographed poem by a 77-year-old MHP supporter who explained the elections in more visceral terms:

*The aim of the rich is position and money,
Poor people work for an empty belly,
They're not even able to find a doctor to treat their
injuries,
No one to cure their ailments.*

*Those who haven't been brought together for a long
time,
Those who saw what was happening without learning
anything from it,
Those who gave their words but not honoring them,
There's no place in parliament for them.*

The conviction that the MHP was the only party that cared about the welfare of the common man was echoed by Baris, a student of environmental engineering living in a cold-water walkup a few blocks from the *ulkuocagi*. Baris's parents were Turks living in Diyarbakir, epicenter of the Kurdish separatist movement; from visiting Diyarbakir, Baris had developed a hatred of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) that led to his joining the MHP while studying in a conservatory in Ankara. Baris wanted to see an uncompromising line against the PKK and against foreign governments that wanted to pressure Turkey to make territorial concessions, including in Cyprus. He believed, furthermore, that the EU was a "trap" that would cripple Turkey's economy; other people, including conservative British historian Norman Stone, have told me that Turkey would only be hurt by the red-tape of Europe's hidebound, decadent societies.

One "group" with which we'd had no contact at all so far was women. After checking out of the hotel we stopped by the internet café to say good-bye to our friends and Julie said hello to three teenage girls crowded around a computer terminal "chatting" by e-mail with friends in Istanbul. After accepting our invitation to join us for lunch they asked whether we wanted to talk to them because two of them were wearing headscarves and one, a pretty red-

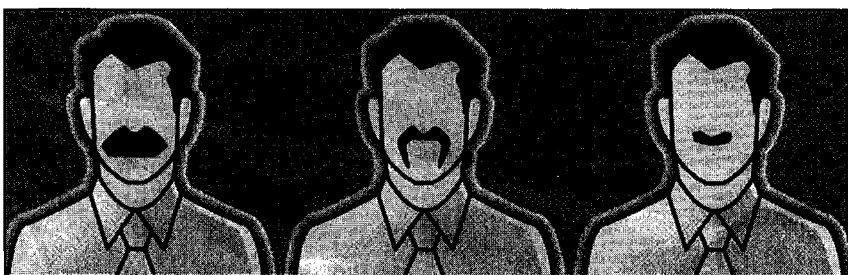
head, was not. We said no, though it did strike us as curious. The two in headscarves, Emine and Nardane, attended a state-supported religious school known as an "*imam hatip*" school, while Aysun studied at the regular state school. The three had met in a private course for preparing for the competitive university entrance examination. All of them hoped to attend top schools.

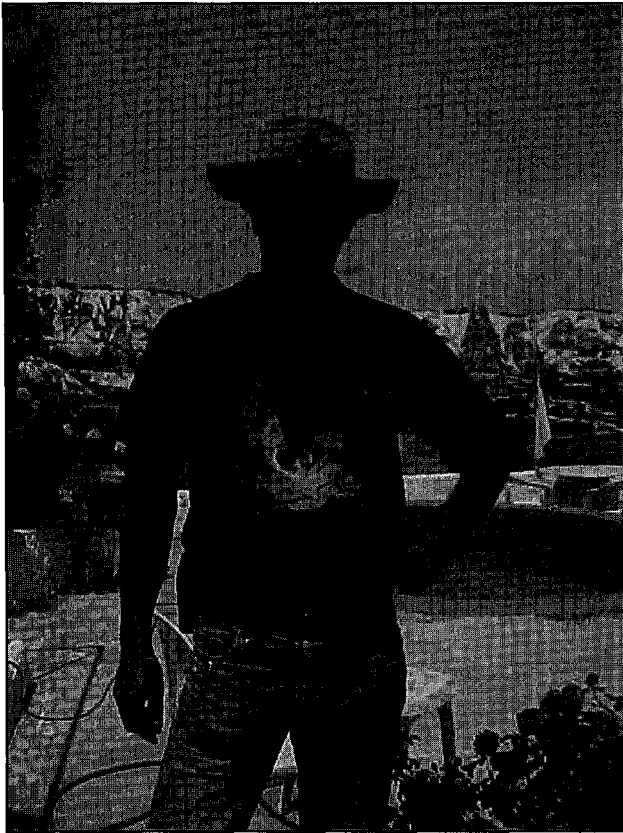
I asked Emine, who seemed smart and critical, and Nardane, a precociously stout and unquestioning conservative, whether they would be willing to remove their headscarves to attend the university, as required by Turkey's staunchly secularist laws; both said they would, reluctantly. Aysun said her mother wore a scarf but put no pressure on her to and she never would. She said she was sure her friends were pressured by their families to wear the scarf. They denied it. Sorry, she said, she didn't believe them. Not surprisingly, Nardane supported the MHP, Emine wasn't sure and Aysun, a self-declared leftist, despised the party. After a few minutes of gently spirited discussion the girls turned back to us. They disagreed about many things, they said smilingly, but as friends they respected one another's views. I tried to imagine such an attitude prevailing among Turkish men: it would revolutionize the country.

