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Panturkism

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Pan-Turkism is the nationalist ideology that emphasizes the common ethnic, cultural, and linguistic roots of Turkic peoples living across Eurasia. Developed as a social and political movement among the Turkic-Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire, the ideology had significant impact on Ottoman intellectuals and policy-makers in the early 20th century.

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Introduction

In the 19th century, a number of European – especially Hungarian – scholars, most notably [Arminius Vámbéry \(1832-1913\)](#), undertook studies on the customs and languages of Turkic peoples.^[1] At around the same time, a process of national awakening started among the educated segments of Turkic-Muslim communities of the [Russian Empire](#). Turkic-Muslim intellectuals turned their attention to the problems of their societies to understand the reasons for their subordination to Russian rule. Such literary, cultural, and educational activities appeared first among the wealthy Azerbaijani Turks (known as Caucasian Tatars before 1920s), Volga Tatars, and Crimean Tatars. Since language was

regarded as the most important marker of the common Turkic identity, these intellectuals put significant emphasis on a simplified written language that would bring the broader Turkic world together. Using education and publication as major tools, Turkic-Muslim intellectuals of the Russian Empire embarked on a program known as “Jadidism,” which was in fact a program of modernist [nationalism](#). The first vocal proponent of cultural unity of Turkic peoples was [İsmail Gaspıralı \(Gasprinskii\) \(1851-1914\)](#), who appealed to a large audience through his widely circulating newspaper *Tercüman* (meaning “interpreter,” published from 1883 to 1918). The slogan of *Tercüman*, “unity in language, idea, and action” (*dilde, fikirde, işte birlik*), became the motto of Pan-Turkism in the years to come. In addition to the towering figure of Gaspıralı, [Abdurrresid İbrahim \(1857-1944\)](#), who mixed Pan-Turkism with Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamist sentiments, stood out among other Pan-Turkist intellectuals of his generation.

Pan-Turkism in the Russian Empire on the Eve of the First World War

After the [1905 Revolution](#), the political climate in Russia instigated the mobilization of mass politics. Numerous Turkic-Muslim leaders were elected to the newly-established [Russian parliament](#), the [Duma](#). In addition, under the leadership of intellectuals like İsmail Gaspıralı, Abdurrresid İbrahim, [Yusuf Akçura \(1876-1935\)](#), [Alimardan Topçubashov \(1863-1934\)](#), a series of All-Russia Muslim Conferences was organized to discuss the cultural, political, and social problems of Turkic-Muslim peoples. The last of these conferences convened in May 1917, shortly after the February [Revolution](#). Even though nationalist mobilization became visible after 1905, there was still a blurry line between religious and ethnic brotherhood, and regional identities often overshadowed the wider Turkic identity.

Pan-Turkism in the Ottoman Empire on the Eve of the First World War

Even though after Tanzimat, some Ottoman intellectuals showed interest in the fate of Turkic-Muslim peoples beyond the borders of the [Ottoman Empire](#), these sympathies were mostly motivated by religious sensitivities, rather than shared historical roots, language or ethnicity. Turkishness was generally defined in a broad manner to include culturally similar non-Turkish Muslims, as well.

Pan-Turkism made headway into the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the 20th century, especially after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. Gaspıralı’s *Tercüman*, though censored during the reign of [Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of the Turks \(1842-1918\)](#), was distributed in the Ottoman capital even before the revolution. In the Ottoman Empire, Pan-Turkism, along with Turkish nationalism, developed under the influence of Turkic-Muslim intellectuals who emigrated from Russia, including Yusuf Akçura, [Ahmet Ağaoğlu \(1869-1939\)](#), and [Ali Bey Hüseyinzade \(1864-1940\)](#). Especially Akçura’s *Three Types of Policy*, in which he recommended Turkish nationalism – as opposed to Ottomanism or Islamism – for the salvation of the Ottoman Empire, became a handbook for Turkish nationalists of the time.

Among Ottoman intellectuals, Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), Mehmed Emin (1869-1944), and Hamdullah Suphi (1885-1966) became the most famous proponents of Pan-Turkist ideas in the early 20th century. Upon the initiative of Turkic-Muslim émigrés and nationalist Ottoman intellectuals, a number of scholarly institutions were established, including Türk Derneği (established in 1908) and Türk Ocağı (established in 1912). These institutions were dedicated to secular Turkish nationalism and declared their mission as supporting academic and cultural activities and publishing on the broader Turkic world.

Pan-Turkist ideas found some audience in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) cadres as well. However, CUP was far from being an ideologically homogenous entity and it would be misleading to consider Pan-Turkism as its official policy. The most important supporter of Pan-Turkism in CUP was Enver Pasha (1881-1922), the Minister of War from 1914 to 1918.