GOREME

Set amid "fairy chimneys" and other bizarre rock formations, Goreme is better known as a base for tourism in Cappadocia than as a bastion of nationalism. But election maps showed that a bastion it was and it didn't take long to find lupine bristles beneath the touristic makeup. As Brett and Julie and I walked around town, I noticed the MHP headquarters standing just behind and above city hall. After looking at several *pensions* with rooms carved out of the soft tufa stone that gives the region its bizarre appearance, the proprietor of one place invited us to sit down and have a beer with him. As he chatted us up, I noticed peeping out of his pocket a key chain with the three crescents of our favorite ultranationalist party. Then I recognized that our would-be host wore the MHP supporter's distinctive mustache with drooping corners. Wolf-hunting in these parts was so easy, it wasn't even sporting. I said to Julie and Brett that as far as I was concerned, this place was perfect. They agreed and we stowed our bags in our respective caves.

Our host was a roguishly handsome guy in his late





Asked whether he minded if I took his photo, Sururi answered: "Just don't talk bad about the wolf."

thirties or early forties wearing jeans and a T-shirt and an Akubra hat (the cowboy hat of the Australian bush) given to him by his Australian-Polish wife. Sururi was a father of five. He told us amiably that he had no intention of allowing his kids to waste their time going to university, which wouldn't teach them any employable skills. Instead all four kids who lived with him were being trained in tourism by working in the *pension* and other family businesses.

Over dinner later that evening Sururi rhapsodized about the various businesses in the family's empire: his tour of the region, his brother's carpet shop, other money-making schemes I can't recall. When we were all feeling fed up with the sales pitch, I pressed the emergency escape button that came with his being a nationalist. Why, I asked, had the Turkish authorities been afraid to give Abdullah Ocalan, aka 'Apo,' the leader of the PKK whose 14-year guerrilla campaign in southeast Turkey had cost over 30,000 lives, a fair trial?

In an instant the light of potential commerce disappeared from Sururi's face. "Fair!" he bellowed. "What do the Europeans know about being fair?" Sururi told us he watched European TV by satellite and hated its coverage of Turkey. "A bomb went off in London the other day, but you didn't see Turkish TV implying that this was a typical event in the UK," he stormed. Infuriating

though this apparently biased television coverage may be, it can't come as a surprise to Sururi since he is convinced that all European countries are determined to divide and rule Turkey. He reserves special contempt for Britain, apparently for allowing Kurdish TV to broadcast from London; for Italy, for harboring Apo and criticizing Turkey's human rights record; and for Greece for every conceivable act of malfeasance.

Sururi isn't alone in feeling sick and tired of being told what Turkey should do. A taxi driver in Istanbul, for instance, told me he supported the MHP because he wanted Turkey to be a great country "like the United States." What was it he admired so much about the U.S.? I asked. Two weeks ago, the driver said, two Germans convicted of murder had been executed in the U.S. The Germans had asked for clemency; the U.S. ignored the request and the execution had gone forward. "Afterward, the Germans had nothing to say. That's power — when no one can criticize you!" said the driver.

The next week I related this exchange to a Turk with an MBA from the University of Texas who had just finished doing his military service as an information officer with the General Staff. I'd expected him to say the driver was twisted. Instead, this well-educated young man agreed that the ability to execute with impunity was a very worthy goal for the country. I've heard similar sentiments expressed by even more sophisticated Turks: at a foreign affairs conference in Istanbul a former U.S. State Department official, who was openly pro-Turkish, outlined several issues — among them making headway on Cyprus and acknowledging the Armenians' loss of life in the first World War — on which Turkey would have to make some concession to appease critics in the U.S. Congress. The speaker was not saying the critics were right, only prescribing what would be necessary to improve Turkey's standing in Washington. It didn't matter; the Turks in the audience sneered and howled at the effrontery.

Turks are conflicted about the criteria by which they feel they should be judged. On one hand, many Turks demand that Turkey be considered a "civilized" European country and be judged accordingly. But many of the same people would argue that Turkey should be judged by the standards of a revolutionary society that in its 75-year history has actually achieved remarkable national consolidation and modernization with much less violence than other states that have undergone changes on a comparable scale, including the former Soviet Union and China.

I asked Sururi what he thought about Armenia, whose steady calls for Ankara to acknowledge the Ottomans' responsibility for the deaths of over a million Armenians in eastern Turkey in 1915 represents one of the most consistent challenges to Turkey's self-image as a bastion of civilized virtue. He knew a lot about Armenia, he said,

because he'd lived with an Armenian woman for five years and had a son by her. While visiting Armenia with his ex-girlfriend Sururi found most Armenians very nice. But he saw a map in an office in Yerevan showing almost all of Turkey in Armenia Sururi said he faulted only the ultranationalist Dashnak party — and their supporters in the Armenian diaspora — for maintaining such territorial claims against Turkey.

ANKARA

I met a young Ph.D. candidate in political science whom I will call H for lunch at a very good Italian restaurant near the prestigious Bilkent University in Ankara. H needs to be mentioned here because he represents an impressively intelligent counterpoint to most of the MHP supporters I've met. H has been active in the MHP for years and frequently writes background papers and policy proposals. One such policy proposal argued that Turkey should unreservedly endorse Kurdish cultural autonomy and thereby turn itself into the great defender of Kurds throughout the region. In one gesture Turkey would end its own civil war and turn up the heat on Iran, Iraq and Syria for continuing to repress their own Kurdish populations.

H's definition of "nationalism" revolved around the notion that Turkey should be leader of an economic and political bloc comprising all the Turkic countries of Central Asia. H happened to be convinced that the Turks and the Turkic peoples share a common history and culture, but his main reason for promoting inter-Turkic ties was pragmatic: the Central Asian Republics needed Turkey's technical, financial and managerial know-how and access to the sea and Turkey needed the republics' natural resources.

H had been close to Turkesh during the last years of his life when he was trying to reform the party. In the 1992 elections thousands of members of the Gray Wolves' youth organization, acting on orders from the *basbug*, volunteered to work for the Motherland Party. Two weeks before the elections, all the volunteers deserted the campaign, leaving no one to do the grunt work such as putting up posters and pennants. H calls this "an example of the political genius of Turkesh."

In Turkesh's last years, said H, the *basbug* had tried to liberalize the party. These reform efforts were resisted by a faction within the party known as the Nationalist Line. This faction was led by none other than the MHP's current party chairman Devlet Bahçeli.

with the *basbug*, I arranged a meeting with Turkesh's son Tugrul.

The taxi dropped me in front of a small, innocuous-looking building near the center of Ankara, which for many years had been the headquarters of the MHP and was passed to Turkesh's son after he left the party. Turkesh senior's attractive, open-faced granddaughter, Aybala, met me at the front door. I was struck by the fact that the only people I saw working in the office, beside Turkesh himself, were three young women, all uncovered.