Pan-Turkism during the First World War

In 1916-1917, Russian armies managed to capture Ottoman provinces in north-eastern Anatolia, but the Russian advance came to a halt after the revolutions of 1917. After the Bolshevik takeover, Ottomans had a chance to restore lands [occupied](#) by the Russian army, as well as Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, lost after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. In addition to regaining occupied Ottoman provinces, from a Pan-Turkist perspective, the Russian collapse also opened the doors of Turkestan to Ottoman armies. Now there was a real possibility for the Ottomans to unite with their Turkic brethren in the East.

Caucasian Front

The Bolshevik takeover in November 1917 and Russia's withdrawal from the war opened up new possibilities for the Ottoman government on the [Eastern Front](#). In the summer of 1918, Ottoman leadership initiated the Caucasian campaign and started advancing on Baku. A Caucasus Army of Islam was created under the leadership of Nuri Killigil (1889-1949), Enver Pasha's brother. The generally accepted explanation for the Caucasus campaign among historians – and the reason professed by the military leaders of the period – is that it was motivated by a Pan-Turkist desire to unite with ethnic and religious brethren in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

An opposite view argues that the CUP had a more pragmatic concern: fearing the resurgence of Russian power in future and benefiting from the turmoil of the war and revolution, CUP leaders wanted to create independent Caucasian states as buffer zones between the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Therefore, Pan-Turkism was used as an instrument to legitimize the Caucasus campaign and bolster Ottoman interests, rather than being the cause of the military operation.^[2] The rich oil reserves of Baku might also have motivated the Ottoman military leadership, a concern shared with the British, Bolsheviks, and Germans. Even though there was a sympathetic relationship between the Ottomans and Turkic peoples of Russia, it would be far-reaching to argue that Pan-Turkist

sentiments were more powerful than local national identities.

In September 1918, Ottoman forces entered Baku, and from there they started marching northward, where they combined their forces with the local militia of the Provisional Terek-Dagestan government of Northern Caucasus. Ottoman military operations in the Caucasus came to an abrupt end when [Germany](#) capitulated to the Allies in 1918. After the conclusion of the war, Ottoman forces withdrew from Baku and other regions they had occupied during the Caucasian campaign. However, regions occupied by Russians in 1916-1917, as well as Kars and Ardahan, were reincorporated to the Ottoman Empire after the [Brest-Litovsk Treaty](#) of March 1918.

Legacy and Aftermath of the First World War

Whether Pan-Turkism was the cause of CUP policies or a rhetorical tool is matter of discussion, but it is certain that the republican regime after 1923 rejected irredentist claims on a rhetorical level as well. The young nation-state promoted nationalism only within its borders. Although from time to time, Pan-Turkist ideas were entertained by some nationalist politicians and intellectuals under changing political circumstances, its political significance mostly died out.

In Russia, following the revolutionary turmoil of 1917, the possibility of independence appeared as a serious option for ethnic minorities. Divided into various ideological factions, Turkic-Muslim intellectuals formed shifting alliances either with the Reds or the Whites during the [Russian Civil War](#). Although some public leaders, mostly Volga Tatars, declared their desire for cultural autonomy and a somewhat Pan-Turkist organization in a democratized Russia, at the end of the day, disagreements between various Turkic groups prevailed. Regional identities, challenging views of Turkic-Muslim public leaders, and the Bolsheviks' program determined the final borders.

In Turkistan, armed fighting continued longer than it did in other parts of the former Russian Empire. The Basmachi revolt – which can only loosely be related to Pan-Turkist ideology, as its constituent represented very different groups with different agendas, including some with Pan-Turkist sympathies – continued until the late 1920s in some parts of Turkistan. In 1921, Enver Pasha joined the Basmachis in Bukhara and died while fighting against the Bolsheviks in 1922. The last significant Pan-Turkist political movement in the Soviet Union came to an end with the demise of [Mirsaid Sultan Galiev \(1892-1940\)](#) in the mid-1920s.

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Notes

1. ↑ Turanianism and Pan-Turkism will be used interchangeably in this text, as people who became a part of this movement did not make any such terminological differentiation. However, we have to note that the concept “Turan” appeared first in the writings of Hungarian Turcologists to mean the hypothetical homeland of the so-called Turanian peoples. By identifying themselves as part of a broader Turanian family, Hungarian nationalists were in fact fostering Hungarian national pride vis-à-vis their Germanic and Slavic neighbours in the Habsburg Empire.
2. ↑ Reynolds, Michael A.: *Buffers, Not Brethren. Young Turk Military Policy in the First World War and the Myth of Panturanism*, in: *Past and Present* 203 (2009), p.140.

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