Aybala introduced me to her uncle Tugrul, who greeted me in flawless English. Turkesh *filis*, it was immediately clear, had inherited a fair share of his father's famous charm and charisma. I asked how it was that he spoke English so perfectly and he reminded me that he had spent three years living in India after his father was exiled following the 1960 coup. Aybala told me later that her grandfather had always told her that he'd never wanted to be involved in the coup but friends roped him into the plot because



The postcard reads, "My soul is dedicated to you, my motherland."

To learn more about Bahçeli's relationship

he was the cleverest member of their circle.

Alparslan Turkesh's life had followed a schizophrenic pattern of alternately celebrating the grandeur of the state and falling afoul of it. Turkesh was first imprisoned in 1944 for writings promoting a romantic pan-Turkism. He burst onto the national stage with his leading role in the 1960 coup.

In the 1980 coup, while the chiefs of all the other major parties were being arrested, Alparslan Turkesh went into hiding from which he only emerged two days later after Gen. Evren threatened him over the radio with severe punishment. Turkesh was tried for ordering political murders, a charge that carried the death penalty, but was acquitted.

After a 1987 a referendum lifted the ban on the former party leaders, the *basbug* returned to the helm of the MHP, then called the Nationalist Work Party (MCP). Some of the nationalists imprisoned after the coup were influenced by Islamist prisoners and after being released, tried to infuse the MHP with a more religious orientation. Though Turkesh himself had made the pilgrimage to Mecca required of devout Muslims, he maintained an emphasis on nationalism rather than Islamism, particularly after Turkey began expanding its ties with the Turkic republics of Central Asia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the mid-90s the MHP expanded its support beyond its traditional lower-middle class base to more affluent voters; its support in the Aegean and Mediterranean provinces doubled. The main reason for this is probably the increasing anger about the PKK's separatist campaign in the Southeast along with a high rate of migration from the Southeast into the cities of the South and West.

After the disappointing results of the 1995 elections, which gave the MHP no representation in parliament, Tugrul Turkesh and some academics brought into the party to improve its credibility drafted a new party program which was then circulated among party officials for comment. Bahceli, according to Tugrul Turkesh, said he and others had many problems with the new program but refused to be specific. To help mend a growing split between Bahceli's faction and the rest of the party, Turkesh arranged for a party conclave at the Uludag ski resort. It was at this meeting, which the younger Turkesh did not attend, that Bahceli enlisted the support of the men who now occupy the top posts in the party. The *basbug* passed away on April 4, 1997, and the leaders of all the major political parties attended his funeral.

The party convened a congress later that year to choose a new leader. Riding on his family name, Turkesh managed to win the most votes in first round. But Tugrul Turkesh said that he'd always worked in his father's shadow and had no network of his own; in the second ballot he was beaten by Bahceli, who became chairman. Turkesh said he later discovered that Bahceli had been

purging the party of deputies who voted for him.

In November 1998 Turkesh left the MHP and founded the *Aydin Turkiye Partisi* or Enlightened Turkey Party. While maintaining its "nationalist base", said Turkesh, the ATP took a more liberal approach to the economy, human rights and improving the legal system.

"When we say 'nationalist' we mean being concerned about the welfare of all of the 65 million people living in Turkey, regardless of their ethnic background," said Turkesh. "We take Ataturk's definition of a Turk as anyone who considers himself a Turk. It's not a racist notion of nationality."

Turkesh said the ATP was a pragmatic party with a "nationalist flavor." Nationalism in Turkey means many different things to different people. In Turkesh's case it seems to imply above all decisiveness. Pressed for an illustration of "nationalist flavor," Turkesh said that if he were in government he would solve the Cyprus issue once and for all. "For 25 years everyone has repeated 'We won't give a pebble of this island' and done nothing else. I would make deals, establish some kind of confederation and solve the problem."

In the Southeast, Turkesh said he would maintain an uncompromising stance against terrorism while avoiding gratuitous provocations and more energetically addressing the region's economic problems.

By this rational definition, I asked, what politician in Turkey would *not* be a nationalist?

When Bulent Ecevit led the government in 1974, Turkesh answered, his Minister of the Interior had two sons in the *Dev Sol* (Revolutionary Left). Some members of *Dev Sol* stormed the Egyptian embassy and took several hostages. When they surrendered, Ecevit's Interior Minister *kissed* them! Turkesh seems to regard this incident as proof that Ecevit can not be considered a nationalist. Nor, according to Turkesh, can be the Islamist party's spiritual head, Necmettin Erbakan, who studiously avoids using the word "Turk." Instead Erbakan uses the word "*milliyet*" referring to the entire community of Muslim believers without reference to Turkish ethnicity or the state.

Turkesh was a smooth operator. In two hours of conversation he had managed to say extraordinarily little. But that in itself had revealed an important fact: besides the MHP, there is a nationalist of impeccable pedigree who understands that less can be more. After Tugrul and I had said good-bye, Ayballa and I had a coffee at the internet café she runs on the ground floor of the building. She said she had been studying computer science in London when her uncle invited her back from London to work as press officer for the party. Her gentle demeanor, he said, would go a long way to soften-

ing journalists' biases against nationalists.

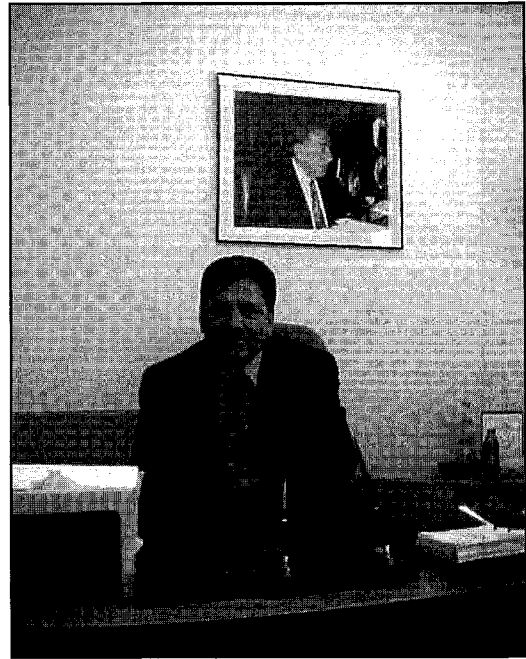
I told her that most of the MHP supporters I'd met were much rougher than she, or for that matter than her uncle. The granddaughter of the *basbug*, the populist with a personality cult second only to that of Ataturk, expressed her view that most Turks are narrow-minded and tend to base their political affiliation on sentimental loyalty to a party leader. I wondered whether her uncle shared this dim view of the nationalist masses. "My uncle says I see the world in black and white," says Ayballa. "But he tells me there are many shades in between."

Having met with nationalists high and low, I now felt ready to talk with a senior official of the MHP itself. Through a rowing friend at Bogazici University I got the number of Mehtin Chetin, long-time party adviser. Despite my explaining that I'd gotten his number from a good friend of his son's, Chetin was extremely suspicious over the phone. It took several conversations over the course of a week and the help of a couple of diplomatically polished Turkish friends before he would agree to arrange an interview for me. This was an unflattering contrast with the openness of both Turkish's Enlightened Turk Party and the Islamist party, which I'd followed during the election campaign. Finally he told me to meet him at party headquarters at 10 in the morning. After taking the overnight bus from Istanbul, my translator, Hale, and I arrived early. Chetin was late. When he arrived 20 minutes late I was struck by how his reptilian appearance fit his shady behavior.

Chetin led us stairs whose spartan appearance recalled the grubbiness of the *ulkuocagi* in Sivas and introduced Hale and me to Enis Oksuz, vice-chairman of the party with responsibility for Educational and Cultural Affairs and a professor of sociology at Istanbul University.

The first thing Oksuz said to Hale was that he knew I wasn't a real researcher or journalist and that I'd come with some hidden political agenda. Instead of wasting his time pretending to interview him, he said, I should cut straight to the one thing I'd really come to ask. Ignoring this provocation, I said that my many questions were in no particular order, but that arbitrarily I'd start by asking why he thought the influential National Security Council had said that the Gray Wolves' connections to the mafia represented "an increasing danger." Glaring at me from under his eyebrows, Oksuz said there were no such connections and if any party member were found to be linked to the mafia, he'd be kicked out.

I gathered that he was close to kicking me out too. I emphasized that I wasn't asking about the veracity of the charge, but about the military's motivations for making it. He said this was a very stupid question and that if I didn't have anything better to ask about, he wasn't going to waste any more time with me. This is when I de-



MHP Vice-Chairman and Turkish Minister of Transportation and Communications Enis Oksuz

termined to try to wind him up to the point that he himself would choose to continue defending himself for far longer than the hour we'd been told we'd have.

I produced the paper in which I'd read about the statement made by the Security Council and Oksuz declared it a flat-out lie. Who did he suppose would spread such disinformation in the press? I asked.

"The communists and other enemies of the party," Oksuz said as if stating the obvious.

I remarked that blaming the "communists" ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall sounded rather anachronistic.

Oksuz conceded that there was no radical communist group left in Turkey, but said there were still some individual radicals and many more who "pretend to be radical communists." Why would people *pretend* to be radical communists in this staunchly anti-Communist country? Because, said Oksuz, foreign governments — including the U.S., Germany and Russia — pay them. Asked to confirm that he believed the U.S. and other NATO allies were waging a disinformation campaign against the MHP, Oksuz shifted the accusation to the less controversial scapegoats of Syria, Iran and Greece.

I asked again whether he believed the U.S. acted to undermine Turkey. Oksuz answered that the U.S. is generally "not a harmful friend." But, he added, it was unjust of the U.S. not to compensate Turkey for the financial burden of maintaining the embargo against Iraq. After all, he said, the war in the Gulf had "nothing to do with

Turkey." In the future, Oksuz said, "Turkey will decide who are its friends and who its enemies; no outside power will dictate this."

Oksuz believed, moreover, that the U.S. regarded the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq as the nucleus of a future independent Kurdistan. Oksuz described this as an example of the U.S. interfering in "family business." Oksuz said the U.S. should consult with Turkey on any security issues in the region because without Turkish participation, "there can never be a correct policy in the region."

Umit Ozdag, an articulate professor of international relations who sat in on the interview and repeatedly tried to save Oksuz from his worst gaffes, added: "The Lausanne Treaty (of 1923) delayed determining the final disposition of northern Iraq. In 1926 the League of Nations decided to attach the Mosul area, which the new Turkish leaders had hoped to include in the Republic, to northern Iraq. We don't want the same mistake repeated at the end of the century."

"Turkey," Oksuz repeated, "should be involved in any dispute in the region." Paradoxically, the MHP vice-chairman simultaneously embraced American hegemony while expecting the U.S. to provide the muscle to defend not American but Turkish interests. "We're after a peaceful world, but one based on justice and we expect the U.S. to guarantee that."

"The main problem in international relations is human rights," Oksuz said rather startlingly, considering the MHP's traditional contempt for such niceties. "The superpower," as he repeatedly called the U.S., "should see what's behind regional problems and intervene preemptively to prevent injustices. Especially in the non-Christian world — Bosnia, Kosovo, Azerbaijan — why did the U.S. take so long to react?"

Oksuz complained that most countries merely deployed concerns about human rights as a pretext for advancing their own political agenda. "Everyone is crying over Apo's human rights (referring to concerns over the trial of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan on charges of trying to divide the state.) But did anyone worry about the human rights of the 30,000 people he killed? Human rights is used to protect terrorists and needs to be redefined."

"The MHP is against the ethnicization of human rights," added Professor Ozdag.

Oksuz continued to betray Yeltsin-like confusion about the empirical realities of the world. "In Kosovo there is genocide because the U.N. did a deficient job of defending the recognized borders of states. What's happening is that people are being driven out of their homes and their ethnic identity is being changed. The reason for this is the late inference in the region." Whether in

this case Oksuz was blaming the U.N., 'the superpower', or other feckless states was unclear.

"We expect the U.S. to act as the world policeman," Oksuz reiterated. "The superpower should have foreseen the crises in Bosnia, Kosovo and Azerbaijan. The Azeris driven out of Karabakh should be returned to show the Armenians that this world doesn't play by their rules."

Speaking of ethnic cleansing produced an expression of contempt on Oksuz's face, which prompted me to ask about the Ottomans' cleansing of Armenians from eastern Anatolia in 1915, resulting in the deaths of over a million people.

"There was a reason for Armenians to be cleansed," said Oksuz. "They cooperated with the Russians against the Ottoman Empire and massacred Muslim men, women and children."

Oksuz compared the Ottoman campaign against the Armenians to the U.S. internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Because the Armenians posed a threat in a time of war, said Oksuz, the Ottoman army rounded them up and isolated them in a piece of territory that at the time was part of the Empire but later became part of the Soviet Union. Then came a real beauty: "Armenians would all be welcome to return to Turkey, but they know what they did and they're too ashamed of themselves to face the Turks." Blame for the Armenians' misfortunes, in any case, rested with France, England and Russia; Turkey and its Ottoman forebear, as always with the Gray Wolves, were blameless.

Given his concern about Kosovo, I asked, didn't Oksuz see some parallel with the Kurds' separatist aspirations in Southeast Turkey? None at all, of course. (This would be the answer of nearly all Turks, even those who consider themselves moderates.) "The difference between Kosovo and the Southeast," according to Oksuz, "is the difference between a 'minority' and a 'subculture'." Ah, I thought, this is where his sociological expertise comes into play! Turks and Kurds are too closely related to effectively distinguish among them. Said he: "It would be ridiculous to consider splitting a single, unified culture." Oksuz related an anecdote from the Lausanne Peace Conference in which Turkish negotiator (and later president) Ismet Inonu opened an Encyclopedia Britannica to show Churchill that Kurds were defined as a sub-group of Turks.

The Kurds themselves, disunited as always, could not agree on a single representative to plead their case in Lausanne. This isn't surprising, said Oksuz, considering that the Kurds speak nine different languages. In a rather bewildering feat of convoluted logic that he delivered as if it were a *coup de grace*, Oksuz added that among the speakers of these nine languages, many did not even consider themselves Kurds. (On the one hand "Kurd" has

no substantive validity as a label for anyone, since a Kurd is merely a type of Turk; on the other hand, the definition of a Kurd is so precise that Oksuz can confidently assign the designation even to people who don't regard themselves as Kurds.)

After two hours of conversation I posed my final question: Did the MHP have any regrets about its behavior during the 1970s?

"First we don't have any regrets because the MHP themselves were the victims in this fighting and you can't very well expect the victims to be sorry. Now we don't want to remember the 70s, we just want peace and prefer not to talk about past troubles any more."

But, I pressed, if the MHP itself was blameless for the years of violence, who was behind it?

"At the time we were all convinced that it was Russia (sic) that was behind the Dev Genc and Dev Sol (leftist groups)," said Oksuz. "But now we understand that it was really Greece, Germany, France, the United States..."

And why would the U.S. want to foment internal disorder in a highly valued ally?

A conspiratorial smile spread across his fleshy face. "It's obvious," Oksuz pronounced elliptically.

"Sorry, but it's not so obvious to me," I answered. "Could you please spell it out?"

"For national advantages."

"And which advantages would those be?"

"The usual — economic, diplomatic, *technical* ..."

We shook hands and I thanked him heartily for his time. "It has been most interesting," I said, exhausting all my tact in one go. As Chetin showed us out I hoped to myself that for the sake of the country, that Oksuz would never get any closer to government.

The next day the papers announced the formation of a government including the Democratic Left Party, the MHP and the Motherland Party. The MHP received a third of the 36 cabinet seats. The MHP received ministries that control a huge portion of the state budget: defense, housing and welfare, commerce, and agriculture. And Enis Oksuz, my loopy interlocutor, had become Turkey's Minister of Transportation and Communications. □

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INSTITUTE FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

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[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

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[SOUTH ASIA]

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[THE AMERICAS]

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[THE AMERICAS]

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[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

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[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

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[EAST ASIA]

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